AIB Club Hurling Championship Semi Final.

Naomh Bríd (Carlow) 1-14 St Endas (Dublin) 1-20

The way the Leighlin boys performed in the middle of Dr Cullen Park on Saturday told you everything you needed to know. The acrobat in question had a maroon and white headband and was celebrating Naomh Bríd’s deserved win over favourites St.Enda’s in a cracking All-Ireland club hurling semi-final at the Carlow venue. A first county title, a first provincial title, a first St Patrick’s Day appointment in Croke Park.

It’s been some year for the Carlow men and their manager, Owen Garvey. “We knew we’d be up against a very good team, and they are a good team,” said Garvey as he was congratulated by what looked like the entire population of Leighlin. “But our lads are just relentless. They’re very fit, very determined, very focused and they have a lot of skill. When you have those attributes you’re always in with a chance. “We knew if we got under their skins a bit we’d have a chance to maybe rattle them and get the better of them.”

The Carlow side played into the wind in the first half but theirs was the happier dressing room at the break. They held the St.Enda’s attack for most of the first half and it was point for point — with the Dublin side relying largely on placed balls — until the 27th minute, when Paddy Connolly struck for the game’s first goal, out-fielding Ger Hickey and finishing well. With the game edging into injury time, Naomh Bríd hit back, Micheal Cowman making a lot of ground down the middle and staying calm to finish from the edge of the square to make it 1-8 to 1-7 at half time in his side’s favour.

The second half started as lively as the first finished. Brendan Lawler’s free-taking helped the Leighlin boys to a five-point lead before a sluggish St. Endas side responded, Connolly leading the charge. Darragh Byrne did some damage at midfield and had a goal attempt from a close-in free turned away, but they couldn’t draw level.

When Naomh Bríd’s keeper James Kehoe somehow kept out Patrick Doyles goal-bound flick, the Offaly men got back in gear: Lawler was unerring from placed balls and restored Naomh Bríds momentum, and a six-point win certainly didn’t flatter them. “

Garvey was looking ahead to the All-Ireland final, suggesting his team will stick to a tried and trusted tactical approach: “We didn’t go out to man-mark them. We knew Paddy [Connolly] would run all over the field, and for someone to run after him would be crazy, to give up a player on your team. So we played an orthodox back line, we didn’t pack our defence, we came out to go for the jugular and to try to win the game. There was going to be no packing the defence — we played our defence in position as much as we could and cut down on the space. “It worked out on the day. Today was a good day and hopefully it’ll repeat itself in the All-Ireland club final.”

Scorers for Naomh Bríd : Brandan Lawler 0-11 (8f, 1 65); Micheal Cowman 1-1; Sean Bambrick and Pat Hickey (2f) 0-2 each; Peter Shaw, Mark Brennan, James Kane and Alan Brennan 0-1 each.

Scorers for St Endas: Paddy Connolly 1-5 (0-3f, 0-1 65); Darragh Byrne and Patrick Doyle (2 65) 0-2 each;, Aidan Moran, Aaron McCormack, Robbie Ruth and Mick O’Brien 0-1 each.

Naomh Bríd: James Kehoe,

Ger Hickey, Desmond Shaw, Johnny Shaw,

Sean Watchorn, Eddie Kane, Alan Brennan,

 James Kane, Jimmy Cahill,

Mark Brennan, Pat Hickey, Peter Shaw,

 Sean Bambrick, Brendan Lawlor, Micheal Cowman.

Sub: Paddy Doran for Pat Hickey (60).

St. Endas : Peter McCormack,

Sean Maher, Kevin O’Gorman, David Maher,

Declan Kennedy, Padraic Maher, Martin Cahill,

Aidan Moran, Jack Enright,

Denis Maher, James Corbett, Darragh Byrne,

Robbie Ruth, Paddy Connolly, Aaron McCormack.

Subs: Ricky Maher for Enright (38); Ger O’Grady for James Corbett (42); Mick O’Brien for Ruth (50).

By Aaron Amond