

FBD League in its present form is not worth competing in

Another year of football action is upon us again and hopefully we will have plenty to look forward to here in Roscommon. On the evidence of recent weeks, the U-21 team look to be our best option as they look a pretty useful outfit.

The senior team have a tough task ahead in the National Football League Division Two and the first aim should be to remain in that division. However it is good to be playing stronger teams and the intense competition will do the players a lot of good. Survival in the division we are in will be an achievement.

Roscommon will have to review its participation in the FBD League the way it is set up at the moment. The way things stand it is not worth Roscommon's while taking part in it.

The panel has been decimated because of the rule with regard to third level colleges and then a few injuries on top of that destroys the panel altogether. The FBD League has done nothing for Roscommon football and in fact it has been a negative influence on the team this year.

All this competition has done is to undermine the confidence of the players who are on the panel already and that's very unfair to new players coming into the panel.

They are playing in a very weakened team and it is very hard for them to show what they can do in such circumstances.

Players like Martin Reynolds and Ross Nolan are ones that come to mind over the past few weeks. It has also undermined the confidence of other players who have had to be played out of position and Michael Finneran comes to mind in that regard.

Roscommon have been poor in the three games they've played in the FBD League. The only plus that I can see out of it all is that Mark Miley has emerged as a prime candidate to be the number one goalkeeper -- as he has done well. However Roscommon supporters will be glad to see lads like David Keenan, Cathal Cregg, Enda Kenny and Ger Heneghan back on the team.

An area for concern has to be at midfield where Michael Finneran seems to be lacking confidence at the moment, while Seamie O'Neill is clearly unfit. The best option there at the moment would seem to be the St. Brigids pair of Mark O'Carroll and Karol Mannion. More on the senior team ahead of the Monaghan game next week.

U-21 team impress

The Roscommon U-21 team have been going along very well again this year but as 2007 taught us there is a huge difference between playing in the Hastings Cup and the Connacht Championship. The team played well against Westmeath and Leitrim and they are playing a lively brand of quick, open football.

All the players are comfortable and confident on

the ball, which is great to see. I presume that a lot of the U-21 players will feature in the opening league game against Monaghan next weekend. This crop of players are the future of Roscommon football.

Retain U-21 grade

We have heard a lot about burnout in recent weeks and months and it comes to the fore at this time of the year when a lot of the same players are playing for third level colleges as well as U-21 and senior inter-county level on the one weekend. There are a few simple things that could be done to help in this regard.

The third level colleges should not be allowed into the competitions like the FBD League and the O'Byrne Cup. They have their own leagues and the Sigerson Cup and that should be enough for them.

With regard to the debate about the minor and U-21 championships, I would like to see the U-18 (minor) age limit raised to U-19. It would help with a lot of lads involved because they would not be doing their Leaving Certificate and training for the championship at the same time.

I would retain the U-21 grade as there are a lot of young players who are not on the senior panel and who do not play with third level colleges and who need to play with football at this level.



Tony Mac talks GAA



Mark O'Carroll (Roscommon) and Trevor Howley (Mayo) pictured in Ballinlough on Sunday...our columnist Tony McManus suggests that an O'Carroll/Karol Mannion midfield partnership may be the best option for Roscommon at the start of the NFL. Picture: Michael McCormack.

Roscommon coast into Hastings Final

Hastings Cup

Roscommon 2-14
Leitrim 0-6

■ Paul Hickey

Roscommon secured qualification to the final of this year's Hastings Cup final with a hugely impressive if somewhat fatuous victory over Leitrim last Saturday afternoon.

James McKeague, Ronan Brady, Conor Devaney, Enda Kenny, Paul Garvey, and Colm Garvey played masterfully for Roscommon on a day when Donie Shine marked his return to the inter-county scene with a goal and a point.

A splendid and hugely entertaining first-half performance utterly

overpowered hapless Leitrim and the game was over as a contest by the end of the opening half-hour. Leitrim's defence was not able to withstand sustained Roscommon attacking throughout the opening quarter and, with Conor Devaney on song at the top of the right and Enda Kenny imperiously dominating at full-forward, the away team led by twelve points at half-time.

The game was over by half-time and everybody – players, officials, and spectators – knew it. A ripple of satisfaction ran through the crowd of Roscommon supporters on the 40-minute mark when Donie Shine was introduced as a substitute. Their happiness was enhanced by his conversion of a free in

the 49th minute; the same player's goal nine minutes from the end provoked the largest round of applause of the day.

The polished performance of the Roscommon full-back line was also well received on Saturday by Roscommon supporters: Michael King executed his duties competently at full-back and Ronan Brady sent a strong message to John Maughan with a tremendous performance at corner-back. Ronan Martin's endeavours at left corner-forward met with approval too: it is hoped that this audaciously talented player will emerge this summer as one of the leading scoring forwards in the county. Midfield impressed additionally: Michael Killilea used his

vast reserves of physical strength to muscle his way out of trouble on several occasions; while James McKeague underscored his tremendous strengths as a footballer by dominating that section of the field throughout.

The play: Roscommon began explosively. Conor Devaney, who was withdrawn at half-time in advance of Sunday's senior game with Mayo, scored three points in the opening seven minutes. An Emmet Mahon free and a score from Shane Foley preceded Enda Kenny's goal in the 15th minute. Paul Garvey, Michael King, Oliver Harney, and Kevin Higgins followed this up with points.

A dramatic and incisive run by David Flynn led to Ronan Martin's second

score in the 25th minute. David O'Gara then fisted over a point after a move involving Ronan Brady and Higgins. Points from Devaney and Enda Kenny brought the half to a conclusion.

Two early second half-points from Leitrim put a veneer of respectability on the scoreline. These were cancelled out by efforts from Kenny and Shine. Shine's goal in the 51st minute widened the gap to 15 points, and Paul Garvey brought the game to a conclusion with a point in injury-time.

Roscommon: Mark Miley; Ronan Brady, Michael King, Oliver Harney; Niall Grehan, David Flynn, Colm Garvey; James McKeague, Michael Killilea; David O'Gara (0-1), Paul Garvey (0-2),

Kevin Higgins (0-1); Conor Devaney (0-4, 0-2 frees), Enda Kenny (1-3, 0-2 frees), Ronan Martin (0-2). Subs used: Alan O'Hara for Devaney (half-time); Donal Ward for Grehan (half-time); Donal Shine (1-1, 0-1 free) for Kenny (40 mins); Ronan Gavin for Harney (43 mins); Robert Gaynor for O'Gara (45 mins); John Donnelly for Colm Garvey (50 mins); Gearoid Cunniffe for Martin (55 mins); Eanna Ryan for McKeague (55 mins). Leitrim: Dougie Butler;

Mark Mitchell, Dermot Reynolds, James Campbell; Stephen O'Hara, Paul Ellis, Darren McLoughlin; James McGreal, Conor Sheridan; Stephen Gilhooly, Shane Foley (0-1, free), Ray Mulvey (0-2); Kevin Conlon, Emmet Mahon (0-3, frees), Declan Foley. Subs used: Trevor Farrell for Ellis (19 mins); Kieran O'Flynn for Conlon (half time); James McWeeney for Foley (50 mins); Jason Conroy for McLoughlin (50 mins).

Man of the match...

James McKeague (Roscommon)
This player performed remarkably on Saturday. McKeague matures as a player with every performance.