



Experimental is the key word as Down get off to winning start

Down debutant Ryan Brady grabbed the opening goal for the Mourne men in their McKenna Cup derby win over Armagh on Sunday at Pairc Esler. Photo: Pat O'Hare

Power NI Dr McKenna Cup Section B Down 2-12 Armagh 0-10 By Joseph Donnan

WITH Down fielding five of the team which lost in the Championship to Armagh and Armagh including only four of their starting 15, this opening NI Power McKenna Cup game at Pairc Esler on Sunday had experimental stamped all over it.

Add to that Dan Gordon and Kalum King both lining out in the Down attack while Charlie Vernon was at full back for the visitors and it really was a case of in with the new.

Down won with plenty to spare but both team managements went away wiser. Down had good performances in every line of the team and the substitutes came in eager to impress. While Armagh's debutants did not fare so well, they do have half the Crossmaglen team to come back in. What they had on show on Sunday was well below what is required at this level but then this competition is all about giving match time to fringe players hoping to break through.

Perhaps, disappointingly, Down did not experiment at full back where they have had problems and given Dan Gordon's impressive input further out the field it would be unfortunate had he to shore up the last line again this season. Kalum King proved an effective target man at full forward if Down can conjure a new

midfield pairing.

James McCartan was reserving judgement so soon into the year. "Nobody did themselves any harm today", he said after the game.

Next up for Down is Monaghan at Clones this Sunday (2pm). Monaghan started nervously against St Mary's last Sunday but finished convincingly, scoring five points without reply in the closing seven minutes to come away with a 0-14 to 0-6 victory and take top spot on score difference in Section B.

Monaghan fielded an experienced side with three debutants in their starting 15. The students enjoyed the lion's share of possession in the first half but still trailed 0-4 to 0-3 at the break. Paul Finlay's move from midfield to full forward had the desired effect for Monaghan in the

second half as they opened up a winning lead, helped partly by wasteful finishing by the students.

Down will probably use this game to give match time to those who did not figure against Armagh so predicting a line-up would be impossible.

Last Sunday's team was nothing like the one released to the media mid week and even showed changes from the revised selection in the match day programme.

Monaghan at Clones in what is effectively a group decider should give a clearer indication of the worth of the Down team at this early stage of the season.

Elsewhere in the McKenna Cup, Donal O'Hare (QUB), Chris Clarke (UUJ) and Ronan Sexton (St Mary's) were Down men catching the eye. See pages 56-57

