



*Match Reports Sat 19<sup>th</sup> March Internationals*  
*Irish Junior Women's Squad v Northern Ireland*

**Irish Junior Women's Development Squad v Northern Ireland U16's**

Having selected the Republic of Ireland Junior Development Squad on March 17<sup>th</sup> at the Junior Girls Inter-County Competition in Naas, the new squad of 17 travelled to Belfast two days later to take on the Northern Ireland U-16 and U-19 sides. It was a daunting task for a team that had never even trained together.

In the first match versus the U-16s, the expected nerves from the Irish team sowed as they quickly went down 10-2 in the first set. Captain Ciara O'Rourke then played her part to steady the team and begin a fight back.

At 16-10 down the team rallied, aided by great setting from Heather Clancy and Leanne Campbell, combined with strong attacking from Amy McDonnell. The spirited fight back was not enough to take the set however, and they went down 25-19.

The second set saw the introduction of Katie Nolan and Aebhin Nugent who both, with strong serving, settled the team into a 12-6 lead. The team were now playing without the first set nerves and looked to be enjoying playing volleyball in front of a large crowd on what were their International debuts. They continued to punish Northern Ireland errors thanks to some great attacks by Ailis Loughnane and Tara Power and closed out the set 25-17.

With both teams now believing they could win the match, the intensity of play increased. Ireland were boosted by strong defensive work from libero Gina Burke. With the third set all level at 16-16, Irish setter Ruth Ryan combined well with Lisa Needham twice to give Ireland a two-point lead. Ireland took this lead and finished out the set strongly with serving from Katie Nolan.

The starts of the fourth set saw Ireland full of confidence and with great serving from Eithne Coleman and all-round court play from Ciara O'Rourke, Ireland were now starting to play some great volleyball in long rallies. They came out 25-17 winners to take the match 3-1, much to the delight of both the players and there travelling support.

*Republic of Ireland Team V Northern Ireland U-16's*

Ciara O'Rourke (Capt)

Tara Power

Aebhin Nugent

Amy McDonnell

Katie Nolan

Leanne Campbell

Gina Burke

Ailis Loughnane

Ruth Ryan

Heather Clancy

Lisa Needham

Eithne Coleman

***Coach: Marie Sheridan***

***Assistant Coach: Tara Dawson***



## Republic of Ireland Junior Women's Development Squad v Northern Ireland U-19's

Spurred on by victory over the Northern Ireland U-16's, Ireland knew they had a much harder task at hand playing against the experienced U-19 team.

Ireland started the match well with both teams going point for point at 7 all; at this point Ireland found their attacking form through Katie Nolan and Karen Benn who scored six unanswered points to take control of the set at 14-7. Solid serving by Ciara O'Rourke and great defensive work by Sarah Benn saw Ireland take the set 25-16.

The second set saw Leanne Campbell assume the setting duties for Ireland and she combined well with Tara Power to keep the teams level at 10-10. Northern Ireland stepped up a level and with some great serving and hitting went into a six-point lead. Ireland rallied at this point but could not recover and lost the set 25-19.

Ireland started the third set with renewed vigour and the introduction of Ashling Clancy saw her make her mark on the game, combining well with her sister Heather to make some great kills. Some deep serving by Aebhin Nugent put Northern Ireland under pressure, which Ireland capitalised on with some great work on the net. The team were in a four-point lead when they hit a purple patch with all players upping their game. Heather Clancy's setting enabled the Irish hitters to attack Northern Ireland with great gusto and finish out the set 25-15.

In the fourth set Northern Ireland threw everything they had at Ireland but this young team were up to the challenge. Eilis O'Brien in the libero position soaked up all the Northern Ireland pressure to keep Ireland on the attack. With the match poised at 19-18 to Northern Ireland it was all to play for. Northern Ireland then got a run of serves to take a 22-18 lead. Orla Lynch on the wing for Ireland did her utmost to level the game with some super hits but Northern Ireland stood strong to win out 25-22.

The great travelling support was now to be treated to a fifth set in this thrilling and tense match. As the visiting team took to the court in the deciding set, the supporters found great voice and seemed to spur the team into action. Ireland started the set solidly, creating a 6-1 lead with some amazing blocking by Karen Benn. The team were now playing with confidence and belief. Three great serves from Sarah Benn saw Ireland move closer to the finish line. The magnificent win was secured by two of the hits of the day from Aebhin Nugent and Katie Nolan.

The weekend was a huge success for a new and inexperienced squad, who showed great potential and skill to win two close matches. The squad now begin to prepare to travel to Belgium at Easter to play in the Flanders Youth Tournament. This weekend showed the future of Irish Women's Volleyball is bright with several up-and-coming stars on this Junior Development Squad.

### *Republic of Ireland Team v Northern Ireland U-19's*

Ciara O'Rourke (Capt)

Tara Power

Aebhin Nugent

Amy McDonnell

Katie Nolan

Leanne Campbell

Eilis O'Brien

Karen Benn

Sarah Benn

Heather Clancy

Ashling Clancy

Orla Lynch

***Coach: Marie Sheridan***

***Assistant Coach: Tara Dawson***