

Oraid an Uachtaran

A chairde,

Ta failte go gach duine to the 111th Ulster Council GAA Convention I welcome you to my home County of Monaghan in what has been a year of celebration for the Gaels of Monaghan and a year of progress and achievement for all the Gaels of Ulster.

Integration

Our leading Ulster officials come together once a year to review and assess our performance as a governing body. It is important to note that Ulster GAA is not just the Ulster Council the GAA in our province it is our 9 County Committees, our colleagues in the Ulster Councils for Ladies Gaelic, Camogie, Handball and Rounders and our 584 Clubs who serve and enhance our Communities across the Province. We are a community based sporting and cultural association and we should always have family and community at the core, this is what makes the GAA unique. I want to commend and endorse Liam O'Neill's plans that propose that the GAA, Ladies Gaelic, and Camogie come together under one new GAA. In Ulster we have been operating in partnership with Ulster Ladies Gaelic and Camogie since 2006. I want to encourage all County officials here today to establish partnerships and links with our ladies and camogie associations as we have a responsibility to encourage the development of all our Gaelic Games.

Paddy McFlynn RIP

The absence today for the first time in memory of the late and great Paddy McFlynn casts a long shadow over our proceedings. His passing marked the end of an era for the entire GAA. Paddy was a giant of the Association serving Derry, Down, Ulster, and the entire GAA well. A former President of Comhairle Uladh and of the GAA his wisdom, good advice and his excellent memory will be sorely missed. Thankfully he has left us his GAA life story in his recently published autobiography –*Leading Through the Troubles ~ A Life in the GAA*

Fixture Success

Congratulations to the Ulster Team on winning the Interprovincial Football Championship the final of which was played in Croke Park and the display of our Ulster team continues to illustrate the commitment of our players and management towards this competition. Congratulations also to Down, Donegal, Derry, Monaghan and Cookstown Fr Rocks on adding their names to Ulster's All Ireland Roll of Honour.

Ulster Hurling Final

As I address you there is some ongoing controversy regarding the refixed Ulster Senior Hurling Final. Claims have been made in the media and also more disturbingly by units of our association both club and county that Ulster GAA do not care about Hurling and treat Hurling as second class. I strongly refute these allegations and ask that they please read our Hurling Development Report before making false allegations.

That being said I accept responsibility for the current situation that we find ourselves in that the 2013 Final is being played in 2014 This year's Fixtures Programme reflects the lessons learned from 2013 and we look forward to a good final in Derry on 2nd February.

Power NI McKenna Cup

Ulster GAA remains committed to the three Universities remaining in the McKenna Cup. Following a report from a review group under the Chairmanship of Aogan O'Fearghail we asked the Ulster Interprovincial Manager Joe Kernan to act as a mediator in order to ensure that Counties and in particular County Managers adhere to the spirit of the competition ensuring that the Universities have first call on their players. This process had limited success with only three Counties fully complying. This now leads us to a cross roads where we must find a way to having agreement from all teams involved. As a first step I will address this issue at the next County Chairman's meeting.

This year over 40,000 people attended the McKenna Cup and tonight we look forward to a very exciting Final.

Third Level

Ulster GAA continue to fund GAA Development Officers in University of Ulster, Queen's University and St. Mary's University College in order to develop our games and our Association at third level. This commitment will continue and we have recently agreed to provide financial support to Queen's University GAA Festival as they play host to Sigerson, Fitzgibbon, the O'Connor Cup and the Ashbourne Cup in the Spring. I commend Queen's University for their vision and approach that will see Belfast play host to all the national third level competitions and look forward I hope to some Ulster success.

FRC Proposals

Football Review Committee (FRC) Report - II

Central Council sub-groups will be established to discuss the FRC report and that the FRC will be asked to present a workshop at Congress. The view of Coiste Bainisti was that Central Council should then discuss the report at a meeting after Congress and decide on a process for making decisions on its proposals.

Finance

I am pleased to report that Ulster GAA has recorded a surplus this year and that Finance of our Province are in a robust state. Our attendances, sponsorship and commercial income have all increased, as has government investment. A significant amount of work goes into ensuring that Ulster GAA continues to have a high level of assurance from Public bodies and confidence from our membership. I thank our Head of Finance Michelle McAleer for her continued work and commitment in this important area of our affairs.

Casement Park Stadium Project

Three significant announcements were made regarding the development of the Casement Park project between the 18th and 20th December. Firstly the announcement by Environment Minister Mark Durkin approving the planning application was an endorsement and vindication of 18 months of Community Engagement and consultation work.

The signing of the funding agreement with the Department of Culture, Arts, and Leisure has also brought total surety to the funding of this project and finally the appointment of Heron/Buckingham JV as the contractors of this project which are a consortia under the leadership of local Derry firm Heron Brothers means that we now are pushing forward with this project. Outside of Croke Park this is the largest capital project ever undertaken by the GAA it will give Ireland's second City and Ulster a fit for purpose GAA stadium that will be not only a statement of intent but the embodiment of the vision that we have for the future of the GAA in Ulster. This project will create much needed local employment and it will be a significant economic and social driver for entire Province. The Ulster Council unanimously approved this project in March 2012 and we have proceeded under that basis of delivery ever since.

There are those who are opposed to this project and I want to send a message to them today- Ulster GAA wants to work with you and we want your input into this development process. We have acted with the highest level of transparency at all times and will continue to do so and our door is always open to meet anyone who wishes to raise an issue of concern.

I want to record my thanks to the Project Board under the dedicated and tireless leadership for our Former President Tom Daly and our CEO Danny Murphy. Tom the Ulster Council owe you a great debt of thanks for all the work you have done on this project and for the time you give in a volunteer capacity to Casement. I will make reference to Danny later but I want to thank him for this continued dedication and commitment around this project. I also think its important I record my thanks to the staff who are driving the operational side of the Casement Project namely: Stephen

McGeehan, Ryan Feeney, Michelle McAleer, Tim Harkin, Sharon Haughey and Geraldine McKavanagh. All of you are doing an outstanding job.

Government Funding and Investment

On daily basis Ulster GAA are in contact with government departments, elected officials and Ministers from both jurisdictions. We lobby to ensure that the GAA gets its fair share of the public purse we are all tax-payers and it recognised by all government departments across this island that the GAA is concerned about more than just sport and culture. Over the last 15 years Ulster GAA has taken forward pioneering work in supporting the GAA's role and place as a significant community anchor and creator of social capital. Our work has secured over £150 million of public investment into the GAA in these nine Counties, this didn't happen by accident this was a strategy that was led by Ulster GAA in particular Danny Murphy and ensured that the inequality that existed for years in public funding was addressed. Our GAA Clubs are key community anchors and remain this Province's leading providers of sporting, cultural and community activities, at minimal cost to the public purse. At all levels the GAA is this island's leading provider of social capital and any investment by government in our Association is a good investment for society as a whole. This year through the work of our Public Affairs staff we secured an additional £1.5 million of government funding for our work. Ulster GAA took the decision to award £500,000 to the Tyrone GAA Centre at Garvaghey and £500,000 to the Antrim GAA Centre in Dunsilly in addition to putting in place new programmes around Youth Employment, Mental Health, Club Development, Disability Games, Participation and Social Inclusion. Ulster GAA has been very successful in supporting our Clubs and Counties in securing funding through lobbying, application and business case support. The result of this work is that this Province has excellent facilities at County and Club level and a significant level of Coaching, Games, Club Development and governance support facilitated by Ulster GAA. I thank Ryan Feeney Head of Strategy and Public Affairs and all of the staff for their continued work in this area in addition to continuing to lobby for funding. Our strategic and public priorities include:

- Securing 100% rate relief for all Community Amateur Sports Clubs in the North
- Revision of the Compensation Order north to include GAA Community Facilities
- Securing a significant sports capital funding programme from DCAL/Sport NI and the Department of Transport & Sport/Irish Sports Council
- Inclusion of Sports participation, Health and Wellbeing as a core priority within the Future Programmes of Government
- Introduction of the Irish Language Act north and south
- Provision of GAA facilities for public use in all local government sports campus and facilities
- Sustaining current levels of Government revenue support for sport and the GAA at all levels in Ulster
- Strengthening Cross Border Sports initiatives
- Enhancing the shared future and respect agenda by participating in the roll out of the proposals contained in the “Together, A United Community” document.

Cross Community and Outreach Work

In 2008 the GAA took a landmark decision to move its official policy from non-sectarian to strongly anti-sectarian and anti-racist and since that Ulster GAA has ensured that we have adhered to that policy in word and deed. The GAA is an open and welcoming organisation we encourage involvement from everyone regardless of gender, community and religious background, physical and mental ability, race, nationality, age profile, sexual preference or social background in the Association and there is no place in our GAA for anyone who wishes to exclude any section of society for involvement in our games and activities

In order to increase the inclusiveness of the GAA, Ulster GAA engages in several regular outreach projects. Information talks about the GAA, focusing on myth-busting, are delivered frequently to cross-community and unionist-identity groups, through interaction with local government good-relations officers and rural

development agencies. The Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin support and Fund this work and I am thankful to them for their ongoing commitment and confidence to Ulster GAA.

In October First Minister Peter Robinson attended and addressed the Cooperation Ireland event that celebrated the GAA's contribution to Peace Building. It was a welcome development and Ulster GAA have fostered good relations with the First Minister and his officials over a number of years and we will continue to work with him and others in a spirit of equality and respect.

I was however very disappointed by the comments made by an elected representative on BBC Radio Ulster the following morning when through his own lack of understanding he suggested that the GAA contributed to the conflict and celebrated violence. As President of the GAA in Ulster I found these comments grossly insulting. No organisation on this island has done more to promote peace and keep young people away from conflict than the GAA.

Misleading information can result in sections of our community viewing the GAA as something it is not and I would respectfully ask people to read the positive words that Peter Robinson First Minister and Director General Paraic Duffy said on the historic occasion of the Cooperation Ireland Dinner in October. I would like to quote the Director General Paraic Duffy who said the following at the Dinner in October:

“I want to make it clear this evening that the GAA wants to be an active partner in building a society based on shared values. We will continue to reach out to people from other traditions and we will show leadership in this regard. There will be challenges in this work as sometimes some of our own GAA members will disappoint us in things they say and do and sometimes we will be disappointed about what others will say about us but be assured the Association remains determined and committed to developing a shared future based on tolerance and respect.”

This is our Policy and this is the Vision we will continue to work towards

Coaching and Games

Our Coaching and Games Development work under the Leadership of Dr. Eugene Young and Chairman Gerry Duffy continues to grow. This year we had several programmes that have assisted in increasing participation and development of our games. Playing our games is at the centre of the core work of Ulster GAA.

Phoenix Gas Elite Academy which is now in its 8th year and has gone from strength to strength. Over two days the young players are exposed to a high performance environment that challenges them to take note of the key parameters that they control that can enhance their performance.

Learning and Physical Disabilities GAA 4 ALL: The development of opportunities for children and young people with learning and physical disabilities has been a very successful programme. Coaches work closely with schools and community clubs to engage with the groups and teach them the skills of the games.

Referees Academy: Central to our games are our referees and over the last few years a closer working relationships has emerged. The Young Whistlers programme is in place to support the development of new referees. T

Curriculum Sports Project: In its 7th year this program is supported by the Department for Education NI. Its focus continues to be the development of physical literacy skills for KS1 pupils. Over 30 coaches are employed to deliver the program that focuses on Agility, Balance and Co-ordination, Running, Jumping and Throwing.

Sports Science: Ulster GAA has been engaging with the Sports Institute since 2001, developing programmes and building knowledge and competencies in this area. The application has been across a range of areas from children's activity levels in the playground, the training environment to elite performers in Croke Park.

Hurling Development: The development of hurling in some weaker counties is a challenge yet the game continues to excite and enthuse all that watch and play it. Development work continues across all age groups and recent grassroots

development has seen the interest in indoor competitions rise significantly. Plans are now in place to have indoor events throughout the winter with greater mentoring of coaches and engagement with schools. Regional leagues and the development of the Táin League has added much needed competition.

I thank Eugene Young, Jimmy Darragh and all of the Coaching staff for their continued work in this vital area of development

Community Health and Wellbeing

The Community Health and Wellbeing Programme under the leadership of Aileen Cummins has been a significant success our programmes such as Drink, Drugs and Sausage Rolls, „Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention Programme, Live to Play, Social Initiative and our new Heads Up mental health campaign which will be launched later in February. This work is pioneering and we are leading the way in the GAA regarding our campaigns. I want to thank Aileen and Maura Kelly who is covering for Aileen during her maternity leave and the different government departments that fund this work. I also want to strongly welcome the development of a mental health programme which will address many urgent issues within the GAA Community.

Twinning

The GAA is vibrant in many areas overseas. Ulster is twinned with Canada and Britain in the development of our games. This relationship has evolved over time with support overseas being provided in a range of ways. Referees tutors have been provided to run courses and to referee important games. Coaching tutors have been trained to deliver coach education courses. Coaches have supported summer camps and Ulster has provided equipment to support these development. At a strategic level time has been spent on developing plans and strategies to help focus the membership to drive the GAA forward. Maura Kelly spent three days in Canada this year delivery a Club Development programme, Ryan Feeney is currently supporting the Council of Britain GAA in their governing body application to Sport England and both himself and Aogan Farrell attended the Council of Britain meeting in December

to support their ongoing work. Eugene Young is unable to attend today's convention as he is in Canada supporting their Coaching and Games programme. Danny and I also had the pleasure of visiting the Canadian convention in 2013 and tonight we send our best wishes to the Council of Britain GAA as they host their convention in Edinburgh.

Marketing and Communications

The Marketing and Communications work of Ulster GAA is amongst the best in Ireland but don't take my word for it take the word of the Character Institute of Marketing Ireland who for the second year in a row awarded Ulster GAA with the top accolade at their 2013. After winning the Chairpersons Award in 2012 for our Ulster GAA Championship Campaign we won the Peoples Choice Award in 2013 for the work carried out around the Match for Michaela and Ryan Feeney who leads our marketing work was recognised as the top marketing industry leader in Ireland during 2013. This work is reflected in our financial reports when it is clear that that last two years has seen a significant increase in our marketing and commercial activity and revenue. I thank John Connolly and the Marketing and IT Committee for their ongoing work and I also want to recognise Ryan Feeney, Damian Kelly, Sharon Haughey, Stephen Donnelly and Michelle McAleer who deliver this important area of Ulster GAA operations

Derry 2013

I want to recognise the work undertaken by Derry GAA in this their 125th year and the celebration of the City of Culture. The organisation of Congress, National Scor and Feile was simply outstanding and I was delighted that Ulster GAA was able to contribute to the programme financially and also to organise a special seminar event that celebrated Derry's achievements throughout the years. I want to thank Chairman John Keenan and the entire Derry GAA members for all of their work in putting together a demanding programme of events and for their outstanding hospitality shown to all of us.

Culture and Heritage

Our Scor profile continues to increase and I want to thank Gaelic Life in particular for providing ongoing reports of our Scor activity and as Scor Sponsors. It is vitally important that we provide our Scor Participants with profile and recognition. Our Irish Language Course at Downings is currently undergoing a review to widen its appeal and we look forward to further developments in this regard over the coming months. Aogan O'Fearghail also led a significant piece of work over the last year and put together a Directory of the names of Ulster GAA Clubs & Grounds. It is an excellent reference source which will help eradicate bad practise. I thank Aogan, Jarlath Burns and all those involved in putting together such an important resource.

Conclusion

In Conclusion the GAA in Ulster is in a good state but we will not rest on our laurels we have much more work to do. 2014 will see us commence a new strategic plan with a new vision on how we operate up to 2020. You will hear more about this plan in the coming months but I want all of you to play your part and feed into the development process. I want to thank all the officers, members of the Council and County Chairman Officers for your support to me and Ulster GAA. Thanks especially to my fellow officers Michael Hasson, Oliver Galligan and John Connolly. Also thank you to all Sub Committee Chairman and members and to all of our loyal volunteers without whom it would not be possible for us to achieve the success that is the entire operation of Ulster GAA. I want to in a special way thank Danny Murphy for his support and friendship over many years. Danny is back in robust health and we are thankful for this continued leadership and work for Ulster GAA.

Today sees the stepping down of long serving members of Ulster GAA – Eddie Hughes, Frank Smith, Danny Scullion, Joe Jordan and Paul Maxwell. They served with distinction and we thank them for their service to Ulster GAA.

Today also marks Aogan O'Fearghail's last day as a member of the Ulster Council. He has served in every position within the Council and given 26 years of service. He was

an outstanding President and is a great GAA man. As you know Aogan is seeking election to the highest office within the Association and as he leaves the service of Ulster GAA today we wish him well and assure him of our support and look forward to his success.

Finally I want to thank my family for their continued support to me as I carry out the role of Ulster President. I relish this job and I enjoy every minute of it and ask us all to leave this convention today united and focused on ensuring the Ulster, its Counties and its Clubs remain at the forefront of the GAA.

Beir Bua!

Mairtin MacAibhne

Uachtaran

CLG Chomhairle Uladh

25u Eanair 2014