

Through to National Cup play-offs

Sligo All Stars are definitely through to the National Cup play-offs which take place in Carlow on Saturday next.

Confirmation was received on Tuesday afternoon after U.S. Navy, Derry, announced that they did not intend to play St. Mary's, Athlone - they would have had to win by over sixty points to challenge Sligo's position at the top of the table - and this means that All Stars go through as winners of their pool.

Sligo have been drawn against the top Tralee club, Na Mistealaig, in the first semi-final at 2.30 p.m., while at 4 p.m., St. Vincent's, of Dublin, will meet Neptuns, of Cork. At 6 p.m. the two losing teams will play off for third and fourth places and the final, to decide Ireland's representatives in the Great Britain and Ireland Club Championship and entry into the European Cup, will be played at 7.30 p.m.

All Stars are under no illusions about their chances of winning the competition. They know quite definitely that it is within their reach and they also know they have one of the finest squads in the country. They can beat the best when they feel like it but they can also play like novices when they don't.

Biggest test

Next Saturday will be their biggest test to date. While they have never played Na Mistealaig - included in their line-up are two current Irish internationals - they watched them in action as recently as at Easter in Cork when the Tralee boys beat T.C.D. in the final of the Lona Tournament.

But that was the day when Austin Stacks beat Sligo by three points and last Saturday All Stars reversed that result with sixty one points to spare. So it is no indication of Sligo's ability and it only suggests that if All Stars hit form, it only remains to be seen what can happen.

But All Stars will have one big advantage this week-end. They will have every available man to strengthen their hand in Carlow. In the past, the weakness of their subs' bench cost games they should have won but last Saturday against Austin Stacks, they showed what can be done when first five players are given short rest periods in the course of a game.

Too many times, Sligo's concentration has broken in the vital last few minutes when fatigue hits players who could not be rested for the finish but that was not the way in Sligo last week-end.

All Stars will be calling Tony O'Hara and Anthony Cronnelly from Dublin; they have transferred David Pugh from St. Joseph's, Belfast; they have John McGowan, Cormac Carty, Joe Palmer, Jerry Monaghan, Buggy O'Hara; they have called into training during the week Stan Burns, Brian McHugh and Robert Burns; Summerhill's internationals Gerry Gallagher and Stuart Watson are two more National Cup campaigners; and at the back of it all, there is coach Tom O'Brien - a hoar of basketball talent with success at national and international level.

It is with this array of stars that Sligo will lay claim to the National Cup and they are determined as never before to bring home the prize this time.