



# CLG ULADH

## AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL 2019

CLUICHÍ | CULTÚR | TEANGA

25Ú EANÁIR 2019

ÓSTÁN NA CILLE MÓIRE, AN CABHÁN



# 05 TUARASCÁIL AN RÚNAÍ

**These are changing times in the GAA world. As I write this report the five experimental Gaelic Football rules are being trialled in the pre-season competitions and this comes on the back of significant changes in the inter-county football and hurling championships which came into being, albeit on a three-year trial basis, in 2018.**

For the first time since 2014 an Ulster county contested the All-Ireland Senior Football Final and while there was to be no luck for Tyrone on this occasion there was success for the O'Neill County earlier in the year with Moy Tír na nÓg taking the honours in the All-Ireland Intermediate Club Championship.

The Red Hands had further success when they captured the All-Ireland Ladies Intermediate Football title and I mention this in the context of the roll-out of the 20x20 initiative during the past year. This is an all-inclusive campaign to change perceptions to women's sport on the island of Ireland with the aim by 2020 to achieve a 20% increase in media coverage of women's sport in Ireland and to increase both participation and attendance levels for women's sport by the same levels. It is an exciting initiative and we all have a part to play in helping this ambitious target to come to fruition.

Ulster GAA has over many years had a successful relationship with the Ulster Ladies Gaelic Football Association and the Ulster Camogie Association and on many occasions Ladies' games have formed part of a double-bill with our main games. But that is not where our innovation ended. This has never been more exemplified with the appointment

of a female referee to take charge of a major inter-provincial final in 2018. In 2017 Cavan's Maggie Farrelly took charge of the Ulster Club Junior Football Final - the first female referee to take charge of a provincial club final - and Maggie added to her impressive list of refereeing accolades in 2018 when she became the first female referee to take charge of an inter-county provincial final when she took charge of the minor decider between Monaghan and Derry.

The GAA's success story is undisputed but none of what has been achieved would ever have happened without the countless hours of voluntary effort that has been amassed across the Association over the last 134 years. The GAA's contribution to Irish life has been immeasurable but it is important, and more so now than ever, that the selfless efforts of the volunteer are not taken for granted. While there are many positives from volunteering, there are also many demands, both from within our great Association and from outside it as well, so the message must be heard loud and clear - that message is that we must have realistic expectations of our volunteers and it is in the long-term interests of no one to over burden them with increased bureaucracy and increased expectations. They are too valuable a resource to be taken for granted.

Equally our players, and particularly our inter-county players, must be treated with dignity and respect. The sacrifices they make to play the game they love are akin in many instances to that of some professional sportspeople. Research undertaken by The Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) on behalf of the GAA

and GPA, and published in September, found that some inter-county players can devote up to 31 hours per week to their sporting commitments and sacrifice other aspects of their lives to do so. While the majority of respondents also reported significant benefits from their involvement at inter-county level, we must be careful that our expectations and demands we put on players do not exceed what should be realistically expected from them.

## 2018 GAMES ACTIVITY

In 2018, the Anglo Celt Cup was reclaimed by Dún na nGall for the first time since 2014.

The Ulster Club Championships continue to enthuse our players and spectators. Ruairí Óg, St. Galls and Castleblayney collected the respective titles in hurling and congratulations to all involved. The Ulster Hurling Club Final between Ruairí Óg and Ballycran took place in the Athletic Grounds with over 3,700 spectators in attendance.

2018 marked 50 years of the Ulster Senior Football Club Championship and this year's final saw the unique pairing of Gaoth Dobhair and Scotstown. At this year's final we invited representatives from all 18 clubs who had previously won the Seamus MacFerran Cup to attend, along with members of the MacFerran family. The clubs were presented with specially commissioned plaques which were warmly received by all our previous winners. 2018 saw Gaoth Dobhair become the 19th club to win it as they became the second Donegal club to lift the Seamus MacFerran Cup. Comhghairdeas Gaoth Dobhair. Well done to Naomh Éanna and Red Hugh's who collected the Intermediate and Junior titles respectively.



2018 saw the seventh year of the Táin Adult Club Hurling League. This initiative saw a total of 22 teams compete from across the province of Ulster, as well as teams from Louth. The Connacht clubs who originally competed were again incorporated into the Connacht section. There were a total of three divisions. Keady (Ard Mhacha), Sean Treacys (Ard Mhacha) and St Feichin's (An Lú) emerged as the Division 1- 3 winners respectively. This competition is littered with the non-fulfilment of games and is in need of a major overhaul. This is currently being examined.

The Ulster Football Club League in 2018 saw a total of 44 clubs involved, with 18 teams in senior and 26 teams in intermediate. This was the highest number of entries in a number of years which illustrates that clubs are keen for games at this time of year. Eoghan Rua Coleraine (Doire) and Laragh United (An Cabhán) won the Senior and Intermediate finals, with both finals being great spectacles. This competition again provided clubs with competitive action at their appropriate level prior to the commencement of their internal county games programmes. The Allianz Football League had contrasting fortunes for the Ulster

counties. An Cabhán secured promotion to Division 1 albeit at the expense of Dún na nGall. Ard Mhacha defeated Fear Manach in the Division 3 Final with both teams being promoted, with An Dún dropping to Division 3. Doire were disappointingly relegated to join Aontroim in Division Four.

On the hurling fields, An Dún reached the AHL Division 2 Final where they lost out to Maigh Eo at Kingspan Breffni Park. In the Nicky Rackard Final, Dún na nGall overcame Warwickshire on a 2-19 to 0-18 scoreline. Well done to all involved.

### **BOI DR. MCKENNA CUP**

In our first competition of the year, the Bank of Ireland Dr. McKenna Cup, Dún na nGall broke the dominance of Tír Eoghain by defeating them in an entertaining final at the Athletic Grounds by 1-16 to 1-12. I wish to compliment the understanding from our counties and universities during the campaign as weather paid havoc with the schedule. Getting it completed on schedule was a major achievement and I commend the counties and colleges for their tolerance and understanding throughout the campaign. I also extend my gratitude to Bank of Ireland

for their continued sponsorship of this important competition in the Ulster GAA calendar.

### **SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP**

The 2018 Ulster Senior Football Championship commenced at Pairc MacCumhaill on Sunday 13th May, where Dún na nGall overcame An Cabhán 2-20 to 1-15. The following weekend, Fear Manach defeated Ard Mhacha by 0-12 to 0-07 at Brewster Park and Muineachán edged out Tír Eoghain by 1-18 to 1-16 in an exciting tussle at Healy Park. One week later, An Dún overcame Aontroim at Páirc Esler on a 1-18 to 0-14 scoreline while Dún na nGall beat their neighbours Doire at Celtic Park on a 2-16 to 0-16 scoreline. The great All-Ireland winning Down team of 1968 was honoured by the Ulster Council at the game in Páirc Esler.

In the first semi-final, played at Healy Park on Sunday 3rd June, a last gasp Eoin Donnelly goal saw Fear Manach shock Muineachán by 1-08 to 0-10 to secure the first Ulster Final place. The following Sunday in St. Tiernach's Park, Dún na nGall powered past An Dún to ease to a 2-22 to 1-12 win.

## 05



The Ulster Final took place two weeks later where Dún na nGall and Fear Manach met at St. Tiernach's Park, Clones on Sunday 23rd June. 28,778 spectators attended the Final on an historic day. The occasion of unique final pairing was added to by the attendance of the DUP leader Arlene Foster at the game.

The Ulster Senior Football Champions from 25 years previous, Doire were honoured. With the inclusion of honouring the successful teams from the past, Cumann na mBunscol exhibition games, band entertainment, the Under 20 Football Final and the Senior showpiece, Ulster Final day continues to be a celebration of our great Association in the province of Ulster. The game itself was a step too far for Fear Manach, as Dún na nGall assumed total control for long spells and emerged as 2-18 to 0-12 champions. Congratulations go to Dún na nGall

for a well deserved success. The 2018 Ulster Senior Football Championship was played over a shortened period with the four quarter-final games taking place over two weekends and counties were playing every two weeks as they remained in the hunt for the Anglo Celt. Sunday 23rd June seemed an early conclusion to our Ulster Championship but is a positive development for all our clubs.

#### ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The All-Ireland Senior Football Championship for Ulster representatives began on 9th June with five of our counties involved. Doire lost out in a high scoring encounter at Owenbeg to Cill Dara by 2-22 to 2-14. Aontroim suffered defeat on the road as they lost out in Tullamore to Uíbh Fhailí by 2-20 to 1-15 to end their season. Tír Eoghain required extra time to see off An Mhí

at Navan, while An Cabhán won in Wicklow and Ard Mhacha won away to An Iarmhí.

In Round 2 of the Qualifiers there were wins for four of our counties, albeit the An Cabhán victory came at the cost of An Dún. Muineachán won easily away in Port Láirge, Tír Eoghain won in Ceatharlach and Ard Mhacha emerged 1-19 to 1-13 winners in Sligeach.

Qualifier Round 3 on 30th June saw another all Ulster clash in Brewster Park. Kingspan Breffni was closed for resurfacing work so An Cabhán and Tír Eoghain faced off with the Red Hand county edging out 0-18 to 1-12 winners. On the same day Muineachán won easily in Liatroim, while Ard Mhacha staged a remarkable comeback to defeat An Clár at the Athletic Grounds.

By Round 4 we had four Ulster counties remaining in the All-Ireland series, along with Ulster champions, Dún na nGall. High scoring encounters were the name of the game in Round 4 as Fear Manach, Tír Eoghain and Ard Mhacha all experienced contrasting fortunes. Tír Eoghain beat Corcaígh by 3-20 to 0-13 at Portlaoise while Muineachán edged out Laois by 0-18 to 1-12 at Navan. Ard Mhacha lost out in a thriller to Ros Comáin while Fear Manach saw their season finish in Navan by virtue of a 3-20 to 0-18 defeat to Cill Dara.

2018 saw the introduction of a phased All-Ireland quarter-final (colloquially known as the Super 8's) format with each team playing three games in two groups of four, to replace the traditional quarter-finals. Muineachán emerged from their group as a consequence of wins over Cill Dara and Gallimh as well as a draw at home to Ciarraí, when they were caught by a last minute goal. Tír

Eoghain and Dún na nGall both lost to Baile Átha Cliath and defeated Ros Comain to set up a winner takes all clash in Pairc MacCumhaill on Sunday 5th August. In a brilliant spectacle, late goals from substitutes Harry Loughran and Declan McClure saw Tír Eoghain progress to the All-Ireland Semi-Final stage.

In the All-Ireland semi-final, Tír Eoghain faced neighbours, Muineachán in Croke Park on Sunday 12th August. This time, it was a late goal from Niall Sludden that proved vital in a 1-13 to 0-15 win for Tír Eoghain. A disappointing end to the season for a Muineachán side that showed real signs of progress and they will be looking ahead to 2019 with renewed optimism. The result also demonstrated how difficult it is to defeat a team of similar standard three times in the one season.

In the All-Ireland Final Dublin faced Tyrone on the earlier date of Sunday 2nd September, as a consequence of the changes to the national fixtures programme. Baile Átha Cliath stormed to four in a row by virtue of a 2-17 to 1-14 success. Tír Eoghain battled fiercely to the end and will also take solace from their first All-Ireland Final appearance in a decade.

### MINOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Ulster Minor Football Championship continues to excite and entertain. These games were traditionally fitting curtain raisers on championship days but 2018 saw a very different competition. The Under 18 Competition was replaced by an Under 17 Championship and as the counties had voted for a 'back door' championship, beaten teams got a second chance up to the semi-final stage. Subsequently, only two Minor games were played as curtain raisers to the senior games and they were Donegal v Monaghan in Ballybofey and Monaghan v Down in Healy Park. We were treated to a brilliant competition with four of the 15 games requiring extra time, with one of those requiring an additional two periods of extra time.

In the Preliminary Round, in a sign of things to come, Doire needed extra time to see off Muineachán at Celtic Park. In the First Round, there were wins for Tír Eoghain, Fear Manach, while An Cabhán and An Dún required extra time in their victories. The following weekend, in Qualifier Round 1, Muineachán ended the involvement of Aontroim at Corrigan Park on a 3-12 to 0-7 scoreline.



# 05

Qualifier Round 2 saw wins for Doire and Muineachán over Ard Mhacha and Dún na nGall respectively. Round 2 saw the four Round 1 winners play each other where Tír Eoghain defeated An Dún and An Cabhán beat Fear Manach. The following weekend, Doire beat Fear Manach at the Athletic Grounds and Muineachán beat An Dún in a thriller at Healy Park. The competition took a break during the exam period with the semi-finals taking place as a double header at the Athletic Grounds on 1st July. In two local derbies, Muineachán outscored An Cabhán by 2-16 to 2-04 while Doire defeated Tír Eoghain on a 2-10 to 1-08 scoreline. In a well attended final at the Athletic Grounds it was Muineachán who collected the Fr. Murray Cup on a 1-09 to 0-09 final score. Well done to all involved.

Both minor finalists qualified for the All-Ireland quarter-finals where Doire were beaten by An Mhí 1-15 to 1-10 and Muineachán won out over Cill Dara by 2-11 to 0-08 at Mullingar.

In the All-Ireland semi-final, played as a curtain raiser to the senior semi-final between Muineachán and Tír Eoghain, the Ulster champions lost out to Ciarraí by 1-16 to 2-11 after an epic struggle.

## UNDER 20 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

This year has seen the introduction of the Ulster Under 20 Football Championship, replacing the Under 21 grade. Doire became the first title holders of the 'Corn Dónall Ó Murchú.' As per the Official Guide this competition was played on a straight knock-out basis in a tight window between the end of May and mid-August and within the province five of these games were played as curtain raisers with the Ulster SFC games which added to the occasion.

In the Preliminary Round, Dún na nGall were fiercely impressive in a 2-21 to 0-10 victory over An Cabhán. The quarter final stages saw victories for Ard Mhacha, Tír Eoghain, An Dún and Doire. The first semi-final saw Ard Mhacha host Tír Eoghain in the Athletic Grounds in what turned out to be a scintillating match, which was won by the home side on a 2-22 to 0-24 scoreline after extra-time. The other semi-final saw Doire come back strongly to defeat An Dún by 2-17 to 2-15 at St Tiernach's Park. The final was played as the curtain raiser on Ulster Final day and Doire put on a great second half display of attacking football to secure the Corn Dónall Ó Murchú on a 2-15 to 1-14 scoreline.

## ULSTER CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Ulster Club Championship still has that lure for our supporters and the local aspect means that all clubs at all levels can aspire to the greatest stage throughout the province and indeed, Croke Park. In the Preliminary Round, Scotstown defeated Fermanagh champions, Derrygonnelly at Clones. In the quarter-finals, there were wins for Crossmaglen, Scotstown, Gaoth Dobhair and Eoghan Rua Coleraine against Coalisland, Burren, Cargin and Castlerahan respectively.

At the semi-final stage, we were treated to a brilliant double header in Healy Park, Omagh with almost 8,000 spectators in attendance. In the first game, it took a nerveless last-minute free kick from All Star Rory Beggan to seal a 1-14 to 2-10 win for Scotstown over a very gallant and skilful Eoghan Rua side. The second game saw a first half scoring spree place Gaoth Dobhair into an unassailable lead and they ran out 4-11 to 0-16 winners over Crossmaglen. In the Final, played at Healy Park, Omagh and screened live by TG4, extra time was needed to separate the sides. The name of Seaghan Ó Fearraigh will go down in Gaoth Dobhair folklore as his extra time point proved to be the winning score in a 0-13 to 0-12 victory for the Dún na nGall champions. Team captain, Niall Ó Fril delivered his entire acceptance speech as gaeilge to the glee of all supporters.

The Intermediate Football Club Championship remains an extremely competitive grade and 2018 was no different. In the Preliminary Round, Banagher defeated Belnacleck at Owenbeg. In the quarter-finals, there





were wins for Tattyreagh, Naomh Éanna, Mullahoran (after extra-time) and Banagher. In the semi-finals, played at as a double header at the Athletic Grounds, we saw Naomh Eanna and Mullahoran progress in dramatic circumstances. Naomh Éanna produced a late rally to edge out Tattyreagh by 0-13 to 1-08. The other semi-final will go down in history as the first championship game in the province where the winners were decided by virtue of a free taking competition. Mullahoran and Banagher could not be separated after full-time so extra-time followed. The game was still level after two periods of ten minutes so a further two periods of five minutes each way followed. With the teams still tied at 1-16 to 0-19, the game was finished via the 'Finish on the Day' process and Mullahoran emerged as 5-3 winners. In the Final played at the Athletic Grounds on Saturday 1st December, a slick Naomh Éanna side claimed the Patrick McCully Cup with a 2-11 to 1-10 win over the Cavan champions. For a club that suffered so much heartbreak during 'The Troubles' it was an emotional success which was welcomed by GAA followers all across the province.

In the Junior Football Championship, Monaghan winners Emyvale won their Preliminary Round game against Drumlane. In the quarter-finals, there were wins for Red Hugh's, Limavady, Aghadrumsee and Emyvale. In the semi-finals, played as a double header in Healy Park, there were wins for Red Hugh's and Limavady in two tight encounters. The Junior Final was played at Celtic Park, after Limavady won a coin toss as agreed by both clubs. Red Hugh's just held off the Limavady challenge to emerge as 1-11 to 1-09 winners and collect the Paul Kerr Cup for the first time ever. Well done to all the club champions.

#### **ALL-IRELAND CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP**

In a great game of football on 24th February 2018, extra time was needed to separate Slaughtneil and Munster champions, Nemo Rangers at Portlaoise in the All-Ireland Senior semi-final. Unfortunately, the Derry and Ulster champions just fell short as the Cork champions ran out 2-19 to 1-14 winners.

In the All-Ireland Intermediate Club Championship on 27th January, Moy travelled to Semple Stadium to take on An Gaeltacht. In a tight affair, a late goal from Harry Loughran proved to be the difference in a 1-5 to 0-6 win. In the All-Ireland Final on 3rd February, it was an early goal from his brother Tom that set the Moy side on their way in a 1-10 to 0-7 victory over Michael Glavey's from Roscommon to secure a brilliant success for the Tyrone champions at Croke Park.

In the Junior grade, Naomh Colmcille (Dún na nGall) lost out to Cork champions Knocknaree by 2-09 to 0-07 at Mullingar.

The 2018/19 All-Ireland Junior Football Club Twinning Final pitted our champions, Red Hugh's against Dunedin Connolly's. The game was effectively an All-Ireland quarter-final and was played at O'Donnell Park, Letterkenny on Sunday 9th December with the Ulster champions winning through after extra-time.

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## HURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

The restructuring of the national competitions aims to provide a high number of games for Ulster counties at their own level, while the apathy towards the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship in recent times has been obvious. Therefore, with a heavy heart, the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship has been discontinued for a three-year period (2018 -2020).

In the new Tier 2 competition, namely the Joe McDonagh Cup, Aontroim had wins over An Mhí, Ceatharlach and Cill Dara in a play-off to retain their status. Doire, An Dún and Ard Mhacha all competed in the Christy Ring Cup in 2018. Ard Mhacha lost all three games while An Dún only secured one victory, albeit at the expense of the Orchard County. Doire fared better with two victories over their Ulster counterparts but lost to Londáin in Round 1 and then to Cill Dara in the Semi-Final.

In the Nicky Rackard Cup we had another three counties involved. Muineachán had differing results in all three group games but lost out to Dún na nGall in a semi-final. Tír Eoghain beat Liatroim but lost out to Dún na nGall and Warwickshire in a semi-final to end their season. Dún na nGall defeated both Ulster counties and Liatroim on way to the Final. There they defeated Warwickshire, in a great advertisement for hurling, by 2-19 to 0-18 at Croke Park.

In the Lory Meagher Cup, Fear Manach and An Cabhán drew in Round 1 in a contest which was the curtain raiser to an Ulster Senior Football Championship fixture. Fear Manach then suffered defeats to Sligeach and Lancashire while An Cabhán also

lost out to Lancashire but defeated Sligeach on their return to senior inter county activity.

The Ulster Minor Hurling Championship has been discontinued for a three-year period (2018 -2020) and following discussions with Comhairle Laighean, Ulster agreed to enter two teams into the Leinster Minor Hurling Championship. An Dún played three games and were defeated by Iar Mhí, Ceatharlach and Cill Dara. Aontroim beat An Mhí and Ceatharlach but lost out to Cill Dara and Uíbh Fhaili before being well beaten by Baile Átha Cliath in a Quarter Final.

The Celtic Challenge (Under 17) saw six of our counties compete in the group stages during March and April, while Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan competed in the group stages during May and June. All counties went forward to the knockout stages with three of them reaching finals. Doire won Division 3 title beating Gaillimh Tribesmen in the final by 2-18 to 3-12. Aontroim were beaten in the Division 4 Final by Laois and Dún na nGall were defeated by Sligeach in the Division 5 Final. In a new venture, the finals were streamed live on YouTube.

Comhairle Laighean agreed to accommodate one Ulster county in the 2018 Leinster Under 21 Hurling Championship. Aontroim and An Dún indicated that they wished to compete for this place and played a qualifier in March 2018. In a brilliant game of hurling that required extra time, Antrim progress by virtue of a 1-23 to 3-14 scoreline. They progressed to the Leinster Championship where they were defeated by Ceatharlach by 3-22 to 1-19 after extra-time.





### ULSTER CLUB HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

In the Ulster Senior Hurling Club Championship, there were only three competitors. In the semi-final, reigning champions Slaughtneil faced Down champions Ballycran at Corrigan Park. In a great attacking display, the Ards men shocked the reigning champions by 4-15 to 1-14. The Ulster Final between Ruairí Óg Cushendall and Ballycran was played as a double header with the Ulster Junior Final at the Athletic Grounds, Armagh. Ruairí Óg claimed back their first title since 2015 on a 1-15 to 0-10 scoreline. A tremendous success for the proud Antrim club.

The Intermediate Club Hurling Championship was a brilliant six team competition. There were quarter final wins for Keady and St. Galls. In the semi-finals, St. Gall's and Keady had great wins over Swatragh and Liatroim respectively. St. Gall's went onto to collect the title at Páirc Esler defeating Keady by 2-12 to 0-11.

In the Junior Club Hurling Championship, there were quarter final wins for Clonduff, Sean Treacy's, Cushendun and Castleblayney. The semi-finals saw Cushendun defeat Sean Treacy's and Castleblayney beat Clonduff. The Junior Final produced a great spectacle as Castleblayney finished strongly to overcome Cushendun by 1-14 to 0-16 at the Athletic Grounds.

### ALL-IRELAND CLUB HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Slaughtneil were Ulster's representatives in the All-Ireland Senior Club Championship, having won the 2017 Ulster Club Championship. In the All-Ireland semi-final they met Na Piarasigh from Limerick and were defeated by 3-15 to 3-08 at Parnell Park.

After collecting the Ulster Intermediate title in 2017, Middletown represented Ulster in the All-Ireland series. On 27th January they were beaten by the Munster champions, Kanturk (Cork) by 3-13 to 0-12 in Newbridge.



## 05



In the Junior grade, Setanta were defeated by Waterford and Munster champions, Ardmore in the All-Ireland semi-final on 27th January by 4-12 to 0-12 at Navan.

The 2018/19 All-Ireland Junior Football Club Twinning Final pitted our champions, Castleblayney against John Mitchels, Warwickshire. The game was played in Páirc na hEireann, Birmingham on Sunday 25th November. After trailing by 1-4 to 0-2 at half time, a storming second half performance from the Monaghan and Ulster champions saw them progress on a 2-11 to 1-10 scoreline. They now take on the Connacht champions Carrick (Liatroim) in January 2019.

#### OTHER HURLING COMPETITIONS

The development of hurling within the province is primarily focussed on improving the delivery programme across Club, County and Schools levels.

Six teams participated in the Bank of Ireland Conor McGurk Cup, with Antrim getting the better of Down in a well contested final at The Dub. With Antrim qualifying to participate in the Leinster U21 Championship, Down, Tyrone, Donegal and Derry all participated in the All-Ireland 'B' Richie McElligott Cup, with Derry losing out to a strong Kerry side in the final.

Hurling Academy Squads were held over the five national squad days for U14, U15 & U16 age grades, culminating with the National Hurling Academy Games day. 2019 will see a more focused approach, with the adoption of a format which is similar to the Celtic Challenge for all Tier 2 - Tier 5 Counties at U15 level.

The Ulster Poc Fada took place in Shane O'Neill's GAC, Glenarm, Co. Antrim with the winners participating in the All-Ireland Finals on the Cooley Mountains. In the Senior Ladies

Section the Ulster champion Louise Dougan (Derry) finished a credible runner-up to defending champion Susan Eamer (Galway).

2018 saw the introduction of the Táin Óg League at U13 which culminated with six hurling finals played in St. Tiernachs Park, Clones. All finals were competitive and this is testimony to the grading committee who had the unenviable task of grading clubs at a level appropriate to their ability. The 21 teams encompassing more than 600 players who competed in the league were guests of honour at the All-Ireland Hurling Semi Finals. 2019 will see this league develop to U15 level.

A Provincial Hurling Coaching day took place in Owenbeg, with over 120 coaches in attendance and within coach education there is an increase in the number of club coaches completing their Foundation and Level 1 awards. 25 coaches have to date gained Level 2 accreditation.

## INTER PROVINCIAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Inter Provincial Championships in both football and hurling did not take place again in 2018. Ulster, who are the current holders of the Football competition, have always been committed to both these championships and it is disappointing to see this once great competition now cast into the dustbin of history, though no formal decision has been taken to permanently remove it from the annual fixtures calendar.

## REFEREES

I thank all our referees for their time, commitment and involvement in the delivery of our games programme which included 319 games in 19 different competitions in 2018. Without referees, there are simply no games. Many of our referees regularly make themselves available and some at very short notice and on behalf of Ulster GAA I say thank you to all of you for your continued support and, may I say it, tolerance.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the sad passing of Paul McKeever in November. Paul was a current member of the Ulster Referees panel. From the Roger Casement's club in Portglenone, he joined the Ulster Referees Academy in 2014 and was a member of the National Support Panel for the past two years. On the provincial stage, Paul refereed in the Ulster Club Championships, the Ulster Minor Football Championship and in 2018 he refereed the Ulster Senior Football League Final in March and the Under 20 Championship game between Donegal and Cavan in May. To Paul's wife Nicola, his children Ryan, Conor and Erin, his wider family, his

team of umpires, the gaels of Roger Casement's, Antrim GAA and his many friends, Ulster GAA offer our deepest sympathy. A Moment's Silence was observed at all Ulster Club games on the weekend following his death. Go ndéanna Dia trocaire ar a anam.

## RYAN, CHRIS AND MARK

While many inter-county retirements are announced with something of a fanfare, the retirement of Ryan McCluskey after a remarkable 20 seasons in the Fermanagh jersey was much more low-key. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Ryan didn't retire with a string of medals to his name – he didn't win as much as a league medal in his illustrious career – but he gave a service to his county that was second to none. In his time with the Erne County he played under nine managers and finally called quits on his inter-county career at the end of the 2018 season.

He didn't play in the Championship in his final year – his last appearance in the famed green jersey was in an Allianz League game against Wexford – but had some consolation of being a component part of the Fermanagh team panel on Ulster final day. He was the longest serving inter-county player at the time of his retirement and last surviving player to have been part of a county panel in the last century (he first came onto the Fermanagh panel as an 18-year-old in 1999). A great ambassador for the game, Ryan McCluskey was a great servant of Fermanagh and Ulster football – he played on the 2009 winning Railway Cup team – and I thank him for his wonderful contribution to gaelic football. Another player who said farewell to the inter-county game in 2018 was Antrim goalkeeper Chris Kerr. The St. Gall's clubman first played senior with 'The Saffrons' in 2007 and he played his last game between the sticks against Down in the Ulster Championship.



# 05

A strong advocate of mental health awareness Chris, like Ryan, may not have been blessed with a handful of inter-county medals but he was a proud player for his county and always give of his best.

At the beginning of December that great Derry stalwart Mark Lynch announced that he was hanging up his inter-county boots after 16 years with the Oak Leaf men. A real team player, the 2008 Sigerson Cup winner also won All-Ireland Minor and Hogan Cup medals and was a lynchpin (if you pardon the pun!) of the Derry men for the last decade. While his last game in a Derry jersey, against Kildare in the All-Ireland qualifiers, didn't have the end he would have wished for, his performance against Donegal in his last Ulster Championship game (when he scored five points) illustrated his overall importance to the Derry set-up. I wish Ryan, Chris and Mark all the best in their inter-county retirements.

## DANNY MURPHY CUP

The contribution of the late Danny Murphy to Comhairle Uladh was unparalleled and it was only proper that he should be remembered with a fitting memorial. The creation of the new Ulster U-20 Football Championship created the perfect opportunity and the Ulster Council owe the Murphy family an immense debt of gratitude for their donation of the Corn Dónall Ó Murchú.

Danny served on the Ulster Council from 1981 until his untimely death in December 2016, holding each Council officership in the process. The trophy named in his honour is a beautifully designed antique Irish silver three handed cup, which was made by Sharman D Neill of Belfast. It was hallmarked in Dublin in 1905.

At this juncture it is worth noting that in January 2016 the First Minister Arlene Foster and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness held a private reception for Danny at Stormont in honour of his work for the GAA and his efforts to promote reconciliation. Like Danny, Martin has departed from this world, but it was deeply significant that Arlene Foster should be present at the Ulster Final when the 'Danny Murphy Cup' was unveiled for the first time, with Derry having the honour of being the first recipients of the magnificent trophy.

## DUP LEADER AT THE ULSTER FINAL

The Ulster final in Clones attracted media attention like no other but, unlike their sporting colleagues, the many news media who attended were more interested in who was in the crowd, as opposed to who was on the field.

As Ireland's largest sporting and cultural organisation the GAA can exert great influence across its community base and indeed far beyond. It is important that this influence is channelled in a positive way and for the betterment of society. When Fermanagh qualified for their first Ulster Final in a decade, I saw it as an opportunity for us to explore the possibility of the DUP leader attending the match.

Given the political inertia at Stormont, I felt it that there would never be a better time for Ulster GAA to act in this way. While securing the attendance of the DUP leader at the Ulster Final was not in itself going to lead to a restoration of the political institutions, it was wholly appropriate that Ulster GAA should play its part in helping to overcome some of the barriers which led to their collapse.



No one should be in any doubt that Arlene Foster had many factors to consider before deciding to attend the game and I trust that the impromptu singing of 'Come on Arlene' by some supporters on her arrival at St. Tiernach's Park helped make her feel somewhat at ease. In her own words she said that she wanted to have a 'shared community' and that going to the Ulster final was a significant step in that direction.

While politically there is obviously still some way to go before there is a restoration of the Stormont institutions, gestures and actions which help create a better understanding of different cultures are vital if we are to move forward.

### **MATCH ATTENDANCES**

Attendances at Ulster Championship games in 2018 fell below 100,000 for the first time in many years. The reduction in attendances was not unexpected and indeed in an interview with 'The Irish News' prior to the commencement of the Championship I predicted that there would be a reduction in the number of people going to games.

There was some disquiet as a result of an increase in admission prices for the Championship in 2018 – the first increase in over a decade. While the increase was not excessive (£2 for games up to and including semi-finals and £5 for the final) patrons in the 'Six Counties' did to some extent feel 'short-changed' when the increases (our pricing structure is based in euro) were taken against the backdrop of a 'weak' pound. While the ticket increase was no doubt a contributory factor to the reduction in attendances, it was by no means the main factor – football attendances in

the other provinces, where there was no increase in prices, also suffered a 'hit.' When, for example, was a Leinster Final involving Dublin last played with Croke Park less than half full?

So, what were the determining factors in reduced attendances? Much store, in the media and amongst the general public, has been placed on the quality of fare on offer and while there were some decent games, the truth is that only a handful of games were truly competitive. An over emphasis on 'zonal' play and teams playing to tried and tested systems, rather than with off the cuff exuberance, is now the norm and it is a factor in people 'switching off'. That said however I think the public have expectations above what is truly realistic and the quality of football on offer is nowhere near as poor as some commentators have us believe. People speak of 'great games' of by-gone days but if some of those games were being played today, they would in all probability receive the same levels of criticism as is currently the case. The wonderful standard of hurling games at the top level in recent years has compounded football's woes and the fact that around twice as many counties have realistic ambitions of winning the Liam McCarthy Cup than the Sam Maguire Cup is a clear illustration of how the dynamics have changed over recent years.

In my view however the condensing of the Championship is the greatest contributory factor to falling attendances. This year, for example, Donegal played four Ulster Championship games in six weeks. Just two years previously they would have played those games over a nine-week period. With the advent of the

new style Quarter-Finals, colloquially referred to as the 'Super 8's, patrons had a greater choice of games and there is solid evidence to suggest that people were more selective in the games they attended.

Saturday night games don't as a rule attract the same number of attendees as Sunday games and this year there were two Saturday encounters. One of these games was played at the same time as the Champions League Final and as this involved an English Club more people 'stayed away' than what would have been the case had no English Club been involved. Twelve months ago there were two outstanding First Round 'derby' fixtures, involving Down v Armagh and Cavan v Monaghan and while there were no such encounters in 2018, the Tyrone v Monaghan First Round game in Omagh did whet the appetite.

Another fact that can't be ignored is that societal lifestyles are changing with much greater levels of choice on offer. Young people especially are more likely to make alternative choices with the net effect that less people are likely to come through the turnstiles.

Many of our patrons who regularly attend our games say that there is much greater entertainment in the club championship than there is in the inter-county game at present and, as if to give some credence to this argument, attendances at our club championship in 2018 were up from the previous year (and this was without the attraction of an Antrim v Derry hurling fixture) although increased marketing levels have no doubt also been a contributory factor.

# 05

## CLUB FIXTURES

The playing (or in some cases non-playing) of club fixtures continues to generate much debate and commentary and the Association at a Special Congress in September 2017 agreed to a number of measures which would create more 'space' for club games.

Key amongst these was the creation of April as a club month. Some sections of the media and indeed others seemed to erroneously interpret this as a 'Club Championship' month and bemoaned the fact no championship games were played in Ulster during this period. It has been many years since any club senior championship games in Ulster were played during the month of April and it should not be forgotten that league fixtures enjoy a higher profile in Ulster counties than in any other province. Only one Ulster county played any championship fixtures in April with a small number of Junior Football games taking place in Monaghan.

Only five counties in Ireland currently organise their club championships on a straight knock-out basis and four of them are in Ulster. Championship formats vary differently amongst the other counties, both in terms of games played and in the number of teams competing in the various grades. In Offaly, for example, every team is guaranteed a minimum of eight club championship games, whereas in Down two is the minimum. Eight teams play in the Fermanagh Senior Football Championship, whereas 32 play in the Tipperary equivalent and the number of teams competing in the respective hurling county senior championships varies from three to 29.

While operating guidelines can be put in place there can be no template for club fixtures as every county has their own particular needs and requirements. What is important is that there are regular games for club players which should continue irrespective how far their inter-county teams advance in their respective championships.

Within Ulster April as a 'club month' was highly successful with some 699 games played throughout the province and this would have been even better had it not been for one particularly bad weekend weather wise. The table below illustrates the club games football games (plus Antrim hurling games) scheduled and those that were actually played. In six of the nine counties members of county panels were available for all games played in April and in the other three counties they were available for all but one round of fixtures. Two of these counties, Cavan and Donegal, were competing in the Preliminary Round of the Ulster Championship.

COUNTY	GAMES SCHEDULED	GAMES PLAYED
Antrim (H)	27	27
Antrim (F)	35	35
Armagh	89	68
Cavan	80	80
Derry	94	89
Donegal	111	90
Down	125	108
Fermanagh	50	49
Monaghan	57	57
Tyrone	96	96

The key challenge for counties is however to keep club players involved when the county team is still involved in the Championship. This can be challenging and Tyrone's

magnificent run to the All-Ireland did, not unsurprisingly, lead to a hiatus in club fixtures during July and August, especially at senior and intermediate levels.

Notwithstanding the importance with which leagues tend to be treated within Ulster, there may need in cases to be some fresh thinking when it comes to ensuring that the club player remains active during the inter-county season.

The Club Survey demonstrated that the unavailability of county players was identified by clubs in five of the nine Ulster counties as the biggest single challenge in relation to club fixtures. Therefore the model adopted by Monaghan in 2018 was innovative and ground-breaking. The format allowed nine league games to be played with county players (five points were awarded for a win in these games) and up to nine without county players (two points were awarded for a win in these games - if it transpired that county players were available for some of these games, two points were awarded for a win as they were not one of the 'designated' five point win games). While one may argue that the five/two differential was too great - this is what the Monaghan Clubs agreed to - the key fact is that games continued to be played all during Monaghan's wonderful run to the All-Ireland semi-final. Notwithstanding the fact that there were some 'issues' around what happened when teams finished equal on league points (these issues can be resolved), Monaghan deserve great credit for some fresh thinking and it may be a model that other counties may wish to learn from moving forward.

## TELEVISION COVERAGE

The fact that just two Ulster Championship games (the first semi-final and the final) were covered 'live' on television came in for a lot of debate prior to and during the Ulster Championship. Under the current contract, which remains in place until 2022, RTÉ television has access to 31 senior championship games each year including all provincial hurling and football finals, and Sky Sports have rights to 20 games, 14 of them exclusive. By agreement with RTÉ, the BBC have rights to broadcast Ulster Championship games on a simulcast basis.

In 2018 RTE 'picked' only two Ulster Championship games and this de facto meant that the BBC could only show those two games 'live' on TV. With the support of Ulster GAA, BBC were able to show full deferred coverage of those Ulster Championship games which were not being shown live. However as deferred games cannot be broadcast earlier than 6.00 pm. on Sunday, the BBC argued that they didn't see merit in showing the two Saturday evening Ulster Championship games (neither of which were being covered by RTÉ) some 24 hours after they had taken place. However, as no games were being shown by either RTÉ or Sky Sports on those evenings,' the BBC, with the support of Ulster GAA, successfully argued that these games could be shown live online without this breaking the 45 live 'television' games quota. This has resulted in every Ulster Championship game being shown in full, either on television or online, and that is not a statistic that can be matched by any other province.



However, no other province has a second public service broadcaster so it is only fitting that gaels in the north have a legitimate right to see gaelic games broadcast as part of their licence fee.

The new hurling format in Munster and Leinster was always going to impact on the number of live provincial football championship games selected for transmission and that came to pass with 14 of the 21 live provincial championship games broadcast on television being hurling contests. As this championship format is in place for at least another two years it is highly conceivable, if not almost certain, that during this timeframe that the majority of provincial championship games televised live will continue to be hurling ones and this will again impact on the number of Ulster championship games that will be shown live by the BBC.

However, the GAA media rights agreement caters for much more than inter-county games and moving forward I believe that there may be potential scope for the televising of more club championship games within the province. In 2018 Eir chose not to broadcast any club championship games and this resulted in a reduction in coverage. This may create new opportunities for other players in 2019 and should this be the case Ulster GAA would of course work hard to ensure greater coverage of our games within the province.

The BBC provided highlights of our County Finals and Ulster Club Championship games on their online platforms and I commend them for that, though I would hope that they will build on this in the coming year and particularly if new television opportunities become available.

# 05

## VIOLENCE AT GAMES

A number of violent and unseemly incidents occurred at games in the province during the course of the year. It should be noted that these violent episodes were not confined to Ulster, though the scenes at games in Tyrone, Derry and Down and at an Ulster U-20 football semi-final did nothing to enhance the image of the game.

Ulster GAA chose the launch of the Ulster Club Championships to highlight the 'One Punch Can Kill' campaign and the dangers of on field violence. As Aaron Kernan so aptly stated at the time, "we don't need to wait until there is a fatality."

Players must think of the consequences of their actions. Players must realise that what happens on the field doesn't always stay on the field and legal action can and does arise from on-field actions. The 'cover' of a mass brawl doesn't make you invisible and the courts largely take the view that take the view that an assault on the field of play is no different to assault on a street corner.

I firmly believe that the offence of 'contributing to a melee' needs to be removed from its current Category III classification and placed in a separate category with much stiffer penalties. In so doing the definition of 'contributing to a melee' should be broadened to include anyone who is any way involved in a melee (even in a 'peace keeping' capacity) as numbers arriving at 'the scene' more times than not inflame the situation. This may seem draconian but if we are serious about tackling this major blight on our games then we need to take draconian action.

Disciplinary Committees should not shy away from their responsibilities, even if it does lead to multiple suspensions, as it's only when players themselves suffer the penalty that this problem can be eradicated from our games. There is however a need for disciplinary bodies to be consistent in their application of rule in relation to melees.

There may be initial criticism from some quarters if the full rigours of the GAA Disciplinary Code is applied but the disciplinary committees should stand firm in the knowledge that they are acting in the best interests of the Association and indeed all who play and support our games.

The Ulster Council were heavily criticised in some quarters when they offered proposed penalties to 18 players/officials as a result of the U-20 melee and while a number of players were cleared to play in the Ulster final following successful appeals, those cases were re-dealt with after the game and at the end of the process 15 players/officials served (or will serve in the case of those still eligible for U-20 next year) suspensions as a result of their involvement in the melee.

## COUNTY HEARINGS COMMITTEES

Rule 3.20 of the Official Guide places a requirement on County Committees to appoint a Hearings Committee and they are charged with the adjudication of disciplinary matters when the offer of a proposed penalty has not been accepted. While detailed guidance is set out in the 'GAA Disciplinary Handbook' I'm not sure if there is a consistent application of policy throughout the Association.

There may be various reasons for this but I am increasingly being told that the removal of 'local interest' may be beneficial to the process. It has been suggested to me from several interested parties that County Hearings Committee members should be drawn from outside the county to protect the interests of all and remove any perception of bias. Another suggestion is that a number of Hearings Panels be drawn up in the province (perhaps based on membership from three counties with an independent Chair and Secretary of each) and that committee members (apart from the Chair and Secretary) only sit on hearings which involve cases outside of their county. In such an instance it would require all three counties to appoint the same County Hearings Committee. It is an area which I feel is worthy of some debate and if sufficient support were to be forthcoming, it could be trialled on a 'pilot basis' in three willing and (ideally) neighbouring counties.



## FINANCE

Comhairle Uladh finances were put under pressure in 2018. The condensed nature of the Championship and changes in the underage competitions affected the organisation financially. However, revisions to distribution levels from Central GAA ensured our income was maintained close to 2017 levels. Expenditure was also reduced, particularly with match expenses which are directly linked to Gate Receipts.

I wish to place on record my sincere thanks to the Finance Committee chaired by Ulster GAA Cisteoir Ciaran McLaughlin and to the finance personnel and gatemen and women who assist us on match days

throughout the year. I thank also the Ulster GAA finance staff members Michelle McAleer, Ruairi Cunningham and Paul Sanders for their unstinting efforts and I must recognise also the important role that Paul plays in ensuring that legal documentation pertaining to clubs is in compliance with Association policy.

The re-vamped championship has meant games being played in a condensed period of time and this placed great pressure on the Finance team and in particular our Ticketing Officer Rose Treanor who worked tirelessly on behalf of the gael of Ulster throughout the season and particularly over the hectic summer period. This has been a learning experience for us all and I trust that

things should be a little bit smoother with last year's experience behind us. I thank also Ashelene Groogan (who is now covering Rose for the period of her maternity leave) for her efforts during this time as her willingness also to go the extra mile proved invaluable. I pay tribute also to all Ulster GAA staff who played their part throughout the Championship campaign. I must also pay tribute to Emma Tormey and the ticket team in Croke Park who were always available to offer advice and assistance.



# 05

## CASEMENT PARK PROJECT

In my report to last year's Annual Convention I expressed the hope that the planning assessment process for Casement Park would conclude by the summer of 2018 with the Ulster GAA's project team, at the time, finalising a return containing Further Environmental Information (FEI), following a request from the Planner's for additional information.

This was a reasonable assumption to make on the basis that the planning application was lodged back in February 2017 and that the first application process took around six months.

By the time this report is brought to Ulster GAA Convention the planning application will have been in the system just one month short of two years, which none of us could have anticipated in terms of duration.

It is of course, right and proper that the views of the planning authority, statutory agencies and all representations made by the public are all fully considered, and that due care and attention is taken around a regionally significant planning application. The Ulster GAA welcomes the robust nature of the process and the engagement of all those concerned during the period. The political situation in the north remains unchanged since my last report, in the sense that there is still no local devolved administration in place at Stormont and no Ministers' (Local or Direct Rule) in place for the planners to make recommendation to.

In my report last year, I highlighted that the ongoing absence of a Minister and the degree to which

civil servants could take key decisions was likely to be tested in the courts.

The ARC 21 / Buick planning decision was successfully judicially reviewed in the High Court and was referred to the Appeal Court with the appeal from the Department dismissed in the summer of 2018. This ruling had major implications for all Government Departments, as essentially the judiciary had ruled (twice) that the Civil Service had only very limited powers and authority in respect of decision making.

In direct response to this development the Secretary for State for Northern Ireland Karen Bradley indicated that she would bring legislation before the House of Commons in the Autumn of 2018 to bring clarity to the situation. In November 2018 the 'Northern Ireland (Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions) Bill' was passed by Parliament and this extends the statutory period to form an Executive until 26th March 2019. The Bill also provides for an extension period of up to a further five months, thereby meaning that the current political instability could continue until 26th August 2019 without any legislative measures being taken to move the situation forward.

Crucially for the NI Civil Service, published alongside the Bill was guidance on decision-making for Northern Ireland Departments during this temporary period which has been set aside for the political parties to try to form an Executive.

Ulster GAA has worked closely with the Department for Communities and the Department for Infrastructure

(Planner's) during the planning process. Final statutory returns are awaited from two key agencies and beyond that it is in the hands of the Planners to give their verdict. Clarification however is required as to what level of decision making can be made in the absence of a Minister and if indeed it transpires that no cross-cutting capital project can proceed without Ministerial sign-off, then this will have wide ranging implications that will reach far beyond Casement Park.

The Ulster Council GAA and Project Board led by Chairman and Project Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) Tomás Ó Dalaigh has continued to oversee the project development and Business Case development.

During 2018 Ulster GAA provided the planning authority with a comprehensive report outlining the detailed work and progress that had been made in respect of safety, emergency planning and alignment with emerging best practice in the sector. The guidance and expertise of the Safety Technical Group (STG) has been crucial in this process and I thank them for their efforts.

Additionally, Ulster GAA and the Casement Park Project Team have both provided significant beneficial inputs for the Safe Sports Grounds Authority (SGSA) in the publication of their recently released "Safety in Sports Grounds, Sixth Edition". I wish to thank our members on that forum, namely Jim Murray and Stephen McGeehan, for their ongoing involvement and diligence on this vital area for the project.

Aiken PR have continued to support the work of our team on the



communication and public relations team working alongside our Project lead Stephen McGeehan and our Communications and Marketing lead Paul McGurk.

During 2018 Colin Donnelly (Antrim Chair) joined the Board and during his time made a valuable contribution alongside the long serving Secretary Frankie Quinn who has represented the interests of Antrim exceptionally during his tenure. At the recent Antrim County Convention Collie, Terry Reilly (Vice Chair) and Pól MacCana (Treasurer) vacated their officer positions where they had served for three years and I want to thank them for their support and contribution to the project efforts during their time in office. Ciaran McCavana has recently been appointed the new Chairperson and I look forward to working with him and Eamonn Grieve (Treasurer) in 2019.

Tomás Ó Dalaigh continues to lead our Board and is always on hand to provide advice to myself in my role as Investment Decision Maker and to the team whom we work with closely. As I write the report, I have just learned of the death of a former member John O' Reilly, RIP, (a former President of the Ulster Council) and one of the most important figures in the GAA's drive to secure a publicly supported stadium in the north. John, alongside Peter Quinn, was instrumental in representing the GAA in the Maze/MLK stakeholder groups back in 2003-2006 period and helped to ensure that no facility would be

developed without GAA involvement. He later accepted an invitation to join our Board and contributed positively during our first planning application, then sadly retiring from his duties due to ill health in recent times.

Our dedicated Stadium Project Team, despite the frustrations with delay, have had plenty of important work to do this year and I wish to thank them for their ongoing commitment to the job. The key individuals are Rory Miskelly, Stephen McGeehan and Tim Harkin and they are supported by Oliver Galligan, and Michelle McAleer at PSG and Council level. The communications work is supported by Paul McGurk and Seamus Donnelly. Geraldine McKavanagh's contribution to the stadium work through the Project Board and the Project Steering Group, alongside the daily administrative work, continues to be of the highest and professional standards and I thank her for her dedication and input.

I wish to acknowledge the enormous contribution that Michelle McAleer has made to this project since its inception. Other aspects of Michelle's roles are highlighted elsewhere in this report but there can be no doubting her effort and commitment to the Casement Park project and our loss is Páirc Uí Caoimh's gain. I trust that following her secondment, the experience she will have gained in operating a built stadium will prove hugely beneficial for both Ulster GAA and Casement Park.

I want to thank all Project Board members, Project Steering Group members all project partner representatives who contribute at those levels. I acknowledge the ongoing support of Ard Stiúrthóir Tom Ryan and Uachtarán John Horan who continue to encourage Ulster GAA and support us to see this project through despite all the challenges faced to date.

From the Departmental for Communities (DfC) I thank Ian Snowden (SRO) for his support. Ian transferred to another post during the year and I also welcome the Interim Programme SRO Deborah Brown, who is the sixth Departmental lead person who has worked directly with the GAA on the project. I want to record my thanks to Jacqueline Fearon, Andrew Dadley and James Macauley in the Programme Team for their support and partnership on the project and likewise to Emma McCracken from the Central Procurement Directorate.

I also thank our two contracted teams who remain fully involved and integrated in the Design and Build process namely Mott MacDonald on the Design side and, to their Belfast Divisional Director Bill Dowey. On the contracting side the Heron Buckingham (HBJV) team remain engaged and I thank Managing Director Damian Heron for his company's unstinting commitment to the job.

# 05

## COACHING & GAMES DEVELOPMENT

Ulster GAA Coaching and Games Team has had a challenging and busy year, with programmes reflected by over 190,000 volunteer engagements. This reinforces our desire to ensure that we continue to deliver and support our grassroots in clubs and counties. The participation blitzes and tournaments, the coach education engagement, the volunteer development programmes are designed to help our clubs be better organised and provide a top-class experience for our players and families.

The diversity of programmes is broad and we often question ourselves as to what is nice to do and what is needed.

However this ongoing and constant evaluation keeps us at the cutting edge in providing activity to both our participation and performance base. The Active Clubs Programme, supported by Sport NI, provided the opportunity to target areas of high social need and engage with people with both learning and physical disabilities and increase female participation. Activities included handball, Gaelic for Girls and fitness related activities designed to attract new members and encourage people to try new activities.

Over the period of the year Ulster GAA have been engaging again with the Sports Institute NI, having previously had the facility withdrawn. Sport NI have supported workshops and provided mentoring for some of our staff and I thank them for this.

Engaging our high-performance county managers and coaches remains a challenge, with some of our counties continuing to have a 'closed doors' approach and a lack of willingness to engage in a meaningful manner. We can all learn from each other and no matter how good or successful you are, there is always room for new learning and improvement. Some great work however is being done in relation to the sharing video footage between counties and this co-operation can only benefit everyone.

The GAA throughout Ulster employs some excellent people and it is our belief that although much of their time is spent working with volunteers, that it is our duty to manage and support employees as would any other employer. They often work remotely, dealing with challenges and issues at the coal face in clubs, schools and counties.



The evening and weekend work can take them out of their family environment to deliver the club plans and the coach the coaches' workshops. It is important that we all value the volunteer but equally important that we value our employees who are working for the benefit of all clubs and counties across the province.

I thank section Director Dr. Eugene Young for once again ensuring that Ulster leads the way in coaching and games development and I thank his dedicated team for their efforts. May I be forgiven for making special reference to team leaders Roger Keenan (Coach Education), Kevin Kelly (Hurling Development) and Jimmy Darragh (Games Manager) for their co-operation and co-ordination of programme delivery and content. Thanks also to the Chairman PJ McGowan for his excellent work in driving the work of the Coaching and Games team and to Danny McLernon, Secretary to the committee for capturing the essence of the wide range of areas that are debated in an accurate manner.

There was a sad end to the year with the loss of the Key Stage 1 Curriculum Sports programme – and I'll deal with this in greater detail below – and the end of the year also saw the departure of our Sports Science Officer Michael O'Donnell, who has returned to work in Australia with the Australian Football League. I thank Michael for the time he spent at Ulster GAA and wish him well in his future career path.

## **CURRICULUM SPORTS PROGRAMME**

Undoubtedly the greatest disappointment of the year for Ulster GAA was the loss of the Curriculum Sports Programme (CSP). This Department of Education funded programme, which combined physical education with literacy and numeracy tuition for Key Stage 1 school pupils, had been in existence since 2007 and its demise resulted in the loss of over 20 staff jobs. In October Ulster GAA were advised by the Department that they would be unable to continue funding the CSP beyond 31st October 2018. The Management Committee of Ulster GAA agreed to fund the Programme until 14th December 2018, while we continued to engage with the Department of Education, wider Civil Service, the Education Authority, political representatives and the GAA nationally.

Meetings with both the Head of the Civil Service and the Permanent Secretary at the Department of Education unfortunately proved unsuccessful in terms of attracting in-year funding, from both within the Department of Education and from other government departments. Ulster GAA also met with the GAA's Ard Stiúrthóir and Director of Finance to ascertain if any central funding could be made available to ensure viability of the CSP. Had there been certainty beyond April 2019 I am confident that it may have been possible to put in place a package which would have allowed the CSP to continue for a further period. Regrettably, in the absence of any concrete deliverables from the Department of Education, we were unable to progress this option in any meaningful way.

For 11 years Ulster GAA and the IFA have made a telling and lasting contribution annually to the lives of over 40,000 children in over 400 schools. I thank each and every one of the Ulster GAA staff who made such an impact on the lives of so many people. The CSP has been a tremendous learning experience for everyone involved – the coaches have enriched the lives of so many schoolchildren and teachers and delivering the programme has also helped them to progress in their careers and personal lives. You are deserving of the highest praise. I also pay tribute to the dignity and understanding of the 22 staff who lost their jobs last month. It was a difficult time for you, your families and indeed for all at Ulster GAA. I thank also the schools for their support over the past 11 years and I know how much of a blow the loss of the programme is to the schools who benefitted from it. I commend also the guidance and support of all the Department of Education staff who worked on this policy initiative over the past 11 years.

There was cross party political support for the retention of the CSP and politicians from all sides supported us throughout the process. I thank them sincerely for their efforts. Ultimately however the combination of reduced exchequer funding coupled with the absence of an Executive at Stormont has resulted in the end of the CSP. For those that argue that not having a functioning Executive makes little difference to the everyday life of people in the north, this is clear evidence to the contrary.

# 05

The parties have said that they would restore the CSP if an Executive was restored. This is to be welcomed and rest assured we will remind them of this should there be such a restoration.

In the face of a reducing budget and competing demands the department had to make some tough decisions and it was the CSP that lost out. They have however intimated that they are willing to explore options with both Ulster GAA and the IFA in relation to a new initiative beyond April 2019 – one which would be broadened to incorporate a wider age range and to tackle issues around mental health, obesity and sports inactivity and drop-out. Options around this are being considered though should there be a positive outcome, it would appear that any future programme will have a very different look and feel than the CSP.

## PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

Comhairle Uladh has every reason to be proud of the commitment and dedication of its volunteers who are drawn from right across the province. Be it on our Council, Management Committee or as sub-committee members, these individuals make an immense contribution to the wide remit of GAA life in the province and we are both proud of them and grateful to them.

Michael Hasson completes his three-year term as Uachtarán Comhairle Uladh today. I will always remember him as being the incumbent President of Ulster GAA when I took up the role of Provincial Secretary in December 2016. I realise that more than anyone on the Ulster Council it was vital that Michael built up a strong working relationship with me from the outset and this he did.

Particularly during those early months, when Ulster GAA was not only coming to terms with a new Provincial Secretary but also the sad loss of my predecessor Danny Murphy (who was still in post when he was taken from this world on 7 December 2016), he offered me his total support. He always gave me his unstinting loyalty and I thank him sincerely for that. I also must pay tribute to his wife Noeleen who accompanied him to many functions and events throughout his Presidency.

Michael is a lifelong gael who has served the Association as a player, supporter, referee and administrator. Michael first served on the committee of his beloved St. Mary's, Rasharkin in 1965 and two years later he became a member of the South-West Antrim Divisional Committee where he remained for thirty years.

In 1997 he joined the Ulster Council as a delegate from the Antrim County Committee and he has remained as a member to this day, laterally holding the offices of PRO, Treasurer, Vice-President and President. On behalf of all the gael of Ulster I thank him for his leadership and service and look forward to his wise counsel and advice over the next year as he continues to serve on our Management Committee.

Oliver Galligan will today become the sixth man from the Breffni County to assume the post of President of the Ulster Council. As Vice-President Oliver has worked tirelessly to promote and further the aims of Ulster GAA and as Chair of the Local Organising Committee of Feile Peile na nOg in 2017 his organisational acumen was clear for all to see.



Winner of an Ulster Senior Football Championship medal with Cavan in 1969, Oliver has served as Chair of the Ulster Hurling Development Committee and the Ulster Integration Committee with distinction. I have worked closely with him over the past two years and am looking forward to many more dealings with him in his new role.

Ciaran McLaughlin has been a Treasurer who led from the front with a 'hands-on' approach. He is widely respected as an administrator at all levels in the Association – he is also Chair of the National Games Development Committee – and is a strong exponent of good governance and best practice and he has chaired Ulster GAA's Finance Committee with distinction. I thank him for his sterling efforts for both Ulster GAA and for the wider GAA family in the province and, indeed, beyond.

During his three years as Public Relations Officer for the Council, Michael Geoghegan has combined tradition with innovation. The Ulster GAA Radio initiative has had a successful induction – I listened to commentary on the Derry v Monaghan Ulster Minor Football Championship Preliminary round game from Marakesh – and we aim to build on our service to patrons in the months and years ahead. Michael is one of the busiest people in the stadium on match days and he has built up a trusting and workmanlike relationship with the media during his tenure. He has been a strong advocate of Ulster GAA and has an excellent working relationship both our counties and internally with Ulster GAA staff, particularly those in the Information Technology, Marketing and Public Relations team. His recognition by the

Ulster GAA Writers by honouring him with their Communications Award last year was well deserved. I thank him for his strenuous efforts in promoting our affairs.

I thank also the Chairs', Secretaries' and members of all our sub-committees for their ongoing efforts.

A number of members today say farewell to the Council after varying years of service and I thank you all for your outstanding contribution to the furtherance of our affairs. I've no doubt that you will all continue to play active roles within the GAA and I wish you well in your future endeavours. A big thank you therefore goes out to Liam Ross, Paul Kelly, Liam Peoples, Liam McElhinney, Sean McKenna and Brendan Casey.

I rely heavily on my Senior Staff Team who offer guidance and support through good times and not so good. I appreciate their dedication, loyalty and support and for their ongoing efforts in support of the betterment of the GAA in the province. Their work straddles many fields and brings them into contact with many people, both inside and outside the Association. To Dr. Eugene Young (Director Coaching and Games), Michelle McAleer (Head of Finance, HR and Business), Diarmaid Marsden (Head of Community, Strategy and Public Affairs) and Stephen McGeehan (Head of Operations, Compliance and Infrastructure) and their respective teams I say a big 'thank you'.

I hope I will be forgiven on this occasion for singling out Michelle McAleer, who has served in her current role since 2007. Michelle has given true and unstinting service to both staff and council members

and next month she will move on secondment to pastures new when she takes up a new role with Páirc an Chrócaigh Teoranta, working exclusively on the re-developed Páirc Uí Chaoimh. The fact that she was offered this post is testimony to the esteem with which Michelle is held throughout the Association and I wish her well in her new role and trust that she will enjoy her time down Leaside way. The post will enable her to broaden even further her vast repertoire of experience and in time I've no doubt that this will be of great benefit to Ulster GAA. We all owe Michelle an enormous debt of gratitude.

Our very reason d'être is the promotion and playing of games and to this end the efforts of Stephen Donnelly, ably assisted by Niall Muldoon, cannot be praised highly enough as week after week they devote endless hours in ensuring the proper organisation of our games at provincial level. I thank them sincerely for the immense contribution they make to the furtherance of our GAA activity.

No words of praise from me can adequately pay tribute to the work of Geraldine McKavanagh as she organises my affairs and is regularly the 'go to' person for people contacting the Council.

Her dedication and loyalty know no bounds and she somehow manages to combine this role with that of Stadium Administrator on the Casement Park Project, as referred to earlier in my report. Her efforts are deeply appreciated.

# 05

## ASSOCIATION MATTERS

In the first year of the phased All-Ireland Football Quarter-Finals it was perhaps fitting that seven of the eight teams who progressed to that stage of the competition had all played in Division One of the Allianz League (beaten All-Ireland finalists from 2016 and 2017, Mayo, were the team that didn't make it) while the eighth team was the 2018 Allianz Division Two League champions. While one cannot draw conclusions on the basis of one season, there appears to be increasing evidence that there is a widening gap between the top teams in the land and those who are further down the food chain.

It was interesting therefore to read the results of a recent GPA survey which found that 58% of their members favoured a two-tiered Football Championship. While it is not clear what percentage of respondents came from counties that are most likely to be included in a 'B' Championship (i.e. Division 3 and 4 counties) there is clear evidence that there is a growing shift in opinion since the issue was last fully debated prior to the 2016 Congress. There is a renewed campaign for some form of a secondary of 'B' Championship but the matter needs to be carefully thought through before any decisions are taken. Any such competition must be meaningful and needs to be well marketed to achieve significant media coverage, while the impact on club activity must be kept to a minimum.

The latter should be achievable. While a 'B' Championship will lengthen the season for most counties, in the vast majority this shouldn't be by any more than a couple of weeks. Counties just need

to prepare for this scenario and, as I referenced elsewhere in this report, if the correct structures are in place an extended championship run need not impact adversely on club activity.

Exposure to the games on television will however not happen without changes to the existing media rights contract, as I'd be very confident that neither RTÉ nor Sky would countenance a situation where a 'B' Championship match (unless a final, perhaps, and even then I'd be surprised) would form one of their live championship 'picks.' I also firmly believe that every county should still have the right to compete in their provincial championship and for the Sam Maguire Cup, though I accept that this is a view that may not be universally shared. Combining all these factors won't be easy but it is a debate that is necessary and timely.

One of the more controversial happenings of the past year was the decision of Coiste Bainistí to investigate a number of counties for alleged breaches of the 'Collective Training' rule. Potential breaches were investigated but just four were hit with sanctions. One of these was rescinded following a Hearing. It beggar's belief that only three county teams were found to have breached the rule and Armagh will no doubt believe, and not without some justification, that they have been penalised for 'telling the truth.' Surely clear guidelines need to be put in place to define 'collective training' as the whole process has just left everyone confused – and Armagh feeling justifiably angry.

## CLUB SURVEY

One of the more interesting findings of the past year were that of the National Club Committee who surveyed every club in Ireland in an effort to gain first-hand information on what they believed to be their main challenges. 853 clubs (53%) responded so the findings have high credibility, though the 40% response from the clubs in Ulster – the lowest of any province – was somewhat disappointing.

While there were regional variances one of the most interesting findings related to fixtures. While many commentators might have us believe that lack of regular fixtures is a plague that besmirches every county, if these findings are to be believed the reality is quite different. Across the country fixtures was ranked fifth of the six most important challenges facing the Association, while in Ulster it was the lowest ranked challenge.

Finance, facilities, demographics and the demands on volunteers are however the key challenges identified by clubs and this is important and timely feedback as we aim to provide the best possible support to our volunteers in an increasingly challenging and demanding environment.



## GAELFAST AND DERRY CITY INITIATIVES

Gaelfast is a new and exciting initiative which aims to raise and further develop the profile of the Gaelic Athletic Association among young people, their parents and their community in order to increase participation in playing and/or involvement in Gaelic Games within the greater Belfast area. It will centre on enhancing existing partnerships and forging new relationships between schools and the GAA, initially focusing on primary schools and later post primary schools, including the delivery of a high quality programme of games and activities, while supporting GAA clubs to improve their governance arrangements, coaching standards and approaches to player development. The Gaelfast initiative is supported by a range of key stakeholders, including the GAA nationally, Ulster GAA, Antrim GAA, Down GAA and Belfast City Council.

During 2018, significant progress was made on the early implementation of the Gaelfast initiative. Paul Donnelly was appointed as the Regeneration Director and he took up post in November. Paul has a wealth of experience in GAA and wider sports governance and I wish him and the Gaelfast team every success moving forward.

GAA 5 Star Centre 'Pilot Projects' involving 16 primary schools have been approved for roll-out during 2019 and over the next year a Gaelfast Management Board will be formally established and a Gaelfast Strategic Plan will be consulted on, developed and launched.

Earlier this year Ulster GAA established a working group to review the state of gaelic games in Derry City.

This committee was expertly chaired by John Keenan, with Kathy Kelly acting as a highly efficient Servicing Officer, and its membership included representatives from the GAA, education and local authority sectors. The committee presented Ulster GAA with their findings last month, almost four months ahead of schedule. These now need to be explored in greater depth but undoubtedly they have made a compelling case for higher levels of investment in the city. Derry City has never been a bastion of GAA activity but as its population continues to grow and is projected to increase by another 1,500 or so over the next decade, it is important that the GAA is to the fore in the provision of meaningful opportunities to enable us to be in a position to attract new generations to our games. I thank this committee for their efforts in compiling this report and for the methodical way in which they conducted their evidence gathering.



# 05

## CORPORATE TRUSTEE

The GAA's Corporate Trustee Company, 'Iontaobhas Corparáideach Chumann Lúthchleas Gael Cuideachta Faoi Theorainn Ráthaíochta (ICCLG), is now firmly established, with outstanding legal issues pertaining to legal variances in both jurisdictions now fully addressed. The ICCLG AGM on 14th December 2018 approved the appointment of Provincial Secretaries as Directors of the Company and a number of GAA units in the province have now vested property in the Company.

As well as winning their first Ulster Club Football title, the Gaoh Dobhair Club in Donegal made further history in 2018 when they became the first club in the province to officially adopt the ICCLG model. I've no doubt that many more will follow suit in the coming years.

## SAFEGUARDING & CHILD PROTECTION

2018 has been an incredibly challenging time in this area of our Governance work as Ulster GAA has assisted a number of our constituent units in dealing with some of the most sensitive of cases to have ever crossed our paths. Now, even more than ever, it is crucial that our clubs ensure that they are compliant with Safeguarding legal and best practice requirements and that these are adhered to in a meaningful way. In so doing this will allow our clubs and members create and maintain a safe, fun and enjoyable environment in which our children and young people can participate in Gaelic Games and activities.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the members of An Choiste Cód Eitice

agus Dea-Chleachtadh under the Chairmanship of David Hassan, our County Chairpersons' and Childrens' Officers' and all of those who support them in this area of work. A great responsibility is placed on your shoulders and your ongoing efforts are to be positively commended.

During the course of the year Ulster GAA were audited by the Department of Justice's Access NI team and I am pleased to report that our procedures were found to be fully compliant. To have passed the audit without one single recommendation for improvement was an amazing outcome and I thank the Ulster GAA Safeguarding Team and Code of Ethics and Best Practice Committee for setting and insisting on such high standards in what is a subject matter of such high importance.

I must pay tribute to the work of Ulster GAA's Safeguarding Manager Bernie Fox for the support and guidance that she gives to the Council, counties and clubs. Her professionalism, sensitivity and understanding in dealing with highly complex and difficult situations cannot be praised enough and she is deserving of the highest praise from all. This was never so true than during the past year when Bernie has on numerous occasions gone far and beyond the call of duty and I know that her kindness and compassion is deeply appreciated by those who have benefitted from it.

I also place on record my sincere thanks to Kathy Kelly and Conn Stevenson for their exceptional work as part of the Ulster GAA Safeguarding team and particularly for their work in dealing with statutory authorities in both jurisdictions.

## FÉILE PEILE NA NÓG 2018

Down co-hosted, with support from some clubs in Armagh, along with counties Louth and Meath co-hosted Féile Peile na nÓg in 2018. It was once again a mammoth undertaking in terms of the allocation of divisions and the scheduling of fixtures. The vetting of host families was a huge and laborious task and I thank all of those involved at Club and County Level, in particular the Féile Officers, host families and clubs for their hard work and support in fulfilling this requirement and providing a safe environment for participating teams. I thank also Bernie Fox, Conn Stevenson and Kathy Kelly for their efforts in processing over 1,100 Access NI applications.

With 11 Boys' Divisions and Seven Girls' Divisions - amounting to a total of 288 competing teams - a mammoth effort was needed in terms of the co-ordination of fixtures and allocation of referees. An incredible 684 games involving almost 7,000 children were played over the weekend and this would not have been possible but for the excellent work of the National Féile Committee under the Chair of Brendan Brien and the Local Organising Committee under the Chair of Diarmuid Cahill. Stephen Donnelly and Niall Muldoon assisted with the results gathering process and the scheduling of knock-out games over the weekend and their experience in this field was greatly appreciated by the organisers. This was the first occasion where the hosting of Féile was spread across two provinces and it proved highly successful, so a big well done to everyone involved in its organisation.



While Féile is a wonderful festival that brings together thousands of children over two weekends, the sheer scale of numbers involved does present risks to the Association, notwithstanding the excellent vetting work that is undertaken in advance. I re-iterate my view that the way forward could well be in the form of expanded Regional Féile Competitions, which would reduce or perhaps eliminate, the need for overnight stays and would also significantly reduce the levels of bureaucracy and administration involved. The current age level of U-14 is ideal for the current weekend competition but if the core underage age grades are to be changed from even to uneven age grades, then there will need to be a complete evaluation of the current format of Féile.

## BREXIT

On 23rd June 2016 the UK voted to leave the EU - more than two and a half years on I'm not sure if we're much wiser as to what form this 'leaving' will take and the repercussions it will have, especially for the island of Ireland. A 'leaving' date and time has been set (11 pm on Friday 29th March 2019) but as that date draws tantalisingly close and the possibility of a 'no deal' Brexit looms even larger, more and more people are starting to question the wisdom of this position. There is increasing

talk of asking all existing 28 member states to agree an extension to this deadline, while the voices of those seeking a second referendum are becoming louder by the day.

Although the Irish border received scant air-time on British airwaves during the referendum debate, for those who thought through the ramifications of a 'leave' vote it was always going to be the key issue post the decision. And so it came to pass! Who would have thought that a term used in baseball, largely unheard of here, would come to dominate our vocabulary over the last twelve months?

The Withdrawal Agreement sets out the terms of the 'exit' but at the time of writing it has still to be put to Parliament for decision - a planned vote last month was postponed by the Prime Minister. Those who are much more au fait with parliamentary matters than I say that the Agreement in its current format is doomed to failure and with little sign of any 'common ground' between the 'Brexiters' and the 'Remainers' the words of that much loved Bellaghy poet Seamus Heaney come to mind; "the voice of sanity is getting hoarse."

Some ask, 'how will Brexit impact on the GAA?' Firstly, a 'no deal' Brexit would virtually guarantee a 'hard

border' and that is something that must be avoided. Even though a Common Travel Area was in place there are many among us who will remember border queues and customs checks prior to Britain and Ireland joining what was then called the European Economic Community in 1973. In more recent times we are all too familiar with different types of border checks - and more long queues. This is something no one wants a return to.

Already we are seeing changes. Ulster GAA have had to register to be allowed to transfer goods to and from the EU, something that we currently take for granted as both jurisdictions are within the EU. As referenced earlier in my report, the weakening of sterling has meant a de facto ticket price increase in the 'Six Counties' as euro is the default currency for the setting of GAA ticket prices. Will more of our young people emigrate in search of work, thus impacting on the ability of some of our smaller clubs to continue to field? These are the known, unknowns and there are no doubt unknown unknowns. No one knows the full impact that Brexit will have on the GAA but it is potentially one of the greatest challenges that the Association is likely to face in the coming years.

# 05

## DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

We all have a fascination with time and irrespective what the final outcome of Brexit, a potentially more far reaching effect on the Irish nation could come from the proposal to abandon Daylight Saving Time.

At the end of August the European Commission announced that they are to recommend to the European Union member states that the practice of changing the clocks in spring and autumn should cease. Currently EU legislation determines that all 28 member states must move their clocks forward to 'summer time' on the last Sunday in March and then move the clocks back to 'winter time' on the last Sunday in October.

While any change will need the approval of both the European Parliament and the respective national parliament to become operational, the proposed directive could have major consequences for the island of Ireland – and not just for gaelic games.

It would be totally unthinkable for Ireland north and south to operate on different time zones for seven months of the year. While I don't think there is any appetite on the island for this to be the case, the scenario of more and more EU nations making the change could result in mounting pressure on Ireland to follow suit. As an all island organisation it's an issue we need to keep on our radar and use all influence we have to ensure that common sense will prevail and the clocks north and south remain aligned.

## ULSTER SCHOOLS

It was a truly historic year for Schools' football in the province with St. Ronan's, Lurgan building on their maiden MacRory Cup victory on St. Patrick's Day by going on to win the Hogan Cup several weeks later. That victory was part of a great day for Ulster in Croke Park with Holy Trinity College, Cookstown winning the All-Ireland Schools 'B' title (Paddy Drummond Cup) in the first leg of a provincial double.

There was more history made in November when An Dun won the Mageean Cup title for the first time, beating St. Patrick's, Maghera in the final with man of the match Ronan Blair hitting a hat-trick of goals in the process.

And just to demonstrate that lightning can strike twice, the success of the Mourne side was followed up a couple of weeks later when Tír Eoghain Schools won the Casement Cup (Senior Colleges 'B' Hurling) with a comprehensive victory over St. Mary's, Magherafelt in the final.

If that wasn't enough more history was made in December when for the first time two teams from the integrated sector contested an Ulster Schools Final. Two years ago Drumragh Integrated (Omagh) created history by being the first integrated school to win an Ulster Schools title, when they won the J.J. Reilly Cup and this year they were back in the final again, when Lagan College were their opponents.



This time victory was to go to the north's oldest integrated college who were winning their first ever Ulster Schools title and, significantly, with a team that predominantly comprised players from what would be described as non-GAA backgrounds.

The success story for integrated schools didn't end there however and in the same week that Lagan College were winning the J.J. Reilly Cup, Matthew Murnaghan, a pupil at Drumragh Integrated College (and a J.J. Reilly medal winner two years ago) became the first player from an integrated school to be selected on the Danske Bank Ulster Schools All-Star team.

Ulster Schools organise over 70 competitions each year and my thanks goes out to their hard working committee under the Chairmanship of Jimmy Smyth and Secretary Seamus Woods. I commend also the work of Niall Muldoon in supporting Ulster Schools in the scheduling of their mammoth fixtures programme.

I ask the question however that given the increasing demands on players may there be any scope for streamlining in any of the competitions? For example, 16 teams entered the premier competition, the Danske Bank MacRory Cup, for the 2018-19 campaign but it takes almost six months to run-off the competition.

I fully understand the attraction of playing the final on St Patrick's Day with 'live' television but does the competition need to begin in October?

### GAA SAFE CLUB INITIATIVE

The cost of insurance claims against the Association is something that we must take cognisance of and exercise care and diligence at all times. While risk can never be eliminated it can be managed and it is incumbent on us all to ensure that any deficiencies in health and safety procedures are addressed.

The Monaghan County Committee is therefore to be commended on developing a 'Safe Club Initiative' and for agreeing to act as the 'pilot county' for the project. It is obviously preferable if Association finances are spent on developing our games and facilities than on contesting or settling claims. Anything that can save our clubs money must be readily embraced.

The 'Safe Club Initiative' rewards clubs in the form of credits towards their annual insurance premium and I await the findings of the 'pilot' with interest and hope that it will pave the way for better housekeeping and risk management throughout the entire Association.

### NATIONAL SPORTS POLICY

In July Ministers' Shane Ross and Brendan Griffin launched the National Sports Policy 2018-27. It's an ambitious document with the key content areas focussing on Increased Participation, Greater Excellence and Increased Capacity.

A key target is to increase participation numbers in sport by 260,000 by 2027 and as the leading sports organisation in the country the GAA will have a significant part to play in helping to realise the target.

One challenge is to our inclusiveness, which is a key value of the Association. Our role is to make our activities accessible to persons of all abilities and therefore the creation of the post of National Inclusion and Integration Officer is to be welcomed.

Participation in sport helps improve health and wellbeing and leads to a better quality of life. Through the Games for All Programme and the numerous Health and Wellbeing initiatives the GAA is helping to achieve this but the National Sports Policy should act as a catalyst for further enhancements in this field.

The policy identifies the importance of physical literacy for young children in the development of their overall wellbeing. It is ironic that this is being promoted at a time when in the north the Curriculum Sports Programme, which does exactly this, has been closed down due to lack of government funding.

# 05

## GAMES FOR ALL

Ulster GAA's Strategic Plan identifies the need for targeted programmes to address disability and this is an area of growing importance throughout the Association. In Fis Shoiléir, the latest GAA Strategic Plan (published in 2018), there is a commitment to appoint an Inclusion Officer and to develop a strategy to communicate and promote disability and inclusion.

Ulster GAA has promoted Wheelchair Hurling and has provided a platform at our provincial semi-finals, through the half-time games concept, for some of our players with learning difficulties. There is much more that could be done however and I am pleased to report that Ulster GAA is positively engaging with Disability Sport NI with a view to increasing our overall package of delivery and creating opportunities for greater diversity within the programmes and initiatives we offer.

## TWINNING INITIATIVES

Ulster GAA has continued its strong twinning arrangements with Britain and Canada and in the past year Argentina has now been added to our list of partners. Martin Lopez Soler from Argentina visited Ulster GAA in August and, thanks largely to the offices of Roger Keenan from the Coaching and Games Department, he had the opportunity to attend some coaching sessions and a Tyrone Minor Football Championship game. The Coaching & Games section have continued to engage with Argentina GAA and while visiting Toronto for the Canadian GAA Convention last month Ulster GAA President Michael Hasson and myself met with Bernardo Devereux from Argentina GAA (he recently moved to Canada for a short period).

As a result of this meeting a number of ideas were developed and it is hoped that a team from Argentina GAA will compete in the GAA World Games in Waterford this summer.

Roger Keenan and Jimmy Darragh delivered a coaching course in Montreal in April, while later that month Frank McDonald delivered a referee's course in Toronto. The number of coaches with Foundation and/or Award 1 coaching qualifications continues to grow and a very encouraging aspect of our association with the Canadian GAA is the growing number of schools that offer Gaelic Games as part of their curriculum.

Ulster GAA again sent referees to cover the Western, Eastern and Toronto Divisional Finals and, for the first time ever, Ulster GAA was officially represented at the Eastern Finals when Vice-President Oliver Galligan visited Prince Edward Island which were hosting the finals for the first time.

Once again Ulster GAA were represented with a cross community team at the All Britain Competition in London and Ulster GAA also provided two referees to help cover the schedule of games. Ulster GAA also provided referees for the British Junior Hurling Final and the Scottish Junior Football Final, while a referees coaching course was undertaken in Lancashire by Brian Crowe.

## CLUB AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Club and Community Development Department is responsible for Club and Volunteer support, Irish Language and Culture, Health and Wellbeing of our members, and Community Outreach. Over the last 12 months the Department has grown in number and now includes a designated Irish Language Officer (Tricia Ní Chearra) and three Community Sports Development Officers (Pierce Caherty, Ryan McShane and Proinsias O'Kane). These additional posts complement the existing Health and Wellbeing Manager, Club Development Officer and Volunteer Development Officer.

The Department plays a role in public affairs and contributes to relevant engagements with public representatives and external agencies and organisations. There are numerous organisations that request to meet Ulster GAA and likewise there are partnerships we have established, to develop the GAA at all levels in the province.

The Club and Community Development Department is a point of contact for all clubs to receive guidance on club matters and volunteer development. The Department deals with queries directly or can signpost to professional bodies as necessary.

The Community Development Department has successfully applied for and received grant funding for a wide range of projects – some of which help fund posts and others for specific initiatives e.g. Sport Uniting Communities Peace IV bid, The



Executive Office and DFA funding of the Cúchulainn Cup, Foras na Gaeilge funding towards an Irish Language Officer, and various Health based initiatives via the Public Health Agency.

Government departments, both north and south, opened major capital funding streams in 2018, and through the Club and Community Department, advice clinics were arranged for all clubs seeking to make an application. 21 clubs in Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan attended the Sports Capital Programme advice clinics in October and a further 19 applications were supported for the Sport NI Multi Facility Funding in the north.

### CLUB MAITH

Club Maith continues to be the recognised brand for club excellence among GAA clubs in Ulster. Seven clubs have been accredited in 2018, – they were, Mullaghbawn Cúchulainns (Armagh), St Patrick's Mayobridge (Down), Liatroim Fontenoys (Down), Kinawley Brian Boru's (Fermanagh), St Martin's Desertmartin (Derry), Greencastle St Patrick's (Tyrone) and Killyman St Mary's (Tyrone) – and I extend my congratulations to them. The Club Maith website continues to be an excellent online resource to clubs compiling their Club Maith Portfolios, and indeed to any club with a club development query. Training and courses developed by the Community Department are placed on the site to keep club officials abreast of new initiatives. Since its inception in 2007, 68 clubs have now achieved Club Maith Status. Currently there are 47 clubs engaged in the process and receiving support and guidance with the aim to achieving accreditation in 2018.

### CLUB PLANNING

Planning within the Association has long been recognised as a vital component of our continued growth and development. This is particularly true at club level where a plan provides direction and enables a club to look beyond the day-to-day operations that can, at times, blur a more long-term vision a club may have. Through the National GAA Club Planning Programme assistance and guidance is available to clubs through trained club planners within their county. Currently 17 clubs from within Ulster are engaged in the process with a call out for additional clubs to be made in early 2019.

A Club Development Plan is a vital document in any club and as such the Club Planning Programme will continue to be an important area of work in 2019.

# 05

## COUNTY PLANNING

Through the support of National GAA and Ulster GAA a number of Ulster counties have undertaken the task in 2018 to produce an updated Strategic Plan. Tyrone launched their updated plan in April, while the last couple of months have witnessed the launch of the Donegal and Cavan plans. Antrim and Fermanagh hope to have their plans in operation in the first quarter of 2019.

## VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT

In the past year Ulster GAA revised and renewed its existing Volunteer Policy. This policy reflects guidelines on our Values, Recruitment and Selection of Volunteers, and Management of Volunteers. This policy will be in place from 2019-2021.

## GOLDMARK

Ulster GAA is a delivery partner for the Millennium Volunteers GoldMark Programme, which promotes and encourages young people aged 14-24 years old to volunteer in sport. Ulster GAA works with clubs to manage this programme through club co-ordinators. In 2018, 148 Young GAA members registered for this programme. 37 achieved 50 hours, 33 achieved 100 hours and 24 achieved 200 hours which is an award of excellence.

A joint awards ceremony was hosted on 21st February 2018 in the Wellington Park Hotel to recognise young sports volunteers participating in the programme from Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and Irish FA. Over 100 young people were rewarded at the ceremony.

## YOUTH FORUM

Ulster GAA organised a new Young Leaders Programme targeting outstanding young GAA volunteers from across Ulster's nine counties. This exciting and innovative programme was the first of its kind in Ulster and was made possible with the support of the Coca-Cola Thank You Fund. 33 Young leaders took part over four days in July 2018 at Garvaghey. Topics delivered included Getting to know the GAA, Event Management, GAA For All, Basic First Aid, Sports Science, Social Media, Communication and Marketing and Nutrition and Lifestyles. The course concluded with a Dual Foundation Coaching course and Safeguarding Children course. The young volunteers then had to go back to their clubs and complete 25 Volunteer Hours incorporating a club event. They were rewarded on 2nd December at the Ulster Club Final with an overall Young Leaders certificate, Foundation Coaching certificate, Child Protection certificate as well as a commemorative sweater designed by the Young Volunteers.

## TRANSLINK YOUNG VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Ulster GAA, in partnership with Translink, run a volunteer recognition programme which highlights the good work being done by young GAA volunteers in clubs across Ulster. Each month, Ulster GAA asks clubs to nominate an outstanding young person who has been involved in volunteering in their club. The winners receive a framed certificate and a return enterprise journey from Translink. The monthly winners and their volunteering stories are widely promoted through Ulster GAA and Translink networks.

The winners for 2018 were:

### MARCH:

Moneymore Derry;  
Emmett Crozier

### APRIL:

Tír na nÓg Armagh;  
Cathal Mercer

### MAY:

Wolfe Tones Armagh;  
Niamh McCarthy

### JUNE:

Latton O'Reilly's, Cavan;  
Christopher Rice

### JULY:

Slaughtmanus, Derry;  
Oran Boyd

### AUGUST:

St. John Bosco, Down;  
Shannon Carroll

### SEPTEMBER:

Naomh Treasa, Antrim;  
Lára McGoldrick

### OCTOBER:

Naomh Pól & Pádraig Sarsfields,  
Antrim; Meabh Kelly & Ava Finnegan

### NOVEMBER:

Ruairí Óg, Cushendall, Antrim;  
Emer & Áine Quinn

Volunteer Development Pathway  
Ulster GAA has now an established Volunteer Development Pathway which includes 3 key steps: New Officer Induction, Club Officer Development Programme and the Elevate Club Leadership Award.

The New Officer Induction is role specific training for all new club officers across Ulster for Chairpersons, Secretaries, Treasurers, PROs, Development Officers, Children's Officers, Coaching Officers, Cultural Officers. In 2018, Ulster GAA ran this induction programme



in association with National GAA to complement the National Club Leadership Development Programme. 342 Club officers participated in this induction across 141 Clubs.

The Club Officer Development Programme delivered training for club officers across priority issues facing clubs. The topics dealt with in 2018 were Financial Issues, Health and Wellbeing, Volunteer Recruitment, Communication Skills, Good Relations (Inclusive Club) and Safeguarding. 256 Club officers participated in this training across 108 Clubs.

Ulster GAA's Elevate Programme 2018 was the third year this Club leadership award was delivered. Involvement in the programme is on a whole club basis with volunteers attending modules that are relevant to their role or interest. Issues explored through this programme include: Leadership,

Management, Club and Community Planning, Marketing and promoting your club, Financial Management, Fundraising, Capital Projects and Partnerships. All Elevate Tutors are volunteers who have expertise in the subject. In 2018, five Clubs achieved the Elevate Award, they were:

- Doire Colmcille, Derry
- Padraig Sarsfields, Antrim
- St. Patrick's Saul, Down
- Stewartstown Harps, Tyrone
- St. Eugene's Newtown Stewart, Tyrone

## CLUB DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Ulster GAA continue to have a strong working relationship with the National Officer Development Committee under the chairmanship of Paddy Flood (Monaghan). This close link has enabled the Ulster GAA Volunteer Development Pathway and National Club Leadership Development Programme to work alongside each other ensuring a more joined up process rather than duplication of events across the Province.

## DFC PROGRAMME AND KEY OBJECTIVES

"Sport - A Home for Lifelong Volunteering" continues to be the primary programme through which club and volunteer development is delivered through Ulster GAA. This programme is joint with the Irish FA and Ulster Rugby and is funded by the Department for Communities. There are a number of Ulster GAA specific initiatives as well as Joint initiatives.

The DfC Multi-sport Volunteering Forum was held in Dungannon Integrated College on 14th November 2018, where participants received information on how to become more inclusive from Disability Sport NI, and The Rainbow Project.

The Schools Roadshow held in Ballymoney on 21st November witnessed the coming-together of pupils from Our Lady of Lourdes and Dalriada Colleges to learn more about volunteering, while also looking at the area of mental health in sport.

In December sports volunteers attended workshops held in Kingspan Stadium (3rd December), and Drumragh Sarsfields GAA (12th



# 05

December) which looked at ways to promote club activities. Successful case-studies from GAA and rugby highlighted best practice.

Other aspects new to the DfC "Sport - A Home for Lifelong Volunteering" include the development of a Club Inclusion Charter which helps clubs to promote what they are doing to make their club more inclusive.

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Ulster GAA's Health and Wellbeing Committee continues to operate and deliver at a high level. Chaired by Monaghan's Cathal Hand the Ulster H&W Committee meets quarterly throughout the year. The Committee have been instrumental in supporting health and wellbeing within Ulster GAA.

All nine County Health and Wellbeing Committees (HWCs) are established but embedded to varying degrees in overall county activity. This is something which has been raised as an issue at the National Health and Wellbeing Forum in October 2018. To help address this issue Cathal Hand, Maura McMenamin and Diarmaid Marsden have met with Ulster Coiste Bainistíochta and Ulster Chairperson's in 2018 to relay the formal position of the County Health and Wellbeing Committee within the county structure. The situation will be monitored throughout 2019 in order to maximise the potential of the GAA health and wellbeing agenda.

Our nine County Health and Wellbeing Committees have delivered a vast array of activity in 2018; directed by their Health and Wellbeing Action Plans 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. It is inspiring to see the progress being made on this significant programme

of work, while also assisting in the delivery of Ulster GAA specific programmes. The huge amount of health and wellbeing activity ongoing within clubs is testament to the support clubs receive from their County HWC's.

I wish to thank our nine County Health and Wellbeing Chairpersons. Unfortunately, 2018 has seen our County Health and Wellbeing Committees supporting a significant number of clubs through critical incidents. Although our County HWC's have been playing an invaluable role in such circumstances it is also important to stress that our County HWC's are not just there to serve this purpose. As dictated by the Critical Incident Response Plan template, the County Executive should lead-out on the response, supported by the County HWC.

Ulster GAA continue to be represented on National HWC through our Community and Health Manager Maura McMenamin. Gambling Awareness and the Critical Incident Response Plan are the main areas of focus in 2018-2019.

## HEALTHY CLUB PROGRAMME

Phase III of the Healthy Club Programme began in March 2018. 150 clubs were selected across Ireland following a highly competitive selection process. 42 clubs in Ulster were awarded the status, representing all nine counties. Phase IV will begin in 2020, and it is hoped that all GAA clubs will be offered the opportunity to attain Healthy Club status.

## CHARITY PARTNER 2018 - CANCER FOCUS

Following a successful partnership spanning over a decade Cancer Focus became Ulster GAA's Charity Partner for 2018. This status gave both organisations the opportunity to further extend their areas of collective effort.

"Care in the Sun" was promoted at the Ulster Senior Football Final where volunteers supported Cancer Focus and Ulster GAA to distributed much-needed sun protection, while also raising awareness of the importance of using the UV Index as the best measure of harmful sun-rays.

Cancer Focus continue to be available to clubs in delivering much needed cancer prevention information and were a welcome addition to Ulster GAA's Staff Health Days' in August and October by providing health checks through their "Keeping Well" health check services. For a small fee Cancer Focus can provide their "Keeping Well" Van to GAA Events, and link formally with Ulster GAA in this regard through the Farm Families Health Checks programme.

Cancer Focus provided resources for the promotion of Breast Cancer Awareness month in October 2018 and Ulster Camogie and Ulster Ladies used their Ulster Club Championships to raise awareness of this important issue. Some vital funds were also raised by the clubs involved.



### MENTAL HEALTH

Following-on from a successful year in 2017, the past year witnessed the extension of funding from the Public Health Agency. MindFit, in association with the mental health charity AWARE, is designed to empower young people to development their resilience and emotional intelligence skills. 20 MindFit workshops were originally funded, but due to a huge demand, the PHA were able to fund an additional 10 workshops. These are being delivered currently in clubs and counties and are proving to be very worthwhile.

As part of the funding received from the Public Health Agency, Ulster GAA commissioned the design and manufacture of pitch-side signage for clubs relaying important information about how to look after ourselves and someone else who may be in need to support for their emotional wellbeing.

### THE SAMARITANS

As National GAA Mental Health Partner, The Samaritans delivered an Active Listening workshop to Ulster GAA staff. This was very well-received with the consensus being that the more support clubs, and coaches can be offered in this regard the better. County HWC's have been linked with their Samaritans Liaison Officers, with the aim of rolling out "The Huddle" concept. "The Huddle" encourages teams to embrace mental health by informally incorporating it into everyday practice, such as the natural wrapping-up of a training session. This concept will be further developed in 2019.

### LIFESTYLE AND AWARENESS PROGRAMMES

#### Live to Play

Ulster GAA entered into a new partnership with the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) and PSNI to develop a new Live To Play Club Event format. The new format involves the use of virtual reality goggles, hence negating the need to source a car-wreck, as was the case previously. The new partnership under the NIFRS 'Your Choice' programme banner was launched in Road Safety Week, November 2018, and is available to clubs and counties currently.

#### One Punch Campaign

Ulster GAA have partnered with the PSNI to develop a "One Punch Can Kill" campaign aimed mainly at young males, advising them about responsible behaviour both on and off the pitch, with an emphasis on 'one punch' scenarios. The one-hour workshop looks at the medical and legal consequences of 'one punch' on the victim and perpetrator.

# 05

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the issue of on-pitch violence was addressed at the Ulster Club Championship launch in October 2018, and was well-received by the media and GAA community.

### Domestic Violence Campaign

Ulster GAA partnered with the Irish F.A. and Ulster Rugby to support a Department of Justice funded domestic violence campaign entitled #Don'tTackleItAlone. The campaign was promoted during the BOI Dr. McKenna Cup Final in February 2018, while Ulster Camogie and Ulster Ladies wore #Don't TackleItAlone jerseys at their respective Interprovincial Tournaments in 2018.

### "Want 2 Stop" Smoking Campaign

Ulster GAA linked with the smoking cessation teams through the Public Health Agency to promote the "Want 2 Stop" smoking campaign at the Fermanagh V Armagh Ulster Senior Football Championship Quarter-Final in Brewster Park on 19th May. Patrons were asked to smoke only in designated smoking areas, while volunteers and PHA staff were on-hand to offer a brief intervention, providing information on free smoking cessation services. The campaign was well received and links well with the drive for GAA clubs to become "smoke-free" and add to the significant number of clubs in Ulster who have successfully gone smoke-free.

### Donation Campaigns

Ulster GAA's "Blood Sub" campaign has been in place for a number of years and has successfully increased the number of people regularly donating blood. 2018 has seen Ulster GAA and Tyrone GAA work with other donation campaigns, namely; blood stem cell donation and organ donation, respectively. As such Ulster GAA are working on a general donation campaign which reminds us to do our best to give to others. We are reminded that Give is one of the "5 Steps to Wellbeing". More information on Ulster GAA's donation campaign will be forthcoming in early 2019.

### First Aid & Heart Start

During 2018, the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) acquired the contract for Heart Start. Ulster GAA remains as a licensed first responder scheme, with staff availing of training in summer 2018. Training for new tutors will be delivered through NIAS in Fermanagh in March. Plans are also afoot to engage more with the "Call Push Rescue" programme which delivers training on the skills of CPR. "Call Push Rescue" has been shown to improve outcomes from Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrests in other countries and is something Ulster GAA plan on rolling-out in early summer 2019.

Ulster GAA have linked with the Red Cross to design bespoke training for GAA clubs entitled "GAA Pitch-side First Aid". This three-hour course covers all the common scenarios encountered through training and games. A special discount for GAA clubs makes this training a very affordable option for first aid training, while best equipping our volunteers on very useful first aid skills.



## CÚCHULAINN CUP

The annual Ulster GAA Cúchulainn Cup took place at the Meadowbank Sports Arena, Magherafelt on Wednesday 14th March. The Cúchulainn Initiative aims to afford young people from different backgrounds the opportunity to engage with one another, and to educate people not traditionally involved with the GAA on the fundamentals of the Association. New to the programme in 2018 was the introduction of a Girls' Competition, with Belfast, Banbridge, Foyle and Magherafelt the participating areas. Taking part in the Boys' Competition for the first time were Antrim and Ballymoney, with Belfast and Enniskillen returning once again, having been involved in previous years.

In preparation for the Cúchulainn Cup Blitz, schools were given "GAA Taster Sessions" in which pupils who had never played Gaelic Games, or had very little interaction in the Games, were taught the basic skills of Gaelic Football and Hurling. Taster sessions were provided in twenty schools with over 300 Year 11 boys and girls getting an opportunity to sample what the GAA has to offer.

In addition, "Getting to Know the GAA" presentations were delivered to participating schools which helped to promote greater understanding and respect for other cultures; a key aim of the Cúchulainn Initiative.

After a very enjoyable day of games the Belfast Cúchulainn team emerged as winners of the inaugural Girls' Cúchulainn Cup, with first time participants Ballymoney Cúchulainns emerging successful in the Boys' Competition.

The young players from Dalriada School and Our Lady of Lourdes School in Ballymoney created memories together in July as they travelled to London to represent their schools and town as the Ballymoney Cúchulainns in the All Britain Competition.

Despite being a team made-up of players who had little or no experience playing Gaelic games, the Ballymoney Cúchulainns represented themselves with distinction showing some incredible skills, passion, and team-work as they came up against club teams who have had several years of experience playing together.

Away from the playing field the group were invited to a tour of the Houses of Parliament at Westminster which was kindly facilitated by Conor McGinn MP, and during the visit Ian Paisley MP for North Antrim welcomed the team and commended them for their participation in the programme. The group also met with Adrian O'Neill, Ireland's Ambassador to the UK and Ciaran Cannon, Irish Minister of State for the Diaspora and International Development during their time in London.

The real value of such an experience was profoundly seen on the young men, as they forged meaningful and lasting friendships. Praise must go to the school-teachers who accompanied their pupils, and staff from Ulster GAA who made it possible for the young men to become involved in the experience. I thank Diarmaid Marsden, Fionntan O'Dowd, Pierce Caherty and Paul Callaghan for their efforts in helping to prepare the team and making the weekend such an enjoyable experience for all. I am

also extremely grateful to The Executive Office for their continued support for this project which is an integral part of our outreach programme.

## IRISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Our Provincial Cultural Committee – Coiste na Gaeilge agus na hOidhreachta – has been working closely with our newly appointed Irish Language Officer, Tricia Ní Chearra, to provide opportunities for clubs to avail of assistance in the promotion and use of Irish. These invaluable links between our County Cultural Officers and our Irish Language representative at Ulster GAA have been vital as we continue to work on goal seven of our Strategic Plan 2016-2020: 'The Promotion of Irish Language and Culture.' We have already begun to see progress in relation to our goals through this relationship.

## CLUB AUDIT

Ulster GAA issued a survey to all Ulster Clubs to ascertain the status of Irish and Culture at club level early in 2018. This audit has been invaluable in the appraisal of Irish promotion and Scór participation throughout Ulster, and an excellent source of information for our newly appointed Irish Language Officer. Ulster GAA vows to use this information to continually strengthen the position of Irish and Culture within our clubs and to encourage our clubs to embrace this aspect of the GAA.

I wish to thank the members of Coiste na Gaeilge agus na hOidhreachta, who were vital to the execution of this audit, particularly the County Cultural Officers who were responsible for driving the initiative at grass-roots level and I offer my sincere thanks to the clubs who responded to the survey.

# 05

I would also like to thank the Chairperson of the Committee Michael McArdle, Secretary Clíodhna Kerr and committee member Pat Connaghan for their direction and assistance in this initiative. Mo cheol sibh.

## **GAEILGE SA CHLUB (IRISH IN THE CLUB)**

In its fifth year, the Gaeilge sa Chlub bursary scheme continues to ensure that GAA club members from across Ulster benefit annually from the £10,000 Ulster GAA invest in this initiative in order to promote Irish at club level across the province.

This collaboration between Ulster GAA and Ulster University continues to successfully promote the use of Irish within clubs throughout Ulster by providing financial assistance to GAA members who sign up for a Diploma in Irish Language. The scheme is successfully equipping our members with the skills to promote the Irish language, with all recipients carrying out an Irish language project in their club following their studies. Significantly, Ulster GAA last year also provided a £1,000 scholarship to Linda Ervine's TURAS Programme, an Irish Language project which she operates from the East Belfast Mission.

The 2018-19 academic year saw an increase in promotion and interest in the scheme with Ulster GAA awarding 24 GAA members £400 each towards their course fees. These recipients have attended directory workshops with Ulster GAA's Irish Language Officer, and the projects each student intends to oversee will be an integral part in the continued promotion of Irish throughout the province.



### COMMUNITY LINKS

An important part of promoting Irish is ensuring that we, as an organisation, interact with and support community-based Irish language groups. Ulster GAA has created links with Glór na nGael as they continue to provide their outstanding Joe McDonagh Foundation service, a project that successfully guides GAA clubs through a process of language acquisition and promotion in order to achieve a high standard of Irish within their club. We have also forged links with several community organisations, including Aonach Mhacha, Armagh's new Cultúrlann, and Irish speaking GAA teams, such as Belfast's Laochra Loch Lao. Ulster GAA will continue to connect and work with the Irish language community both in and out of the GAA family and encourage such organisations to contact us to create these links.

### SCÓR

Scór continues to be an outstanding showcase of national talent and there was an excellent display from the Ulster Gaels who represented the province brilliantly at all levels. Comhghairdeas to all who participated in these competitions and to our winners who advanced to the All-Ireland finals in Knocknarea Arena, Sligo, where Ulster won two titles at Scór na nÓg with an excellent display of talent by all participants: Killeavy, Armagh won the Rince Foirne, and Cornafean, Cavan were the overall winners of the Tráth na gCeist. The Scór Sinsir All-Ireland Finals also saw two titles being brought back to the province. Watty Graham's Glen, Derry won the Rince Foirne and Dearbhlá Scallan of Tyrone claimed the Amhránaíocht Aonair All-Ireland Title with a wonderful rendition of

'The Ballad of Tom Clarke.' Paddy Mee of Armagh was also honoured at the All-Ireland Scór Sinsir Final for his service to Scór over the years and I extend my congratulations and thanks to him. I thank also the Ulster Scór Committee, particularly our Chair Ailish McEntee and Secretary Danny McLernon, for their efforts in running Scór across the province. I commend all those who foster the tradition of Scór and thank them for their ongoing efforts. At the heart of Scór is participation and celebration of our national arts. This year Scór celebrates its 50th anniversary. Special events will take place nationally, provincially and within counties to celebrate and remember a half-century of Scór activity. The Ulster Celebration event will take place in Omagh on 30 March and as one might say, let's hope it is one Bígí páirteach!

### THE PEACE IV PROGRAMME

The Peace IV Programme entitled 'Sport Uniting Communities' is a joint project between Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and the IFA and is funded through European Regional Development Funding from SEUPB. The programme is designed to support peace and reconciliation within the nine counties of Ulster, with a clear cross community and cross border focus.

Nine Community Development officers (three from each sporting body) deliver twelve joint projects and three individual projects each year all with the aim to help build positive relations with people from different communities and backgrounds. The programme was successfully launched on 21st March 2018 at Queen's Sport. Speakers including Pete McGrath,

Conor McManus and Michael O'Neill spoke highly of how sport provided opportunities for them to work with people from various backgrounds and how important sport is in leading peace and reconciliation.

### CLUB SPORT FOR PEACE DAYS

Club Sport for Peace days are activity-based events that are ran as joint projects between the three organisations. These allow children and young adults from various backgrounds to come together through sports participation. Participating clubs host the event and in turn promote their commitment to becoming an open and welcoming organisation to all. In 2018 there were nine 'Club Sport for Peace' days delivered within the project which engaged over 800 young people.

### GAME OF THREE HALVES

The Game of Three Halves events are joint events involving coaching sessions from each of the three sporting bodies. This event allows participants to try sports they may not have tried before whilst also working and learning with people from different communities and backgrounds. The events promote the learning of skills as well as games-based scenarios, whilst promoting team work and other attributes that are important for all three sports. There were 18 Game of Three Halves events delivered in 2018 as part of the 'Peace IV Sport Uniting Communities' Programme, involving almost 1000 participants.

# 05

## HAVE A GO DAYS

CSDO's from Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and The IFA work together to deliver 'values based' coaching at our 'Have a Go' events. These events are based in areas where opportunity to take part in certain sports are minimal, as well as the opportunity to work with people across the religious divide. There have been six 'Have a Go' days during 2018 with over 300 young people having the opportunity to take part.

## VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Volunteer Development Programme involves a series of five workshops, which are attended by volunteers from each sport to discuss important aspects of their clubs including the definition of different roles and responsibilities within clubs, volunteer recruitment and retention, succession planning and becoming an inclusive club. Feedback from these events was very positive and clubs highlighted that although many roles within the clubs across the three sports were similar, each sport could learn from each other in how they promote volunteering and retain volunteers.

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP

The Youth Leadership Programme involved the creation of youth forums where participants engaged in training in volunteering and personal development, allowing them to gain a Level 1 Qualification in Sports Leadership. 45 young people from across the three sports and various community organisations gained the Level 1 Sports Leaders qualification in 2018.

## CLUB EDUCATIONAL VISITS

Volunteers from clubs across the three sports attend educational visits to various stadiums, including Croke Park, Celtic Park, the Athletic Grounds in Armagh, Kingspan Ravenhill and Windsor Park with a view of addressing perceptions and building relations. These visits also provide an informal opportunity for networking between clubs and people from different backgrounds.

## GETTING TO KNOW THE GAA

Getting to know the GAA is a single led activity ran by Ulster GAA's three Community Sport Development Officers. Groups from various communities and backgrounds receive a presentation and are involved in discussion about the history of Ulster GAA, its methods and its work within the community. Feedback from these events has been very positive, with many highlighting that they were unaware of the work done by the GAA outside of sport within the local community. In 2018 these presentations were delivered to PSNI students, a group of visiting students from Amsterdam University and a range of community groups and organisations.

The Multi Sport partnership with the Irish FA and Ulster Rugby has proven to be very successful over the last few years in lobbying jointly for funding, as in the DfC "Sport a Home for Lifelong Volunteering" Programme and Peace IV SEUPB "Sport Uniting Communities" Programme. Government Departments and funding bodies recognise the strength of the three main sporting organisations working together to achieve objectives which fit in with our own governing body strategic

plans, as well as achieving numerous objectives contained within the draft Programme for Government. There is a real concern that the impasse at Stormont could seriously affect some of these programmes going forward. This would have a detrimental impact on the ability of Ulster GAA to provide the necessary support to clubs and volunteers right across Ulster.

## CONGRATULATIONS

That great Crossmaglen and Armagh stalwart Joe Kernan was inducted into the GAA Hall of Fame, a fitting and lasting tribute to a great servant of club, county, province and country.

Three players from the province were selected on the Electric Ireland Minor Team of the Championship; Ronan Grimes and Aaron Mulligan from Monaghan and Tiarnan Woods from Derry, while at U-20 level exciting Derry prospect Callum Brown was selected as the EirGrid Player of the Province.

It was a great night for Ulster at the annual President's Awards in February, with three recipients from the province. That great St. John's and Antrim gael Seamus O'Hare, who has been an ever-present volunteer at Ulster Council games over many years, was a worthy recipient as was fellow Belfast man Sean McEntee, from the St. Paul's Club. Sean has been a lifelong devotee of handball as a player, coach and administrator and is a former President of the Irish Handball Council. The third Ulster 'winner' was Seán Ó hEarcáin from Donegal and he was rightly honoured for his efforts in organising the wonderful competition that is Comórtas Peile na Gaeltachta.



The evergreen Mickey Linden, who in 2018 won a Down Reserve Championship medal at the age of 55 (and indeed scored a trademark Linden classic point in the final), was inducted into the Gaelic Writers' Association Hall of Fame and the same organisation honoured another great forward from the province in selecting Conor McManus as their Football Personality of The Year. It was a great night for Ulster at the annual All-Star Awards with six players from the province being honoured. Conor McManus picked up his third award and his Monaghan colleagues Rory Beggan and Karl O'Connell were honoured for the first time.

All-Ireland finalists Tyrone had two winners when Colm Cavanagh and Pdraig Hampsey were selected in the full-back line, while Ryan McHugh (Donegal) became only the seventh footballer to win All-Star awards in both defence and attack with his selection at left-half-forward.

I also congratulate each of the hurlers from Ulster who were honoured with selection on the 'Champions 15' teams from the Joe McDonagh, Christy Ring and Nicky Rackard/Lory Meagher Cups and make special mention of Donegal's Declan Coulter who was player of The Nicky Rackard Cup. In a year when Ulster teams just fell short at national level, the victory of the Donegal hurlers in this competition was a welcome boost to the province.

The complete list of Ulster winners was as follows; Antrim's Neil McManus (Joe McDonagh), Derry's Cian Waldron and Cormac O'Doherty, Down's Dáithí Sands and Armagh's Stephen Renaghan (Christy Ring), Cavan's Kevin Connelly, Donegal's Declan Coulter and Stephen Gillespie, Fermanagh's Ryan Bogue, Monaghan's Kevin Crawley, Tyrone's Dermot Begley who all received Nicky Rackard/Lory Meagher Champion 15 Awards.

Two McNamee Awards came to Ulster with St. Peter's, Warrenpoint winning the Best GAA Website Award and that hospitable 'Donegal Democrat' journalist Paddy Campbell won the Provincial Media Award for his magazine feature marking the 25th anniversary of the county's historic 1992 All-Ireland Football Final win.



# 05

## PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MARKETING

Over the Christmas period when reading through the pages of a book chronicling the GAA of a century ago I could not help but be taken aback by what different times we live in now. Those were the days before RTÉ (or 2RN) and phones were a rare commodity. GAA games received nothing like the publicity they receive now. To even get the result of an All-Ireland final you most likely had to await someone who was at the game arriving home – or read about it in the following day's paper (assuming it was reported on). Today you can follow every score of a club league game from the comfort of your own home – which might be half a world away.

The media therefore plays an increasing role in our everyday lives, with digital media increasingly becoming the media of choice. It is against this backdrop that the Ulster GAA communication team operates. The past year has again witnessed an increase in our digital media output and the number of followers continues to grow - Ulster GAA now has over 72k followers on Twitter, over 42k friends on Facebook and over 10.5k followers on Instagram.

Ulster GAA Radio was a new concept initiated in 2018 and this resulted in full online radio coverage of 23 games in the Ulster Minor and U-20 Championships. I commend all involved in this great undertaking which has done much to raise the profile of our inter-county underage fixtures.

While there are occasions when we may be unhappy with some levels of media coverage, the positives largely outweigh the negatives and I thank our broadcast, print and digital media for their continued coverage of our games and issues.

Our partnership with Q-Radio for the Ulster Senior Football Championship was a new initiative and this is one which I hope to build on in 2019.

I thank our programme sellers at our games and the counties for their continued support on the many facets of PR activity. I also thank Tiernach Mahon and Dessie McDonnell for the assistance they offer in this regard at Ulster Championship games and to Mark Nelson for the role he plays in relation to media access at games.

Ulster GAA has a hard-working Public Relations Committee under the watchful eye of Michael Geoghegan (Chair) and Declan Woods (Secretary). I thank them and all the committee members for their invaluable work.

Michael Geoghegan completes his term as PRO today and in his three years at the helm he has been innovative and has led from the front. He has had a wonderful rapport with press personnel and with our county PRO's and I thank him sincerely. His recognition in 2018 by the Ulster GAA Writers was well merited.

A huge debt of gratitude is also due to our Marketing & Communications Manager Paul McGurk for his expertise in this field and for his unstinting efforts in the media and commercial sectors. I thank also the immense contribution made by Claire Curran and Seamus Donnelly to the work of the Communications Unit and I thank also Stephen Donnelly for his tireless efforts in the production of our match programmes.

I thank also AV Browne for their advice and support in relation to our media content and design and I commend our photographer John Merry and the team at Linwoods Armagh TV for their ongoing work for Ulster GAA.



## OBITUARIES

As 2018 drew to a close Ulster GAA was saddened to learn of the death of their former President and Vice-President John O'Reilly. A lifelong devotee of his beloved Crossmaglen Rangers, John was President of the GAA in Armagh at the time of his passing. John served as President of the Ulster Council in the years 2001-04 during which time he witnessed his native Armagh winning their first All-Ireland title and the following year, in 2003, he had the remarkable honour of being the provincial Chair when for the first time two teams from the same province contested an All-Ireland Senior Football Final (Tyrone and Armagh).

The year started with the demise of Seamus McGrattan, who served as the first Ulster Hurling Development Officer. The genial Ballygalget man gave a lifetime of service to the GAA in Down and Ulster and hurling was always his great passion in life. Seamus did much to broaden the playing base of the game in the province and in so doing he has left a lasting legacy. Seamus also had the distinction of serving as the secretary of the Down Hurling Board in the 1970's at a time when his father Paddy was the chairman of the same committee.

In August the former Chief Steward of Ulster GAA Brendan Kirk was laid to rest after a long illness. Never one to complain Brendan fought his illness with both bravery and dignity and he left behind a great legacy with his times at Ulster GAA as a trusted steward and volunteer.

The GAA community in Pomeroy and indeed throughout Tyrone was cast into mourning in early January with the sudden death of Christopher Colhoun, just hours after being admitted to hospital with severe 'flu' symptoms. 'Crico', as he was affectionately known, was a former Tyrone panellist but was better known for his exploits with his beloved Plunkett's. He was an integral part of their Ulster Intermediate Club Championship winning team of 2016 and indeed scored crucial goals in both their semi-final victory over Castledawson and in the final against Donaghmoynce.

Another link with that ground-breaking Down team of 1960-61 was broken with the death in July of John Smith. John wasn't part of the 1960 team but lined out at left-half-back in the 1961 semi-final and final, replacing none other than Kevin Mussen, and in both games he more than justified his selection with solid performances. Another link with the Mourne men's All-Ireland roll of honour was broken in September with the passing of Pat McAlinden, who was a member of the 1968 panel.

We were all shocked on the evening of 29 May to learn of the sudden passing of William James Smith, Irish Language and Culture Officer for the Down County Committee. Just three days earlier William James attended the Down v Antrim Ulster Championship game at Páirc Éisler and he seemed to be recovering well following recent surgery.

William made an immense contribution to the GAA at club, divisional, county and provincial levels. Quiet spoken, people listened when William James spoke as his contributions were always well thought through and were made rationally. His heart was in his native Glasdrumman, located between the beautiful Mourne Mountains and the sea, and he was certainly a Mourne man true and true. A former South Down Board Chairman and a Vice Chairman of the Down County Committee, William James also served as a member of the Ulster Council and was a member of the provincial Scór Committee at the time of his death. Perhaps his proudest ever GAA moment came in February 2017 when young Niamh McDowell from his own club won All-Ireland Scór na nÓg honours in Solo Singing. William James stood as tall as the Mourne Mountains that evening and rightly so and it was fitting that Niamh was amongst those who performed at this funeral service.

In May, Derry and Ulster paid a sad farewell to that iconic footballer Seamus Lagan. The Watty Graham's man won All-Ireland U-21 and Minor Championship medals and was an integral part of that great St. Columb's Hogan Cup winning team of 1965. Seamus also had the honour of winning three Ulster Senior football Championship medals in the 1970's.

Two great servants of hurling in Down, Pat Watterson (Kilclief) and Jerry Sheehan (Kilkeel) were also called to their eternal reward during the past year. As well as being steeped in hurling the Cork native, who is father of Down senior hurling manager Ronan Sheehan, was a Scór Sinsear Tráth gCeist champion from 1971, the initial year of the competition.

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Derry hurling and the Na Magha club were plunged into deep mourning with the tragic death of young Aodhán O'Donnell who had lined out for his county in the Christy Ring Cup just weeks before his untimely passing, while Ballygalget's teenage hurler Niall O'Connor also died in tragic circumstances. The sudden passing of young Clonduff hurler Pearse Branagan serves as another reminder that death has no respect for age and how fitting it was that Clonduff's win in the Down Junior Championship a few months later was dedicated to his memory. There was further tragedy in Down when Karl Heaney from the John Mitchels club in Newry was tragically killed in a road accident en route from a club training session, while eight year old Daniel Bradley who also died as a result of a road traffic accident had strong links with the Glen Club in Maghera.

Crossmaglen Rangers lost a great stalwart with the death of their lifelong volunteer, and Honorary President, Paddy Kindlon. So also did the St. John's Club in Belfast with the passing of Patsy Donnelly, father of former Antrim County Committee Chair Collie. St. Mary's, Convoys and the wider Donegal GAA family lost a great stalwart with the sudden passing of Liam McConalogue. A great volunteer for club and county his death was a tremendous shock to all who knew him, as was that of Cathal O'Reilly from Cavan who was a regular gateman at Ulster GAA games over many years. Clonduff lost a great stalwart in Sean Cairns, Drumaness in Jim Savage and Downpatrick lost two wonderful servants in Al Dillon and Oliver Morgan.

On the evening of 13th November all gaels in Ulster were saddened to learn of the death of Paul McKeever. The Portglenone man was one of the province's best refereeing prospects and indeed just over five short months earlier he had taken charge of the Ulster U-20 Football Championship match between Donegal and Cavan in Celtic Park. In his playing days he represented Antrim at Minor and U-21 level and indeed featured for his county in the 1997 Ulster Minor Football final against Tyrone.

As the year was in its twilight hours news broke of the passing of Frank Campbell. The Pomeroy Plunkett's clubman gave a lifetime of service, in numerous guises, to the GAA in his native Tyrone over many years and we are all the poorer for his passing.

## THANKS

In conclusion I wish to pay tribute to all my colleagues at Ulster GAA for their commitment and support throughout the year. On a daily basis I deal with officials from across Ulster and beyond and I commend each and every one of these people for their continued dedication and support. In particular I thank the County Secretaries' and Chairs' from across the province – most of my dealings with counties are through you and I totally appreciate your advice, understanding and, on occasion, forbearance.

In April Tom Ryan succeeded Páirc Duffy as Ard Stiúrthóir of our great Association and I thank him and the entire staff team at Croke Park who are always on hand to give good counsel and fine wisdom when required.



To succeed Páraic was going to be no easy task but Tom in his first nine months at the helm has shown that he will be a steady hand at the tiller. He has a loyal team of staff within the Ard Stiúrthóir's Office and I give special praise to them as much of my Croke Park dealings are with them. I thank also Fergal McGill, Pat Daly, Alan Milton, Ger Mulryan and their respective staff teams and pay tribute also to Peter McKenna and his staff at Páirc An Chrócaigh Teoranta for their on-going help and co-operation.

I thank also my colleagues in the other provinces and to colleagues in other sporting bodies with whom Ulster GAA works closely. Your guidance and support is both welcome and valued. In the summer Simon Moroney retired as Secretary of Comhairle Mumhan. Simon and I go back a long way since our time as respective County Secretaries in Clare and Down and I wish him well. I offer my congratulations to his replacement Kieran Leddy and look forward to working with him in the years ahead.

Ulster GAA owes a big debt of gratitude to our main and corporate sponsors. In O'Neill's International Sportswear we have a company who is recognised as being at the top of their industry and in their centenary year it was fitting that Ulster GAA recognised the great contribution that this company has made to the GAA by launching both the Ulster Championship and the Bank of Ireland Dr. McKenna Cup at their Strabane premises. Bank of Ireland continue to be a loyal supporter of the Dr. McKenna Cup and I thank them for this very welcome support.

Our games are the conduit by which we generate revenue to support the development of our activities and none of these could take place without the loyal band of dedicated volunteers who turn out week after week to ensure we have the required number of personnel in place to allow these games to take place. I thank in particular our Chief Steward John Connolly, Deputy Chief Steward Michael McCarney, our Event Controllers and Designated Persons - it is through your efforts and those of your teams of volunteers that so many people get to see our wonderful games. I thank the players of club and county teams who give selflessly of their time and give us so much enjoyment.

Last, but by no means least, I thank my family and especially my wife Deirdre for their unstinting loyalty and support. The demands of the job mean many evenings' away from home and without their understanding and tolerance there is no way that I could give the time and commitment necessary to carry out my duties to the best of my ability.



**BRIAN MAC FHÍOBHUÍ**  
RÚNAÍ