

GAA MUNSTER CLUB SHC FINAL



Munster champions: Na Piarsaigh (above) celebrate their famous Munster club SHC final win over Crusheen in Thurles yesterday; below left - James O'Brien shows his delight at the final whistle; below right - Kieran Bermingham with his son Conor (3) and the Billy O'Neill Cup

Pictures: Sportsfile

# Na Piarsaigh deliver again

Na Piarsaigh	1-13
Crusheen	0-9

**COLM KINSELLA**  
In Semple Stadium

GOOD things come to those who wait.

Winning a prestigious Munster senior club championship title must have seemed like a lifetime away to Na Piarsaigh after their capitulation to Adare in the county senior hurling final of just two years ago.

But yesterday, the Caherdavin club completed a remarkable transformation in their fortunes, earning their place at club hurling's top table, adding a first ever provincial title to the county senior hurling championship they won for the first time in their history earlier this autumn.

For the first time since Kilmallock's success of 1994, the O'Neill Cup will winter on Shannonside as a result of Na Piarsaigh's remarkable season.

The replayed final win over Crusheen caps a remarkable year for the city outfit which has won all before it on the Limerick club front in 2011. The Limerick champions are now

reaping a rich harvest for having produced a conveyor belt of underage talent over the past decade or more.

Na Piarsaigh can now look forward to an All-Ireland club semi-final date with Loughiel Shamrocks on February 11. Boosted by the confidence this victory is sure to bring, Na Piarsaigh will fancy their chances of lifting the ultimate prize in club hurling on St Patrick's Day.

Ultimately, the game was decided by Na Piarsaigh's indomitable spirit and admirable self-belief and will-to-win.

Trailing by three points 0-6 to 0-9 towards the end of the third quarter, their task appeared a significant one, but they settled to it with renewed vigour.

Crucially, while the new champions rattled off a significant 1-7 before the end, their opponents failed to score.

Substitute Adrian Breen rifled home the defining goal in the 58th minute following good approach play from Kevin Downes and Shane Dowling. It stretched Na Piarsaigh's lead

from an uneasy two points to five. An electric Breen went on to finish with a terrific personal tally of 1-3 from play.

While Breen will enjoy much of the plaudits, four of the winners' starting forwards managed to score from play through David Breen and Kevin Downes, who contributed a pair of points each, as well as Kevin Ryan and Kieran Kennedy, who chipped in with one, Na Piarsaigh's defence and midfield deserve a huge degree of credit too.

For the second successive week, Crusheen were unable to breach their opponents defence.

Kieran Breen, team captain Kieran Bermingham, James O'Brien and Brian Hartnett marshalled a tenacious Na Piarsaigh defence which refused to yield.

The Munster Council reduced the admission charge for the game to €10 three days before the replay, but the filthy weather in the hours before throw-in put pay to the decider attracting a bumper attendance.

At least conditions had improved for the 2,486 paying

customers by the time game began. If the drawn game was somewhat lacklustre, the exchanges here were full-blooded from the throw-in. Indeed, three Na Piarsaigh players were yellow-carded inside.

Those opening minutes showed the steely determination and desire with which the Limerick champions approached the replay.

Na Piarsaigh raced into a useful 0-3 to 0-1 lead after 12 minutes. Their opening two points came from Kevin Downes, while Kevin Ryan clipped over the third.

The wet and greasy underfoot conditions didn't help the flow of the game although referee Cathal McAllister did his best to help continuity.

Crusheen's defence settled to their task in the second quarter, limiting the Na Piarsaigh attack to a single point over the remainder of the half.

The Clare champions rattled off four points without reply, with their industrious centre half forward Jamie Fitzgibbon hitting a brace.

Crusheen led 0-5 to 0-4 at the break and when they stretched into that three-point advantage mid-way through the second half, Na Piarsaigh were facing an uphill battle.

Not for the first time this year, however, they proved more than up to the task.

**SCORERS - Na Piarsaigh:** Adrian Breen 1-3, Shane Dowling 0-3 (two frees, one '65), Kevin Downes, David Breen 0-2 each, Cathal King, Kevin Ryan, Kieran Kennedy 0-1 each. **Crusheen:** Jamie Fitzgibbon 0-4, Pat Vaughan 0-3 (two frees), Tony Meaney, David Forde 0-1 each.

**NA PIARSAIGH -** Padraic Kennedy; David Lynch, Kieran Breen, Kieran Bermingham (Capt); Alan Dempsey, James O'Brien, Brian Hartnett; Cathal King, Pat Gleeson; Shane Dowling, David Breen, Kevin Ryan; Kieran Kennedy, Kevin Downes, Shane O'Neill. **Subs:** Adrian Breen for Gleeson (27 mins), Aidan Hennessy for Bermingham (39 mins), John Madden for O'Neill (47 mins).

**CRUSHEEN -** Donal Touhy; John Brigdale, Cronan Dillon, Alan Brigdale; Ciaran O'Doherty, Cian Dillon, Cathal Dillon; Pat Vaughan, Tony Meaney; Gearoid O'Donnell, Jamie Fitzgibbon, David Forde; Patrick Meaney, Gerard O'Grady, Fergus Kennedy. **Subs:** Conor O'Donnell for Forde (43 mins), Joseph Meaney for Tony Meaney (51 mins).

**REF -** Cathal McAllister (Cork)



## AFTERMATCH REACTION

## Stack in 'dream land' as Na Piarsaigh win Munster

**COLM KINSELLA**  
In Sempie Stadium

VICTORIOUS Na Piarsaigh coach Sean Stack admitted he was 'in dream land' after the Limerick kingpins claimed an historic first AIB Munster Senior Club hurling title in Thurles yesterday.

Clareman Stack, who also won the title as a player, said he was hugely proud of the players' efforts in finally seeing off back-to-back Clare champions Crusheen.

"I am in dream land at this moment, but where will this road take us, I have no idea," Sean Stack admitted.

"With Crusheen you have to battle it out. We were confident we had the bench and Adrian Breen, when the physicality waned a small bit, is a serious athlete and look at the damage he did.

"We thought if we got to the 45 minute barrier in this match, we had a serious chance.

"When our lads spotted David Forde going off, it was a big lift to us. We felt he was their main engine."

Victorious Na Piarsaigh captain, Kieran Bermingham said the turnaround in the fortunes of the Caherdavin club's senior hurling team had been enormous inside the past decade.

"The mood in our dressing room is brilliant. To be fair, five, six, seven,

**Defensive duties:** David Lynch (right) in action for Na Piarsaigh in yesterday's Munster Club SHC final in Thurles

eight, nine years ago, we were playing senior hurling to survive," Kieran Bermingham pointed out.

"Now we want to play senior hurling to win Munster championships to win. It's unbelievable. No one sets out at the start of the year to train for a Munster championship. You set out to win the county. We were lucky enough to achieve that and we brought it to the next level."

"All credit to Sean (Stack), Paul (Beary), Donal (Hartnett), PJ (Breen), they are all terrific guys. It is brilliant."

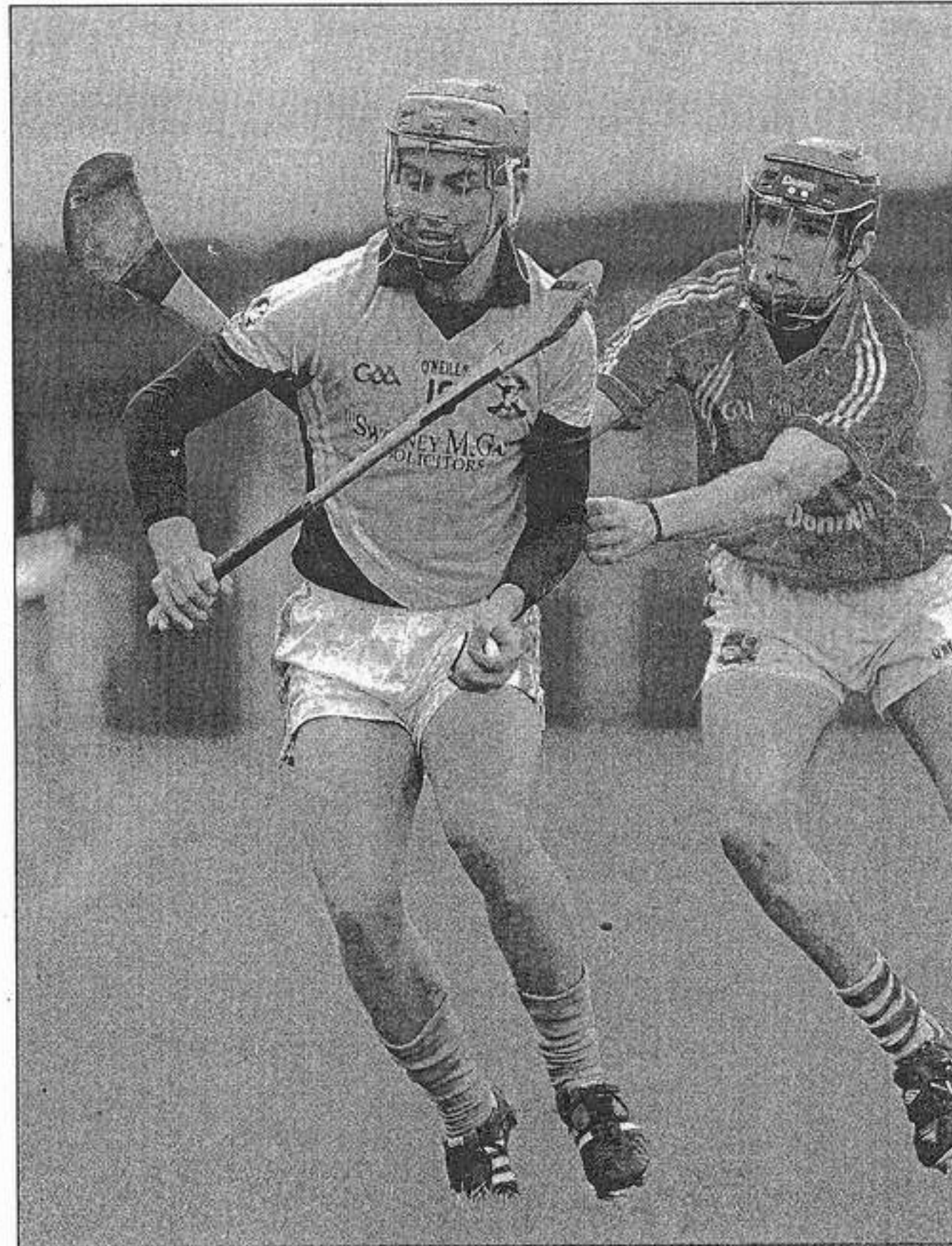
Scoring sensation Adrian Breen made the kind of impact he could only have dreamed of when introduced as a substitute just before half time. UCC student Breen pilfered 1-3 from play, including the match-clinching 57th minute goal.

"It suited me more coming on to the game. It took the guys of maybe 50 minutes before we started to open them up," 19-year-old Breen said.

"It was a tight game all the way, like we knew it would before we finally cracked them open. It wasn't easy won.

"At half-time it was a question of not panicking. Our composure has helped get us this far.

"If we can hang in there, bring the game into the home stretch, we always feel we have a major advantage over any team because of the work-rate of our entire squad."



Picture: Sportsfile

## IN BRIEF

## Main Man - David Breen

A difficult call in the circumstances with several Na Piarsaigh players putting their hands up for the accolade. The likes of Kieran Breen, Brian Hartnett, substitute Adrian Breen and centre half-back James Breen have strong claims, but for his overall work-rate, the award goes to David Breen. The towering centre half-forward also struck over two precious points from play, including a real beauty from long range in the 53rd minute.

## Key moment

THE complexion of a low-scoring final changed utterly the moment substitute Adrian Breen rifled home the game's only goal in the 57th minute.

While Na Piarsaigh had been the better side through the final quarter, their lead was a precarious two points approaching the final few minutes.

However, Breen's goal - following excellent approach play from the hugely influential Kevin Downes - provided the Limerick champions with a five-point lead and finally some breathing space.

## Talking Point

MUCH of the pre-match build-up was dominated by talk of the final venue and how the cost of €20 had prevented a significantly greater number of supporters from attending. The official attendance at the drawn game was 2,893 and the Munster Council chose to reduce the admission fee to €10 for the replay. And the attendance figure this time round? It was down by some 400 on the drawn game to 2,486. The miserable, wet morning and early afternoon certainly didn't help



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