

KILMACUD SET TO EDGE CLASSIC

KILMACUD Crokes will look to secure their second successive Dublin U21FC 'A' title when they encounter Ballymun Kickhams in their eagerly-anticipated decider in Newcastle this evening.



Kilmacud Crokes' Ben Shovlin in action in their U21FC 'A' semi-final victory over Ballyboden St Enda's. Pic: Justin Farrelly

The holders, after an indifferent opening round fixture against Cuala, highlighted their credentials with a hugely impressive 15-point win over Ballyboden St Enda's last Saturday week.

Given that Boden had defeated Na Fianna a week previously, a tight, hard-fought local derby was anticipated but Kilmacud dominated from the first whistle with their 1-18 to 0-6 success an accurate barometer on the complete control that they enjoyed over the hour.

Any defence that concedes just six scores over the duration can look back with satisfaction on a job well done and it was obvious the benefit that many of the Kilmacud players who have played senior football on a regular basis this year, enjoyed over their opponents.

Cillian O'Shea was one player who has improved massively over the past 18 months or so and he has the ability and the physicality to dominate from centre-back, much in the manner that Ross McGowan managed in last year's successful campaign.

Kilmacud Crokes' Ben Shovlin in action in their U21FC 'A' semi-final victory over Ballyboden St Enda's.

Kilmacud still have a decent number of players from the 2015 team still eligible this year and the positive experiences from last year is surely an advantage to them this evening.

Despite the continued absence of key forward Dara Mullin as he continues his rehabilitation from injury, Crokes still possess a wealth of attacking options with inside forwards Cian O'Connor and Callum Pearson showing well in that semi-final win over Ballyboden.

MATURITY

However, it was their half-forward line that proved their most accomplished line with Dan O'Brien showing great maturity from centre-forward while on either side, both Tom Fox and Andrew McGowan barely wasted a ball in addition to sharing four points.

If Ballymun are to spring what many observers would consider a surprise, they will need to dominate in this area in particular but they have strong grounds for optimism given the impressive campaign they have enjoyed to date.

Battle-hardened is one word that could be used to describe Paddy Christie's charges and there is no doubt they would have benefited from the tight encounters they experienced with Lucan Sarsfields and St Vincent's at the quarter-finals and semi-finals stage respectively.

While Castleknock were blown away in the preliminary round, Kickhams have been forced to dig deep over the past fortnight with talented goalkeeper Evan Comerford highlighting his importance to the team in terms of his shot-stopping abilities, accuracy from restarts and prowess from 45s.

Darragh Conlon, minor again next year, is another player that has impressed Christie with solid showings at corner-back and he will look to offer defensive stability alongside Leon Young while Aaron Elliott will look to provide a solid foundation at midfield for Kickhams.

If allowed to do so, there is a wealth of attacking options for Christie to mull over with the consistent Carl Keeley, Colm Hulton, Dillon Keating and Anton Swan all capable of posting decent tallies.

Of course, Paddy Small's promising senior club 2016 season saw him claim a Dublin Bus/Herald Dubs Star award this year, and that is something that will encourage Christie further but it may be that Kickhams are deprived of sufficient possession with Crokes, a good deal more mature physically, expected to pull through narrowly.



Ballymun Kickhams' Evan Comerford pulls out a great save for Kerry St Vincent's at semi-final Connolly during the 2016 Dublin GAA.



VERDICT: Kilmacud Crokes