

## EXPRESSsport

LEINSTER SPECIAL JHC FINAL

## Ratheniska reach Leinster



Above: Barry Fingleton celebrates his crucial second half goal in Sunday's Leinster Special JHC in Ratheniska while below, he throws his body on the line as he attempts to block this clearance from Parnells defender Graeme George. Photos: Alf Harvey



<b>Park-Ratheniska</b>	<b>2-10</b>
<b>Parnells (Dublin)</b>	<b>1-8</b>

**Jack Nolan**

Park-Ratheniska created history on their home ground on Sunday afternoon, as they became the first Laois team to win a Leinster hurling and football club double when they defeated Parnells of Dublin in a thriller to take the Special Junior Hurling title to add to the football one they won back in 2006.

This was a special day in the history of Park-Ratheniska, as they hosted a Leinster final for the second time and once again came out winners. On this occasion they had to produce one of their best ever displays to see off the Dublin champions, who were aiming to make it four-in-a-row in this competition for Dublin clubs.

The standard of hurling was of an exceptionally quality and the large attendance was kept entertained right to the finish, as Parnells fought to the very end but Ratheniska producing their best hurling on the day when they were always destined to take the cup.

Goals win matches, and Park-Ratheniska got two at crucial stages. The first came in the dying seconds of the first half when Sean Tynan burst through and set up Darragh Nolan, who sent a blistering shot to the corner to give his side a 1-6 to 0-4 half time lead. On the restart Parnells hit back with Colm McDonald point and then Darragh Curley-Fagan shot a terrific goal to leave just a point between the sides. However, three minutes later Barry Fingleton cut in from the left and sent a rocket to the far corner.

This was a brilliant team display from the Laois champions, who had come through a tough Leinster campaign to reach the decider, and who had also lost Cathal Óg Greene and Jimmy Langton along the way to suspensions. In their absence, the team really rose to the occasion and showed a huge appetite

for success right from the throw in, against a Dublin side that came full of confidence and backed by a large travelling support.

The pitch, after torrential rain on Friday and Saturday, was in remarkable condition and a fine sunny afternoon made it perfect for hurling. The home side got off to a great start with Brendan Fingleton landing a long range free after Sean Tynan was fouled, and then Paddy Kelly cut up the right wing and sent over a magnificent point on the run.

An overly fussy referee was whistle happy in the early stages, and Colm McDonald got Parnells off the mark in the fifth minute. A short puck out from Benny Dowling found David Larkin soon after, and his long shot reached Eamon Cooke, who in turn passed to Darragh Nolan who fired over a fine point. Minutes later a great solo from Sean Tynan through the heart of the Parnells defence ended with a super score for a 0-4 to 0-2 lead.

Colm McDonald was deadly accurate from frees for the visitors and he cut the gap to a single point, but points from Cooke and Brendan Fingleton stretched the gap to three by the 20th minute.

The next ten minutes saw Parnells put on huge pressure, but the Ratheniska defence were once again magnificent and held them to just a single score. A two point gap with the aid of the breeze didn't seem enough for Park-Ratheniska as half time approached, but they would soon change that. A wonderful clearance from Brendan Fingleton was sent straight to the hand of Sean Tynan, who turned and drew the defence and then passed to Darragh Nolan, who beat his marker before rifling to the corner of the net for a 1-6 to 0-4 half time lead.

Within three minutes of the restart a flying Parnells side had shot 1-1 and were on top, until Eamon Cooke settled the Ratheniska nerves after Sean Tynan was fouled. Cooke then put a perfect ball in the path of Brendan Fingleton who sent a blistering shot to the far corner of the net to the delight of the



Eamon Cooke looks for options for Park-Ratheniska in Sunday's Leinster Special JHC Final in Ratheniska