

Major Tournament success

ALL STARS BEAT

IRISH CHAMPIONS

AFTER years of disappointment, narrow defeats and near misses, Sligo All Stars finally achieved one of their great ambitions when they won their first-ever tournament in Dublin last weekend.

The big event happened at the new Hulla Mhuire, Inchicore, when the Sligo squad pipped Trinity College 28-27 with a basket in literally the last second of the game to win the National Invitation Blitz from an entry of sixteen teams.

But the final was a complete anti-climax because All Stars recorded what might well be the sensation of the season by eliminating a full-strength St. Vincent's side in the semi-final.

The defeat of the national champions and five times winners of the Roy Curtis Trophy came after a five-minute period of extra time and was greeted by scenes of jubilation and near ecstasy by a huge crowd.

Earlier in the day, Sligo had overcome Chanel College and Corinthians B and already they were showing signs of fatigue after their gruelling game against Penilee the night before.

But they took on St. Vincent's with just the one thought in mind and even the crowd were excited with the meeting of what were up to then their favourite winning and losing teams.

Straight from the tip-off it was clear both sides meant business. Defence was the key and the fight for possession under the backboards was a thrilling sight. Sligo traded every score with the Dublin boys and it was impossible to forecast the result even when All Stars led 15-13 at half-time.

The second half was a humdinger and excitement and tension mounted as the impasse continued. Sligo continued to show to the fore and St. Vincent's were really trying everything in their book to get on top but even their best play was thwarted by Sligo's hustling man-to-man defence.

All Stars were two points in front inside the last 30 seconds and St. Vincent's came pounding down the court to put away the equaliser. Sligo had the ball into front court in a flash and a foul was called. With 5 secs. remaining, Joe Palmer stepped to the free-throw line, missed the first but made the second to leave the score 27-26 at the final whistle.

Consternation

But there was consternation when an error was discovered in the score-sheet and the officials ordered that an extra five-minute period be played. Apparently a field goal had been marked down as one point instead of two and, in fact, the score was level when the final whistle went.

All Stars trooped back on court to the cheers of the crowd and they proceeded to put the issue beyond doubt, taking a 7-2 lead and finishing the extra period 7-4 in front.

Spectators erupted on to the court to congratulate the Sligo boys while the gallant losers made their way unnoticed to the dressing room.

It was without doubt Sligo's greatest moment of glory and one richly deserved for their years of effort to get into the top bracket. And they brought this historic victory off with one of their best displays—a true team performance in which each man rose to the task magnificently.

Sligo were obviously still in celebrant mood when they took the floor against Trinity College in the final. But they were brought quickly to their senses as Trinity snatched the lead and held on to it.

After turning over trailing 13-6, All Stars quickly narrowed the gap to three points but T.C.D. showed their determination to maintain control and went seven points up again.

The score was 23-16 with five minutes left for play and at last, All Stars

exploded into life. Pressing furiously despite their flagging spirits, they hauled Trinity back to 23-22 only to see the Dublin squad recover with two baskets in a row which seemed to seal the result.

But Sligo's up and coming youngster, Tommy Hickey, fired his team-mates with new-found inspiration when he slotted two free throws and followed up with a great basket from play.

Looked secure

Still Trinity looked secure—they had the ball and there was just half a minute left. In an effort to steal possession, however, Hickey committed a foul and T.C.D. were given the option to take two free throws or possession from mid-court.

In the circumstances it seemed a wise decision to take possession and freeze

the ball but Trinity's Malaysian captain, Yik, was overcome with excitement. He shot the ball and missed. All Stars got possession and got it up for a shot. Palmer got free but his shot rimmed the basket and once again Trinity had the ball.

In a do-or-die effort, Palmer and McGowan trapped the Trinity dribbler, the ball went loose, McGowan grabbed it and drove for the basket. His shot and the final whistle were simultaneous—the ball went into the basket and the referee ruled that the score should count—Sligo had won.

All Stars did not get the scoring records on the games but it did not matter. Every player to a man gave his utmost and the rebounding of Jerry Monaghan and Anthony Cronnelly was no less valuable than the defensive work of Brian O'Hara or the winning shot from John McGowan.