

EXCITING NATIONAL CUP GAME

All Stars snatch victory

Sligo All Stars are still in the National Cup, though only by the skin of their teeth. Last Sunday, in Derry, they had to call on all their experience and know-how to beat a cool, well-drilled U.S. Navy team in a battle of wits which was tremendously exciting if not producing a very high standard game.

After leading all the way, All Stars were overhauled with five minutes on the clock, and from then on it was a do-or-die effort to survive. And it was not without a little bit of luck that the Sligo boys got the vital points in the last minute to pull through by four points, 48-44.

Two priceless Cup points went a-begging for the sake of a single score - had Sligo won by five points they would have earned the bonus for an aggregate victory - but at least All Stars are still there with every chance. Now it will probably be a straight fight between these two sides to qualify for the play-offs and the deciding factor will be points for and against.

Unfortunately the knowledge of having to win by so many points rather than just winning had an obvious effect on the game because all through, Navy were playing with extreme caution, stalling, slowing, almost teasing Sligo into making defensive errors.

Successful tactics

Their tactics proved successful to a certain degree because they swung the initiative in their favour just at a stage when All Stars seemed to be getting on top and for the remainder of the game it was Sligo who were fighting for their lives, even though they were a few points in front most of the way.

Sligo played their best basketball in the early stages of the game and they showed every sign of scoring a clear-cut victory. But no matter how they tried, they could never get a lead of more than five points over their opponents, who seemed content to just stay in touch.

All Stars were leading 28-24 at the break, and they continued to keep their heads above water until Navy took the lead for the first time at 38-37 entering the final five minutes.

A note of desperation crept into Sligo's play and they looked about to crack, but they survived this critical period and set about pulling the game out of the fire.

Navy, on the other hand, began to play with extra confidence as they saw victory in sight but this proved their undoing. There were forty-one seconds remaining and Sligo were a point in front. They needed four for an overall victory on aggregate; they got three and missed two shots which would have paid the dividend.

Sligo All Stars - J. McGowan (18), A. Cronnelly (11), J. Palmer (10), J. Monaghan, B. O'Hara, G. Gallagher, C. Carty, S. Watson, T. O'Brien.