

Sarsfields 2016 Feile Na nGael Camogie Campaign

The Sars U14 camogie team and 4 trainers departed from their base in Riverstown on Friday 17th June @ 3.45pm.

Despite the journey that lay ahead and the potential of what the weekend could bring the girls were relatively calm and relaxed. Their initial destination was Dundrum, Tipperary for an opening match against Knockavilla/Donaskeigh Kickhams. From there the team would move to their host club Eire Og Annacarty where they would play the remaining group games.

We reached Dundrum in good time and the team was able to stroll around, stretch their legs and strike a few sliothars before heading to the dressing rooms. Each girl was allocated her jersey for the weekend which emphasised the occasion and the excitement levels were starting to rise.

The team won the game against Knockavilla/Donaskeigh Kickhams 1-4 to 1-1 but we struggled to find our rhythm against a well organised opposition. Once the match was over the team boarded the bus and drove the short distance to Annacarty.

Our 2nd match on Friday night was against the Kilkenny champions Thomastown. We started off better this time around and tapped on a few early points. There was never very much between the two teams, both defences were excellent, midfields were equal and forwards were getting no space. Heading into the 5th minute of injury time Thomastown were awarded a 45m from the sideline which was scored and the match ended all square - 06pts each. This was probably a fair result on the balance of things and both sets of teams knew that there couldn't be many harder games than that in the competition.

At this stage all parents, supporters and players went to the Annacarty clubhouse where we met the wonderful co-ordinator Anne O'Dwyer and the host families. There was a fantastic selection of food prepared for us and straight away we were put at ease. The girls were paired off and introduced to their "new mums" and each family was presented with a gift showing our appreciation. We remained there chatting and enjoying the evening until it was time for the girls to depart. There were a few anxious looking Sars parents but the girls reassured them that all would be ok as we waved them off.

On Saturday morning the girls all returned to the Annacarty pitch well rested. As a result of our draw the previous night we potentially had a trip to Gaultier, Waterford but only if we won our remaining match against the host club. In the final group game Sars headed into an early lead and looked comfortable for most of the game but mid-way through the 2nd half a determined Annacarty team scored a goal which brought them back into the match. Our girls responded well and put a few more scores on the board to leave us 2-5 to 1-2 winners. Once all the results were in our fears were realised and we had to make the 2hr journey to Gaultier.

Our host club could not have been more accommodating by feeding everyone involved with our group and wishing us well as we heading to Waterford. They themselves had qualified for the plate competition so everyone was pleased.

The journey to Gaultier was one which most of us wont forgot in a hurry. We crossed numerous counties, many towns but needed only one toilet break. The team entertained themselves with singing and it was obvious that great camogie teams do not make great choirs!

We arrived in Gaultier at 2.55pm - 5mins before throw in where Feakle/Killanena (Clare) were awaiting. After some phone calls the match was put back 15mins to allow for the trek we had undertaken. The girls looked relaxed and an excellent opening first 10mins set the tone for the rest of the match. Our opposition were strong but we moved the sliothar fast allowing our dangerous forwards to get on the ball and we ran out 2-8 to 0-5 winners. As was the case in every club we visited all weekend, Gaultier had prepared food for the team and once we had finished we boarded the bus for a return trip to Clonmel Og's ground.

The weather at this stage had taken a turn for the worse and we arrived in a wet Clonmel to play Bunclody (Wexford) in a semi-final – throw in @ 6.30pm. On arrival we were met with the news that there were at least 4 teams all scheduled to play on one pitch. So after some further phone calls/discussions it was decided that we would move to the Clonmel Sports Ground for a 7.15 throw in. So we boarded the bus once again and drove to our new destination, all parents and supports following on eventually found us despite what google maps was saying.

We had some concerns that the amount of travelling would eventually catch up on the team but they were so focussed and determined to put in a decent performance and give themselves every chance to make a final. Sars started the semi-final well and had a huge amount of possession but couldn't translate that into scores, the first half flew by and we went in winning by a slim margin despite all the ball we had. We knew we just had to keep doing the same and in the 2nd half we pulled away from the Bunclody team and won on a score of 4-2 to 0-0. There were great scenes at the end of the match and after a long and eventful day we got back on the bus and headed back to our "home from home" Annacarty. It was close to 10pm by the time we returned where the host families were waiting patiently and our children without hesitation jumped into their cars and headed away

We all arranged to meet in Dundrum house on Sunday morning where we would travel to Dungarvan and play our group opponents Thomastown in the 2016 Cup final – throw in at 1pm. The girls were looking a bit tired, nervous and the choir wasn't in full voice on the trip but once Dungarvan was reached they started to perk up. Our excellent driver "Dan" was able to drop us right outside the entrance and the rain was belting down as we entered the ground. It was great to see all the Sars supporters, lots of whom had no children on the team who had travelled to encourage this wonderful bunch of girls.

In the dressing room before the match, lots of the girls spoke about what the weekend had meant to them and their families. They mentioned the effort their mums and dads had made to get them here. The training and hard work which the club had put in, it was an emotional but fiercely determined atmosphere. When we ran onto the pitch the noise from the Sars supporters was incredible. Right from the warm up the girls were calm and controlled and weren't going to let this opportunity slip.

Thomastown as expected were just as determined as ourselves. They got the opening score from a free and we equalised from play before halftime. The rain hadn't let up and the girls came in at half time

knowing they had to improve if they were going to win. Early in the 2nd half Sars got a goal which proved to be the decisive score and point just after to make it 1-2 to 0-1. Just like the group match Thomastown pushed on and got the next 2 points which made it 1-2 to 0-3 with a few minutes to go. Thankfully on this occasion Sars scored another point and held on to the win by 1-3 to 0-3.

It was an incredible performance not just in the final but all weekend by an amazing bunch of girls. Off the pitch they were so well behaved and the feedback from the host families was so positive. The coaches never had to ask them to behave and their manners were especially evident all weekend which is a reflection on the parents.

It was a journey with some little bumps like dead phones, no google maps, getting sick on the bus, changed venues, bad weather but all of this made it a weekend to remember for everyone involved and a privilege to be in the company of this special group of players.

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