

## **Tuarascail Bhliantúil 2009**

The year of celebration for our one hundred and twenty five years of commitment and service to our Country, has been widely acclaimed and supported with many outstanding events and occasions, to ensure that the input of many great people over this period of time who dedicated to the development of the Gaelic Athletic Association were recognised. History is important and we must always be aware of where we have come from. It can be motivating and enlightening to the current times. Today is about knowing where we are now based on what has gone before. We need both these elements to inspire us to build for the future. We have strategies in place to guide us towards our goal but strategies alone cannot be the driving force for a vibrant tomorrow. The things that motivate members, Clubs, Counties, Provinces and an expanding Association is that idealism of extended community pride based on the core values of the GAA. These are what will take us to our future. The world of today is vastly different from our founding times and the intervening period has thrown up many varied challenges to the GAA.

We have been and must remain relevant to the times that we are in, based on the essential commitment to our aims and ideals. We have changed in so many ways during the past one and a quarter Centuries that our Founders would have hardly imagined how we would have developed even with the best vision of Dr. Croke. The Association has democratically remained true to our core values, despite the variable of the difficulty of the times, and this is important when we envisage our future. We need to be a confident organisation to enable us to change the things that need changing, courageous to retain those elements that are the bedrock of our Association and wisdom to know the difference. This is the tried and trusted formula of the past that points us confidently towards our next jubilee 2034. We should relish the challenge of tomorrow but we must also deal with the issues of today. Our strength is in our unity of purpose and not in the strategies, structures and systems of our time. The great danger in recognising the past is that we can be deflected from the issues of today and the plans for tomorrow.

Inne, inniu agus amarach was the motto of our 2007 involvement in the Smithsonian Institute Festival in Washington and it is appropriate to look at these as the pathway to our future. The celebrations will be covered later in this report and the present shall be covered in the various sections. The future is something that needs planning and with the advent of all our County Strategic plans, our own Strategic Plan, 'Teaghlaigh agus Pobail – An Fabraic de Cumann Luthchleas Gael' and the National Strategic Plan, then we have plenty of indications of the way forward. The drive to have a coordinated approach is obvious for all to see, but the relevance of the process is dependent on its ability to achieve our objectives. This in past times was the bulwark of our Association, based on the democratic support for our leadership and our policies, while at the same time recognising that the role of our membership, Clubs, Counties, Provincial Councils and the Association as a whole in working cohesively for a common purpose. I believe that we need to be developmental, responsive and motivated if we are to expand our Association in the challenging times of today.

The past year has been a difficult one with a very challenging economic climate but it has witnessed several very noteworthy successes, mainly typified by the winning of the All Ireland Minor Football Championship by an undefeated Armagh and Ulster winning a record

breaking twenty ninth Interprovincial Football Championship. Tyrone won the Senior Football Championship and Down were our Under 21 Champions who suffered a last minute defeat to Cork. Tyrone also had the honour of winning our only National Championship with merited display in the Lory Meagher Cup defeating neighbours Donegal in the final. Antrim had a clean sweep of our Provincial Hurling titles, and while we had a team in each of National Football League Finals, it was promotion rather than trophies in this area of activity. At Vocational Schools level there was a trio of success for Monaghan in the Inter County, St. Malachy's High School, Castlewellan who retained the Under 18 title and a truly remarkable achievement by St. Paul's High School, Kilrea who proved their worth by winning the Under 16 Championship.

I would also like to commend those in charge of Handball as it is at the top of the World at this moment in time and in Ulster there were many successes at the recent World Championships in Portland, Oregon. Paul Brady (Cavan) and Fiona Shannon (Antrim) won their respective titles for the third time and both are currently rated number one in the world. This is tremendous for one of our games and for this Province. It demonstrates clearly that motivated people can achieve great things and it should be hugely promotional for the game throughout our GAA community.

## **Finance**

The economic climate has proved difficult for all aspects of our work in 2009. The strength of the euro has effectively meant a reduction of admission prices throughout the various competitions at inter county and inter club level. While attendances have remained relatively constant the consequences has been a significant reduction in dispersible monies deriving from the gate income. The overall investment in games, coaching and other areas of responsibility have been maintained from external sources despite the challenging environment that existed and is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. During the year we allowed for Counties to determine in which currency they wished to deal with and this looks set to remain throughout 2010. This has cost implications for everyone involved.

The increasing costs of Association Insurances, mostly relating to the ongoing strength of the euro, has also had a very substantial impact on the finances of our Clubs and this is also likely to remain the case for some time to come. The claims experience applying to Ulster has also had an impact on these costs and the only indicator of improvement was the awarding of a Chief Constable's Certificate to one Club, and the granting of a Rates Exemption Certificate to another Club giving them access to the new Compensation Order in respect to damage to their property. Rates Exemption is subject to the relevant Club being registered as a Community Amateur Sports Club. The role of all our constituent units in ensuring that we are safety conscious at all times will also assist in reducing the overall costs involved but the need to examine the benefits of schemes such as CASC can also be of help.

The Comhairle Uladh finances are consistent with the level of support for our games programme but dispersible income remains heavily dependent on the returns from the senior football championship. The total income amounted to €6,062,695 inclusive of all grants. Our gate income, €1,775,596, represented 29% of this compared to 47% of the total income in 2008. In 2009 our grant income, €1,368,959, represents 23% of our total in

comparison to 29% in 2008. The expenditure amounted to €5,624,014. In addition, the investment in Grounds and Infrastructure amounted €470,016. There was an operating deficit, after grounds grants to clubs, on the years working equating to €59,396 which was met from our accumulated funds. The continuation of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure funding has enabled us to progress modernisation programme and to support the counties in this vital work. The grants from Ard Comhairle have also assisted in these objectives but these reserves are finite and the future is unclear at this time. The bureaucratic approach and the significant under funding of Ulster is likely to place significant costs on our counties if we are going to meet the Key Performance Indicators. We have worked diligently to assist all of our constituent units and we shall endeavour to meet the challenges that lie ahead but the process internally are unworkable, restrictive and potentially costly. The costs of running our games programme are also evident but it needs to be stated that we have not increased our admission charges in 2008 but the current exchange rates will require a review of the equity of the current pricing arrangements.

Comhairle Uladh have a tremendous team of workers both voluntary and employed. Too often the voluntary input of employed staff is overlooked, but this is a very valuable support on very many occasions. The stewards, team officials, members of Comhairle Uladh give an enormous amount of time to act in many capacities such as stiles men, stewards, counters and supervisors throughout the year. We could not do without this outstanding input by a great team. An Cisteoir, Mairtin Mac Aibhne gave generously of his time to the wider benefit of Comhairle Uladh and provides the necessary support in the managing of our financial matters and for which we are deeply indebted. Michelle McAleer our Business Manager is a very important part of the team and keeps all aspects of finances under strict control leading to us being subject to full audit and meeting the level of assuredness required for Governing Bodies by 2019. We are grateful to her for her work, diligence and support in this vital area of governance for the Association in Ulster.

### **Games Activity**

2009 proved to be another eventful year on the playing fields across Ulster. The Inter County Championships continue to be the showcase competitions but we also remain committed to servicing the needs of the club player. The continuation of the Ulster Club Championships in three grades and both codes provides an outlet for our county winners. Club activity remains to be an integral part of our games programme and following on from the five divisions in the Ulster Senior Hurling Club League in 2009, it is hoped to have a similar format in place for the year ahead. With regard to the Ulster Football Club League, 2010 will see the introduction of an Intermediate grade on top of a Senior grade, which will provide clubs with competitive action prior to the commencement of their internal county games programmes.

The Annual Fixtures Seminar highlighted the vast array of games played in Ulster in 2009 that amounted to over 20,000 and I would like to take this opportunity to commend all those involved in fixture making in their roles on the Competitions Control Committee in their respective counties. The scheduling of games can be an arduous task but we are fortunate in all our counties, to have the personnel to cope with this and I hope that this continues in the years ahead.

While Ulster had no representatives in the All Ireland Final, we had representatives in all four National Football League finals. Unfortunately, Doire, Muineachain, An Dún and Aontroim all suffered narrow defeats in their pursuits of league success but in respect of the aforementioned teams in Divisions 2 and 3 and they all achieved promotion that places all our counties in the top three divisions.

In our first competition of the year, namely the Dr McKenna Cup we had an intriguing final in which Dún na nGall saw off the challenge of Queens University to edge out victors by 2-12 to 0-11 at Healy Park, Omagh. This competition continues to serve a valuable purpose for all our nine counties and also for the three universities, as they prepare for the National Football League and the Sigerson Cup respectively.

### **Senior Football Championship**

The 2009 Ulster Senior Football Championship will live long in the memory. The presence of the Saffron County in an Ulster Final after a 39 year absence, was a great sight and underlined the open nature of our Provincial Championship. Antrim's appearance in the Ulster Final ensured that all nine of our counties have appeared in the Ulster Senior Football Final since 1997, which demonstrates the competitive nature of our Championship.

The Championship commenced at Brewster Park on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May, where a late Fear Manach surge saw off my own county, An Dún on a Scórelíne of 0-13 to 0-10. One week later, Championship fare returned to Celtic Park, where Doire took on Muineachan. This game received a lot of negative press in the aftermath, but it was a Paddy Bradley goal that proved to be the difference in a 1-10 to 0-10 victory for the Oak Leaf County. The following week, and after much debate surrounding the venue, Tír Eoghain faced Ard Mhacha in an Ulster Quarter Final at St Tiernach's Park, Clones. Played in front of over 26,000 spectators, it was Tír Eoghain who emerged victorious in a thrilling game by 2-10 to 1-10. The staging of this game in St Tiernach's Park proved to be the correct decision as it allowed us to cater for family tickets which were available at a reduced rate in substantial numbers. The following Saturday, An Cabhán defeated Fear Manach in Kingspan Breffni Park by 0-13 to 1-09 in a tight encounter. The curtain raiser to this game was an Ulster Ladies Championship fixture between Tír Eoghain and Ard Mhacha and this further emphasised the important role of integration in our Association. The next encounter was at Mac Cumhaill Park for the last quarter final as a Tomás McCann goal ensured that Aontroim collected a memorable victory over Dún na nGall on a Scórelíne of 1-10 to 0-12.

On 21<sup>st</sup> June 2009, Doire and Tír Eoghain faced up to one another in the first Semi Final that was played at Casement Park. Tír Eoghain saw off this challenge relatively comfortably as they emerged to another Ulster Final on a Scórelíne of 0-15 to 0-07. The second Semi Final took place the following Saturday, where An Cabhán and Aontroim were vying for an Ulster Final spot. St Tiernach's Park was awash with saffron and white at the final whistle as Aontroim emerged winners by 0-13 to 1-07.

The final three weeks later where Aontroim and Tír Eoghain met in a unique Ulster Senior Football Championship Final on Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> July. Over 32,000 spectators attended the Final on a day when each county was represented by either former All Ireland winning Captains,

Captains of historic teams, or their representatives as part the pageantry of our 125 celebrations. It was fitting that our greatest players of the past were present and introduced to the attendance by Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh on a memorable day for Ulster GAA. The Ulster Champions from 25 years previous, Tír Eoghain were also honoured as part of our ongoing initiative on Ulster Final day. *Uachtarán na hÉireann* was in attendance and was introduced to the two teams prior to throw in. When the action got underway, a brilliant first half blitz by Tír Eoghain laid the foundations for an impressive 1-18 to 0-15 victory and a 12<sup>th</sup> Ulster title for the Red Hand County. Our Congratulations go to Tír Eoghain for a well merited success.

### **All-Ireland Football Championship**

The All-Ireland Football Championship for Ulster representatives began with five of our counties involved on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> July. In the all Ulster affair, Muineachán did just enough to overcome Ard Mhacha by 0-13 to 0-12 after extra time in Clones. An Dún recorded a comprehensive victory over Londáin at Pairc Esler on a day when Down's Danny Hughes lined out against his brother Johnny in a 1-16 to 1-07 victory. Dún na nGall also collected a comfortable victory by defeating Ceatharleach at Mac Cumhaill Park on a Scórelíne of 2-13 to 1-06. Fear Manach travelled to Aughrim to take on a resurgent Cill Mhantain side and were defeated by 0-17 to 1-11.

Following their quarter final meeting in the Ulster Championship, Doíre and Muineachán were paired together again, this time in the All Ireland Qualifiers in St Tiernach's Park, Clones on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July. In one of the best games of Football of 2009, both counties put on an exhibition of Scóre taking, and it was a Paddy Bradley inspired Doíre side who took the honours once again by 3-16 to 0-20. On the same day, An Dún recorded a good victory over Laois at Pairc Esler on a Scóre line of 2-08 to 0-07. Dún na nGall edged out An Clár by 0-13 to 1-07 at Ballybofey, while An Cabhán exited the Championship when they were defeated by Cill Mhántain at Aughrim, 1-12 to 0-08.

For the third successive week, Dún na nGall received a home draw and this time it was near neighbours Doíre who would be visiting Mac Cumhaill Park. After an epic tussle, it was the home side who held on for a 2-13 to 0-18 victory after extra time. On the same night, An Dún made the long journey to Aughrim and became the third Ulster County to be defeated by Wicklow in the 2009 Championship on a Scóre line of 1-15 to 0-17. The following weekend, Dún na nGall produced another solid performance as their run through the qualifiers gathered momentum by defeating Gallimh by 0-14 to 0-13 at Sligo. The following day, only seven days after facing Tír Eoghain in the Ulster Final, Aontroim met Ciarrai in Tullamore in what was a memorable week for Saffron followers. After a tremendous effort, Aontroim were edged out on a 2-12 to 1-10 Scóre line.

In the All Ireland Quarter Finals, both Dún na nGall and Tír Eoghain were in action on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August. First up were Dún na nGall, and after a number of encouraging performances through the All Ireland Qualifiers, they were comprehensively defeated by Corcaigh in Croke Park, as they went down by 1-27 to 2-10. That left Tír Eoghain as Ulster's sole representatives and they didn't disappoint as they overcame Cill Dara with the help of a rejuvenated Stephen O'Neill by 0-16 to 1-11 in a great game. In the Semi Final three weeks

later, they took on Corcaigh who gave a strong performance to end the interests of the Red Hand County in the 2009 Championship as they emerged victorious by 1-13 to 0-11. In the All Ireland Final, an all Munster affair saw Ciarrai emerge victorious as they saw off their near neighbours, Corcaigh.

As regards the 2009 All Stars, I extend my congratulations to Karl Lacey (Dún na nGall) and Stephen O'Neill (Tír Eoghain) who were selected at right corner back and left corner forward respectively. There was further delight as Michael Murphy of Dún na nGall was selected as Young Footballer of the Year. Congratulations to Michael and he continues Ulster's great track record with reference to this particular award.

### **Minor Football Championship**

The Ulster Minor Football Championship again provided us with eight exciting games, many of which were played as curtain raisers to the senior games. First in action were Fear Manach and An Dún at Brewster Park, where a Ross McGarry goal rubber stamped a convincing victory for An Dún. The following week in Celtic Park, Muineachan produced a strong performance to defeat Doire by 1-12 to 0-10. Six days later in the Athletic Grounds, An Dún needed a late point from half back Kevin McClorey to see off the challenge from An Cabhán by 1-11 to 2-07. The following day, two of the front runners went head to head as Tír Eoghain and Ard Mhacha met in Clones, and a late Robbie Tasker penalty ensured that it was Ard Mhacha who would advance to the semi finals on a Scóre line of 2-08 to 1-09. In the last quarter final, Dún na nGall saw off Aontroim by 0-14 to 0-11 at MacCumhaill Park, Ballybofey.

In the first semi final, An Dún narrowly defeated Dún na nGall at St Tiernach's Park by 1-10 to 1-08. Following the All Ireland Qualifier draw, Muineachan and Ard Mhacha were paired together and both counties were due to face each other the same weekend in the Ulster Minor Football Championship. It speaks volumes of the goodwill of our counties that Ard Mhacha agreed to travel to Clones to play the minor fixture as a curtain raiser to the All Ireland Qualifier and I thank both counties for their co-operation in making this possible. On the field, Ard Mhacha outScóred their opponents in a great game by 2-14 to 2-08 to set up a final showdown with their neighbours. While the 125 celebrations were extremely evident on Ulster Final day, the place of our minor teams was not diminished in any way as they played out their decider as a prelude to the Senior Final. A great final was anticipated, but unfortunately, both teams did not play to their full capacity and it was Ard Mhacha who collected their second Ulster Minor title in five years on a Scóre line of 1-8 to 1-5.

As Ulster champions, Ard Mhacha faced Cill Dara at Kingspan Breffni Park in an All Ireland Quarter Final; a strong performance ensured that they progressed by 2-14 to 2-08. Following their Ulster Final defeat, An Dún could take some comfort from the fact that they still had an All Ireland Quarter Final to look forward to. However, a swine flu epidemic severely affected these preparations and they were subsequently granted a postponement of their clash with Baile Átha Cliath for a fortnight. When the action commenced, they played out a titanic tussle and the Mournemen emerged victorious by 2-16 to 2-14. In the first All Ireland Semi-Final, Ard Mhacha, aided by two goals from Gavin McParland, saw off the challenge from Ciarrai as they collected a marvellous 2-10 to 0-10 victory.

One week later, An Dún were aiming to set up an all Ulster decider as they faced Maigh Eo. Unfortunately, it was a case of Maigh Eo taking their goal chances while An Dún spurned theirs as they were defeated by 2-09 to 0-09. On Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September, Ard Mhacha lined out against Maigh Eo and in doing so ensured that Ulster have been represented in 10 of the last 13 All Ireland Minor Finals. A nervous opening was quickly replaced by a display of composure and maturity as Ard Mhacha finished strongly running out 0-10 to 0-07 winners, and Declan McKenna became the first Armagh captain to lift the Tom Markham cup since 1949. This was a tremendous achievement for all concerned and I extend my congratulations to Paul McShane and the entire backroom team for delivering another underage title to the Province. This victory ensured that Ard Mhacha went 17 competitive games unbeaten and in the process collected the Ulster Minor League, Ulster Minor Championship and All Ireland Minor Football Championship in what was a remarkable achievement. The next challenge that lies ahead is to retain this talented group of players and ensure that as many of them as possible make the transition through to Under 21 and senior ranks.

### **Under 21 Football Championship**

This Championship has found a niche in the fixture programme where it does not directly impinge on counties preparations for National Football Leagues and also benefits from an increased interest from our spectators. The attendances for the 2009 Under 21 Football Championship were excellent and the Wednesday night slot has proved to be a massive success. Furthermore, the modernisation programme has greatly aided the playing of this competition with the advent of floodlighting in our county grounds. Action commenced in Emyvale on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March where Fear Manach produced something of a shock to defeat the home side by 1-07 to 1-06. The following week, the four quarter finals took place across the Province. There were home wins for Ard Mhacha, Dún na nGall and Tír Eoghain as they defeated An Cabhán, Doire and Aontroim respectively. An Dún were the only side to win on their travels as they defeated Fear Manach by 2-11 to 2-08. In the semi finals, Ard Mhacha travelled to Ballybofey and a brilliant first half display ensured that they progressed to the final on a Scóire line of 1-10 to 0-06. On the same night, An Dún and Tír Eoghain played out a thriller in Pairc Esler. Scóires were aplenty and this was a fantastic advertisement for Football at this age group and the home side ran out 2-14 to 1-14 winners. The final that took place two weeks later was marked as a potential classic and it lived up to its billing as the game ebbed and flowed from start to finish. An Dún once again displayed their staying power and they edged out Ard Mhacha by 1-14 to 2-10 to collect another Under 21 title.

In the All-Ireland semi final, An Dún faced Connacht champions, Maigh Eo at Pearse Park, Longford and collected a fine win by 1-15 to 2-09. On 4<sup>th</sup> May, An Dún took on Corcaigh in the All Ireland U21 Football Final. Seconds away from victory, An Dún were hit with a sucker punch as Corcaigh grabbed a late goal to take the title on a Scóire line of 1-13 to 2-09 at Portlaois. Commiserations to all involved in this campaign as the Under 21 side from An Dún were undoubtedly, the hard luck story of 2009. Like I stated earlier for our Minor champions, the challenge lies ahead for this team to progress en masse through to the senior ranks in years to come.

## **Club Football Championship**

The 2009 Ulster Senior Football Club Championship was one of the most open competitions at this level in some years as teams such as Loup, Kilcoo, Derrygonnelly and Pearse Og entered the Ulster arena once again. Despite this, it was two familiar faces in the form of Cavan Gaels and St Galls who met in the Preliminary Round. Following a recent addition in rule to include extra time in club Championship games, up to the final, it was inevitable what would happen. St Galls emerged victorious by 1-12 to 1-10 after extra time! The four quarter finals were fixed for 1<sup>st</sup> November but after torrential rain, they were all postponed to the following weekend. At this stage, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the many volunteers that assist on match days. On this particular date, we had eight of our twelve matches postponed on the morning of the game because of the weather. There was an immense effort from the numerous people who inspected pitches and communicated the information to teams, match officials, gatemen and media to ensure that no-one travelled needlessly. Thanks again to all for your continued support in this area. There were wins for Loup, Kilcoo, Clontibret and St Galls as they defeated Derrygonnelly, St Eunans, Dromore and Pearse Og respectively. In the semi finals, a late comeback from Loup secured a spot in the final as they defeated Kilcoo by 1-12 to 1-11 at Casement Park while St Galls convincingly defeated Clontibret by 2-15 to 0-11 at the Athletic Grounds, Armagh. Two weeks later, at Pairc Esler, an exceptional team performance by St Galls ensured that they took the Seamus McFerran Cup by defeating Loup on a Scóreline of 0-16 to 0-5.

In the Intermediate Football Club Championship, Down champions Ballymartin defeated Ballymaguigan in the Preliminary Round by 0-9 to 0-8 at Celtic Park. In the Quarter Finals, the away sides remarkably won all four ties. Fanad Gaels defeated St Michaels Newtownhamilton, Lavey from Cavan defeated Kinawley, Cookstown beat Ballymartin and Monaghan Harps edged past Ahoghill. In the Semi Finals, Cookstown beat Monaghan Harps by 1-11 to 1-9 while Lavey produced a strong second half performance to see off the challenge from Fanad Gaels. The final was played at Brewster Park, and in a low Scóring encounter it was Cookstown Fr Rocks who won their first ever Patrick McCully Cup on a Scóre line of 0-09 to 1-04.

In the Junior Football Championship, Merville and Down champions, Glenn, met in the Preliminary Round; goals were the order of the day as the Donegal champions won on a Scóre line of 5-06 to 2-05. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Armagh champions, Shane O'Neills, Merville, Emyvale and St Teresa's of Antrim over Sean Dolans, Belnaleck, Newtownstewart and Butlersbridge respectively. In the Semi Finals, Emyvale defeated Shane O'Neills at Casement Park while St Teresa's beat Merville at Brewster Park on the same day. In an intriguing Junior Final played at Pairc Esler as a curtain raiser to the Senior Final, St Teresa's and Emyvale played out an entertaining 1-9 to 2-6 draw. One week later at the same venue, Emyvale produced their best performance of the competition to collect the Paul Kerr Cup on a Scóre line of 2-14 to 1-11.

Congratulations are also extended to University Ulster Jordanstown who won the Ryan Cup in 2009, while Queens University Belfast became the first college team to reach the Dr McKenna Cup Final in the same year.



## **Inter Provincial Championships**

The Inter Provincial series is a competition that we, in Ulster have always taken seriously; this was again the case in 2009. The Hurling competition took place in early season and Ulster lost out in the semi final to Leinster by 4-14 to 0-08 at Casement Park on 21<sup>st</sup> February. Due credit is paid to the management team of Dominic McKinley and Terence McNaughton and all the players for their continuing support and effort in this competition. In the Football, in terrible weather conditions but on an excellent pitch in Crossmaglen, Ulster recovered from a first half where they played against a gale force breeze, to emerge victorious by 1-14 to 1-10. The final took place on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November in Ruislip, where another strong finish ensured that Ulster defeated Munster to collect the 29<sup>th</sup> Inter Provincial title on a Scóire line of 0-15 to 1-08, and team captain Stephen O'Neill proudly collected the cup from Crístóir Ó Cuana and competition sponsor, Martin Donnelly. Well done to the team and its management of Joe Kernan, Seamus McEnaney and Tony Scullion.

## **Senior Hurling Championship**

In the Senior Hurling Championship, for the second year running, all nine Ulster counties and London participated. This is the only Provincial Hurling Championship where all counties in a Province participate. We are delighted with the positive approach of the counties to this Championship which we hope will improve and prosper. Following Antrim's acceptance into the Leinster Hurling Championship, a new structure was applied. The format seeded the teams based on their performance in the 2008 Championship and gave Antrim a bye into the Ulster Final.

The 2009 Championship commenced on 9<sup>th</sup> May with First Round games involving Fear Manach and An Cabhán, Dún na nGall and Tír Eoghain, Ard Mhacha and Muineacháin. The first game proved to be a very close encounter with Fear Manach winning by a single point on a 0-13 to 1-09 Scóire line. However, the other two games produced easy wins for Dún na nGall (1-21 to 0-06) and Ard Mhacha (1-22 to 1-08). In the Second Round, Fear Manach travelled to Ruislip where they met a talented Londáin side who had aspirations of causing a couple of upsets within the competition. Fear Manach were warmly welcomed to Ruislip but were comprehensively defeated by 1-23 to 0-07. In the other Second Round game, Ard Mhacha defeated Dún na nGall, 3-24 to 2-12.

The Quarter Final stage saw the introduction of Doire and An Dún to the competition. Doire were drawn against Londáin and struggled throughout the entire game to dampen the enthusiasm of a spirited Londáin challenge. The result was in doubt right up until the final whistle before Doire eventually ran out winners on a 4-10 to 3-12 Scóire line. Ard Mhacha were determined to make an impact in this year's Championship and they firmly believed that they could beat An Dún. However, the Mourne men were in uncompromising form and they shattered Armagh's dreams with an excellent display running out winners by 5-20 to 0-14.

Due to the new format there was only one Semi Final with the winners going through to meet Aontroim in the final. Doire against An Dún at Casement Park is usually a mouth watering clash. However, due to Down's comprehensive victory over Ard Mhacha and the

fact that Doire struggled to overcome Londain, most Hurling enthusiasts expected An Dún to win convincingly. Doire did not agree with this assumption and they put in a massive performance and for long periods threatened to cause an upset. An Dún responded well though and they rose to clinch a place in the Final by a flattering 5 point margin (1-15 to 2-17). In the Ulster Final on 28<sup>th</sup> June, An Dún were determined to get one over on their great rivals, Aontroim, who had been well beaten by Dublin in the Leinster Championship earlier in the month. However, despite considerable pressure, the Ulster Champions dug deep to retain their title, for an eighth consecutive year, on a 3-20 to 4-15 Scóre line. As part of our 125 celebrations, Queens University Belfast 1953 Fitzgibbon winners, 1959 Antrim Junior Hurling Home Champions and 1964 Down All Ireland Junior Hurling champions were honoured on the day, and it was great to see so many of the people involved in these achievements at Casement Park.

### **All Ireland Hurling Championship**

Antrim gained entry to the McCarthy Cup through participation in the Leinster Hurling Championship where they were drawn against Baile Átha Cliath in the First Round. Despite a magnificent first half display, Baile Átha Cliath overcame the Ulster champions by a convincing 2-16 to 0-12. Aontroim then entered the qualifiers where they were surprisingly defeated by Laois (0-18 to 1-12). This result condemned Aontroim to a series of relegation playoffs, where they were defeated by Offaly (0-13 to 1-23). A further play off against Loch Garman was averted when Aontroim made an appeal against the process, given an earlier commitment to play in the Leinster Championship for three consecutive years, which required a Rule change for to encompass for the Championship of 2010.

In the Christy Ring Cup, An Dún and Doire were Ulster's representatives and played against each other in the group stage. An Dún again shaded the encounter with a four point margin (3-20 to 1-22). They went on to win their way through to the final where they were unlucky to be beaten by an excellent Ceatharleach side on a Scóreline of 1-15 to 0-14.

The Nicky Rackard Cup saw Muineacháin and Ard Mhacha compete. Ard Mhacha, despite making significant progress over the last couple of years, fell to An Mhí once again in Championship Hurling. Both teams were drawn together at the Semi Final stage with An Mhí, the eventual Champions, winning by 0-21 to 1-14. Muineacháin failed to get a win in the competition and were eventually defeated by Sligeach in a relegation play off by 3-14 to 2-09.

In the Lory Meagher Championship Ulster had five representatives – An Cabhán, Dún na nGall, Fear Manach, Tír Eoghain and An Dún Theas. Four Ulster teams proceeded to the Semi Finals where Dún na nGall defeated An Dún Theas by a single point (1-15 to 2-11) and Tír Eoghain defeated Longfort with a four point winning margin (3-16 to 4-9)

That set up an all Ulster Final with Tír Eoghain, who lost in the first round to Dún na nGall by 18 points, causing a remarkable shock when they gallantly overcame the Dún na nGall challenge with a 5-11 to 3-16 victory. Congratulations to Tír Eoghain on a fine display and to recover from their early season form to capture an All Ireland Hurling title.

## **Minor Hurling Championship**

There were a total of seven counties competing in the Ulster Minor Hurling Championship in 2009. As in the Senior Championship, Aontroim got a bye into the Ulster Minor Hurling Championship Final, where they had a facile victory over Doire (4-16 to 0-09). Doire had beaten Ard Mhacha 2-11 to 0-09 in the Quarter Final and had an emphatic 3-15 to 1-09 win over An Dún at the Semi Final stage before their encounter with Aontroim. However, yet again Aontroim failed to make an impact on the All Ireland stage going down to Gallimh by 0-10 to 4-23 in the Quarter Final. The wide gap between Aontroim and the remaining Ulster counties on one side and between Aontroim and the rest of Ireland on the other is worrying.

## **Under 21 Hurling Championship**

Five Ulster counties competed in the Under 21 Championship, which was played on a knock out basis for the first time since 2006. Round One brought Ard Mhacha and U21 Shield winners Muineacháin together, with the Orchard County progressing on a Scóire line of 3-18 to 1-03. However, this success was short lived as Aontroim were in top form when they overcame Ard Mhacha by 5-25 to 1-11 to qualify for the final. Doire defeated An Dún in their Semi Final (3-15 to 3-09) and proceeded to face Aontroim in the Final with dreams of a third Under 21 title in a row. Aontroim, however, were uncompromising and saw off the Oak Leaf challenge with a 1-17 to 0-09 victory. In the All Ireland Semi Final, Aontroim despite a good first half performance, were second best to Cill Channaigh who were worthy winners with a 15 point winning margin (2-22 to 2-07).

## **Under 21 Hurling Shield**

In the Ulster Under 21 Hurling Shield Semi Finals Muineacháin defeated Dún na nGall (3-08 to 1-11) and Fear Manach beat Tír Eoghain (0-17 to 2-09). Muineacháin collected the shield (2-10 to 0-09) and went on to compete in the All Ireland Under 21 'B' Championship, where they were defeated in the Semi Final (1-07 to 1-14) by Ros Comáin.

## **Club Hurling Championship**

In the Ulster Senior Club Championship, Antrim Champions, Cuchullains Dunloy, emerged as victors after defeating Ballycran (Down), who had defeated Derry's Kevin Lynch's in the Semi Final.

In the Intermediate Club Hurling Championship Antrim club, St Gall's recorded an unprecedented club double when they emerged as champions by defeating Middletown in the final, before going on to win the Ulster Senior Club Football Championship some six weeks later.

In the Ulster Club Junior Hurling Championship, played before the Senior Final Tyrone's Naomh Colum Cille won their first ever Provincial title in a thrilling encounter with St Mary's Rasharkin (Antrim) with a two point winning margin, thanks to a late goal (2-14 to 4-10). This increased club activity and at higher standards is encouraging.

## **All Ireland Club Hurling Championship**

Cushendall were Ulster's representatives in the All Ireland Club Championship, having won the 2008 Ulster Club Championship. In the All Ireland semi final confidence was high as they faced De La Salle from Waterford. However, in a very hard fought game at Parnell Park, Dublin the Munster Champions edged the game after extra time on a Scóire line of 1-21 to 1-19. Cushendall's standard matched De La Salle, we are not far away.

In the All Ireland Intermediate Club Championship Ulster Champions Gort na Mona (Antrim) defeated Robert Emmetts in the All Ireland Quarter Final before losing out to Cork champions, Blarney at the next stage. Lisbellaw from Fermanagh went down to Dripsey from Cork on a 2-13 to 2-05 Scóire line in the All Ireland Junior Club Hurling Championship Semi Final.

### **Hurling Development**

The arrangements for Hurling development were modified during the past year and we had a unified approach across our Counties. The work with development Squads and the overall approach has been clearly implemented to ensure a dual expansion of both participation and skill. The work in this area is supplemented by the Counties through their own programmes, and it is apparent that while progress has been made there is still a very significant amount of work that is necessary to progress our National game to the levels relevant to Munster and Leinster. We need to recognise that substantial advancement has taken place in the schools sector but we are still under providing for games at Club level. The need for a concerted input by the Counties and Comhairle Uladh is demonstrated by the Ulster Hurling League as it provides a significant part of players activity within Hurling. The need to encourage more participation by teams at under sixteen and minor level is obvious and this is borne out by the fall off between Under 14 and Minor participation. We are currently working through the Hurling Strategy and it can improve the sense of direction, but we need to ensure that the structures and systems are capable of carrying the weight of expectation; both for Hurling development and at the same time ensuring the organisation of the required fixture programme.

Coiste Forbartha Iomána are charged with Hurling development and they collectively are very dedicated to delivering the requirements of the games. It needs to be recognised that the membership of this Coiste need a reporting structure that ensures that the views of Hurling are central to the overall work of the Committee. It also needs all people who represent their County to be part of the County Management so that decisions being made are relevant and constructive. We acknowledge the input of the members of the Committee and their total commitment to the cause of Hurling. Aogan Ó Fearghail has given total commitment to the work of Hurling development and to this Committee and we thank him for his three years at the helm. We also acknowledge the outstanding work of Jimmy Darragh aided by Kevin Kelly for all the developmental work, seminars and coach improvement programmes. We thank all those who work for Hurling and assure them that they are recognised for their dedication and supported in their quest.

### **Referees**

The referee still is a pivotal person within our games programme and for many years we have been well served by the referee in getting a huge games programme completed. The referee is more important than a simple exponent of the Rules of the game; he is an integral part of the Association's Rules and the games themselves. He needs to be respected and treated with courtesy at all times. He is not above criticism but verbal abuse, unfair public statements and disparaging and personal invective do little to enhance our games, our Association or the games themselves and inhibits the development of refereeing. Referees have made significant progress and have met the challenges of the games and the changes that have taken place. We all need to take stock to ensure that we don't undermine confidence or the support for those who make such an outstanding contribution to the games. The referee's responsibility is to ensure that our games are played in accordance with the rules and to achieve this position requires the respect and support of players, mentors and administrators alike towards the referee, the games and the concept of fair play.

We have continued to support our referees in every regard, and the efforts of the Referee Administrators and Tutors do ensure that the match officials team is supported by the administration structure at all times. We have an excellent Referees Academy and good progress is being made by the next generation of referees for the Inter-County scene. Two referees from the Academy participated at the Inter Continental Youth games in San Francisco and despite refereeing thirty seven games between them over three days the level of complimentary response was a welcome outcome and something that would assist the overall development of the referee.

The Referees Committee does a fine job in the recruitment, training and assessment of our referees and we are indebted to those that work to support the referee. The role of John Gough , Paul Doris, Tiernach Mahon, Gerry McClory and Frank McDonnell have has always been exemplary and I would like to pay a particular tribute to John Gough who has given a lifetime of support to referees, the training and tutoring of referees and we in Ulster are deeply indebted to him for his unstinted work on our behalf in this critical area. Liam MacNiallais has been a very active Chairman of our Referees Committee and has been totally committed to the betterment of all aspects of refereeing throughout his term at the helm. He has been fully supported throughout by our Referees Administrator and Secretary, Brian Armitage. We are grateful to them both and to their Committee for all their work in this vital area of activity. We thank our referees for their time, commitment and involvement in the delivery of our games programme and also acknowledge the continued work of the County Referees Administrators, Assessors and Tutors to whom we are also indebted and who continue to do outstanding work for our Association.

## **Education**

The Ministers Coaching in Schools Programme continued to expand with thirty two Coaches working in three hundred and twenty schools as well as a substantial contribution to the Summer Camps. This work is at the forefront of games development and the Foundation and Key Stage 1 Pupils are reaping the benefits now, of a programme that introduces all the important requirements to this age group, that will ensure that they are active, motivated, healthy, and from our games perspective, capable of playing our games to whatever level

they wish to be involved. This is building foundations on which our players, both male and female will emerge to be better skilled and more competent as they participate in our games. We are well served by this team of excellent young Coaches who are delivering a world class physical literacy programme that is admired by other sport and youth organisations well beyond the GAA and our shores. The leadership of this programme by Dr Eugene Young is exemplary, and the interaction with the Department of Education is also a key element of his work. He is supported by Terence McWilliams, Diarmuid Marsden and Bernie Fox in providing the substantial management element to this programme. Michelle McAleer deals with the complexity of financial drawdown from the Department, and ensures that we are well managed in every regard. We are indebted to all the Schools involved for their assistance in delivering the Coaching in Schools Initiative. We are grateful for the support of the Department of Education and thank their staff for all their assistance to us. The Minister of Education is fully supportive of what we do and we thank Caitriona Ruane, for her encouragement and wholehearted support.

During 2009 we fully engaged the Overarching Committee, under the Chairmanship of Aogan O Fearghail to address the new structures applying to second level Schools activity. It needs to be stated that both the Vocation Schools Committee and the Ulster Colleges Council are still autonomous and administer a tremendous amount of games activity commensurate with the individual demands of their respective schools. We acknowledge the input of the teachers and the support staff for what they have achieved. They need to be supported by coaching initiatives within our Counties and there is a need for a collective approach if we are to deliver and expand our games.

Cumann na mBunscol also has an important role to play both in the games programme and in the education requirement. In today's environment the importance of our games and indeed our Association needs to be introduced and supported. They have already demonstrated their full support for our games and our heritage through their activity programmes. We are grateful for the tremendous work of our Primary Schools and thank the teachers, their helpers and Clubs for strengthening the Club Schools link. With this work, plus our own substantial input, then this sector will be critical to our future development.

Third Level continues to be supported substantially based on their strategic need. We are working with this sector due to its importance in the intermediate timescales. Many of our best and most talented young players and administrators are attending University, and we directly award bursaries to ensure that those recipients are continuing to be actively involved in our games, their University Club as well as their own Club and in many cases their County. We want to see our Association at the centre of the recreational involvement by our members in the complete work of our University Clubs. We also are trying to ensure that lifestyle management is factored into their schedules as well with programmes such Drink, Drugs and Sausage Rolls. The role of Comhairle Ard Oidheachas Uladh has been very good and we shall continue to address the various issues that arise including the provision of playing facilities commensurate with the demand of Gaelic games.

## **Grounds**

The development of facilities has continued at an enormous pace and we are seeing the vibrancy of our GAA community deliver high quality facilities throughout Ulster. We have just concluded the 125 Club Awards, and the excellent standards of the Club grounds and in their properties were simply astounding. It is heartening to observe the total dedication of the membership to having the best grounds available for the playing of our games and the wider participation in the use of training and other indoor facilities is testament to the high confidence of our Clubs. The awards were Kickam's GAC, Creggan, (Provincial Winner), Silverbridge Harps (Provincial Merit Award), Saval (Provincial Merit Award), St. Aidans Templeport (Cavan Winner), Carndonagh (Donegal winner), Sean O Leary's GAC, Newbridge, (Derry winner), Herber McMahan, Brookboro, (Fermanagh Winner), Emyvale GAC, (Monaghan Winner) and Pearses GAC, Fintona, (Tyrone winner). These are grounds that received the awards but they demonstrate the very best standards of maintenance and presentation.

The re opening of Celtic Park was a most welcome occurrence and all associated with this development must be proud of what has been achieved. Likewise the upgrade at McCumhaill Park has also brought a very significant improvement to the playing facilities at main county ground level. Two more projects are about to get underway and we look forward to having all of our main grounds to the highest affordable standards. The development of secondary County Grounds is being taken forward and there are several grounds that have been added as the result of the Safety at Sports Grounds Legislation. This now places legal requirements on the Association in the six counties to meet the legal standard. We are working closely with our Counties to enable the various aspects from steward straining to contingency planning to be put in place. This over a period of time should deliver the necessary safety standards at the designated grounds but this will have a knock on effect on the capacity and in some cases the fixing of games at non designated grounds.

The National Strategic Investment Fund is now beginning to have the planned effect. Several of the projects at Cavan, Convoy, Garvaghy, Owenbeg and Dunsilly are either approved for financial support or will shortly be approved. There has been a very strategic approach adopted by Comhairle Uladh, and from our initial identification of the need for Regional clusters at the Ulster presentation to the National Infrastructure and Safety Committee in November 2007, we have been fully committed to seeing these projects being taken forward. As a result of the National requirements, we have set up a clear structure to examine, assess and recommend projects in this strategic area. I would congratulate the Counties for their vision for the future and their determination to deliver these excellently planned regional centres. The deferral of the 'Places Programme' is likely to inhibit the speed of delivery but these are projects that are planned for delivery and use. On the support of the 'Places Programme' we are indebted to Liam Mac Niallais, Ryan Feeney, Stephen McGeehan, Mark Conway and John O Neill, who gave generously of their time to support our Clubs in planning the application process, and supporting the Clubs on making their applications. This was a most effective way of supporting the Club and supporting the volunteer, while at the same time assisting the continuing high demand for playing facilities.

Our Parks and Safety Committee deal with the County projects and ancillary matters including training of stewards, safety officers and the overall legal requirements. They also

deal with grant applications from Clubs, and disburse Central Council grant aid to approved projects. The Club Planning and Physical Development Committee are also very active and they are the advisory body to our clubs on a wide range of matters. A year ago, we had made significant progress on resolving legal issues around title to our properties. The matter has been resolved in one regard of having a clear register of titles, but the issues are being caused by the position being adopted by the banks in registering their charge, and the legal consequences that this is potentially likely to create for our trustees and the Association. We are dealing with these issues at present and we are examining ways to avoid a very complex set of arrangements being required by our units. We acknowledged the assistance of the County Development Officers, Paul Sanders and Maura Kelly in dealing with all of the issues that arise. We record our appreciation to Dan McCartan as Cathaoirleach, Ryan Feeney as Runai and the members of the Committee for their expertise and time in these very worthwhile elements of our Associations affairs.

The proposal to build a Multi Sport Stadium at the Maze/Long Kesh site has been abandoned. Since the formal announcement was made, we were asked to submit a Strategic Option and we did this on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2009. After a meeting in April we saw the development of a Strategic Outline Business Case in July and we were invited in October to work with consultants to bring forward an Outline Business Case in conjunction with Rugby and Soccer. We are still engaged in this process at the present time. We have identified the site and other related matters but until the Business Case is concluded we are somewhat constrained as to what might be the final outcome. We have had the full support of Eamonn Prenter (Planning), Des McMahan and Deirdre Lennon (Stadium Design) Barry McGurgan (Economic Appraisal) along with Tomás O Dalaigh, Peadar O Coinn, Sean O Raghallaigh, Cristoir O Cuana, Paraic O Dufaigh, Tomás O Riain, Peadar Mac Cionnaith supported by Stephen McGeehan and myself. It is hard work but we have been involved for eighteen years and we are there to ensure that our Association is adequately and properly provided for.

### **Provincial Council**

The Provincial Council is coming to the end of an era. When Congress passed the 'five year rule' little thought was given to the impact of such a far reaching decision. We now have arrived at that point on the road where we are going to see substantial change in personnel. While change in membership is happening it needs to be understood that the requirements on our Provincial Council are continuing, and the Strategy gives us direction into the future until 2015. The function of strategic planning is of critical importance in defining the direction that we as an organisation intend to travel. We need to see change as beneficial as it means that our core work, values and vision are made with current and future consideration at its centre. The French proverb says it so well in 'the more we change, the more we stay the same'. This is needed to ensure that we are a modern fit for purpose organisation that deals with the Gaelic Athletic Association in its time.

The 125 celebrations have shown us the amount of change that has evolved over the past one and a quarter centuries. We need to always recognise that there are three crucial elements in advancing any organisation and they are, firstly, have an agreed strategy, secondly, have appropriate and required structures, and thirdly, have the necessary systems



to deliver the need of the first two. These are important principles that we have developed over a long period, and in any future strategic vision, there is a need for all our constituent units to have involvement in outworking our future that will shape the Association of 2034 and beyond. Albert Einstein described "Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting the same result". Thankfully, we have modernised our approach as an organisation and we are indebted to our units and membership for what he has achieved to date. New horizons beckon and new challenges will emerge but only if we know who we are, where we are at and where we want to go. Our future is assured for so long as we value our core values and visions. We need to acknowledge that the Association of today has substantially changed since 1984 and we are the stronger for it. We need to be true to our ideals and relevant to the times that we are in. Should we adhere to these principles then we can face the future with confidence in a planned and coherent way. Public Affairs and Lobbying work continue to be a core focus of the Community Development staff. The Ulster Council now responds on an ongoing basis to relevant consultations and meets MLA's, TD's and MP's regularly to lobby for GAA support and provision. This work has yielded results, however we must continue to highlight the relevant role that the GAA plays in society and in communities throughout Ireland. Over the past few months the focus of this work has been on local government as we try to address the serious under provision for Gaelic Games that unfortunately exists in this area. Local government in the Northern jurisdiction has statutory responsibility for the development of sport at local level, to date support for the GAA by some Councils has been poor and I hope this is something that we can support both Clubs and Counties in addressing in the coming year. Active Communities is a Sport NI investment programme that seeks to employ, deploy and train a network of full time and part time sports coaches and leaders to deliver activities in community and club settings across the Six Counties, with a view of increasing participation in sport and physical recreation. The programme focuses on three key areas, namely; Female participation, participation by older people and participation by those with a disability. Through an intensive lobbying process Ulster GAA has to date been successful in securing 10.5 coaches from the programme who will work with both the County Games Managers and Regional Development Officers in rolling out a range of new programmes focused at increasing GAA participation in underrepresented groups. We are also working with County Committees to address similar issues with the County Councils in Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan.

County Strategic Development has been fully supported by Comhairle Uladh and

Eight County Committees now have their county strategic plans in place, with the final plan in Monaghan now in draft format. It is envisaged that this draft will be put to the County Committee for approval by April 2010. Antrim, Derry and Cavan have started their mid-way strategic reviews and this process will be completed by May 2010. Fermanagh, Tyrone and Armagh will start their reviews in September this year. Officials from Ulster GAA meet with each of the County Strategic Implementation Groups on a bi-annual basis and provide reports on progress to the County Secretaries Network and the Provincial Developments Committee.

Community Outreach and Inclusion are the two core themes of our Community Outreach Programme. These are central to our diversity and inclusion activity and the focus of this work is to promote involvement and understanding among individuals and groups who

traditionally have no involvement in the GAA. In April 2009 the Association took a significant decision which moved GAA policy from being a non-sectarian and non-racist to anti-sectarian and anti-racist, therefore it is now incumbent on all GAA members from Club level to Central level to actively promote inclusion and diversity in all activities. The GAA Strategic Action Plan and Vision highlighted that this would be led by Comhairle Uladh on behalf of the entire GAA with the remit to promote engagement and contact with the unionist Community. We initially developed a range of programmes and initiatives which are now being taken forward at Central GAA level in line with the new GAA Inclusion strategy.

The Cúchulainns project is a second level, school based engagement. During the past year we quadrupled the involvement of schools, and indicators are that further significant development should occur during the coming year. We had a Cúchulainns Cup Hurling competition which saw school children from across Belfast, Armagh, Limavady and Fermanagh compete in a cross community Hurling tournament. This initiative aims to promote Gaelic Games to young people who are not currently involved with the Association, while also helping to build relationships between young people from nationalist and unionist backgrounds. All the boys participating in the Cúchulainn Cup are Year 11 students and have no prior experience of playing competitive Gaelic Games. Our coaches have been working in schools in Belfast, Armagh, Limavady and Fermanagh, teaching the new players the essential skills of Hurling and Gaelic Football. Both the Belfast Cúchulainns and the Armagh Cúchulainns have travelled to the Intercontinental Youth Games in America, with Belfast representing Ulster and winning the Under 14 section in 2008 and Armagh reaching the final in 2009. Plans are now afoot for Fermanagh to attend the games in 2010. Each of the Cúchulainn teams is made up of five players from four schools in each area, with two representing the controlled sector and two schools representing the maintained sector.

We acknowledge the interaction with the various external bodies, Non Departmental Public Bodies and the various people who influence the wider community agenda. We are active in bringing forward the Associations views on legislation, being prepared, and in advising our constituent units on these issues. We also provide Club and County support on a range of matters that have ensured that our units are in receipt of their adequate fiscal support in a range of developments. This ranges from local authorities to the Office of the President of Ireland. It can also relate to matters as diverse as Games Development, to areas of Community Development that have important implications for our future. These can influence public provision of facilities to the grant aid support for our Clubs and Counties. We acknowledge the support of the Sports Councils, the Department of Education, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, the Department of Social Development, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department of Tourism and Sport, the Department for Foreign Affairs, the North/ South Ministerial Council and all political parties, who have been encouraging to us in the work that we do. We acknowledge and thank Eamonn McCartan, Chief Executive of SportNI, for all his work and also of Chairman of SportNI, Dominic Walsh. We recognise the many officials that we are engaged with, and in particular Edgar Jardine, Colin Watson and Ciaran Mee at the Department of Culture, Arts, and Leisure for their assistance. We must be engaged and relevant so that GAA is included in all future plans wherever they originate.

Today we say farewell to several outgoing members of Comhairle Uladh. They are Sean O Mothlaigh, (2000), Olibhear O Gealagain,(2001), Tomás O Raghallaigh,(2001), Gearoid O Maolain, (1989), Fiontan O Maosain, (1986), Mairtin MacBriain,(1982),Brian Armitage,(2001), Deaglain O Flannagain, (2004), Liam MacNiallais, (2004), Cuthbert O Donghaile, (2002), Tomás O Cuilinn (2001), M. Mac Geibheannaigh, (1997) and Breandan Mac Gadhra (2004) all of whom have made a very substantial contribution to the Association. These men not only played a very important part in our Councils affairs, but were also fully involved in their own Counties and in many cases at National level also. They provided a clear conduit to and from their Counties and their input to our work is immense. We thank them for their work and wish them well into future, where it is hoped that this committed, loyal and considered group who work so diligently for the GAA, will continue to be active in the affairs of the Association. We are the better for their over one hundred and thirty four years of combined service to this Council and the constituent units of this Province.

Tomás O Dalaigh concludes his term as our President and he has made a truly outstanding contribution to the Association at Central level and has given clear, incisive and forthright leadership to the GAA in Ulster. He has given very generously of his time, while holding down a very demanding job within the HSE. He is the true committed volunteer. In his dealings at all levels he has contributed substantially and articulated the views of Ulster on many occasions with clarity and decisiveness. He has been a tremendous support to all of our work and to the programmes that we advanced. It is impossible to recount all of his involvements but history will judge that Tomás was, and is an outstanding ambassador for this Association that has visions of what it can be, while at the same time ensuring that the affairs of the Association are dealt with in a fair and dispassionate manner. Well done Tomás and thank you for a job excellently done.

Aogan O Fearghail, Leas Uachtaran, has also given generously of his time in the best traditions of the Association in Ulster and has been heavily involved in the work of Council. He has worked at National level on the Strategic Implementation Committee and been the Chairman of our Coiste Iomana. He has also chaired our Overarching Committee for Second Level Schools and he also has led the Integration work of Comhairle Uladh. In all his functions he has been exemplary and has represented the Council at a wide range of events. We acknowledge his work on our behalf and thank him for his work and support across the full spectre of our activity.

Our Cisteoir, Mairtin Mac Aibhne has also given generously of his time and has played a very important part in the administration of the affairs of Comhairle Uladh. He has contributed to the match programme particularly from the finance point of view and has contributed to several areas of activity including stewarding, financial management and the work of the 125 Committee. He has represented Comhairle Uladh on many occasions. We thank him for his work and his input to the affairs of the GAA in Ulster.

Micheal O hOsain, our OCP, has also been diligent in his work and has represented our Council on many occasions. He has fostered a solid relationship with the media and has dealt efficiently with the various issues and statements in a very positive manner. He also ensured that our results were available to the media outlets and he was always on call to

our units and the outside requirements. We record our appreciation to him for his help, support and advice on many occasions.

Earlier I paid tribute to the departing members for their work on our behalf; they collectively with the remaining members have provided a tremendous service to the Council, our Counties and to the wider GAA. They have overseen a massive amount of work on very many fronts while at the same time they have represented their Counties with integrity and distinction. They also provide a substantial contribution to the GAA through their membership of the Council, and the three Executive Sub Committees of Comhairle Uladh and for which we are deeply grateful.

We acknowledge the work of Sean Mac Taidgh and Eamonn Mac Mathuna who have acted as Chairman and Secretary of the Hearings Committee respectively, and who have given generously of their time in the delivery of our appeals and disciplinary process. Stephen Donnelly gives a tremendous service to our Coiste Cheannais na Chomortaisi, the Counties and the Clubs and to other fixture making bodies. His detailed report on our Fixtures is a very valuable resource in the overall assessment of the delivery of our Games programme. During the year Bernie Fox, who is involved in event planning moved from Coaching and Games to support the work of our Coiste Eisteachta Cuige and Bernie, along with Geraldine McKavanagh give full support to the throughput of cases and process all matters as required. Geraldine McKavanagh has continued to service Coiste Bainisti, County Secretaries and Senior Staff on an ongoing basis while at the same time, she keeps me from getting lost as she organises my diary also.

The Senior Staff Team, which has been restructured in line with our new Strategy works to support all the initiatives that are being taken forward as part of our strategic Plan and the other requirements placed on our units by the National Plan and external bodies. This group which is responsible to me, provides the necessary support in the day to day management, operations and work of Comhairle Uladh subject to the direction of the relevant Committee. The Team comprises of Dr. Eugene Young (Director of Coaching and Games), Michelle McAleer (Finance, HR and Business Development), Stephen McGeehan (Operations, Compliance and Infrastructure) and Ryan Feeney (Community Development, Strategy and Public Affairs), Geraldine McKavanagh supports the team as Secretary of the Group and I would also like to acknowledge the input of our Senior Staff. They all are totally dedicated to their work and give of their time way beyond the call of duty and without their help and support it would be impossible to meet the demands of our Association and for which we thank them.

### **Games Development**

The work of Games Development has been very much to the fore as we have tried to meet the demands of our units and external groups against a significantly changed economic environment. We have substantially introduced changed arrangements within the Counties, brought into operation Merit Based Funding and assessment of key performance indicators. Through this input we have managed to draw down the various monies that contribute to a very vibrant manifestation of the healthy state of the games and their promotion. The work in Foundation and Key Stage 1 also was maintained at the same level, which sees our

Physical Literacy Programme delivered in three hundred and twenty Primary Schools and involving over nineteen thousand four to eight year olds.

Within the emerging new Coaching structures, it is important that everything is complimentary so that the full benefit of our work can be realised. We have seen the advent of new coaching structures and they need to be given a chance to be taken up; but we need to be sure that we are not starting to redefine qualification to the disadvantage of qualified and active coaches. We also need to ensure that the person taking these matters forward are compliant to the various legal requirements, while at the same time ensuring that the input from our voluntary coaches is focused and valued.

The outreach, diversity and lifelong involvement in the affairs of the GAA also needs to be continued as central to our work, as the membership of the GAA needs to be encouraged, enriched and ensured. Through our Alcohol and Substance Abuse Programme and our Health agenda, we are dealing with issues identified in Government strategies that are consistent with the benefits of active lifestyles of our sports. Within our games we can provide a whole life involvement in Gaelic games. These present challenges to the Association but from playing to coaching, refereeing, administration and tutoring we have an opportunity to be involved, contribute to our community and above all continue to expand and strengthen the Gaelic Athletic Association.

The Coaching and Games Committee carry out a large remit, from dealing with volunteer coaches, community projects, developmental games and blitzes to overseeing the strategic development of our games, and from a Comhairle Uladh perspective, ensuring that all our staff and programmes meet their declared objectives, meet the Key Performance Indicators, and that the provision of resources is effectively managed. We are indebted to the members of the Committee for their diligence, their effectiveness and cooperation in delivering a truly outstanding programme. Oilibhear O Gealagain comes to the end of his term as Cathaoirleach and has been a clear and decisive representative of all that is best in Coaching. He has been exemplary in his duties and a clear advocate for Coaching and Games Development within Ulster and indeed elsewhere. He has been a most loyal and supportive person in taking forward many initiatives for the greater benefit of the Association. Bernie Fox supported the work of the Committee and was assisted by Gerard McNally in ensuring the vast administration requirement was met. Dr. Eugene Young continued to provide leadership and direction while at the same time retaining the exuberance for innovation and improvement. The complete games coaching staff are part of an enthusiastic team and we are well served by this outstanding group of motivated people.

### **Gaeilge agus Oidhreacht**

This Committee continues to organise the Seamus de Faoite Course in the Downings and they have ensured that it again was a very successful venture. The work being undertaken in Fear Manach in conjunction with the local District Council to advance the understanding and use of our language in everyday life is most noteworthy. The Officers attended at Coiste Bainisti to advocate for a review of the role of this Committee, its engagement with Counties and Clubs and dealing with the current expansion in the use of Irish including the growth of Irish Medium education in society. We need to work towards our strategic goal of

increasing the use of our language in every aspect of our activity. We also need to deal with the rich heritage that we had glimpses of during our 125 celebrations. The use of our town land names are again centre stage and we need to assert the history of our Country by working diligently to towards the objective of identifying, retention and use of the town land names of our Country.

The role of this Coiste is a specialist one and we have reason to admire the fortitude and diligence of all those who contributed to the only GAA Language promotion that exists. We have threats from the importation of television but we have a huge opportunity to work, develop and encourage the use of our Language and its rich and living heritage into the future. We acknowledge the outstanding contribution of Nollaig Mac Cumhaill agus Tomás O Cuilinn as Cathaoirleach agus Runai respectively. They have provided leadership and hard work in advancing the work of this Comhairle and the Association. They have made a very outstanding contribution to the benefit of all involved, in working for our language and for which we are deeply grateful. The Coiste also are fully supportive and several members contribute generously to various aspects of the Course and we are indebted to them.

### **Culture and Scór**

The fortieth anniversary of the founding Scór and Scór na nOg coincided with the 125 Celebrations of the GAA. Scór was an inspired and visionary concept at its foundation, and it still has huge potential to engage and involve a cross section of our community in areas that are important to the future development of the Association. It can provide a full involvement in the Culture and heritage of our Country, while affording active lifelong opportunity for everyone interested in our music, song, dance and other aspects of our rich tapestry of poetry, drama and related matters. The work of the joint celebrations ensured that the Scór competitions were special and that it was involved in conjunction with other aspects of our year's activities. The celebration function in An Sabhail was a wonderful night's entertainment that saw many All Ireland Champions taking part. It was an occasion that will demonstrate the completeness of Scór for the whole family, for the whole life. It was also great to have Anton Mac Liam present as one of the founders of Scór.

Coiste Scór carryout a tremendous amount of work in ensuring the various events and programmes for Scór, and Scór na nOg are concluded in an organised and appropriate manner. We are indebted to all involved in Scór, to the Coiste for their work on so many occasions. Miceál O Grianain has given outstanding leadership to Scór in Ulster and has developed a much stronger Scór entity at the helm. We are deeply grateful to Miceál for all his work on our behalf and to the advancement of Scór. Fearghas Mac Aoidh has given outstanding service as Runai and has been to the fore of the resurgence of Scór.

### **Child Protection**

This aspect of our work continues to grow in the numbers entering the process and also in respect of the legal requirements being placed on the Association at all levels, particularly within six of our Counties. The application of the Independent Safeguarding Authority legislation since November now places a very clear responsibility on people who have contact with a child, which is defined as any person under eighteen years of age. There is

the likelihood that about forty percent of society will fall within the scope of this legislation and our units and membership are also likely to similarly affected. There are some benefits in the application of the ISA, once fully implemented but there are also significant requirements that must be met including the reporting of issues to the ISA that need to be included in their assessment of each individual on the register. This will require fullest cooperation of our Counties and Clubs to ensure compliance with the legal requirements into the future. The full compliance date for everyone is 2014, and we have a mammoth undertaking to meet this objective. The Association has a huge input into the wellbeing of the youth of our Country and we have always had a high sense of ethics that should assist us in taking forward these legal requirements.

The Association and the requirements emerging are challenging and in some cases daunting. Given the substantial contribution we make to our Country's sporting and cultural life we must succeed in meeting all requirements placed on the Association and on our individual volunteers. The concept of subjecting volunteers to the Garda Vetting Unit, AccessNI or the Independent Safeguarding Authority may be disconcerting, but we have always operated to best practice and this is simply a variation on the theme. Gearoid Ó Maolmhichil at National level and the ongoing work of Geraldine McKavanagh, our Child Officer, should ensure that we meet this challenge and by doing so, give assurance to parents and society as a whole that we operate within a safe environment for children and vulnerable adults. The current processing of vetting is around one hundred and fifty people being processed every week which has required us to employ Kathy Kelly to assist in the administration and recording of all those processed. The work of the Code of Ethics and Good Practice Committee continues and we acknowledge and thank them for their important work. Mairtin Mac Briain, as Chairman, is most noteworthy and he provides the crosschecks and balances in taking forward the issues that arise from time to time. Geraldine McKavanagh is a treasure in regard to the whole field of ethics and Child Protection and provides a tremendous resource as our Child Officers. We record our thanks to her for her outstanding work.

### **Association Issues**

The past year has been a challenging one due to several factors, including the recessionary times that we live in. This has focused the Association on the essential issues and how we progress our Association. The manner in which our Central Council have dealt with the difficult decisions are meritorious and given the complexity of our Association need to be given due credit for their approach and their support. The outworking of the National Plan has implications for all our units and it is imperative that we have input at all levels and are responsive to the demands of the grassroots and the structure in between.

The advent of playing Rule changes has again caused a general discussion and there are two sides to the appropriateness of the suggested changes. I think that we need to take account of two important elements that should influence the determination on any playing Rule change. It needs to demonstrate that there is a problem in the specific area and that the proposed change addresses the issue or issues involved. The second requires that any change is enforceable and does not place the referee in an impossible position. The new trial rules are in danger of conveying that there are problems with the games themselves and that without setting forth the rationale for what is being attempted and therefore,

could cause a loss of public confidence in the games themselves, which if played and refereed in accordance with the Rules are a wonderful spectacle and are attractive to a wide audience. We need to manage this area better and when we as an Association advocate change we should be able to articulate the reasons why change is necessary.

Some time ago I wrote that the greatest threats to our Association were within the organisation and the need for core unity is vital at this time. We have been disunited over the position of our players and particularly our Inter County players. There have been many controversial aspects to this relationship over several years and the agreement between our Association and the Gaelic Players Association, hopefully, is the beginning of a better way forward. We need to recognise the tremendous commitment of our players; they are our most essential asset. The one matter that appears central to a fully integrated approach and a workable way forward is the need to recognise the overall structure of the Gaelic Athletic Association and the democratic imperative of our Rules.

The recession in the economy is impacting on all parts of society and the GAA is affected also. The issue of concern is the relationship between our units and the various financial institutions. The tightening of borrowing requirements has meant a reassessment of several projects. The issue for the Association is now likely to surround the control of our property, the role of our Trustees and the need for an efficient mechanism for protecting our real assets, and ensuring that we are prepared for an uncertain future in regards to lenders and their requirements. There is a need for an urgent review the Rules covering our control of property, the appointment of Trustees and the processing of borrowing limits for our Clubs.

The working arrangements between Comhairle Uladh and Ard Comhairle have been very good and there is an agreed programme of meetings at the various levels, and between the Directors at National level and the respective personnel at Provincial level. This has also given a clear line of discussion and resolution to the various issues as they arise. The National Executive also is beginning to enable issues to be examined and possible ways of formulating policy for the Association to consider. This is replicated at Ulster level with the meeting of County Secretaries and their interaction with the current issues. The possibility of efficient consultation can only be beneficial to the GAA and to all of its constituent Units.

I would like to thank the staff at Central Level for their help and cooperation and would particularly like to acknowledge the input of Tom Ryan, Dermot Power, Pat Daly, Peter McKenna and Lisa Clancy for their work and assistance to us. We are indebted to our Ard Stiurthoir, Paraic O Dufaigh, who has provided excellent leadership to our Association and has always been available to assist Ulster in our work and development, for which we thank him and all his staff. We are also well served by our County Committees and their work is acknowledged, as is the tremendous input of our County Chairmen, Treasurers and Secretaries some of whom have changed under the five year Rule. The other officers also deliver a substantial service to our Clubs and Members. Their involvement with the Council, its Officers and Staff are deeply appreciated as we all work for the greater good of the Association.

**GAA 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations**



The major success story of 2009 was the success of the Provincial 125 Committee and its work, which saw the Clubs and Counties in Ulster celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the GAA in a special and meaningful way. Some of the projects that were part of our celebrations were the Special 125 logo which was designed and incorporated on all Ulster GAA material and branding for the whole of the year. We circulated 10,000 125 lapel badges to GAA members to wear during 2009, and a series of GAA Historical lectures ran throughout the year in conjunction with the Cardinal Tomás O’Fiaich Library and Archive. This was climaxed in March with the 125 Historical Conference, organised in conjunction with the O’Fiaich Library at which Uachtarán na hÉireann gave the opening address. A special commemorative 125 book using the speeches and essays from the 125 Conference was launched in December and was fully supported by the Ulster Historical Foundation.

We decided to ensure that all matters were planned and to this end we organized for 55,000 GAA 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary calendars to be sent out to all Ulster Clubs and readers of the Irish News. In addition, each club in Ulster received a special 125 club pack that included a La na gClub advice note, 125 Flag, 125 Calendar, Club Maith Tool-kit, Irish language signage and GAA Today DVD.

A number of aspects were linked to the Football and Hurling Championships, and a number of other approaches were taken to ensure that we recognised the significance of the year by running a series of historical articles in the match programmes throughout the Championship. We recognised all the players and teams by holding special gala events at both Ulster Finals, Uachtarán na hÉireann was also in attendance at the Ulster Football Final.

To recognise the volunteer input of all administrators to the GAA we erected commemorative plaques in memory of all deceased past Presidents and Secretaries of Comhairle Uladh. This expanded when public representatives in the North sponsored the planting of a commemorative tree on the Stormont estate to mark the 125 years service by the GAA to our country. The Peoples Forest campaign was linked to this launch that will eventually see over 125,000 trees planted throughout Ulster sponsored by GAA clubs.

The search for John McKay’s ancestry was taken forward by Donal McAnallen, aided by Ciaran McConville and Roddy Hegarty. And they undertook significant work to find GAA founder member John McKay. Donal’s work uncovered John McKay’s birth place in Downpatrick County Down, his career as a journalist in both the Irish News and the Cork Examiner and his grave in St. Mary’s Church London. A special plaque to commemorate John McKay will be erected on the Irish News building this month.

Other events and awards also took place, such as a special 125 grounds awards programme which was organised with a winner in each county, two Provincial merit awards and an overall winner, which was Kickams GAC, Creggan. We also had special 125 balloon launch to mark Foundation day in Armagh, with primary school children representing each of the nine Ulster Counties. A special 125 Provincial Scór concert was held in Saval GAA County Down, on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> November, with 350 people attending and 12 acts performing at the event which also marked the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Scór. Finally, the Ulster GAA Writers’ Association became officially affiliated to Ulster GAA, and as result of this new partnership, the annual

Awards Gala dinner has now become an official Ulster GAA event. The special 125 dinner took place on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November.

These matters were the product of an excellent Committee who gave tremendously of their time to formulate the ideas, plan the events and to deliver everything on time and to adhere to the budget. This was a worthwhile effort as it focused people on our Association, its dedication to our Diaspora and to those who made the GAA we know today. Our thanks are due to everyone who made our 125 celebrations such a success and in a special way to the members of our Ulster 125 Committee.

### **Information Technology and Marketing**

The work of this committee is often observed but not seen; as the work is in creating the imagery that we have come to accept. The various advertising concepts, the use of IT to great effect and its utilisation for improving the communication with our units and members and also with the general public are central to its work. The Committee are innovative, motivated and completely focused on what we need to be doing to meet the modern marketing requirements. Information Technology is now firmly established as the main communication facility in many aspects of our daily written communications with the Association, the media and the general public.

The use of our Website too is an important part of our imagery and communication that provides both open and restricted information direct from our site. We have used it as a resource support to our membership, and the information available under password protected access is earmarked to assist our Clubs in meeting the new challenges that they face from time to time. This usage is likely to continue to expand, as more support documentation is developed. We acknowledge the excellent work of the Committee for their input and ideas in creating the vibrant images for our Association and the other expansive use of IT. Micheal O hOsain gives outstanding leadership to this work and we are indebted to him for all that he does on our behalf. We also acknowledge the work of Damian Kelly, our staff member responsible for ICT, Website and functionality of our systems and know that he will be diligently planning to enhance our systems as we advance towards an interactive future.

### **Media**

The past year seems to have been a year of media coverage from our games to every aspect of our 125 celebrations. We utilised the strengthening relationship between the GAA and the media, and the improved circumstances have assisted everyone to understand the work of the Association and how we relate to the general public. This has also been helpful when we dealt with controversial issues, and while we do not agree with everything stated by the media, we would recognise that in most areas the reporting is fair and criticism is rational. We have close involvement with the media and we endeavour to deal with all matters as they arise. We issue statements, give interviews and generally are responsive to the needs of media in the coverage of our affairs. We have a respectful engagement with the various facets of media including TV, Radio and the written and photographic coverage of our games and the related matters.

The position of television has in relation to the BBC improved significantly, and we are grateful for the input of Paraic O Dufaigh, who along with Tomás O Dalaigh ensured that the arrangements between the Association and BBC were improved, and this was manifested in the improvements of the past year. We also acknowledge the assistance of RTE and Dermot Power, of the Marketing and Commercial Section in Croke Park. The position of UTV is still unclear and they need to improve both their coverage and their interactions with the GAA. The position of Radio is in a position of change but in general, Radio coverage has been very good and is likely to expand in the coming years. We acknowledge the support of the spoken medium and particularly the input from local radio.

We appreciate that the media reflect and report on the work we do, the games we play and the special events that occur. They have afforded us excellent coverage and we pay tribute to the journalists, photographers, radio and television personnel for bringing out the build up to games, reporting on the events and occasions, and recoding for posterity our great occasions and events. We particularly acknowledge the work of The Irish News in their intensive coverage for all aspect of our Associations affairs, including totality of the main events of the 125 celebrations. We thank Micheal Ó hOsain for all his excellent work as our Public Relations Officer. He has worked very closely with me and has been most helpful in dealing with the media in general. I would also like to thank Stephen Donnelly and Damian Kelly for their work and support in this area of operation.

### **Comhbhrón**

Each year we observe the demise of many of our members who have been part of our Association as players, officials, referees and administrators. We are a better organisation for their involvement and we sympathise with their families, Clubs and Counties. This year I shall record three people who have by their contribution being representative of the Association and the quality of their service. There are many, many more who have a similar input to the GAA. The death of Mick Higgins R.I. P caused great sadness throughout the Association as the last link with the Polo Grounds of 1947 was laid to rest. He was a true gentleman, a great sportsman, an outstanding player and a lifetime committed member of the GAA. He will be long remembered for his playing ability and his successes as player for Cavan and Ulster, but the abiding memory is of a quiet and forthright man proud of disciplined approach to playing our games. The same sentiments from an administration perspective could said about Sean McGettigan, who made a great contribution in the administration of the Association, the work to build Casement Park and his total dedication to Scór are among his many attributes. He was journalist who was glad to be involved within the GAA. The recent death of Dessie Slater also saw a lifelong member of the Association go to his eternal reward. He too was a totally committed person who wanted the best standards to apply to every aspect of life.

The Sacrifice of the Mass will be offered for all the deceased members of our Association in Séipéal Mhichíl Naofa, An Mhuinchille, on the morning of Convention at 11.00 a.m. It is hoped that all delegates can attend as a mark of respect for all our deceased members.

### **Conclusion**

At the start of our 126<sup>th</sup> year we must learn from our past and the essence of our history. It is people that made the GAA that we know today. The input of countless people shaped the organisation, supported its development and defended it when required. When we paid our tribute to many key people during the past year it was a matter of family and community pride that we remembered the contribution of many deceased members. We need to ensure that those who are part of the Association today appreciate the selfless effort of people and the dependency of the GAA into the future. We owe our future to those who built the GAA of Today, and our legacy needs to be of a similar standard if we are to be as motivated in 2034. Thanks to the GAA, people we are confident of that future and we need to ensure that our legacy is a vibrant Association reflective of the idealism, community pride and determined to enhance community development.

Is mise, le meas,

Donall O Murchu, Runai