

## **COMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL 2010**

**OSTÁN EIREAGÁIL**

**COOTEHILL**

**CO. AN CABHÁIN**

**27ú FEABHRA 2010**

Ar dtús, a dhaoine uaisle, fáilte mhór roimh achán duine agaibh go dtí Chontae An Chabháin, áit in a bhfuil stair iontach agus ceangal mór le Cumann Lúthchleas Gael i rith na mblianta.

Gabhaim mo bhuíochas pearsanta agus buíochas ar son Comhairle Uladh, do gach aon duine agaibh as ucht an obair iontach a rinne sibh ar son Cumann Lúthchleas Gael sa chúige seo i rith na bliana atá díreach thart. Mo bhuíochas speisialta do Oifigí agus baill an Chomhairle, do na hoibrithe deonacha go léir ar fud na cúige agus don Runaí Dónal O'Murchú agus an fhoireann oibre cúige.

It is my pleasure to welcome you all here today to Cootehill, Co. Cavan, an area which has a long tradition of involvement with the Association and which is also the locality in which our Leas-Uachtaran Aogán Farrell, his wife Frances and family reside. We welcome them here today in a special way.

At the outset I wish to pay tribute to the former Chairman of Cavan Co. Board Phil Smith for his work for the GAA over many years and particularly for his contribution as Cathaoirleach of this important GAA County. I wish the very best to his successor, Tom O'Reilly, who has been a positive contributor to the work of Comhairle Uladh over many years and who has assumed the leadership of the GAA in this County.

In November 2007, in response to a request by then Uachtarán CLG Nicholas O' Braonáin, the 4 Provincial Presidents were asked to nominate priorities for the application of the Strategic Investment Fund available for certain facilities development. In Ulster the approach was informed by the Provincial Strategy and the individual Co. Board Strategies. Whilst there were some frustrations along the way in steering Ulster projects through to the point of approval, it is a great tribute to the Co. Board in Cavan that their project, a maximum size 3<sup>rd</sup> generation floodlit GAA playing field, was completed recently and is in active use. This is the first facility of its kind in Ulster and we hope to see many more. The quality of the facility combined with the range of other facilities in the Breffini Park campus, provides the County with a modern complex, on a single site, which will play a continuing huge role in consolidating and developing the GAA in this county. Congratulations on a job well done.

On the playing fields, the magnificent achievement of the Armagh Minor Football team, with an unbeaten run in the Ulster Minor League, Ulster Minor Championship and All-Ireland Minor Championship, takes pride of place. This success means that Ulster teams have contested 10 of the last 13 All-Ireland Minor Football Championship Finals with 8 Titles coming to Ulster distributed across 4 Counties, Tyrone (4), Down (2), Derry (1) & Armagh (1). This is a very positive reflection of our youth, coaching and games development programmes at club, schools, colleges, county and provincial levels and is reward for the countless hours of voluntary work invested in coaching our young players.

The magnificent achievement of Ulster players in the World Handball Championships, the appearance of Ulster teams in each of the finals in the 4 Divisions of the 2009 National Football League, Donegal and Tyrone's success in proceeding to the All Ireland Senior Championship quarter finals and semi-finals respectively to be eventually defeated in each case by a resurgent Cork team, Carl Lacey and Stephen O'Neill's achievements in being selected as All-Stars.

The record making success of Ulster in the Inter-Provincial Football Final led by the same Stephen O'Neill and played in Ruislip as part of the 125 celebrations there, was a very significant achievement. There is still uncertainty about the Inter Provincial Championships in Hurling and Football. The players from this province have consistently demonstrated that they want these competitions to be retained. I ask the Ulster Counties for their continued full support for the Inter Provincial Championship. The overall provincial identity is something that needs to be developed further into the future as it is an inherent element of the overall "GAA Brand".

Downs achievement in reaching the All Ireland U21 Championship Final which they lost by the narrowest of margins to Cork and the achievement of the Down hurlers in reaching the Christy Ring Final, were on yet another occasion success eluded them, were all notable achievements.

The progress of club teams in the Junior, Intermediate and Senior grades in both Hurling & Football in the 2008/2009 All Ireland Club Championships is well documented in the Report of our Director. In more recent times we had the magnificent success of Cookstown Fr. Rocks achieving an All-Ireland Intermediate Football Title and we wish St. Galls of Belfast the very best in their Senior Club Semi-Final clash tonight against Corofin (Galway). The great tradition of hurling represented by Dunloy (Antrim) saw them achieving yet another Ulster Club Senior Hurling Championship Title and giving it their all in the All Ireland Semi-Final before going down to Portumna (Galway).

Positive signals for the improvement of club hurling standards was demonstrated by the appearance of St. Galls (Antrim) and Naomh Colmcille (Tyrone) in the finals of the All-Ireland Intermediate and Junior club championships respectively.

On the hurling front, Antrim re-asserted the primacy of its position within Ulster by winning the Senior, U21 and Minor Inter-county Hurling Championships. Their

involvement in the Leinster Senior Hurling Championship provided a tough test. However, in development terms this was always destined to be a longer term project which will hopefully yield positive results both for Antrim & Ulster hurling, over time. The proposals coming forward to Congress in relation to the teams which will participate for the future in the 4 tiers of the Hurling Championships at National level provide a reasonable formula and will hopefully receive widespread support. The great success of a committed Tyrone team, who played with skill, confidence and passion to defeat Donegal in the Lory Meagher Final is noteworthy and reflects well on all in the County who work so hard to improve and promote all aspects of the game of hurling there.

The launch of the GAA's National Strategy in 2009 marked a significant milestone. At Ulster Council level, we delayed the completion of our 3<sup>rd</sup> Strategic Plan "Teaghlaigh agus Pobail – an Fabraic de Cumann Lúthchleas Gaeil", to ensure we could embrace the targets in the National Plan within our work. It is pleasing that with regard to both plans, Ulster has not alone met, but exceeded the targets set in each. Prior to publication our Strategy had the direct input of both the Uachtaran Criostóir O'Cuana and Ard Stiúrthóir Pádraig O'Dufaigh. Their endorsement combined with that of our own Council and the County Boards in Ulster, provides us with a clear Framework up to 2015 for the development of our Association here. Achieving all that is set out, right down to the specific actions and targets, is challenging; however, progress in the first year on all fronts has been hugely encouraging so it is a matter of maintaining our focus and a continuing dynamic and energetic approach to what is an ambitious route plan for growing our Association here, in all of its dimensions. Highlights and important indicators of progress in the past year, and this is not a comprehensive list, include: -

- The Launch of "Ardú Béal Feirste" – a Strategy for GAA in Belfast

- Reaching the stage where 8 of Ulster's Counties have published their Strategic Plans with the 9<sup>th</sup> substantially finished
- Achieving approval to the appointment of a full-time GAA resource by virtually all local authorities in both jurisdictions
- Structured arrangements for providing Ulster GAA support to Co. Boards via monthly meetings between the Provincial Director and Co. Secretaries and quarterly meetings between the Provincial President and Co. Chairmen
- More intensive direct support to clubs in Ulster through the Club & Volunteer conference (400+ attendees), Coaching Conference (400+ attendees) and grant aid clinics where technical support is provided to ensure maximum success in applying for Exchequer Funding for physical development projects
- A new club officer development programme provided directly in each Ulster County which will see Ulster GAA staff and volunteers train up to 1,500 GAA club officers in best practice in the running of their clubs. This Programme will be completed by the end of March 2010. As it is being run on Saturday, to facilitate club officers it means that as well as the voluntary trainers, our own staff are also giving voluntarily of their time.
- The addition of an Ulster Intermediate Football League to complement the Senior Football League and Senior Hurling Leagues. These initiatives are in direct response to past National policy to provide more competitive games for clubs. In 2010 they will add over 300 club games to the existing County Board Programmes. Our monitoring of competitions within the counties, as required by Rule, indicated that 20,000 games were played in 2009 and that in all counties

and in the dominant code, the threshold of a minimum of 16 games was being met for most adult club teams.

- The formalisation of the link with the Ulster GAA Writers Association and our success in securing a generous sponsorship arrangement with Quinn Direct to support the Annual Awards Banquet for the next 5 years. The initiative of our Director, Dónal O'Murchú in achieving this substantial sponsorship deserves special mention.
  
- Based on existing Urban Strategies for the development of the GAA in the cities of Derry and in Belfast, a major submission was made in response to a call at National level for projects to bring forward the urban development agenda. We eagerly anticipate an early favourable decision from Central level of the GAA so that the huge challenges in both cities and the many opportunities to grow the GAA in each can be vigorously pursued.
  
- The welcome expansion of the Cúchulainns Cross-Community Programme with an increase in the number of schools and locations now involved to include Belfast, Armagh, Enniskillen, Limavady and Cavan and with further expressions of interest.
  
- Major projects approved in 5 of our Counties which will see €20m invested in state-of-the-art facilities. These strategically located clusters, together with existing and further planned centres in the other counties will be of enormous benefit to the future development of our games. The €7.8m funding allocated to these developments by Central Council C.L.G is a clear statement of their confidence in the work we do and is sincerely appreciated by all in the GAA here.

On the matter of Cross-Community out-reach work the decision of Congress 2009 to enhance the existing rule on “non-sectarianism” to reflect an “anti-sectarian” and “anti-racist” organisation is a major and welcome policy and must change the Association’s role in these matters to a progressive and dynamic one, rather than the passive approach of the past. The strategic approach already developed in Ulster influenced this rule change in a significant way. In the particular circumstances of Ulster, it has to be of significant future benefit to society here and to the lives of all people that an Organisation of the standing of the GAA promotes, in an unambiguous way, an anti-sectarian and anti-racist stance. At many different levels there has been significant support for these initiatives from all sections of society. Our President(s) and Ard – Stiúrthóir within our own organisation, the Central Council of the GAA and the Provincial Presidents from each of the other Provinces, (including the GAA in Britain) have been generous and sincere in their support for this work. At times this can be challenging and difficult work; but also encouraging and rewarding as it leads to the positive role of the GAA in the Province being recognised by people and in places where we had little visibility or support in the past. Maintaining a committed, reasoned and fair approach to this work into the future is vital if we are to live up to our commitments in the area of diversity as set out in our own Strategy and in the “The GAA Strategic Vision & Action Plan 2009-2015”.

The celebration of the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the GAA provided a magnificent opportunity to the Association in Ireland and abroad to put before the general public the magnificent achievements of the GAA over such an extended period. It was our opportunity to shine a light on the role of the GAA at community level and the extent of its overall contribution to society everywhere. In this Province I had the great pleasure of Chairing the Ulster 125 Committee which included the officers of the Council including the Provincial Director, Donal O’Murchú and the voluntary officers leading each of the various streams of the GAA in the Province including Culture & Heritage, the Irish Language, Scor na nÓg and Scor Sinsear, together with the leading officer of

the Ladies Football Association and the Camogie Association. We were joined by several members of the Council's staff and there was a tremendous enthusiasm and energy shown by all involved to ensure that the 125 celebrations in the Province were marked in a vibrant and in a unique way. Very special contributions were made to this work by people like Donal McAnallen, Mark Conway and Niall Laird. I wish to compliment everybody who was involved. The programme of work undertaken was extensive and is fully detailed in the Convention documentation put before you today. In a special way I wish to recognise the contribution made by each of the County Boards and all of the clubs in Ulster to celebrating this important milestone. I would also like to pay tribute to the Chairman of the National 125 Committee Jarleth Burns for his co-operation.

In celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the GAA in the Province we also took the opportunity to highlight the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the initiation of the Scor na nÓg and Scor Sinsear competitions which make such a valuable contribution to the celebration of our Culture & Heritage. The work of the Scor Committee Chaired by Miceal Greenan with Fergus MacAoidh as Secretary was truly outstanding, not just in 2009 but over the past 3 years where they have brought participation levels to a new high and our organisation of events including presentation and adjudicating to a very high standard. Rud eile atá iontach tábhachtach dúinn go léir ná An Ghaeilge. Sheas Comhairle Uladh leis an teanga i gcónaí. Molaim gach aon duine i gCúige Uladh a chuireann an teanga chun cinn. Molaim go specialta na daoine i gCumann Lúthchleas Gael sa Chúige seo, nach raibh aon seans acu an teanga a fhoghlaim ach go bhfuil meon na Gaeilge acu. Tá obair sár-mhaith a dhéanamh ar son na Gaeilge ag an gcoiste atá againn sa chúige seo agus tá an Comhairle ag comhoibriú anois le comhairlí áitiúla leis an teanga a chur chun cinn. Is í an tseoid is luachmhaire atá againn mar náisiúin. Ba chóir tús áite a thabhairt di i gcónaí.



Today 13 members of the Ulster Council see their term as representatives of their respective counties/or units coming to a close. In terms of longevity we will never see service like this at Ulster Council level in the future, within the time limits imposed by Rule. I wish to sincerely thank, Martin McBrien, Fintan Mussen, Gerry Mullin, Malachy McGeeney, John Moley, Oliver Galligan, Tom O'Reilly, Brian Armitage, Tom Cullen, Cuthbert Donnelly, Liam Nelis, Declan Flannigan and Brendan McGeery. Their service has been truly outstanding and extends in some cases from the mid-eighties onwards.

The work of the core sub-committees of the Ulster Council is detailed in the Report of the Director; I wish to thank members of each of those Committees and particularly the Chairmen and Secretaries of the Committees for their fantastic work over the past three years. It was a great comfort for me to have the support of experienced Committee Officers who followed through in their work in a confident and competent way. I thank them one and all.

With the addition of further club competitions at Provincial level the demands on Referees in Ulster, involved in both Hurling and Football, are at an all time high. As well as officiating within the counties, increasingly they support an extended range of competitions at Provincial level. I sincerely thank them for their time, commitment and for the key and critical role that they play in ensuring that our games are played fairly and to the best possible standard.

For 2010 there has been a huge change in the Chairmanships of the Ulster Counties with 7 new County Chairmen appointed recently. I wish to thank each of the out-going Chairmen in the 9 Counties for their support and for their readiness to find solutions whenever issues arose. Together with their respective County Officers they undertake some of the most onerous and important work in the Association and I would like to recognise them for that. I wish the incoming County Chairmen, whom we have met

recently, the very best in their leadership roles at County level in this competitive Province.

During the past year Nickey Brennan finished an extremely busy and exciting term as President of our Association. During that time he travelled extensively to Ulster to participate in GAA events at all levels here. He was generous with his time. I wish to thank him sincerely for his support for the work of the GAA in Ulster and congratulate him on a job well done. As our current Uachtaráin Christy Cooney approaches the end of the first year in his term I would firstly like to congratulate him on his appointment and sincerely wish him the very best during the remainder of his term of office.

Economic circumstances make our current times challenging ones and that challenge also extends to many aspects of the administration, management and development of the GAA. With a very clear template for the development of the GAA in Ulster up to 2015 which is closely linked to the objectives in the national GAA Strategy we look forward to working in a collaborative and co-operative way with the President of our Association Criostóir, Ard Stiúrthóir, Paraic O'Dufaigh and Central Council in order to continue to advance the Association at all levels.

It is well known that we have worked hard to develop a positive working relationship with all levels of government in both jurisdictions.

I wish to acknowledge in a special way the support we have received from Sport NI. Over my years as a Provincial Officer there have been many meetings and contacts between Sport NI and Comhairle Uladh. In this regard the Chief Executive, Professor Éammon McCartan has been an exemplary public official to work with. He has always given a fair and impartial hearing to our requests for support which have to be considered and dealt with by him in the context of a broad range of sports which his organisation must support, with finite resources.

As I complete my term as President of the Ulster Council C.L.G. today I wish to first of all thank the Counties in Ulster for honouring me by giving me the opportunity to assume this prestigious leadership role in this famous GAA Province. It has been a great honour and indeed great experience to serve. I wish to pay a special tribute to our Stiúrthóir Chúige, Donal O'Murchú for his friendship at a personal level but particularly for the depth and breadth of work which he undertakes on behalf of the GAA both at Provincial and National level. I have known him since I became a member of the Ulster Council some 22 years ago, always admired his dedication to the GAA in Ulster and particularly over the last 3 years have come to know, at close quarters, the extent of his dedication to promoting our games and all aspects of our activities. Everything that is achieved at Provincial level in the GAA here is achieved through team-work. I have been lucky to have outstanding fellow officers in Aogán Farrell, Martin McAviney and Michael Hasson over the past three years and I would like to thank them and their families for their wholehearted devotion to the cause of Ulster GAA. I sincerely wish them the very best in the various important roles which they will assume after today's Convention. To Aogán in particular, I wish him the very best and pledge whatever support I can give during my last year on Coiste Bainistí with him. I would like to thank all of the members of the Management Committee and of the Ulster Council itself. Finally, when I reflect on my own involvement in the Ulster Council over the past 22 years I see a first half of the game where we had many many ideas but little by way of resources to bring them forward. The second half of the game, particularly during my 9 years as a Provincial Officer, has seen us secure the sort of resources that are needed to make a real impact. In this respect we have been very fortunate to be in a position to employ and to secure the employment of some of the best qualified, best motivated and dedicated staff that any organisation could wish to have. I would like to thank all of the staff including the members of the Senior Management Team under Danny's leadership. To those involved in games development and in our general support services and indeed those who are carrying out the work of coaching and games development on the ground, I wish them continuing

success with their work and hope that will always be proud to work for Comhairle  
Uladh C.L.G.

Mar fhocal scoir a dhaoine uaisle, tá súil agam go mbeidh toradh maith ar ár gcuid oibre  
inniu ins an Chontae tábhachtach seo ar son C.L.G agus go mbeidh an cumann níos  
láidre sa chúige dá bharr. Ní neart go chur le chéile

**Tomás O'Dalaigh**

**27ú Feabhra 2010**