THE GREAT ULSTER DERBY

Huge Ulster rivals Monaghan and Cavan clashed in the preliminary round of the Ulster Championship in St. Tiernach's Park, Clones on Sunday the 10th May 2020. It was a damp Sunday afternoon as 36,000 fans flooded into St Tiernach's to see one of the matches of the year. The atmosphere in the stadium was unbelievable.

Monaghan were favourites heading into the match after a great league campaign in Division1, but Cavan were not afraid to face a strong Monaghan team after previously training very hard.

Monaghan started the much better team. They outscored Cavan four points to one in the first fifteen minutes. Niall Kearns and Darren Hughes were dominating around the middle of the field. Monaghan's forwards were also on-form with Conor McCarthy and Conor McManus scoring two points each. Ray Galligan scored a fantastic 45 metre kick from out near the stand. Apart from that, Cavan were struggling to get the ball out of their own half with their strategy of the short kick out.

At half time, Monaghan had a lead of three points. The score was 0-07 to 0-04. Ryan Wylie was undoubtedly man of the match in the first half with his tough tackling and his long kicking into the full forward line. Although, when Cavan did get the ball into their inside forwards, they were very accurate only missing one shot, which dropped into Rory Beggan's hands.

The second half started with a huge surprise; Cavan scored three points without reply. Monaghan found it hard to stop Cavan when they used their pace and power to cut open the Monaghan defence. Monaghan only scored one point whereas Cavan scored five points in the first ten minutes of the second half. With nearly fifteen minutes until full time a high ball went in on top of the Monaghan defence. The ball took a huge deflection off the foot of Kieran Duffy and the ball slowly rolled into the bottom left corner! The score was now 0-08 to1-09 in favour of Cavan.

Shortly afterwards as Karl O'Connell was dashing up the field, Gearoid McKiernan made a dangerous tackle on O'Connell and was sent off by referee Maurice Deegan. As Gearoid marched off the field manager Mickey Graham shook his head in disappointment.

It was not long until Monaghan started finding holes in the Cavan defence. In the last ten minutes of the game Monaghan scored two points and Cavan added another point to their tally leaving a three-point gap between the sides. In the dying seconds Cavan conceded a 45-metre kick. Rory Beggan would be stepping up to take it. The Cavan penalty box was crowded. Monaghan needed a goal to at least take it to a replay. Beggan kicked it long and it and it dropped into the net without anyone touching it! Rory Beggan had scored directly from a 45-metre kick! Ray Galligan tried to take a quick kick out but it was too late. Referee Maurice Deegan blew his whistle for full time. Everyone arose to go home, ready to come back for the replay, but the referee signalled for extra time!

Everyone around the stadium was in shock, extra time!

Early in the first period of extra time Monaghan opened the scoring with a Jack McCarron point, but it did not take long for Cavan to come back into the game. They scored two points in the space of one minute which left the score at 1-11 to 1-12 to Cavan. Things went from bad to worse for Monaghan. Monaghan's star player Conor McManus made a great diagonal run out in front of his marker Pauric Faulkner but unfortunately cramped his left leg. When the ball went out of play the medical team rushed over to help him. He had to be subbed off for David Garland. The Monaghan supporters were devastated to hear that Conor McManus

had to go off injured. The Monaghan supporters asked themselves "Would David Garland be a good replacement"?

It was drawing near the end of extra time when Cavan grabbed a late score. There were now two points between the teams. Very late on, Rory Beggan took possession of the ball in the middle of the field and tried to send a long ball into the Cavan penalty area. Cavan somehow cleared the ball back out in the direction of Rory Beggan who was deliberately fouled by Gerrard Smith just behind Cavan's 45-metre line. Once again Cavan's penalty box was crowded. Beggan sent the ball in long and the ball ended up in the net! Nobody knew what had happened, but David Garland was thumping the air in delight. The Monaghan supporters got their answer, David Garland was a great replacement.

Referee Maurice Deegan did not even wait for Ray Galligan to kick the ball out, he just blew his whistle for full time. The Monaghan supporters were thrilled with a one point victory walking out of St. Tiernach's park. Monaghan would be playing Antrim in the next round of the Ulster Championship. After that performance, the Monaghan supporters would be expecting another win.

"We got a bit lucky, but we got over the line. I owe a lot of thanks to the commitment of David McCague, Conor Laverty and Peter Donnelly" exclaimed Monaghan manager Seamus McEnaney.

"We were unfortunate today, but we have to prepare for the qualifiers" announced Cavan manager Mickey Graham.

"That was a fantastic game of football" proclaimed analyst Pat Spillane on RTE's Sunday Game.

"One of the games of the decade" added Colm O'Rourke.

BY: Diarmuid Flanagan, Aged 11.