

MATCH BREAKDOWN

PLAYER OF THE GAME
NIAMH O'DEA
(CLARE)

IT SEEMS that Niamh O'Dea's talents know no bounds as the dual star is now unquestionably Clare's most effective leader, target and finisher for Clare's flagship camogie and ladies football sides, reinforced by Sunday's rich haul of 2-8.

WON AND LOST

While this championship bow was ear-marked as Clare's match to lose, a depleted Down certainly didn't come down to Kinnegad just to make up the numbers as they upped the physical stakes on the Banner. However, the ultimate difference was in terms of scoring prowess as all but one point of Clare's handsome tally of 2-17 stemmed from play while a limited Down could only manage 1-1 over the hour.

WHERE TO NEXT

WITH a two week gap to their next outing, managers James Murrhly (Clare) and Jim Burns (Down) will be interested spectators in Crettyard this Sunday for the meeting of Leinster duo Kildare and Wexford (2pm), with a repeat of the 2016 All-Ireland decider against Kildare up next for Clare while Wexford are scheduled to meet Down in Round 2.

TEAMS

CLARE Grace Lynch (Cúil Gaels); Laura Egan (Kilmihil); Ellie O'Gorman (Kilmihil); Grainne Harvey (West Clare Gaels); Roisin Considine (Liscannor); Laurie Ryan (Banner Ladies) (Captain); Carol O'Leary (Newmarket-on-Fergus) (0-1); Eimear O'Connor (Cúil Gaels); Louise Woods (Banner Ladies); Caoimhe Harvey (West Clare Gaels) (0-1); Eimear Keane (St Joseph's Miltown) (0-3); Orla Devitt (Éire Óg); Fidelma Marrinan (West Clare Gaels) (0-3); Niamh O'Dea (Banner Ladies) (2-8, 1f); Cliodhna Blake (Doonbeg)

Subs Siofra Ni Chonnaill (St Joseph's Doora/Barefield) for Egan (28); Aine Kelly (Fergus Rovers) (0-1) for Blake (40); Clare Hester (Fergus Rovers) for O'Gorman (44); Aine Keane (St Joseph's Miltown) for Marrinan (50); Aisling Morrissey (Cooraclare) for G. Harvey (56)

DOWN Aisling Burns (Castlewellan); Laoise Duffy (Bredagh); Orla Boyle (RGU Downpatrick) (Captain); Chara Laverty (Kilcoo); Cassie Moane (Bredagh); Clara Mulvena (Rostrevor); Aimee Greene (Teconnaught); Kate McKay (Carryduff); Kyla Trainor (RGU Downpatrick); Megan O'Boyle (Castlewellan); Grainne McClean (Bryansford); Jessica Foy (Carryduff) (1-6, 6f); Brea McKee (St John's) (0-1); Natasha Ferris (Bryansford) (0-2f); Meghan Doherty (Carryduff)

Subs Sarah Doherty (Bryansford) for McClean (HT); Jenny Fitzmons (RGU Downpatrick) for McKee (52); Aisling Flynn (RGU Downpatrick) for O'Boyle (55); Maria McCann (Carryduff) for Moane (57)

Referee Des McEnery (Westmeath)

LADIES FOOTBALL ▶ ALL-IRELAND INTERMEDIATE CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND 1



Clare get Down to business

Clare 2-17 Down 1-09

At Kinnegad

CLARE moved ahead of the pack in more ways than one on Sunday afternoon when eventually moving through the gears to brush off the challenge of Down on neutral soil.

With this All-Ireland Intermediate opener brought forward a week to accommodate the Ulster side, Clare now not only have two weeks to prepare for their next outing against Kildare back in Kinnegad but they can also view their remaining opponents Kildare and Wexford this Saturday along with allowing their three dual players Niamh O'Dea, Carol O'Leary and Orla Devitt, who all started on Sunday, a clear run at their crunch All-Ireland Senior Camogie Championship clash with Kilkenny this Saturday.

In contrast, Kildare and Wexford face a more gruelling three matches in 14 days schedule which is another clear advantage for the Banner who have three points safety tucked away following Sunday's relatively routine win.

Niamh O'Dea's immense contribution of 2-8 masked over any cobweb-blowing frailties of being Clare's first real competitive outing in three months. However, although James Murrhly's side were sluggishly inconsistent in the opening period, they still managed to lead throughout before finally finding their feet to devastating effect on the turnover.

Chief target O'Dea was Clare's clear, constant source of inspiration but captain Laurie Ryan was equally prominent at both ends of the field as she mopped up tirelessly at the back and also powered forward at every available opportunity to link up with



by
Eoin Brennan

her free-scoring club-mate.

Newcomers Fidelma Marrinan and Eimear Keane impressed with three point hauls while Roisin Considine, Louise Woods and Caoimhe Harvey were very powerful ball-carriers which was necessary to avoid a bruising dogfight with their obstinate opponents.

Down only arrived in Kinnegad with 19 players but what they lacked in numbers they more than made up for in teak-toughness and sheer heart in an attempt to upset their Munster opponents.

And it was effective as with the wind at their backs, Tyla Trainor and Jessica Foy in particular inflicted a troublesome counter-attacking gameplan. Clare made a bright start with Louise Woods collecting the throw-in to race through the centre and work the ball through O'Dea to Eimear Keane to fire over the crossbar after only 15 seconds while O'Dea would get off the mark herself in the next passage of play.

However, any thoughts that this would be a cakewalk were soon dismissed when Down fired a warning shot of their potency as the roaming Brea McKee initiated a back-to-front move involving Grainne McClean

and Natasha Ferris that ended with Jessica Foy rifling an effort off the far post before McKee impetuously fly-kicked the rebound wide.

The Ulster side did open their account in the fifth minute through a Ferris free and with Clare kicking three wides, they had to rely on O'Dea to lift them clear once more as she arrowed over a brace of points, the second of which was intended for the net before offloading to Fidelma Marrinan to provide a 0-5 to 0-1 cushion by the 11th minute.

But Down refused to accept their fate and after a Foy free, the same player was unlucky to strike a second goal chance wide only two minutes later, only for play to be called back for a free that Ferris gladly pointed at 0-5 to 0-3.

A hefty challenge by Trainor on Louise Woods at the turn of the second quarter did alter proceedings as the experienced forward was duly yellow-carded to the sin bin for ten minutes. And Clare would take full advantage as Caoimhe Harvey robbed possession before Cliodhna Blake passed inside to O'Dea to find the right corner of the net in the 22nd minute.

They might had double their goal tally a minute later, only for Laurie Ryan's shot to be deflected away for a '45. Additional points from West Clare Gaels duo Harvey and Marrinan left Clare with a healthy six point lead approaching the break. However, Trainor's return to action would immediately pay dividends to put a spanner in the works as she played in Foy to billow the net and halve the interval arrears at 1-7 to

1-4.

Clare used the break well to refocus and with the wind to come, they emerged a much more determined outfit, kicking four points without reply through O'Dea (3) and Marrinan before another yellow card, this time for Kate McKay, allowed Clare the space to raid for a second goal to effectively end the game as a contest in the 42nd minute.

It stemmed from a hopeful Louise Woods delivery from the right wing that was easily collected by goalkeeper Aisling Burns. But in her attempt to handpass out of danger, Niamh O'Dea nipped in to intercept and finish to an empty net at 2-11 to 1-05.

And that was essentially it really as despite the helping hand of referee Des McEnery who did his best to make a contest of it with an incessant series of Down frees, Clare were able to match Foy's placed balls for the remainder.

Indeed, considering Clare's dominance, the fact that the second half frees count was 17 to 3 in favour of the Ulster side was baffling to say the least. However, Clare never let it affect their challenge as Eimear Keane, Carol O'Leary and O'Dea all equalled Down points to quell any potential revolt.

Even the surprising sinbanning of Clare substitute Siofra Ni Chonnaill couldn't dampen Clare's spirits as they finished with the last three points through O'Dea, Keane and replacement Aine Kelly to ease up to a deserved 11 point win.

Above: Action from Sunday's match.