

# Day of Destiny for Ardscoil Rís with historic All Ireland Final

With their epic Dr Harty Cup victory and All-Ireland Semi-Final victory, Ardscoil Rís have shone a ray of sunshine into the hearts of hurling fans at a bleak time for the sport in Limerick. The team lines out in the All Ireland Colleges Hurling Final against St Kieran's College, Kilkenny, this Saturday at Semple Stadium in Thurles, 2.30pm. In this special pull-out supplement, the Limerick Independent salutes Ardscoil's achievement and anticipates the possibility of All Ireland hurling silverware for Limerick.



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# Ardscoil's epic journey to Semple Stadium

ARDSCOIL Rís's path to Semple Stadium for the All Ireland Colleges Hurling Final and the battle for the Croke Cup against St Kieran's Col-

lege, Kilkenny, has been a roller-coaster ride, making for some of the best hurling witnessed Shannon-side for some considerable time.

Even their path to the qualifying tournament, the Dr Harty Cup for Munster schools, was truly an epic. This was the North Circular Road school team's first appearance in a Harty Cup final, and it was with great satisfaction that they took to the field, making up for the disappointment and knock-backs in the semi-finals of the previous two years.

The Limerick side has clearly been champing at the bit in terms of this year's effort, and Derek Larkin's teenagers have not let their supporters down—roaring out of the traps with dream-like skill and grace to lift the spirits of fans of all ages in Limerick who have been bitterly disap-

pointed by the rows and chaos that is currently besetting the senior team.

The Dr Harty Cup, is the prize awarded to the winners of the Munster Colleges Senior 'A' Hurling Championship, with players under the age of 19 years).

In a hurling-hungry province, this is one of the major prizes. For one thing, the winners (and in the past few years, the runners-up) go on to represent Munster in the battle for the Dr Croke Cup, which is awarded to winners of the All Ireland Senior 'A' Colleges Hurling Championship.

But this is also a competition with a long and rich history, and final first-timers Ardscoil Rís will be hoping to add



their names to the 16 Munster schools who have raised the trophy since the tournament's inception back in 1918.

The only other Limerick side to have carved a major corner for themselves in terms of Harty Cup reputation is Limerick CBS.

In the competition's roll of honour for the top ten holders of Harty Cup titles, Limerick CBS is ranked third.

CBS has won the tournament no fewer than 10 times, the last in 1993. Prior to that, Lim-

erick CBS triumphed in 1920, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1932, 1964, 1965, 1966 and 1967.

But even as finalists, CBS have loomed large in the history of the competition, having fallen at the last hurdle on a further eleven occasions. Limerick CBS were beaten in 1998 by St Flannan's, Ennis; in 1984 by St Finbarr's Cork; in 1975 by Colaiste Iognaid Rís, Cork; in 1974 by St Finbarr's, Cork; in 1970 by North Monastery, Cork; in 1968 by Coláiste Chríost

Rí, Cork; in 1958 by St Flannan's, Ennis; in 1955 by North Monastery, Cork; in 1941 by North Monastery, Cork; in 1940 by North Monastery, Cork; in 1924 by Rockwell College; and in 1923 by Rockwell College.

To have fielded a team in the final 21 times in less than a century is no mean achievement, and Ardscoil Rís will be fervently hoping to join the winners' roll call.

Ardscoil Rís can join that honour roll with pride.

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COACHES FOR ALL OCCASIONS

Wishing Ard Scoil Rís every success in the All Ireland Final

# Omens were always in favour of Ardscoil Rís at outset of campaign

**The Dr Harty Cup campaign of 2010 afforded Ardscoil Rís an opportunity to make up for the 'close but no cigar' disappointments of 2009 and 2008, as well as settling scores against old enemies. While the smart money would have favoured them overcoming any possible jitters to exact the ultimate prize, their success was by no means a foregone conclusion**

THE most authoritative sports pundit of all—that is, the one who is wearing the 20-20 vision enhancing goggles of hindsight—can see that the omens for Ardscoil Rís progress to the All Ireland final were always favourable.

The Limerick school team had a lot of factors on their side.

They were spurred by the humiliation of 2009, when they were hammered off the pitch in the semi-final against County Clare side, St Caimin's. And 2010 marked the third consecutive occasion that the Limerick team had found themselves within sniffing distance of Dr Harty Cup glory (and by extension the All Ireland Croke Cup). The disappointments of 2009 and 2008 had to be made up for.

And 2010 offered them an opportunity for vindication.

The campaign had got off to a good start. There had been convincing victories over the hotly fancied teams, St Colman's of Fermoy, and Cashel Community College.

The victory over St Colman's had been

particularly important, with John Fitzgibbon and Brendan O'Connor ratcheting up the points to secure victory on a 1-13 to 1-9 scoreline. Cashel, meanwhile, did not belong on the same pitch as the Ardscoil Rís team that conquered them that day.

Then in the quarter final, on January 20 at Golden, came Ardscoil's 2-10 to 1-9 defeat of Our Lady's College of Templemore, with Kevin Downes (Na Piarasigh) crasing home two splendid goals to put victory beyond Our Lady's.

Still, nothing was being taken for granted. Ardscoil's start against Our Lady's had been a bit sluggish, and it was only the goals of Downes, right down on half-time and full-time, that put victory beyond doubt.

And if they really wanted to prove themselves this time round, they had to pass the ultimate test—to face the foe that had humiliated them on the receiving end of a bruising 0-16 to 0-6 scoreline, at the hands of St Caimin's.

Yes, the Dr Harty Cup semi-final was

to be a replay of that match.

Would the Ardscoil soldiers 'choke' at the (semi) final hurdle, and let all of their good work in 2010 go down the tubes?

Well, back in January and early February, there was no real indication that this would be a foregone conclusion.

Indeed, there was no small amount of trepidation among the followers of the Ardscoil Rís hurlers.

The Clare team announced that they would be fielding around half of the lineup which triumphed in the semi-final of 2009, and it's almost certain that this would have sent a shiver up the spine.

However, free of injuries, the Limerick squad was facing into the semi-final full of confidence and intent on wreaking vengeance for 2009, which had seen a tied, closely-fought first tie, and then St Caimin's cruising to a comfortable victory in the re-match.

Nine of last year's panel were available to Derek Larkin for Ardscoil Rís and his fellow

mentors Liam Cronin, Niall Moran, Natal O'Grady and Jimmy Browne, so the anticipation for the match within the Ardscoil Rís community was huge.

As it turned out (putting back on the 20-20 vision hindsight glasses again), Ardscoil Rís needn't have worried.

But that is another story...

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# Sweet revenge on St Caimin's in Harty 'semi'

THERE was no small amount of trepidation felt among Ardscoil Rís supporters ahead of the Dr Harty Cup semi-final match against St Caimin's of Shannon, writes Mal Keaveney.

But as it turned out, the Limerick team turned in a patient and commanding performance on the pitch at Meelick on Sunday February 7.

It was a case of third time lucky for the Limerick outfit, beaten semi-finalists for the past two seasons, when they turned the tables on their conquerors of 12 months ago, St Caimin's of Shannon, with an unexpected runaway victory (0-16 to 0-6) at Meelick.

The next stop for Derek Larkin's star teenagers was a clash with Thurles CBS, for whom this will represent a third final

appearance in as many seasons.

Inspired by Cathal McInerney, Kevin Downes, Declan Hannon, Niall Kennedy, Martin Moroney and Mark Ryan, Ardscoil were seldom troubled by the disappointing St Caimin's selection.

Ardscoil sped into an early four point advantage and were full value for their interval lead of 0-9 to 0-3.

By the close of the next quarter, the Limerick XV had surged ahead by seven points. St Caimin's were in desperate need of a goal to reignite their challenge but there was no beating of the upcoming netminder that is Adare's PJ Hall, who produced a really wonderful save to deny Donagh Keogh inside the closing ten minutes.

With the confidence bolstered hugely by this win, it is with

huge optimism that Ardscoil were looking forward to their spot in the final on February 28.

Interestingly, and somewhat ironically, the match was a disappointing result for former dual underage performer with Limerick, Paul Kinnerk (Monaleen), himself an ex-student of Ardscoil, but these days on the teaching staff at St Caimin's where his extended remit includes management of the college's flagship hurling team. Three-in-a-row seeking Thurles CBS were 1-15 to 1-10 winners over Nenagh CBS in the other semi-final. Limerick CBS of Sexton Street were the last local winners of



Adrian Breen in action for Ardscoil Rís against St Caimin's. Picture: Keith Wiseman

the Harty Cup when they tore the formbook to shreds with a famous success over St. Flannan's of Ennis at

Nenagh's McDonogh Park.

Ardscoil 2010: PJ Hall, Declan Hannon, Kevin Keane, Jody Hannon, John Fitzgibbon, Ronan Keane (all Adare); Eric Neville (Askeaton); Cathal McInerney (Cratloe); Fergal Carey

(Creora); Brendan O'Connor (Crough/Kilfinny); Niall Kennedy (Granagh/Ballingarry); Sean O'Connor (Meelick); Eoghan McCarthy (Mungret); Alan Dempsey, Shane Dowling, Kevin Downes, David Sheppard, Adrian Breen, Mark Ryan,

Ciaran Keogh, Kevin McNamara (all Na Piarasaigh). Eamon Farrell (Newport); Shane Crehan (O'Callaghan Mills), Martin Moroney (Parteen); Sean O'Brien, Jack Kelliher, Mark Carmody, Kelvin Lynch (all Patrickswell), Jamie Shanahan (Sixmilebridge).



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# Ardcoil's thrilling 'three-match' final

THE final of the Dr Harty Cup between Ardcoil Rís and Thurles CBS could hardly have been predicted.

Not only was it a marathon that was finally decided by a second replay, but it also yielded some of the best, and most passionate hurling seen on a competitive stage in Limerick for some time now.

In a hugely entertaining drawn encounter against their Thurles CBS opponents at McDonagh Park, Nenagh, on February 28, Ardcoil rescued a draw deep into stoppage time when John Fitzgibbon confidently pointed a difficult free to level affairs at 1-12 apiece.

"By God, we'd have taken a draw before the start but especially when we found ourselves down by that point so late-on," commented Ardcoil mentor Liam Cronin.

"What's a plus now is that the lads have behind the experience of playing in a final, something that is very important at this level. Thurles had the advantage before of having played in last year's final but the playing field is now level. From our point of view, we'll have a couple of training sessions this week and do a lot of homework on ourselves and Thurles and go out and give it another right crack next weekend."

Ardcoil scorched into an early 1-4 to 0-1 lead after towering Kevin Downes splendidly goaled.

Thurles kept in touch with seven pointed frees in the opening-half to rail by only two at the break, 1-6 to 0-7.

Pa Dunne first-timed to the net on the three-quarter-way mark to tie up the contest for the first time.

Points were swapped before Mike O'Brien nudged the holders

ahead at the death only for Fitzgibbon to shoot over the leveler in the final act.

"We had a great start but really needed to kick-on from there but didn't really," Cronin said. "They dropped back their number 12 (John Bergin) and that kind of threw us a little as we lost our shape for a little while. That start was actually very important for us as we had won the toss and opted to play with the advantage of the breeze. Overall our team showed great character to come back and early another deserved chance at winning this championship."

Added coach Derek Larkin: "To be honest it was the right result. While both sides wasted chances in the closing minutes to win it, such was the evenness of the teams that neither deserved to lose. The fact that all their scores came from frees in the first half means we will have to look at that in the lead up to the replay. We got punished for conceding too many frees and it could have cost us dearly."

LINING out at the same venue on March 6, the teams left many observers gasping with a sterling battle which also ended all square.

Limerick great Ger Hegarty immediately predicted another epic contest in the second replay of the coveted Dr. Harty Cup Final at the same venue the following Thursday, so impressed was he by the brilliance of teenagers playing themselves to a standstill delivering two drawn encounters, the latter of which included extra-time and after which it stood Ardcoil 2-21; Thurles 4-15.

Derek Larkin's young guns were three points ahead at the break but needed a trio of minors

in quick succession to ensue extra-time, the last of which came from the previous weekend's saviour John Fitzgibbon (who hit eight points in all), and more thrills for the healthy attendance.

In the closing ten minutes, Niall Kennedy, Jamie Shanahan and Fitzgibbon points pushed the debut finalists into a three point lead only for the defending champions to rattle off four points without reply through ten-point star Mike O'Brien to take a dramatic late lead.

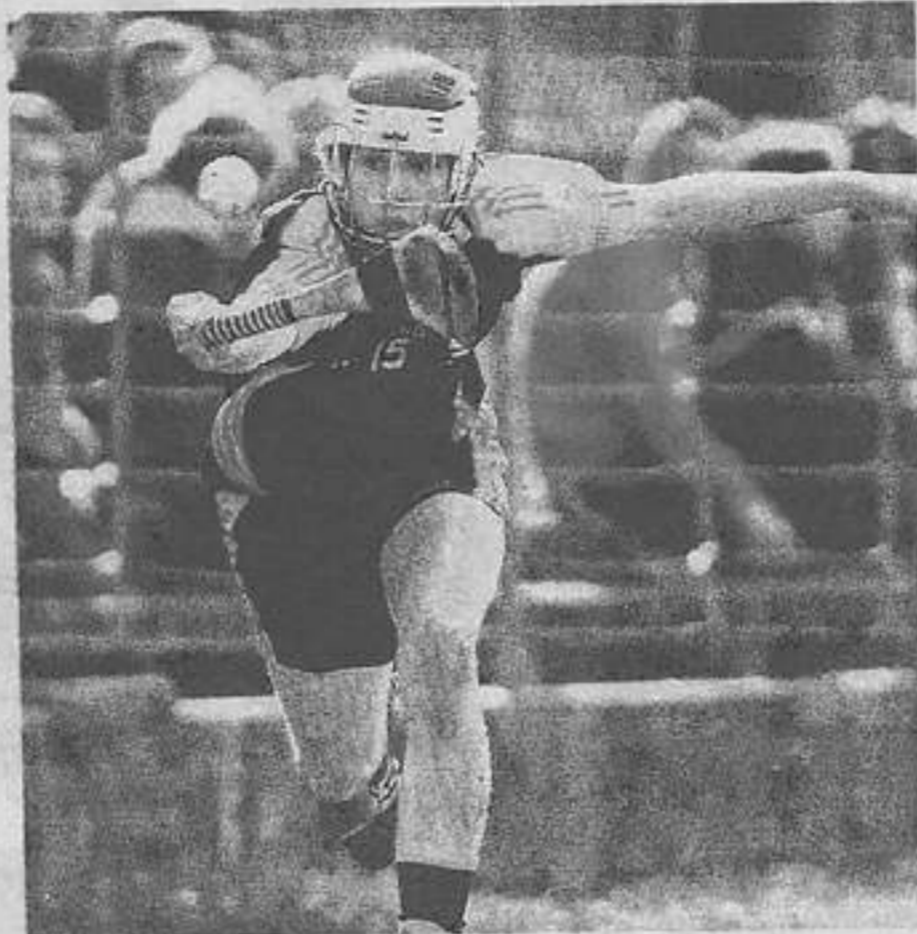
In the final act of a cracking encounter, towering Declan Hannon drove forward from defence to pick-off a sensational leveler (1-5 in total), which sent the Ardcoil supporters home nursing hoarse throats.

"It was the finest exhibition of play in a Dr. Harty Cup competition that I have ever seen," enthused Hegarty. "For excitement, passion, intensity and quality of scores this had absolutely everything. It would have been heartbreak for any of them to have lost it, both deserve at least another day out and what another game is likely to be on our hands. "It's far too difficult to call again - it will be just as tough and close as it has been in the last two matches. I reckon there will be no more than a point or two between the two of them again, and don't rule the possibility of more extra-time. Expect a lot of drama in the last few minutes, as has been the case all along this year, particularly in the two drawn finals."

"From my perspective, and for Limerick also, this is very encouraging for the future, including this year's Munster Minor Championship," added the Limerick Minor Manager.

While both teams were relieved to have emerged from the cauldron with another bite of cherry, there were natural missed opportunities in the run-in.

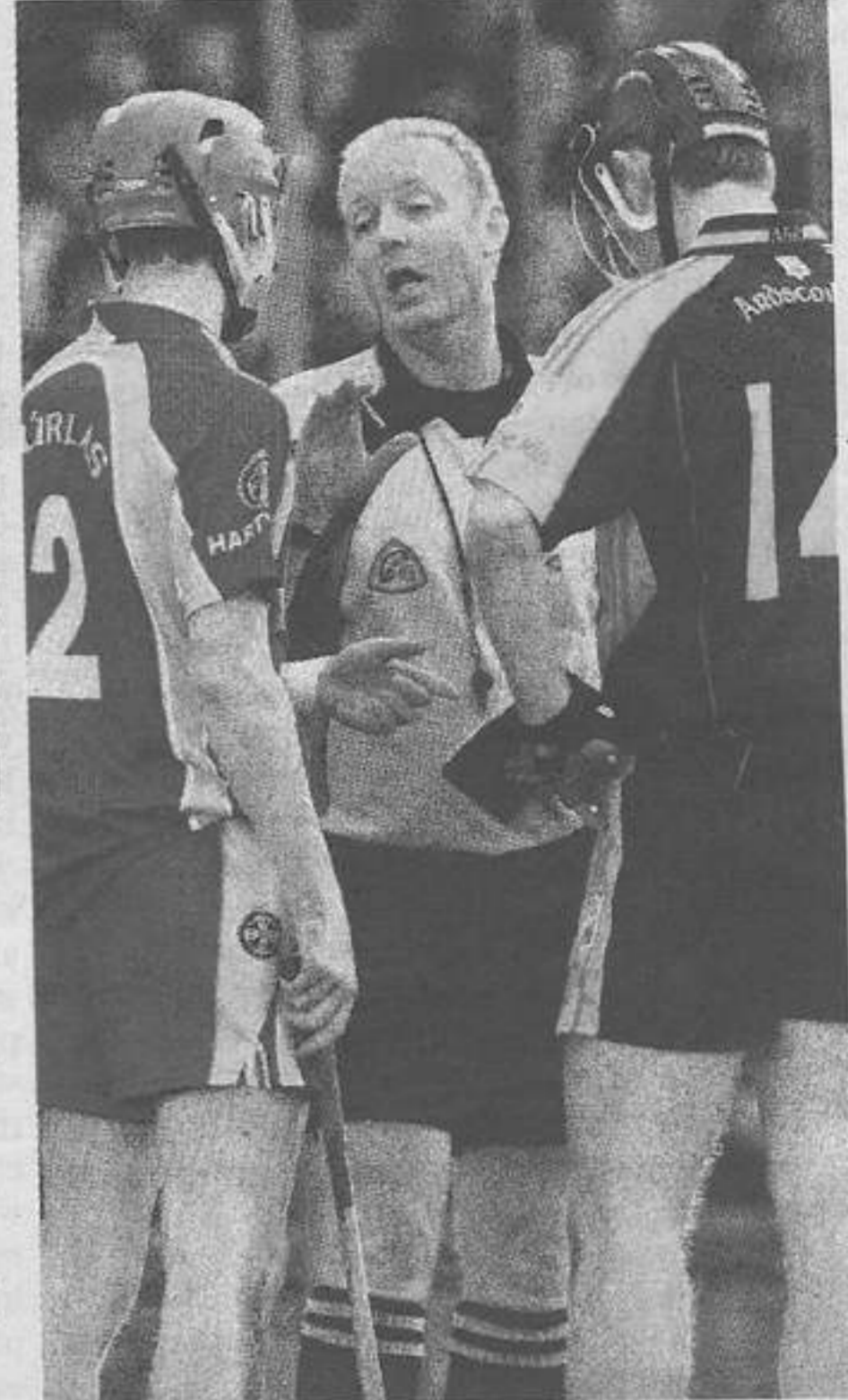
Earlier-on, dominant



Adrian Breen in action for Ardcoil Rís during the Harty Cup Final. Picture: Keith Wiseman

Ardcoil could well have been out of sight when a few well-directed shots flew just over rather than under the crossbar of Thurles goalkeeper Aidan Stakelum. "Both sides probably had the winning of it but we'll take this draw," commented Ardcoil Coach Derek Larkin. "From our perspective,

we're determined to give this third final one hell of an effort and win our biggest piece of hurling silverware for the school, and for Limerick." Eoghan McCarthy, Shane Dowling, Sean O'Brien, Kennedy, Hannon, Fitzgibbon and Kevin Downes will again spearhead the Ardcoil challenge.



CLOSE CALL: The referee speaking to players from both sides during the final. Picture: Keith Wiseman

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# Dr Harty Cup victory at last for Ardscoil Rís

MARCH 11 was Ardscoil's date with destiny regarding the Dr Harty Cup.

Derek Larkin's young guns eventually captured their first Dr Harty Cup when they breezed past holders Thurles CBS in the second replay of the decider in front of another fine attendance at McDonagh Park in Nenagh.

The final score was Ardscoil Rís 3-15 to Thurles CBS's 0-14.

Over the previous magical encounters, the teams were glued together but in the third installment, Ardscoil reigned supreme.

"What people have witnessed here over three games has been nothing other than an exhibition of wonder-

ful hurling involving two fantastic teams," enthused Munster Chairman Jimmy O'Gorman. "Have little doubt but that history will record with relish the three Harty Cup Finals of 2010 as something very special. Those present will remember too to rever these great occasions," he said. "Both sets of players can be very proud of themselves as they were a credit to their schools, families, clubs and counties. School days are the best days of one's life and for Ardscoil Rís these past few days will live with you always. On this latest evidence, Munster Hurling is in very safe hands with teams like Ardscoil

around," O'Gorman added.

In a lovely gesture, skipper Seán O'Brien invited his suspended co-captain Cathal McInerney to join him for the presentation. "Cathal has been fantastic for us all year," noted Larkin. "His red card the last day was probably the only card of any colour he ever picked-up, he was just unlucky. The team, however, are all good friends of Cathal and were never going to let him down, particularly at this stage of the championship." In his acceptance speech, an emotional O'Brien said: "Three games probably tells its own story of how difficult it was to eventually come away with this win, the greatest win in the world for us. A lot of people deserve praise, but especially our excellent management team with Niall



WORTH WAITING FOR: The victorious Ardscoil Rís team and their supporters celebrate their victory in the final of the Dr Harty Cup. Pictures: Keith Wiseman

Moran involved, who must surely be one of the best readers of the game." Now Ardscoil

can set about negotiating their way through to All-Ireland glory. "Few teams find themselves in this position," noted mentor Natal O'Grady, Patrickswell. "We are worthy Munster Champions and are not going to shrug the responsibilities that go with that particular tag. There is no reason why we can't be All-Ireland Champions within a month, that is certainly our goal as of now."



Ardscoil Rís players Shane Dowling and Alan Dempsey celebrate their Dr Harty Cup final victory against Thurles CBS.

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in the  
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# Defeating favoured Kilkenny CBS for a place in the final

ARDSCOIL Rís's qualification for the Easter Weekend All-Ireland School's Hurling Final (Croke Cup) was all the more praise-worthy given that their camp resembled a mini hospital ward ahead of the semi-final victory, 3-13 to 2-11, over fancied Kilkenny CBS at Templemore, writes Mal Keaveney.

In addition to the suspended Cathal McInerney and injured goalkeeper PJ Hall, the first-time Dr. Harty Cup kingpins were also forced to deal with illness surrounding Shane Dowling, Mark Ryan and Niall Kennedy, all of whom were on strong medication the week prior to the match.

"We've a panel of 30 and 24 of those had experience of Harty Cup



Pictured (left), David Sheppard celebrates the final scoreline (below)  
Pictures: Keith Wisemana

action as some point this season and in that regard many of them were well-blooded for championship," remarked manager Derek Larkin.

"We always keep a strong panel but never expected to have to call on so many of them on the one occasion between non-starters and guys who became enforced substitutions.

"What it will mean, however, is a bigger headache than ever for the management team in terms of the 15 players that will actually line-out in the All-Ireland Final against 16-time winners St. Kieran's College (semi-final victors against Athenry).

"Naturally, our energy levels were low as we had played so many games in such a short space of

weeks before this semi. We drew on every reserve we had within us, even young Jody Hanon who is just a kid."

As his norm, Kevin Downes slammed home an early goal for the Limerick XV who went on to lead by a few points at the interval.

On the re-start, the favourites were quickly on level terms and actually pushed ahead for the first and only time on the three-quarter-way mark.

A brace of points from John Fitzgibbon swapped the advantage in favour of Ardscail who then bolted for home with late goals from Fitzgibbon and Adrian Breen.

"Winning is a very nice habit," acknowledged Larkin. "It's a fantastic achievement for us to reach an All-Ireland Final having never even won the Harty Cup before this. We were looking for a good start and we got just that. Actually it was strange for them to have won the toss and opting to play against the breeze. We would like to have played with the breeze anyway. We did go through a purple patch of our own but then there were about 20 to 25 minutes (either side of half-time) when we were sapped of energy and they had their period of dominance."

Limerick CBS were the last local team to lift the coveted Croke Cup way back in 1964.



**Best of Luck to Kevin, Shane, Alan, Mark, Ciarán, Adrian, David & Kevin & All the Ard Scoil Team in the All Ireland Colleges Final on Saturday from Na Piarsaigh GAA CLG**



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**Best Wishes to Ardscail Rís in the All-Ireland Collages Final on Saturday**



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# Victory over Kilkenny leaves Ardscoil within sight of All Ireland glory

Limerick  
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**ALL PICTURES BY  
KEITH WISEMAN**



Jamie Shanahan and David Shepard, Ardscoil Rís, at the final whistle against Kilkenny CBS in the All Ireland Colleges A Semi-Final in Templemore on March 20



Ardscoil Rís coaches discussing tactics at half-time.



The final scoreline at Templemore on Saturday March 20 says it all — Ardscoil Rís, for the first time ever, are through to the All Ireland Colleges A Final!



The Ardscoil Rís team that lined out for last Saturday's All Ireland Colleges A Semi-Final in Templemore against Kilkenny CBS in Templemore on Saturday March 20.



Kevin Downes, Ardscoil Rís, watches a glorious sliothar fly towards the opening goal for Ardscoil against Kilkenny CBS at Templemore on March 20.



David Shepard, Ardscoil Rís goalkeeper, clearing his lines against Kilkenny CBS at Templemore on March 20.



Shane Dowling in full flight for Ardscoil Rís.



Kevin Downes battles for possession during the All Ireland Colleges A Semi-Final in Templemore.



Jamie Shanahan, Ardscoil Rís reaching for a high ball against his Kilkenny CBS opponent.