

All Stars reach National Cup semi - finals

(By a "Sligo Champion" Sports Representative).

SLIGO ALL STARTS are through to the semi-finals of the National Cup but only by virtue of one of the toughest struggles they have ever experienced. On Saturday night they were put through the mill by a stubbornly determined Austin Stacks team from Tralee and after a gruelling, bone-bashing forty minutes of the most unattractive basketball imaginable, they emerged with the honours.

The final score was 58-39 in Sligo's favour but in actual fact, All Stars had only five points to spare on aggregate because they started the game fourteen points down from the away match in Tralee last December.

There was an air of abnormality about the whole affair because Sligo could never play their usual game in the constant knowledge that they had seven baskets to make up before the game got under way and then when they finally struggled out in front, that fourteen points was always hovering over their heads.

Austin Stacks had their tactics well worked out in advance. They adopted a completely negative attitude based on the fact that they could afford to lose the game by up to fourteen and still win. Their policy was to slow the play down to a crawl and this, backed up by a hustling, hard-working man to man defence, was intended to upset Sligo's rhythm and force errors and bad shots.

The Tralee boys were determined to win at all costs and they gambled rather recklessly with their fouls in the hope of frustrating the locals who are known to prefer the pure, free-flowing game.

To a large extent they succeeded in their intentions because they tied up Sligo's attack into a stop-go, disorganised operation and only that All Stars had a distinct height advantage over their opponents they might never have broken down the defensive barrier with which they were faced.

And their frustration tactics paid off in another respect too because both John McGowan and Joe Palmer discovered that the finer

skills of the game had no place in the struggle and both players ran into foul trouble more through desperation than design.

In fact McGowan sat out the greater part of the game on the bench having incurred four fouls in the opening fourteen minutes and when he returned late in the second half he was unfortunate enough to pick up his fifth in a very short time.

Kept hopes alive

With both of these players greatly subdued, All Stars might have been in trouble but not at all. Brian O'Hara and G. Monaghan were only impatient to get their chance and it was this pair who kept Sligo's hopes alive throughout a very critical first fifteen minutes.

Austin Stacks had four up on the board before Monaghan got Sligo's first score from play and that was after five minutes had gone. Stacks continued to show to the front and it was not until the thirteenth minute that Sligo levelled the score at 14-14—and still seven baskets to erase!

Small wonder there was a hint of despair about Sligo's play as they found themselves not only failing to make up the leeway but falling even further behind. Defence was obviously the key and defend Sligo did.

Once Anthony Cronnelly gave Sligo the lead at 16-14, the All Stars put a lid on the basket and Austin Stacks were deprived of a further score between then and half time in which stage Sligo had stretched the gap to 26-14.

Palmer made it 28-14 shortly after the restart and at last the sides were level on aggregate. Still defending desperately but with deadly effect, Sligo eased out 38-18 and thanks to some fine base-line play by Cronnelly, it was soon 48-22.

But the job wasn't yet done because Austin Stacks threw aside their cat-and-mouse policy in the hope of pulling the game out of the fire and Sligo seemed to be caught in a moment of relaxation.

With three minutes to go, Stacks had reduced the gap to 50-30—six points overall and the tension became almost overwhelming as they reduced it even further.

Going into the last minute it was 52-35—three points overall but Sligo kept cool and kept control to win 58-39.

Tense, exciting

Although the game had little to offer in the way of attractive play, it was one of the most tense and exciting ever witnessed by the home supporters who were kept on the edge of their seats right to the finish.

Brian O'Hara had, perhaps, his finest-ever game at home although he is a player who has been improving steadily all season while Gerry Monaghan had a really brilliant first half.

Anthony Cronnelly was a tower of strength in the second half and both Gerry Gallagher and Stan Burns contributed in no small way to the victory.

Sligo All Stars:— A. Cronnelly 16, G. Monaghan 11, B. O'Hara 10, J. Palmer 8, G. Gallagher 6, J. McGowan 5, S. Burns 2.