

Sligo Minors retain Connacht title

Sligo Minors 62;
Mayo Minors 49.

In an action-packed thriller at Castlebar on Sunday last, which saw the sides level on two occasions in the second half, Sligo Minors won the Connacht title for the third year in succession when they had a tremendous victory over Mayo to the tune of 62 points to 49, and they will now go forward to meet Dublin in the All-Ireland Semi-Final which will be played in Sligo in the near future.

Sligo's success was all the greater an achievement considering they were without their star centre Tony O'Hara, who went down with flu on Saturday, and Sean Gallagher, a valuable player to have on the bench. The loss of O'Hara was a deadly blow to Sligo as the attack is centred around this player and he can usually be relied upon for twenty points.

The absence of these two players left Sligo very much short-staffed and with only one extra man in the event of anybody being fouled out, it was obvious before the game started that it would take a great display from Sligo to pull off the hat-trick.

The game in itself was as exciting as any ever seen at the Castlebar venue and the standard of play was very high.

Mayo fielded a very strong side which included a schoolboy international and five under 20 inter-provincials and their play was built around Seamus O'Dowd, who is also one of the key players on the Mayo senior team. They moved the ball around very well and took their shots mainly from the outside.

Sligo built their attack around captain Joe Palmer, and he controlled the play from the outside while the forwards took their chances from close-in. Sligo played a more direct type of game, seldom wasting time passing the ball round, and whenever an opening presented itself, they were through in a flash.

Tremendous pace

The game was played at a tremendous pace all through and this suited Sligo much more than Mayo who usually like to dictate the speed of the play. Sligo went straight into the lead from the jump ball and Mayo equalised. Sligo went ahead again and this was the pattern for the first half with Sligo scoring three baskets to Mayo's two. At half-time, Sligo well deserved to lead by 32-22.

In this half, Sligo used a very

strong zone defence which forced Mayo to concentrate on play from the outside. After the interval, Vinnie Middleton was introduced instead of John McGowan as a precaution against this player being fouled out and the Sligo team changed to a man-to-man defence in the hope of confusing the Mayo side.

Sligo did not settle down so quickly in this half and after three minutes still led by ten points. Just then, things began to go wrong in the Sligo defence and Mayo hit on the right time to stage a comeback. In four minutes, they had caught up and equalised at 36 points all. Sligo came back and scored six points to relieve the tension, but only temporarily. The homesters replied with three quick baskets to level once again.

Then Sligo got in control and scored 16 points within the space of three minutes to give them a very safe lead and they went on the a well-deserved and hard-earned victory.

The Sligo captain, Joe Palmer, played a big part in this win. He was a great encouragement to his team-mates and was never ruffled when the going was neck and neck. He capped his fine performance by scoring 22 of Sligo's points.

Jim Eccles, who partnered Palmer in the backs, was a tremendous defender. He did great rebounding and blocked many shots destined for the basket. However, he failed to impress greatly on the scoring list although his capability to do so in a big way is unquestionable.

John O'Donnell, who stood in at the last moment for the flu-stricken Tony O'Hara, did an excellent job on attack and defence while Brian McHugh really rose to the occasion and put in a faultless performance.

Key man

John McGowan was a tireless worker in the forwardline and his scoring ability made him a key man on the Sligo team. Vinnie Middleton fitted in very well when he came on in the second half and although he scored only two points, they were vital as they restored Sligo's lead after Mayo had equalised the first time.

Seamus O'Dowd turned in a brilliant display for Mayo, scoring 25 of their 49 points. Tom O'Malley, the schoolboy international was extremely dangerous although he was not given proper support by his team-mates.

Sligo:— J. Palmer, capt. (22); J. McGowan (14); J. O'Donnell (12); B. McHugh (8); J. Eccles (4); V. Middleton (2).

Mayo:— S. O'Dowd (25); J. O'Malley (10); T. O'Malley (8); M. Galvin (2); J. Flannery (2); E. Courell (2);



Jim Eccles, a student at Summerhill College, Sligo, and a member of Sligo All Stars Basketball Club, who was selected for the Irish Colleges' Basketball team to play in the forthcoming quadrangular tournament in Dublin following inter-provincial trials in Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin, recently. Son of Mr. and Mrs. Jim Eccles, Pearse Road, Sligo, Jim has been playing on Sligo basketball teams in all grades for many years and earlier this season played on the Irish under 20 team at a four-country tournament in Dublin.