

# Majestic Monaghan Move On

McManus Masterclass means Banty's men move one step closer to Ulster Glory

Monaghan 2-11- 2-05 Cavan

It will be Monaghan who will face Antrim in the Ulster SFC Quarter-Final on the 23th Of May. It wasn't easy for the 2015 Ulster Champions who faced a stern test from the Cavan men.

There's nothing quite like the opening round of the Ulster Championship, from the fresh cut grass to the huge crowds that gather to watch two teams battle it out for a Quarter-Final spot.

For the first 20 minutes of this long awaited affair, it was quite a lackluster contest with both sides struggling to get out of the blocks. The first score came 7 minutes in when Conor McCarthy delivered a pin-point pass into full-forward Kieran Hughes who put it on a plate for the marksman, Conor McManus. Cavan responded quickly with Mickey Graham's side scoring off the end of a great team move finished by the ever present Gearoid McKieran. Cavan pushed up on the Monaghan kick-out and Rory Beggan uncharacteristically kicked it straight out of play to the surprise of all the fans in the famous old ground of St Tiernach's Park. McKiernan was again on the end of another glorious team move which included a Ciaran McDonald like outside of the boot pass from Stephen Smith into McKiernan who slotted it over to the delight of the Cavan following. Monaghan continued to struggle to retain possession from their kickouts with Beggan really having no other option but to drive it down the middle and the midfield pairing of Niall Kearns and workhorse Darren Hughes weren't getting any primary possession. That first time ball into Martin Reilly which was evident in Cavan's successful League campaign was working for the Breffni County but they just couldn't capitalize with the scores they needed. Cavan manager Mickey Graham alluded to this in his post-match interview where he said " We probably dominated the first 15 minutes or so but just couldn't take

advantage and get a foothold in the game which really cost us when you look at the wide count at the end of the game". Graham was right and Monaghan punished Cavan for not taking their chances. McManus who looked to have been 'Self-Isolating' himself in the full forward since that point in the seventh minute was the creator this time, when he delivered a very accurate pass into Christopher McGuinness who popped it off to Kieran Hughes who with the Clones breeze behind him slotted over a trademark outside of the left boot point in front of the McGrane stand. This Monaghan side knew they needed to get on top when they had the wind advantage. Three more points from the boot of McManus meant that Monaghan were 0-5 - 0-2 up with 4 minutes left of the first half. Cavan were probably happy enough going into the break 3 points down as there was a very strong breeze blowing into the town end in Clones which was in Monaghan's favour. Seamus 'Banty' McEnaney made reference to this in his post-game interview where he said "At that stage we would have liked to have been a little bit more ahead going into the break as we knew how much of a bearing that wind has". His request would be granted as a mistake from Cavan centre back Ciaran "the holla" Brady lead to Dermot Malone picking up possession and hitting the influential McManus with a on the money pass who handed it off to the speedster Ryan McAnespie who then squared to Scotstown man Conor McCarthy who had enough time to just tap it in in front of the hill in Clones. You could cut a bit of slack to Cavan corner back Pdraig Faulkner who must have thought he was still social-distancing as there wasn't a hand laid on McCarthy as he slotted home. This was a killer blow inflicted on a Cavan side who would have been happy going into the break. Cavan manager Mickey Graham pointed this out after the game "We would have been happy enough going into the break three points down but that goal really knocked the wind out of our sails, but to be fair to the boys they responded well to it and started well in the second half".

Graham was right and whatever was said in the away dressing room in Clones was Al Pacino like stuff as the Breffni men were a rejuvenated bunch for the first 10 minutes of the second half. They scored 1-3 in that period including two frees from Gearoid McKiernan, a point from Martin Reilly and a fabulous goal from Centre Back Ciaran Brady who made

amends for his earlier mistake which led to the Monaghan goal. Some good refereeing from the man in the middle David Coldrick who played the advantage after it looked like Darren Hughes left the hand in a little bit too long in a challenge on eventual goal scorer Brady. Ciaran 'the holla' dummied Monaghan full back Conor Boyle just outside the D which left a huge gap in the Monaghan full back line and Brady drove right through the throat of the Farney defence and proceeded to smash the ball into the top left corner of the Monaghan net. Many would have thought that the Cavan team wouldn't have posed any threat to the on form Monaghan side without the likes of Killian Brady, star forward Dara McVeety and Conor Moynagh who propelled them to the Ulster Final last year, but they started that second half like a group of men on a mission.

It was level at 1-5 apiece with about 20 minutes to go and it was anyone's game for the taking. In the 53rd minute a brilliant team move from Monaghan resulted in a one on one between wing forward Dessie Ward and Cavan goalie Raymond Galligan where Ward ballooned the ball against the crossbar. It came out to Conor McCarthy just outside the 13 yard line who was dragged down by the full back Pdraig Faulkner. Faulkner was already booked from an earlier off the ball incident and there was no question regarding the colour of the card coming out. Faulkner got a black card which ultimately meant a red card and off he went. This was a huge blow to a Cavan team who were the better team so far in the second half. McManus pointed the free and then the farney side regained possession from the kickout. A high ball into Kieran Hughes from his brother Darren was a danger to the Cavan side who lost their full back minutes earlier. Hughes got up and fetched the high ball and laid it off to McCarthy who slotted the ball past Galligan for the second time this afternoon in a move which was very similar to the Peter Canavan goal in the 2005 All-Ireland Final. Monaghan kicked the next four scores to really seal the deal. 2 frees from McManus and points from McCarthy and Dermot Malone meant that it was an uphill task for a Cavan side losing 1-5 to 2-10 with 7 minutes to go. The Breffni men rallied though, and a goal which some would say was lucky when Beggan failed to clear his lines following a high ball pumped into the square fell to the substitute Oisín Pierson who was in the right place at the right time to tap it in for the Breffni men. Some time wasting from

Rory Beggan which showed the experience of the 2018 All-Ireland Semi-Finalists took the sting out of the game and a point from the on-form Conor McCarthy put the nail in the Cavan coffin and sent the noisy neighbours into the draw for the qualifiers on Monday morning.

Cavan will look back on this game as one they left behind them with some easy scores not put away and they didn't really capitalize on their dominant purple patches during the game. Monaghan will expect they should be back here for an Ulster Final in July, but this Monaghan team know all too well about letting a chance at an Ulster Final slip through their fingernails which was the case against Down in 2012 and 2017 and Fermanagh in 2018.

**Man Of The Match:** Conor McManus

**Top Scorers for Monaghan:** Conor McCarthy 2-2, Conor McManus 0-7, Dermot Malone and Kieran Hughes both 0-1

**Top scorers for Cavan:** Gearoid McKiernan 0-4, Oisín Pierson and Ciaran Brady both 1-0, Martin Reilly 0-1.

Max McGinnity

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Castleblayney