

Crazy Gang are at it again

St Clarets 1-6

Tir Chonaill Gaels 0-6

THE LAST TIME I watched St Clarets play was at the end of the 2003 season, when they lifted their first ever senior trophy by picking up the Tipperary Cup. That day I rambled on about the dangers of leaving Patrick Lynott unattended, even for the briefest of seconds, as his ability to make something out of nothing was impressive indeed.

Since then a great deal has changed for the Hayes team. They were relegated from Senior Championship status last month due to a technicality, Patrick Lynott and Paddy Quinn have both become established London players and they have also lost the services of the brilliant Paul Rouse, who has opted to play football at home. However, one thing has remained constant throughout that time and that is young Lynott's ability to make a goal chance out of practically nothing.

Mind you, that is not the only thing that has remained unchanged about the Clarets over the winter break. On certain days, and this was undoubtedly one of them, they are like a MCG wicket that has been specially prepared for Victoria's favourite son - Shane Warne - simply unplayable.

There is no particular tactic involved in their play, no game plan and at this stage of the sea-

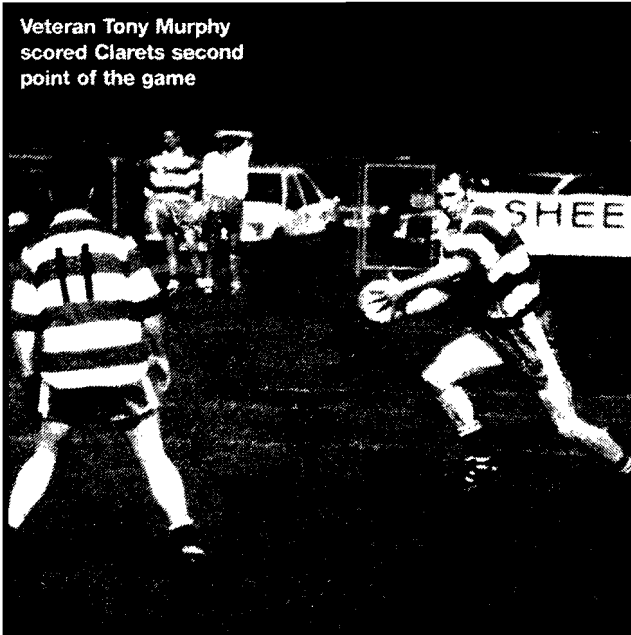
son, precious little training. If they were a soccer team then they would still be playing in Plough Lane, Wimbledon, regardless of whether the local council wanted them there or not, they would do it just to spite people. They are indeed the "Crazy Gang" of London GAA.

What excites them? Well reputations for starters, and in London football they don't come any bigger than Tir Chonaill Gaels. Facing a team like them, or any of the other pretenders to greatness in this football village, is what gets the Clarets' juices flowing and with that comes the ability to either out-play the opposition or force them to under-play. In this case, there was a little bit of both involved.

The Gaels, as ever carrying a huge burden of expectation created by those that have gone before them, were under-strength on this opening day fixture. County men Brian McMonagle,

Hugh Cunningham, Gary Kane, JP O'Donnell and JP Breslin all failed to start the game and indeed only Breslin made any appearance. So in that respect the losers were handicapped from the start. However, the Gaels are too big a club to hide behind that excuse and their pulling power is too great to allow themselves to be outnumbered in any way by the likes of St Clarets.

One of their few quality acts got their ball rolling in this



Veteran Tony Murphy scored Clarets second point of the game

game when Paddy McConigley landed a fine point when bursting through from wing back after five minutes.

Martin Hession, starting his nineteenth consecutive season with the Clarets, responded with his side's first point of 2004 and a minute later, another veteran campaigner, Tony Murphy put the Hayes team ahead.

That man Lynott then popped over a free to extend the lead to two points, before a quick salvo of points from London's hero in Carlow last week, Fergal Hoban and newcomer Owen Brosnan restored

parity.

Paddy Quinn, another star performer in the county colours this year, landed a great free from distance to push the Clarets ahead and that was that at the half time whistle.

Throughout that opening thirty minutes, the Gaels had thrown all sorts of shapes, but none of them, even remotely resembled that of a fluid football team, with far too many passes going astray and invariably straight into the arms of a St Clarets man, who was often simply in the wrong place at the right time.

At the interval changes were made. On came JP Breslin and former London man Pat Dooher to try and improve the quality of the team's performance, but throughout the second half the men in red and white just carried on serving up the same dish of what could probably be best described as "treacle football", with no flow to it at all; the chefs of that particular gastronomic catastrophe being those St Clarets men.

The impressive Hoban landed his second excellent point from distance within a minute of the re-start and although some may have thought that it was the beginning of the big push, all it was really, was a case of catching the Hayes men cold after the break.

Five minutes later Lynott got his second score of the day, this time one of those three-pointers he so likes.

Moments later disaster struck for Andy Carr's team, when midfielder Declan Meehan was red carded for a second booking and not only were the Gaels faced with playing against the Crazy Gang, but having to do it without their full compliment.

St Clarets attempted to press home their advantage but were unable to thanks to a mixture of post, crossbar, keeper, defender and tired legs, but despite the lack of scores, they did have the Gaels firmly on the ropes.

The brilliant McConigley

landed another for his team, again storming through from wing back, but Tyrone man Paddy Quinn cancelled that out with a free and then Dan Sheehan, exactly one year after his comeback, showed guile when taking his time before lobbing a final assurance point for his team with two minutes to go.

Fergal Hoban tried in vain to repeat his magic of last week in Carlow, but alas for him on this occasion, all he could muster was a consolation point and when the final whistle went John Kelly's team were worthy three point winners.

So the new football season in London is exactly one day old and already the Clarets are up to their old tricks. The trouble with these tricks is that as well worn as they are, no one as of yet has found a way of figuring them out.

The Gaels on the other hand will be hoping that this was as bad as they will play all season, for should they reserve a dish of this for another more important day, then they will certainly not be adding a 2004 Championship to their impressive collection.

Scorers

ST CLARETS: P Lynott 1-1 (0-1f), P Quinn 0-2 (both frees), M Hession, T Murphy, D Sheehan (0-1 each).

TIR CHONAILL GAELS: F Hoban 0-3 (0-1f), P McConigley 0-2, O Brosnan 0-1.