

SENIOR HURLING QUARTER-FINAL REPLAY

Elwood's goal proves crucial as Mellows scrape home in replay

City men edge out Clarinbridge to reach first county semi-final since 2008

LIAM MELLOWS	1-11
CLARINBRIDGE	0-12

PATRICK FLAHERTY
AT KENNY PARK

LIAM Mellows booked their place in the semi-finals of the Senior Hurling Championship following a hard fought replay victory over Clarinbridge, as a flurry of 1-2 without reply midway through the second half proved to be decisive.

Ronan Elwood would bag the crucial goal on 45 minutes which put his side in front for the first time since taking the lead in the third minute and the city side never looked back, defending gallantly throughout the final quarter to book a date with Cappataggle on Sunday week.

Tadhg Haran would get the scoring under way with a fine point from play, but it would be Clarinbridge who would take control of proceedings early on, two frees from Evan Niland sandwiched in between a monster score from midfield by Michael Daly saw them lead by two points after eight minutes.

Adrian Morrissey would step up with the first of eight crucial frees a minute later to narrow the gap, but that score was soon cancelled out by a fine point from Eoin Forde, who benefited from the first clean catch from a puck out of the game by Michael Daly.

Despite being two points down, Louis Mulqueen's charges were dominating possession and had the bulk of the early chances, but worryingly their strike rate was very poor as they managed to pile up six wides inside the opening 15 minutes, and began relying heavily on the free-taking skills of Adrian Morrissey to stay in the contest.

The Bridge on the other hand were looking much more lethal, scoring from play with greater ease than their city counterparts, as some long puck outs and impressive catches from Barry Daly and Niall Armstrong saw them add to their lead.

Mellows did somewhat get their act together somewhat in the second quarter as they began running at their opponents nearly every time they managed to secure possession, pacy runs through the middle from Kevin Lee and Ronan Elwood proving to be a serious problem.

That tactic was drawing

fouls, and with Morrissey well on his game, the vocal Mellows support were confident he could score from anywhere, and despite missing an easy free early on, he was soon hitting them over the blackspot at every opportunity, getting four of Mellows six first half points.

Leading 0-7 to 0-5, Clarinbridge had a huge chance to finally put a little daylight between the sides just before half time, a great team move started by Barry Daly eventually saw Niall Armstrong receive the ball in the corner, only to be denied by a superb block by Sean Morrissey.

A further 65 for Niland coupled with a free from Morrissey left just the two between them at the break, the game well and truly in the balance at 0-8 to 0-6.

This quarter-final replay restarted at a frantic pace, with both sides on the scoreboard inside three minutes with Haran pointing well from the corner for Mellows, while Daly got his third of the day following some great work by Steven Forde who blocked down an Adrian Morrissey clearance to set up Daly.



THE INFLUENTIAL HARAN MADE A GREAT CATCH TO SET UP JACK FORDE FOR A SCORE MINUTES AFTER BEING INTRODUCED

Mellows' first chance at goal came a minute later as a long range ball was caught by Haran in the corner, the All Ireland Poc Fada winner duly darted across the end line and found an unmarked Conor Kavanagh, only for Arron Bindon to make a remarkable save from close range to deny him.

The tide was shifting in favour of the city side and after the teams traded frees to leave it at 0-10 to 0-8, Mellows would hit 1-2 without reply to regain a lead they would never let slip again.

The influential Haran made a great catch to set up Jack Forde for a score minutes after being introduced, while Morrissey stepped up with his seventh free of the day to level the game for the first time in 40 minutes.



Clarinbridge's Cian Salmon and Sean Morrissey of Liam Mellows follow the flight of the ball in Sunday's senior hurling quarter-final replay at Kenny Park. PHOTOS: JOE O'SHAUGHNESSY.

Then came the crucial goal, as once more Haran made a fantastic catch, this time sliding in to secure a long range free from David Collins before laying it off to Ronan Elwood, who once more powered through the heart of the Clarinbridge defence and blasted home past Bindon on 45 minutes.

The three point lead was as much daylight as any team would manage to build up throughout the contest, and with 15 minutes remaining there was plenty of time for the 2011 All Ireland champions to rescue the tie, especially having seen their opponents come from six behind a week earlier.

Goals seemed to be the agenda for Jarlath Niland's charges, however this was proving to be a tough tactic to implement as Mellows were more than up for the challenge, and the added aggression to their tackling was making it extremely tough for their opponents to get within range of a goal.

Steven Forde and Evan Niland both pointed well in the closing minutes, as the Bridge battled on in search of an equalising score, but their insistence on netting a goal proved to be their downfall as Mellows remained dogged in defence, thus



Kevin Lee of Liam Mellows comes under pressure from Niall Armstrong of Clarinbridge at Kenny Park.

securing their spot in the semi-finals for the first time since 2008.

While his side showed some great qualities in their two hard fought battles with Clarinbridge, Louis Mulqueen will know much more is needed if they are to go one step closer to a first county title since 1970, knowing a reliance on free taker Adrian Morrissey and a poor strike rate from his fellow for-

wards could easily be exploited by Cappataggle in an intriguing semi-final.

On the day Adrian Morrissey, David Collins, Tadhg Haran and Sean Morrissey were all major factors in their side's victory, while Evan Niland, Michael Daly and Barry Daly all deserve credit for their fine displays in defeat.

Liam Mellows: K Walsh; C Reilly, S

Morrissey, M Conneely; M Hughes, D Collins, S Barrett; K Lee, J Hastings; C Hynes, D Fahy, R Elwood (1-0); T Haran (0-2), C Kavanagh, A Morrissey (0-8, all frees). Subs: J Forde (0-1) for D Fahy (38), S Killeen for M Hughes (52). Clarinbridge: A Bindon; D Ryan, S Bannon, S Kilduff; S McArdle, B Keane, B Moran; S Ryan, B Daly; N Armstrong (0-1), S Forde (0-1), M Daly (0-3, 0-1 free); E Forde (0-1), C Salmon, E Niland (0-6, 0-3 frees, 0-1 '65). Subs: A Monaghan for E Forde (56).

Referee: Christopher Browne