

Rugby – Connacht v Leinster, Guinness PRO12 Final

Dream end to a dream season for Connacht



Perennial PRO12 underdogs, Connacht, outplayed their more celebrated Leinster rivals in the Guinness PRO12 Final on Saturday at BT Murrayfield to win the title for the first time in their history.

Never headed on the scoreboard, the team from western Ireland played their outstanding brand of running and passing rugby in the Edinburgh sunshine to overcome the opposition and take their first ever PRO12 title.

It looked like business as usual from the former Champions as they went on the offensive from the start and pushed Connacht deep into their 22. A mistake from the 'away' side then gave Connacht the ball and they spent the next six or seven minutes working their way out of their own half and into the opposition's.

A missed tackle on wing, Matt Healy in the middle of the pitch put Leinster on the back foot and the ball was moved on, via the quick hands of centre, Bundee Aki, to full back, Teirnan O'Halloran. With 30-odd metres to the line, he fended off Rob Kearney, and outsprinted the cover to go over for the opening try. Stand-off, Alan MacGinty then slotted home the conversion and Connacht were 7-0 ahead with 13 minutes played.

A mid-field collision saw Leinster lose second-row, Mick Kearney, but Connacht were still in the driving seat, forcing a desperate defence on the part of their opponents.



With just over 20 minutes played, another break from Healy set up the next score as the ball was flipped through the hands with amazing dexterity and out to Niyi Adeolokun on the wing. The speedster then chipped the ball over the head of Eoin Reddan and easily outpaced the scrum half to collect and dive over for the second try. MacGinty's attempt just skimmed across the front of the posts, but they were 12-0 ahead and, already looking like winners.

A few minutes later, they were on the scoreboard again. Leinster were increasingly desperate for ball and territory and, as a result, were increasingly drawn into handling and playing errors as they tried to make up lost ground. Another turnover sent Connacht on the attack again, but this time they were left with a penalty as Leinster infringed at the break down, handing an easy kick to MacGinty to make it 15-0 with just over 10 minutes left to the break.

Leinster then had a period of possession inside the opposition 22, but Connacht's defence matched their attack and the half ended with the ball being cleared up to Leinster's 22.

So, could the underdogs from Galway who had never finished higher than seventh in the league, keep the momentum up against the mighty, former, PRO12 and European Champions from Dublin, Leinster?

The first couple of minutes of the second half suggested not... Ever dominant in the scrum, Leinster won an early penalty deep in Connacht's half to let stand-off, Jonathan Sexton, knock over an easy penalty to close the score to 12-3.

MacGinty almost cancelled the score out a few minutes later, but it was back to the script as, following on from another well defended attack by Leinster, Connacht almost made the scoreboard again via prop, Tom McCartney who broke clear inside the 22, but was held up over the line by substitute full back, Zane Kirchner.

Maintaining their territorial advantage, Connacht held onto the ball and dragged the Leinster defence all over the pitch, before a neat grubber from MacGinty put Healy through to touch down for the third try. MacGinty missed the conversion, but, with 57 minutes on the clock, it looked a long way back for Leinster.



Leinster then enjoyed their longest period of possession, but still could make few inroads, being held out on a few occasions when near the five metre line. Kirchner did cross the line on one occasion, but play was pulled back for a forward pass.

An unfortunate clash of heads then left O'Halloran stretched out on the pitch being attended to by the medical staff. As referee, Nigel Owens saw no need to stop the match as play moved away from the scene, Leinster were now a man to the good. They took full advantage and, swinging play across the front of the defence, they put Sean Cronin in space and through for the try, accompanied by a chorus of 'boos' from those who thought the match should have been stopped for the injury. Sexton followed up with the conversion for a 20-10 scoreline with 12 minutes left to play and two scores to find.

Another injury left Connacht to play the final few minutes of the match with winger, Healy, at scrum half , but they held easily held on to their 10 point lead to take the title and the Cup back to Galway.

Images from the match will appear [here](#) over the next few days.