

CLG ULADH

An Chomhdháil Bhliantúil 2016



TUARASCÁIL AN RÚNAÍ



Tuarascáil an Rúnaí

A Chairde,

The progress of the Association is onwards, upwards and at times very slowly before us. The performance of our Counties is generally good but the matter of hurling does need to be reviewed and renewed.

When the past year is examined there are many aspects that are admirable as we are very competitive in football, but we do need to adhere to the One Club One Association ideal. We welcome and admire the success of the Tír Eoghain Under 21 football team in winning the All-Ireland Championship. This was an excellent achievement, given the overall strength of the teams involved both within Ulster and throughout the Country. It is an important marker in the scale of team and player development and our competitive capacity seems to be progressing across more counties at this level. In hurling Fear Manach deservedly won an exciting final of the Lory Meagher Cup. O'Donovan Rossa won the All-Ireland Intermediate Club Championship and given the previous success of Loughgiel indicates that the standards at Club level are on a competitive level with Clubs anywhere.

The past year has been most competitive and this has demonstrated that the games are still the central focus of our Association, and the teams taking part make a tremendous contribution to the development of our Counties, Clubs and Schools. This is very much in evidence and the current standards are relevant to the aims and ideals of the GAA and its future within our Country where the Irish Diaspora needs to remain at the heart of the GAA.

FINANCE

The Financial affairs have seen continued expansion with regards to the various aspects of the financial workings of Comhairle Uladh. The past year has needed some very complex work in dealing with the 'Peoples

Pension' requirements. At the end of the year Comhairle Uladh had worked its way through the many complex legal aspects that apply to employees, Comhairle Uladh and to the law of the land. This has witnessed the ongoing of the requirements being more and more regulated and everything from VAT to Pensions are placing greater responsibility on organisations like ourselves. The ongoing inputs relating to the proposed redevelopment of Casement Park are also quite time consuming; the increased attendances, greater input into funding for projects and the stringent budgetary requirements places further obligations on the Council. The ongoing work in relation to the Council's own income and expenditure continues to be central to our work and it is in this sphere that the demands have continued to increase.

The income of Comhairle Uladh amounted to €6,674,527 inclusive of all grants. Our gate income, €1,746,950 represented 26% of this compared to 31% of the total income in 2014. In 2015 our grant income, €1,539,509, represents 23% of our total in comparison to 23% in 2014. The expenditure amounted to €6,004,573. In addition, the investment in Grounds and Infrastructure amounted €159,237. There was an operating profit on the years working equating to €510,717 which was transferred to our accumulated funds. The through put of funds in respect of Casement Park are separately accounted for and this is the basis for the total project and beyond. We are grateful to the Finance and Governance Workgroup and Brendan Waters for their guidance on this very important work. We acknowledge the grants from DCAL and Ard Comhairle in respect of the Casement Park Project.

Our attendances have continued to increase over the year and this has seen an increase of income across our competitions which we acknowledge and thank all our members and

supporters for their continued attendances at our games. The substantial reduction in the value of the Euro has had significant impacts on transfers in the euro and sterling transactions. The Marketing of our games has been very substantially maintained and this in turn has seen a continued increase in online sales of tickets for games ensuring that those attending our games can pre - purchase tickets either through our units or via tickets.ie or through outlets of the Musgrave Group. We are now starting to see the growth in the wider economy and we shall continue to market our games, continue to work for the community and be part of the future of the Country and our Diaspora. We shall continue to support the enhancement of Community development and to this end will seek to maintain our investment in games, games development and areas of physical development.

The team of stewards from the Counties, the team officials and members of Comhairle Uladh have given great assistance to the organising of a very substantial games programme and without these continuing efforts we would be unable to maintain major input into all aspects of the games programme. We acknowledge their dedication and commitment given so generously throughout the year and thank them for it. They all do so in a voluntary capacity and that includes many members of staff who are also vital to our overall work on match days. An Cisteoir, Oilibhear Ó Gealagain is an outstanding Officer and a totally committed person who has given great work to the Council throughout the year and on a myriad of fronts. He has been fully involved in our financial affairs and has been an outstanding help to Comhairle Uladh. We thank him for his outstanding work on our behalf. The complex work undertaken by Michelle McAleer, our Head of Business and Finance, has also been outstanding and her contribution to

our overall work of Comhairle Uladh has been enormous. Brian Mallon has been a tremendous asset and although he has moved to work for Ard Mhacha we were well served by his enthusiastic approach and wish him well in his new challenges ahead. Paul Sanders also contributes to the controls that ensure that in this field, our finance team are always in charge. We are grateful to their diligence in taking care of our finances and related matters.

COMÓRTAISÍ CÚIGE

In 2015, the Anglo Celt Cup was reclaimed by Muineachán while Aontroim again won the Liam Harvey Cup. The Ulster Club Championships both went to familiar homes in the recent months as Ruairi Óg Cushendall and Crossmaglen Rangers collected the honours in their respective codes. The fact that both our Senior Finals required extra time illustrates the competitiveness of our club championships. Crossmaglen edged out Scotstown in the football final at the Athletic Grounds in front of over 8,600 spectators while Ruairi Óg secured a memorable and historic extra time win over Slaughtneil at the same venue. The attendances at our Ulster Club Championships continued to rise and we experienced particularly large crowds at the Ulster Football and Hurling Club Finals.

2015 saw the fourth year of the Tain Adult Club Hurling League. This

initiative saw a total of 24 teams compete from across the province of Ulster as well as teams from Louth. The Connacht clubs who originally competed were again incorporated into the Connacht section. There were a total of three divisions. Middletown (Ard Mhacha), Setanta (Dún na nGall) and Sean MacCumhailis (Dún na nGall) emerged as the Division 1, 2 and 3 winners respectively. With regard to the Ulster Football Club League, 2015 saw a total of 41 clubs involved, with 14 teams in senior and 27 teams in intermediate. Ballinderry (Doire) and Galbally (Tír Eoghain) won the Senior and Intermediate finals, with both finals being great spectacles. This competition again provided clubs with competitive action at their appropriate level prior to the commencement of their internal county games programmes.

Ulster had three representatives in the National Football League Finals, with contrasting results. Ros Comain defeated An Dún in the Division 2 decider, while Ard Mhacha beat Fear Manach in the all Ulster Division 3 Final. With regards to hurling, we had representatives in the Ring, Rackard and Meagher Finals. In the Christy Ring Final, Ciarraí defeated Doire by 1-20 to 0-12 and then they went on to defeat Aontroim in the Liam McCarthy Play off. This was a seriously disappointing result and means that Aontroim will participate in the Christy Ring along with An Dún and Doire in 2016. In

the Nicky Rackard Final, Ard Mhacha conceded a costly last minute goal to lose out to Ros Comain by 2-12 to 1-14. In the Lory Meagher Final, Fear Manach just edged out to Sligeach by 3-16 to 1-17 on an emotional day for the Ernemen. They overcame the tragic death of their teammate Shane Mulholland and gave his family a fitting tribute to claiming the national title. Ar dheis do go raibh ananam. They then backed this up with a Nicky Rackard play off win over An Lú to cap a successful season that ensures they will play at a higher level in 2016.

In our first competition of the year, the Dr McKenna Cup, Tír Eoghain again collected the title by defeating An Cabhán by 1-13 to 0-10 at another well attended final at the Athletic Grounds. I also extend my gratitude to Bank of Ireland for their sponsorship of this important competition in the Ulster GAA calendar.

SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2015 Ulster Senior Football Championship commenced at Pairc MacCumhaill on Sunday 17th May, where Dún na nGall welcomed Tír Eoghain. In an enthralling encounter, Donegal just held out to emerge 1-13 to 1-10 winners. Seven days later, in Kingspan Breffni Park, a late surge from Muineachán saw them defeat An Cabhán by 0-16 to 0-15. On May 31st, Fear Manach gave us a sign



of things to come as they defeated Aontroim by 1-13 to 0-08 at Brewster Park. The following Sunday, Doire just edged out An Dún by 0-12 to 0-11 at Celtic Park. In the last Ulster Senior Football Championship quarter final at the Athletic Grounds, Dún na nGall produced a brilliant first half showing as they blitzed Ard Mhacha to record a 2-11 to 0-08 scoreline.

In the first Semi-Final, a strong last quarter including a Conor McManus goal ensured that Muineachán progressed to the Ulster Final at the expense of Fear Manach at Kingspan Breffni Park. The following Saturday night in St Tiernach's Park, another goal from Martin O'Reilly proved crucial as Dún na nGall saw off Doire by 1-09 to 0-10 to reach their fifth consecutive Ulster Final.

The Ulster Final took place three weeks later where Dún na nGall and Muineachán met at St Tiernach's Park, Clones on Sunday 19th July. 31,997 spectators attended the Final on a day when the Ulster Senior Football Champions from 25 years previous, Dún na nGall were honoured. With the inclusion of honouring the successful teams from the past, Cumann na mBunscol exhibition games, band entertainment, the Minor Football Final and the Senior showpiece, Ulster Final day continues to be a celebration of our great Association in the province of Ulster. The game was a titanic tussle between two great teams that was in

the balance until the last play of the game when a Donegal shot just sailed wide of the mark. Muineachán seemed to possess a greater cutting edge for scores and emerged as 0-11 to 0-10 champions in an intriguing tussle. The scenes of jubilation at the final whistle from a county who had retained the Ulster Championship after a mere one year lapse were memorable and congratulations go to Muineachán for a well deserved success.

ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The All-Ireland Senior Football Championship for Ulster representatives began on 20th June with both An Cabhán and Aontroim facing tricky away fixtures. The Breffni County travelled to Ruislip and defeated Londáin by 2-22 to 0-11. The surprise of the entire qualifiers came in Portlaoise where Aontroim overturned Laois with a strong finish to run out 2-15 to 1-16 winners.

The following week, three of our counties were in action. Ard Mhacha and Tír Eoghain both had comprehensive home victories over Cill Mhantáin and Luimneach respectively. An Dún disappointingly exited the championship with a 2-16 to 2-11 at Loch Garman. Six days later, An Cabhán were beaten at home to Ros Comáin by 3-16 to 1-17 at Kingspan Breffni Park. The following day, Fear Manach and Aontroim met again at Brewster Park, with a similar outcome,

with the margin being 13 points this time.

On July 11th, Doire saw off Loch Garman at Owenbeg while Tír Eoghain edged out An Mhí by two points at Healy Park. 24 hours later, Gaillimh ended the season for Ard Mhacha as they left the Athletic Grounds as 1-12 to 0-12 victors. At the same time, Fear Manach were performing heroics to comeback from the dead and pip Ros Comáin in a 1-14 to 0-16 thriller at Brewster Park. In Round 3, Tír Eoghain travelled to Tiobraid Arainn and won comfortably while Doire were beaten in Gaillimh in terrible weather conditions. In Round 4, Fear Manach continued to blaze a trail as they defeated Iar Mhí at Kingspan Breffni Park while Tír Eoghain coasted past Sligeach at Croke Park. Dún na nGall rediscovered their goal touch to defeat Gaillimh by 3-12 to 0-11 at Croke Park on the same day.

The following day, the Erne County was deserted as they all moved to the capital to take on Áth Cliath in the All-Ireland quarter final. Displaying the same spirit and skill that got them to this stage, Fear Manach played some great football only to be outgunned by the Leinster champions by 2-23 to 2-15.

In the other quarter finals, Ulster champions Muineachán were paired against their neighbours Tír Eoghain. The Red Hand County controlled the game for large periods and won out by 0-18 to 0-14. In the same double



header, Dún na nGall met Connacht champions Maigh Eo. Unfortunately, the Connacht champions proved moved stronger on the day to run out 2-11 to 0-08 winners. The All-Ireland Semi-Final on Sunday 24th August ended Ulster's involvement in the 2015 series. Ciarraí displayed greater efficiency on a very wet day to emerge 0-18 to 1-11 winners over an unlucky Tír Eoghain side who showed great progress as the year developed.

As regards the 2015 GAA / GPA All Stars, I extend my congratulations to the two Ulster recipients, namely Conor McManus (Muineachán) and Mattie Donnelly (Tír Eoghain). I also commend all the recipients from our province who collected Ring, Rackard and Meagher All-Star Awards on the same night.

MINOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Ulster Minor Football Championship continues to excite and entertain. These games are fitting curtain raisers on championship days and 2015 again produced another great competition. In the Preliminary Round, Dún na nGall defeated Tír Eoghain on a 1-11 to 0-08 scoreline. In the quarter finals, there were wins for An Cabhán, Aontroim, Dún na nGall and Doire. In the Semi-Finals, An Cabhán beat Aontroim by 1-19 to 1-11 while Doire edged out reigning champions Dún na nGall by 0-11 to 0-10 at St Tiernachs Park.

The final meeting between Doire and An Cabhán ensured that we had four of our counties represented on Ulster Final day, with Dún na nGall and Muineachán sharing the senior stage. Doire controlled the minor game for most of the game and won out by 1-11 to 0-11 to collect the Fr Murray Cup. Congratulations to Doire for a well deserved success.

In the All Ireland Quarter Finals, there were contrasting fortunes for our two representatives. An Cabhán were beaten by a strong Cill Dara side at Navan on a scoreline of 2-14 to 2-12. Doire needed a strong second half to recover from the concession of two first half goals to win out 0-12 to 2-04

winners over Longfort at Brewster Park. On Sunday 23rd August, Doire were defeated by the reigning champions, Ciarraí by 1-11 to 1-06 at Croke Park. A disappointing end to the year for our Ulster champions, but the experience of playing in such massive occasions in front of huge crowds will leave an indelible positive mark on these youngsters.

UNDER 21 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

This Championship continues to thrive in its current Wednesday night slot 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. In the Preliminary Round on Wednesday 11th March, Doire defeated An Dún by 2-12 to 1-11 at Celtic Park. On Wednesday 18th March, the four quarter finals took place and there were wins for all four home teams in Tír Eoghain, Dún na nGall, Muineachán and Ard Mhacha. In the Semi-Finals, there were wins for Dún na nGall over Muineachán at Healy Park and Tír Eoghain over Ard Mhacha at Kingspan Breffni Park. I wish to place on record my gratitude to both Ard Mhacha and Tír Eoghain for travelling to Cavan at very short notice after Brewster Park was deemed unplayable.

The following week, Tír Eoghain and Dún na nGall played out a brilliant encounter in front of a large crowd at Celtic Park. Tír Eoghain held on to win by the minimum on a 1-11 to 0-13 scoreline. After securing their first Ulster title since 2006, Tyrone progressed to the All-Ireland stage. They played some outstanding football to account for Connacht champions, Roscommon in the Semi-Final. In the All-Ireland Final, played in terrible conditions in Parnell Park, Tyrone just edged out Tipperary to claim another well deserved All-Ireland title at this level. Their run through the Ulster campaign left them in good stead as they claimed the All-Ireland title on the same scoreline as their Ulster decider. A brilliant achievement by all concerned. Congratulations to Tír Eoghain on this All-Ireland success.

CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Ulster Club Championship still has that lure for our supporters and the local aspect means that all clubs at all levels can aspire to the greatest stage throughout the province and indeed, Croke Park. In the Preliminary Round, reigning champions Slaughtneil easily disposed of Derrygonnelly. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Trillick, Scotstown, Crossmaglen and Kilcoo over Glen, Naomh Conaill, Slaughtneil, Kilcoo and Kingscourt respectively. At the Semi-Final stage, Scotstown held off a resilient Trillick challenge as they ran out 2-09 to 2-07 winners at Brewster Park. In the other game, Crossmaglen produced a really controlled performance to defeat Kilcoo by 0-12 to 0-8 at Pairc Esler. In the Ulster Final, Crossmaglen and Scotstown played out a thriller at the Athletic Grounds in Armagh in front of over 8,600 spectators. Extra time was required when a goal from Kyle Carragher proved vital for the Armagh champions, as they ran out 2-17 to 2-12 winners.

The 2015 Ulster Senior Club Championship was a brilliant competition which included a number of great games. The Senior and Junior Finals were played as a double header in the Athletic Grounds and it was a fitting end to another great year of activity on our playing fields.

The Intermediate Football Club Championship remains an extremely competitive grade and 2015 was no different. In the Preliminary Round, Loughinisland defeated Derry champions, Greenlough. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Glenavy, Bundoran (AET), Doohamlet (AET) and Loughinisland over Irvinestown, Clann Eireann, Ballyhaise and Edendork respectively. In the Semi-Finals, there were convincing wins for Loughinisland and Bundoran to set up a final meeting. In the Final, played at Owenbeg, both teams played some fantastic football in terrible conditions with Loughinisland's eye for goals proving the difference on a bizarre scoreline of 4-01 to 0-07.

In the Junior Football Championship, there was the return of Fear Manach

champions to make a full complement of nine participants. In fact, Fermanagh winners, Coa won their Preliminary Round game against Tullysaran. In the Quarter-Finals, there were wins for Templeport, Glasdrumman, Rockcorry and Faughanvale over Naomh Ultan, Davitts, Coa and Brackaville, respectively. In the Semi-Finals, there were wins for Rockcorry and Faughanvale. The Junior Final was played in the Athletic Grounds, and it was Rockcorry who collected the Paul Kerr Cup by virtue of a 3-10 to 0-09 scoreline.

ALL-IRELAND CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

In a great game of football on 15th February, Slaughtneil produced a great display to edge out Austin Stacks by 1-14 to 2-10 in Portlaoise to reach their first ever All-Ireland Club Final. On St Patrick's Day, Slaughtneil represented their county and province with fierce pride but came up against a formidable Outfit. Corofin produced a masterclass on the biggest club stage and won out by 1-14 to 0-7.

In the All-Ireland Intermediate Club Championship, Cumann Pheadar Naofa faced Ardfert and were beaten by the minimum, 1-8 to 0-10 in Portlaoise. In the Junior grade, Rock were also beaten at the Semi-Final stage, albeit after a replay by Brosna on a 1-08 to 0-07 scoreline at Ballinasloe to end their involvement.

SENIOR HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2015 Championship was a five county competition with Aontroim again receiving a bye to the Ulster Final. In the quarter finals, played on 21st June, Doire defeated Dún na nGall by 3-17 to 5-07 scoreline at Celtic Park. The other quarter final was played at the Athletic Grounds as An Dún ran out comfortable 5-20 to 3-14 winners over Ard Mhacha.

The Semi-Final saw Doire take on An Dún in Owenbeg on Sunday 28th June and in another great game between familiar rivals, the Mournemen were victorious by 3-16 to 1-7.

The 2015 Ulster Senior Hurling Final was played at Owenbeg in front of

a really good crowd and those in attendance were treated to a great spectacle of inter county hurling. In a game that ebbed and flowed, Aontroim produced a late rally to retain the Liam Harvey Cup by virtue of a 1-15 to 1-14 victory over An Dún. Well done to all involved.

ALL-IRELAND HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Aontroim were again involved in the Leinster Senior Hurling Championship round robin series, This commenced with a fantastic 5-17 to 3-22 victory over Laois at Ballycastle which raised the hopes of the Saffron county. However, subsequent defeats away to both Iar Mhi and Ceatharlach ended their involvement in the All-Ireland series. Their fate was compounded when they lost a playoff to Ciarraí by 2-16 to 1-18 to relegate them to the Christy Ring Cup in 2016. This is a really disappointing development but they have the opportunity to regroup, refocus and return to the top tier by 2017.

In the Christy Ring Cup, An Dún and Doire were Ulster's representatives. Doire defeated An Dún in the Semi Final played at Owenbeg by 0-23 to 2-12 to claim a final place. There they faced a strong Ciarraí outfit and were defeated by 1-20 to 0-12 at Croke Park.

The Nicky Rackard Cup saw Ard Mhacha, Dún na nGall, Muineachán and Tír Eoghain as the competitors from the province. Muineachán beat Longfort before they were defeated by both Dún na nGall and Ros Comáin. Dún na nGall and Tír Eoghain were eliminated at the Semi-Final stage by Ard Mhacha and Ros Comáin respectively. In the final, a last gasp Ros Comáin goal claimed the Nicky Rackard Cup at the expense of Ard Mhacha.

In the Lory Meagher Cup, Fear Manach were our only representative. After suffering heart breaking final defeats in 2012 and 2014, Fermanagh won their way back to the Lory Meagher decider at Croke Park. On 6th June 2015, the Ernemen produced a great attacking display to win out by 3-16 over Sligeach in a great game of hurling. This was a fitting tribute to

former player, Shane Mulholland who passed away earlier in the year and we are all very proud of this tremendous success in remembering Shane. Congratulations to all concerned in this All-Ireland success.

MINOR HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Five counties competed in the Ulster Minor Hurling Championship in 2015. In the quarter final, Doire comfortably defeated Dún na nGall by 6-18 to 2-05. In the Semi-Finals played at Owenbeg, there were comfortable victories for both Aontroim and Doire over Ard Mhacha and An Dún respectively. A fortnight later, the final brought Aontroim and Doire together at Owenbeg. An impressive all round display by Aontroim saw them emerge victorious by 2-20 to 0-09. Well done to Aontroim. In the All-Ireland Quarter Final, Aontroim were beaten by Áth Cliath by 2-22 to 2-11 at Kingspan Breffni Park. In concluding this minor summary, I congratulate Tír Eoghain on their All-Ireland Minor C title, as they defeated Maigh Eo in the final after a replay.

UNDER 21 HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

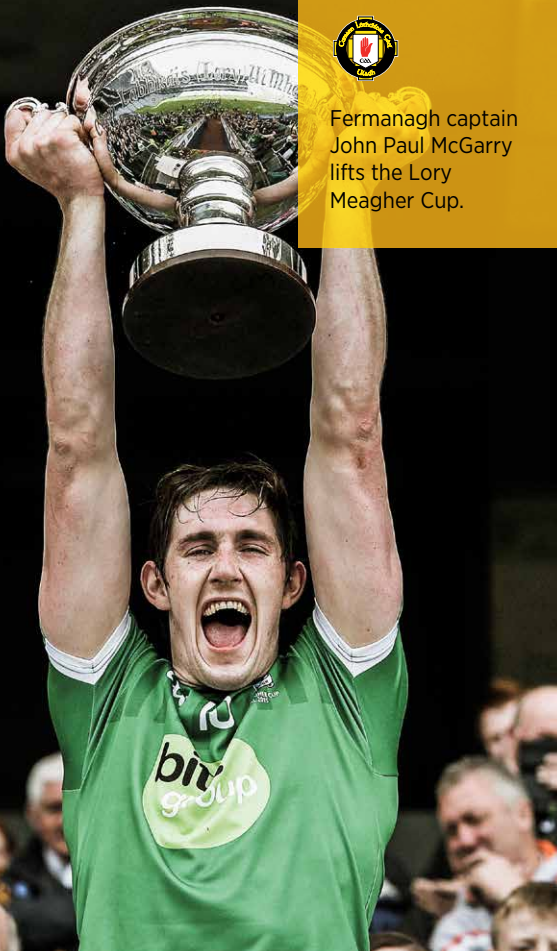
Four Ulster counties competed in the Under 21 Championship, which was played on a knock out basis again. The Semi-Finals saw Aontroim comprehensively defeat Ard Mhacha at Ballycastle. The other game was a brilliant encounter with Doire winning out over An Dún by 3-16 to 3-14 at Owenbeg. In the final that was moved to Ballinascreen at late notice, Aontroim retained their title by beating Doire by 1-19 to 0-17. In the All-Ireland Semi-Final, Aontroim came up against Loch Garman at Thurles and the Leinster champions collected a 1-20 to 1-08 victory.

ALL-IRELAND CLUB HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

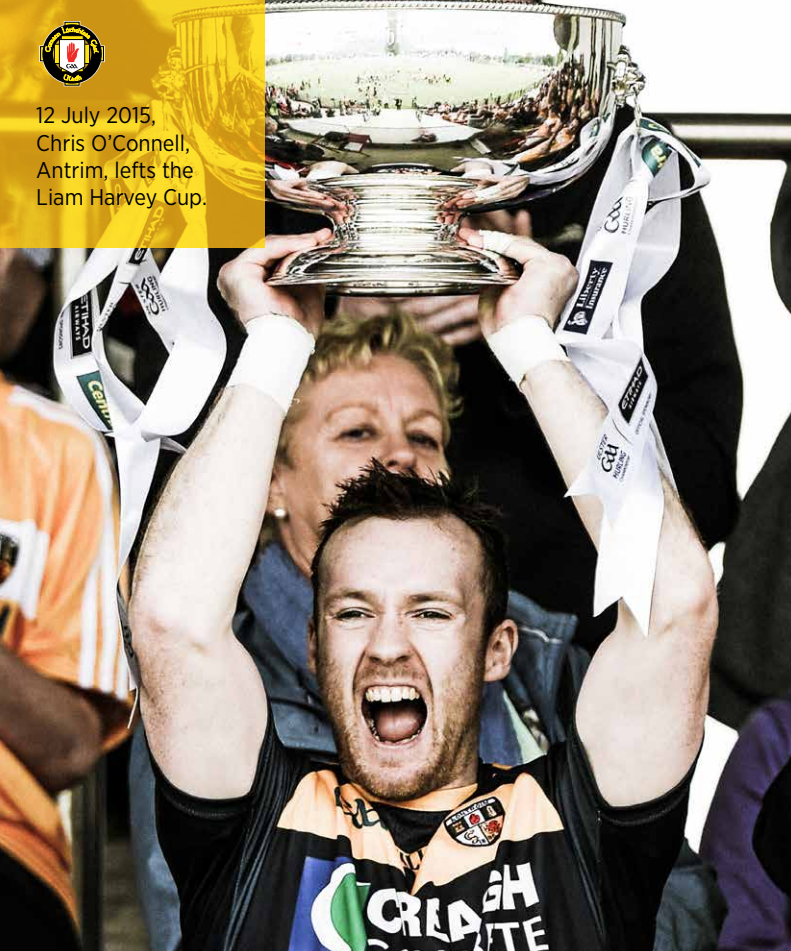
In the Ulster Senior Club Championship, we were treated to some great encounters. In the quarter final, Middletown just held on to beat Lisbellaw by 0-19 to 2-10. In the Semi-Finals, Slaughtneil beat Ballycran at Dungannon while Ruairi Óg needed a strong second half to see off Middletown. The Ulster Final was



Slaughterneil representatives pictured at the Ulster Club Championships Launch.



Fermanagh captain John Paul McGarry lifts the Lory Meagher Cup.



12 July 2015, Chris O'Connell, Antrim, lifts the Liam Harvey Cup.

played as a double header with the Ulster Senior Camogie Final and threw up a brilliant game of hurling. Extra time was required as Ruairi Óg won by 1-24 to 3-16 at the Athletic Grounds. A tremendous success for the proud Glensmen.

In the Intermediate Club Hurling Championship, Kickhams Creggan collected the title at Owenbeg, following wins over Castleblayney, Burt and Eire Óg. In the Junior Final, Eoghan Rua Coleraine defeated Ballela at Owenbeg.

ALL-IRELAND CLUB HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Portaferry were Ulster's representatives in the All-Ireland Club Championship, having won the 2014 Ulster Club Championship. In the All-Ireland Semi-Final on 7th February, they came up against Kilmallock at Pairc Esler. Unfortunately, it was a bridge too far as the An Dún and Ulster champions just lost out by 2-17 to 0-12.

After collecting the Ulster title last October, O'Donovan Rossa represented Ulster in the All-Ireland series. On 25th January they edged out Cappoquin in the All-Ireland Semi-Final to secure a Final slot. On 15th February in Croke Park, O'Donovan Rossa claimed the All-Ireland crown by defeated Kilburn Gaels by 1-9 to 2-3. Congratulations to all involved.

In the Junior grade, Castleblayney were well defeated by Fullen Gaels by 2-18 to 1-07 at Parnells in Dublin.

INTER PROVINCIAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Inter Provincial Championships in both football and hurling remained on the games programme in 2015. Ulster were delighted that this has been included in the fixture calendar in 2015 but unfortunately Storm Desmond eliminated the possibility of any sporting activity taking place on the weekend of 5th / 6th December. At the time of going to print, CCCC are currently examining dates in early 2016 to play this important competition.

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

The hosting of Feile na nGael was a very significant event in our province and the input of the Clubs involved, Counties and members of Comhairle Uladh are fully acknowledged and represented a tremendous overall dedication and commitment of the GAA in Ulster. The role of the Feile Executive and particularly Micheal Ó hOsain and Jimmy Darragh has to be acknowledged as representing the very best standards of our Association. The work of facilitating such an event is reflected by the various sub committees and host families who were tremendous and demonstrated the importance of Feile to the Association in Ulster. The

work in relation to the redevelopment of Casement Park continued apace and we are now in the process of consultation with the view that we will seek to obtain planning permission for the second time. It needs to be restated that we have a world leader, Mott McDonald, in the field of Stadium design working for us and we are satisfied that we were doing everything that is required of us. The reassessment of all aspects of the case outcome has formed a major part of our work in the past year and we have a clear determination on the matters at hand and were the future is likely to take us.

The Project Board and our stadium team has been ably led by Tomas Ó Dalaigh and operated to the highest standards. The past year has witnessed the retirement of Sean Ó Raghallaigh and we record our gratitude to him for his unstinted work over a long period. We are still committed to the delivery of this project as a vital strategic objective set down in the Strategic Review Committee Report of 2002 and in subsequent documents including the Programme for Government which committed itself to meeting the strategic needs of the three sports and that includes the GAA. To this end two external members have been added to the Stadium Project Board and the expertise of John Cole and Michael McGuckin should prove beneficial in the difficult months ahead.



The past year has seen the tremendous and ongoing work of the Officers and Members of Comhairle Uladh. Those who work on our Sub Committees have also worked diligently for the greater good of our Association and we are indebted to them. Our staff have collectively ensured that we are meeting the challenges that comes our way while at the same time assisting our constituent units and members in planning for the future and our role in it.

We are indebted to Mairtin MacAibhne, Uachtarán, for his leadership and he has been totally dedicated to his work on behalf of the Council. He has given generously of his time in the best traditions of the Association in Ulster. He has worked diligently at National level on several Committees and he has been a member Coiste Bainisti Naisunta and Ard Comhairle. He has represented the Council across a diverse list of functions and events and in all these he has exuded the leadership of a vibrant and confident organisation. We thank Mairtin for his work on our behalf and for his support across the full spectre of our activity in Ulster.

Micheal Ó hOsain, Leas Uachtarán, has also been an important part of the work of Comhairle Uladh. He has given generously of his time and has played a very important part in the administration of our affairs. He is the Chairman of Coiste Forbartha Iomána and also the Executive Committee of Feile na nGael. He has ensured that the interests of hurling are provided for including the maintenance of the Tain League. He has also continued as Cathaoirleach of the Integration Committee and has worked diligently to ensure that the continuing work of integration continues to be advanced. We acknowledge his work and we thank his dedicated input to the affairs of the GAA.

Oilibhear Ó Gealagain, our Cisteoir, has been a very active Officer and has given excellent support to the work of the Council and in particular to all financial aspects of our work. He has been a member of our Finance Committee and they have worked diligently to ensure that good

governance is at the centre of the work of the Council and also our Counties. We are indebted to Oliver for all his work on our behalf and his diligence to our Council and its' affairs.

Our OCP, Sean Ó Conghaile, has continued to ensure that our work and affairs are adequately portrayed in the media. He has dealt very efficiently with the various issues and statements that have arisen in a most efficient and positive manner. He has also worked to market our games and activities in a very effective manner and has overseen the utilisation of modern media to ensure that our people are informed. We thank Sean for his tremendous work on our behalf.

The Membership of the Ulster Council continued to give generously of their time throughout the year. Through their efforts they have provided a substantial service and support to the work of the GAA in Ulster. Their contribution at all levels of our affairs including working on our own sub committees and also on National Sub Committees has been exemplary. They also help by supporting the operational requirements on match days. We acknowledge the work of our members and for their dedication and support throughout the year. We record our appreciation for the work of those who leave the Council at this Convention and we acknowledge the outstanding contribution made by Danny McLernon, Patsy Mullan, Aodh Mairtin Ó Fhearraigh, William James Smith and Gerry Duffy. They all have represented their Counties with distinction and we wish them well in the challenges that they undertake in the future on behalf of the GAA. We thank them for their work on behalf of Comhairle Uladh during their time as members and know that they will continue to work for the Association in the years ahead.

The work of our Coiste Eisteacha has witnessed a tremendous commitment to their role within the discipline and appeals system. We acknowledge Nollaig Mac Cumhaill and Eamann Mac Mathuna who again have as Chairman and Secretary of the Hearings Committee respectively carried out

a mammoth amount of work on our behalf. I also want to record my thanks to Damian Kelly for his work in this area. We are grateful to the members of the Hearings Committee for their dedication in resolving these important matters on our behalf.

We are well served by Stephen Donnelly who gives an outstanding service to Coiste Cheannais na Chomortais, our Counties, Referees, Clubs and to other fixture making bodies as required. Bernie Fox, assisted by Kathy Kelly and Paul McKillop provides clear leadership in the field of Child Protection and for which we are grateful. I would also like recognise the work of the Senior Staff for their continued dedication to the GAA and their support and loyalty the GAA and to me. I thank Eugene Young (Director Coaching and Games), Michelle McAleer (Head of Finance, HR and Business), Ryan Feeney (Head of Community, Strategy and Public Affairs) and Stephen McGeehan (Head of Operations, Compliance and Infrastructure) who undertake outstanding work on our behalf. Ryan Feeney is moving on to new challenges but we appreciate his work on our behalf. In Geraldine McKavanagh we have a great treasure and her unstinted work across the complete spectrum of our work is exemplary. I wish to thank Geraldine for her loyalty, support and dedication to the many aspects that she delivers every day.

CHILD PROTECTION

2015 has been as expected a demanding year and full of change in this vital area of our work in both Jurisdictions, and a year that has provided us with many challenges. The long awaited commencement of the Fairer Faster Justice Bill NI in 2015, saw the beginning of online applications to AccessNI in April 2015, aided by a Case Management Tracking System, and accompanied by the change to Single Certificate in November 2015. Portability is due to come into effect in the North at some point in 2016, and this will carry different requirements for us as we manage this very complex process. The challenges associated with these changes have led the council to

source and implement a new database to ensure that these matters are dealt with as efficiently as is possible while ensuring accuracy to the highest level. It is encouraging to see the numbers of those processed growing to over 20,500 across our Vetting systems in Ulster to date, however there is still much work to be done in this area, and we encourage all clubs to be proactive and ensure that all those who should be vetted complete the process as required.

A system of E-Vetting is being developed by the Garda Vetting Bureau in line with the introduction of the Garda Vetting Bureau Bill 2012, which is due to commence in 2016. It is likely that the GAA will be involved in the pilot of this system and this is something that we welcome. We look forward to cooperating with Croke Park to develop a central GAA Vetting database for all Codes.

In October 2015 Coiste Baniste Uladh in conjunction with an Coiste Cód Eitice agus Dea commissioned an Audit of all clubs in Ulster to ensure that they are compliant with any best practice and legal requirements in terms of Safeguarding. All clubs were provided with a list of those vetted and trained in the GAA Safeguarding Children and Young People in Sport workshop, and asked to ensure there are no gaps in terms of the lists held by us and those working with children and young people in their club. It is imperative that our clubs create and maintain the safest possible environment in which our children and young people can participate in our games and activities and therefore we thank our clubs for their assistance in this area of work. This was a time consuming task and we thank Paul McKillop and Kathy Kelly for their attention to detail in dealing with clubs and counties on these matters.

For the second year in succession, Ulster hosted Feile na nGael, and with it came the requirement to ensure all host families and those involved with teams were appropriately vetted. We record our sincere thanks to all those involved in this process and a special word of thanks goes to our County Children's Officers and to Kathy Kelly

for their tremendous work in this area.

Following on from the launch of the new joint code of behavior in 2014, we started to implement the new committee structures at both Club and County level with the establishment of a Code of Best Practice Hearings Committee at both levels, and the County Determining Committee. We acknowledge the difficulties experienced at all levels in setting up these committees and carrying out their functions, and we look forward to the publication of a more detailed guidance document, and to the development of a training programme to assist those involved in early 2016. It is important that this new structure is implemented across all of the Gaelic Games Associations, and we thank our County Children's Officers for their assistance in this matter.

We continued to promote our Tackling Bullying Programme throughout the year, placing focus around the National Anti Bullying Week in November, where our messages were widely supported and publicised across all of our Counties and constituent units. We encourage all clubs to adopt a zero tolerance approach to bullying behaviour and to avail of assistance when it is required.

Our Safeguarding Children and Young People in Sport workshop remains at the forefront of our suite of training courses available as a requirement for all those who work with children and young people in our Association. To date we have trained over 34,600 people in Ulster and 2015 will see the introduction of a refresher course which will be recommended to be completed every 3 years. At National level, the three hour Children's Officer Workshop which is currently at pilot stage will be available to all clubs in Ulster by the end of January. We encourage all those who are involved in Safeguarding in their clubs to complete this course in 2016.

CLUB DEVELOPMENT

Club Maith was upgraded in all of its aspects in the past year. The Portfolio was updated to reflect advancements

made in GAA programmes, particularly in the area of health & wellbeing, volunteer recruitment, and coaching & games. As part of upgrade the Club Maith Toolkit, Website and supporting resources have been reviewed and updated as appropriate. Clubs continue to recognise Club Maith as a club development tool, and branding has been updated this year to reflect the new content. Club Maith Facilitators continue to play a vital role in the assessment of clubs, and are supported in their role through training which took place this year.

The Club Planning Programme continues to be a key process in enabling clubs to better prepare themselves for the future. This programme is rolled-out through Ulster GAA in conjunction with County Development Officers. A bank of Club Planners has been established in each County, who are on-hand to assist with clubs wishing to engage with the programme, A Club Development Plan is a vital document in any club and as such the Club Planning Programme will continue to be an important area of work in 2016.

The Club Officer training aims to provide club officers with all essential information for the year ahead. In 2015, there were two compulsory workshops: Child Protection and Health and Wellbeing. Each county was then asked to select up to three other workshops from a bank of twenty to ensure that the content delivered was of the most relevance to their clubs. These three workshops were selected from six different themes; club development, governance, communications, volunteer development, culture and language. 644 Officers were trained in 2015 across 50 workshops.

Ulster GAA is very proud to once again achieve Investing in Volunteer Standard. This award rightly puts the spotlight on our volunteering policies and procedures. Ulster GAA is run by volunteers, supported by a dedicated staff base, but it is our volunteers who make decisions and plan the way forward for the future. It is extremely important that we have strong



volunteering policies and procedures and I am very proud that we have once again achieved this standard. I take this opportunity to thank all those volunteers who participated in the Investing in Volunteers assessment process.

Our community department are currently developing a new Leadership programme for club volunteers to be delivered in February and March. Entitled the 'Elevate Award' this programme will offer clubs and individuals the opportunity to develop knowledge and capacity across eight key areas; Leadership, Management, Club Planning, Marketing, Financial Management, Fundraising, Capital Projects and Partnerships. Experienced volunteers from across the province have been recruited to assist with the delivery, sharing their experiences in relevant areas of work. It is hoped that this additional programme will build stronger volunteers and ultimately stronger clubs within the Province.

Having previously achieved the Foundation Level in 2014, Ulster GAA are one of only two sporting organisations in the Province to have been awarded the preliminary level of The Equality Standard: A Framework for Sport in 2015. Sporting

organisations that are committed to tackling inequality received their awards from Sport NT. Whilst achieving the Preliminary Level highlights how far we've come in our work around making Ulster GAA accessible to all, and our continued commitment to addressing equality issues, we will be looking to maintain and improving upon our Preliminary Level to ensure Ulster GAA remains at the front of Sport and Community affairs.

Ulster GAA continues to be represented on the Sport For Change working group which is responsible for overseeing Game of Three Halves events. The Belfast Interface Games took place from 20th -31st July finishing with more than one hundred children taking part in a flagship event at the Queens Sports Pavilion.

Our relationship with Ulster Rugby and the Irish FA has been strengthened greatly in the past twelve months and as we move forward together into a Peace IV application I am confident that our connection has never been closer. The joint work on the Stadia project, together with operational projects emerging from the DSD and DCAL programmes, has ensured that at all levels of the three Associations

there is trust and mutual respect, the foundations of any good working relationship. I was delighted that that the efforts throughout 2015 culminated in the three codes launching a Joint Strategic Framework in the presence of the Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness. This framework recognises our collective potential to making a better society by delivery in areas such as community development, good relations, club and volunteer development and capacity building. There is immense strategic value in the three largest bodies of sport in the north of Ireland working together in these areas, while each recognising our differences in make-up and strategic goals. Moving forward I remain committed to further strengthening the partnership and developing our joint work, which will undoubtedly serve the entire Community in Ulster well.

The past year has witnessed what was another significant one for Health and Wellbeing within Ulster GAA. The formal establishment of the Ulster Health and Wellbeing Committee was a notable milestone this year, affording this key issue the appropriate recognition within the Council by formalising it into our structures. I am grateful to Cathal

Hand of Monaghan for Chairing this committee in it's inaugural year and to the personnel across Ulster who have worked tirelessly to improve the wellbeing of our members. It is evident to me through the large presence of Ulster representatives on the National Committee that our progress in this area will not only serve the members in our own province well, but those across the Country.

The inception of the 'Blood Sub' campaign added much colour to this year's Championship campaign with it's launch amid a sea of red balloons in the Athletic Grounds in June. This campaign calls on members to encourage and support blood donations, while a wealth of online materials are available on the Ulster GAA Health microsite to ensure we are better informed on this crucial topic. By engaging with the Blood Transfusion Services this has ensured that we can signpost our members directly to the relevant services in thier area.

One of the other key achievements this year was the inception of the Live to Play 'Oscars'. Now in it's fifth year, Live to Play has become one of our

most recognisable campaigns. The 'Oscars' represented the culmination of the Road Safety Video Competition and rewarded six winning schools for their efforts in making a campaign film. I am delighted to say DOE have continued their investment in us again into 2016 and I look forward to the 'Oscars' in March.

Significant work has been undertaken over the last year to ensure that the GAA remains relevant to government policies and funding opportunities in the Assembly, The Oireachtas, Westminster, Brussels and at local government level. We engage weekly with elected representatives and policy makers to ensure our Units and Volunteers are recongised for the significant and positive contribution they make to our Community. The Community staff have again this year made significant progress in dealing with a range of issues including responding to consultation exercises on draft legislation, dealing with Club level planning issues, lobbying for funding and attending Assembly scrutiny committees to make presentations on areas of work relevant to the GAA.

It is our hope that the new structure will result in more local support for sport but also clear joined up thinking when it comes to strategic community planning. We also continue to have a strong and positive relationship with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. This is vitally important to the joined up approach we have that ensures all of our nine Counties receive appropriate funding and support in the development of their programmes for participation.

The work that is advanced by our Coiste Forbartha, Club Planning and Physical Development Committee and Coiste Pairceanna agus Slandala are vital to the overall wellbeing of the Association and they are involved in advising and the forward planning that is required within the Strategic Plans at County, provincial and National level. The work is supported by the Community and Public Affairs staff of the Ulster Council is reflective of our units and members across a diverse and complex Association. We acknowledge and appreciate the work of Ryan Feeney, Aileen Cummins, Sharon Haughey-Grimley, Maura McMenamin, and Fionntan O'Dowd in this vital area.



GROUNDS

The Club Grounds Awards were a central part of the work during the past year. The inspection of the grounds of all our Clubs was a tremendous piece of work and we are indebted to the members of CCC, Coiste Forbartha and Coiste na bPairceanna agus Slandala for their outstanding work and dedication to the task in hand. The County winners were all invited to the Presidents Awards and received their awards. The overall winner was CLG Ardara and the highly commended was Loughmacrory and they too received their provincial awards. I would like to pay tribute to Mairtin MacAibhne for his total commitment to the project and to Geraldine McKavanagh and Paul Sanders for their support and work in delivering this very worthwhile project.

Significant progress was made on the funding front this year for the Antrim GAA Centre at Dunsilly, when Ulster GAA was able to secure for Antrim GAA £800,000 investment for a new phase of the Antrim GAA Centre at Dunsilly. We acknowledge the input of DCAL and particular the Minister Caral Ni Chuilin in resolving the outstanding matters I would like to acknowledge the work of our staff in completing the Business Case and relevant documents and guided the project through the funding milestones. This is significant and positive progress that will see the Centre open and operational in late 2016. I want to record my thanks to Ryan Feeney, Michelle McAleer and Frankie Quinn for their work in achieving this significant investment for the project.

During the first half of 2015 much time and significant resource was expended on legal reviews and due diligence to ensure that the GAA ambition for a strategic fit for purpose Provincial stadium at the Casement Park site could be achieved. Central to this work was securing the NI Executive commitment to the retaining funding for the project as originally envisaged. On that specific point the Funding Agreement between the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the GAA was paramount and we are grateful to Minister Caral Ni Chuilin

for her personal and professional commitment to ensuring parity for the GAA despite the challenging political and economic environment.

The technical and legal work of our team was somewhat overshadowed very publicly from late April and through the summer as despite the fact that the Casement Project planning consent had been 'quashed' by the court the chair of the STG group presented himself before the Culture, Arts and Leisure (CAL Committee) and what has ensued since has been a lengthy and complex 'nugatory' exercise in my view which is focussing on a stadium design that no longer benefits from a planning consent. Contrary to views expressed at committee or on the media reports from it, the GAA achieved advisory group sign off for the design during the previous process and had the court decision not quashed the planning consent all remaining compliance issues typical of a design and build construction process would have been resolved fully.

What is very important to state here and for the record which was vigorously stated by our Association delegation to the CAL Committee in June is that this Association takes the health and safety of all of our patrons very seriously indeed. Public Safety is both paramount and fundamental in everything we do as a sporting organisation and our track record in this regard is impeccable. On behalf of the Council I categorically reject the bogus charge that Casement Park was or ever will be any different in that respect.

Following the developments at the CAL Committee and other investigations ensuing relating to public sector policies and processes the Minister for DCAL instigated a High Level Programme Assessment Review (PAR) of the Stadium Programme with a specific focus on the emerging difficulties on the Casement project. This report which was led by the Cabinet Office (experts in multi-billion infrastructure projects) entirely vindicated the GAA team and our professionals in relation to the matters on safety. On the wider project

matters the report made a number of recommendations for the Casement Park project.

The Ulster Council and Project Board unanimously accepted the findings of the PAR Report and a high level working group including the Uachtaran CLG, Ard Stiurthoir CLG, Uachtaran CU CLG, Runai CU CLG, Tom Daly Chairman of the Project Board and Feargal McCormack, member of Coiste Bainisti CLG and Project Board has worked diligently to implement all of the critical recommendations from the report.

With a renewed confidence and enthusiasm the Ulster GAA, the Central Council of the GAA and Antrim GAA remain firmly committed to the development of a new Provincial GAA Stadium at Casement Park, Belfast. The Project Board is continuing to work closely with the planning and delivery teams to prepare a revised scheme for the Casement Park Stadium that will:

- Develop and deliver a world class stadium in Belfast for the GAA
- Enhance the local Community that the new Casement Park will serve
- Deliver a facility suitable for hosting Club, County, Provincial and National fixtures while contributing to the economic and social development of Belfast and Ulster

The GAA will be in a position to commence public and community consultation on our new proposals in early 2016. Another comprehensive engagement process will be undertaken and following consideration of the results and feedback we will prepare and submit a revised proposal. In recent weeks there has been much welcomed and needed site activity at Casement Park relating to both the security and presentation of the site which has re-energised the GAA members and local community to take pride in a strategically important GAA and Community facility in Belfast.

In the interim the Project Board will again in an open and transparent manner engage with all stakeholders to progress the new Casement Park which will include the GAA membership at all

levels, local residents, local community groups, elected representatives and government departments. We have already had an initial and positive engagement with the Chairman of the Safety Technical Group.

We have added two additional experienced, competent and highly respected individuals namely Professor John Cole and Michael McGuckin as independent members of the Project Board. Rory Miskelly has also been added to the GAA's delivery structure as a Project Director. With his programme experience previously in DCAL and direct delivery experience at Kingspan Ravenhill Stadium, he will bring extensive construction expertise; project planning, delivery and commissioning experience to complement the existing GAA delivery team. The GAA deferred its plans to make such an appointment in late 2014 when it was prevented from proceeding with site works and stadium construction due to Judicial Review proceedings against the Minister for the Environment. These appointments are additional to the existing GAA personnel involved in the Project.

A working group lead by Peter Quinn charged with working with the issues that emerged around the existing and future tenure of the Casement Social Club reported to Ulster Council in recent weeks. Much progress has been made on that front and at the time of writing Annual General Meetings are being planned with legal agreements being finalised to work towards the move from the existing stand to temporary facilities to facilitate site preparation and ultimately to new permanent accommodation in the new Stadium. On behalf of the Ulster GAA I wish to acknowledge the contribution that the CSC made over many years to the GAA in Antrim and look forward to them continuing to do in the exciting future for the stadium and the county.

There have been a number of officer changes in Antrim County Committee this year and I wish to thank all of the outgoing members, Chairman Jim Murray in particular for his commitment and support to the GAA

in the County and to the Casement Park project during his term. It has been a challenging time and Jim has and continues to contribute to the project via his work on the new STG group alongside Stephen McGeehan.

Equally, I wish all of the new Antrim officer's and Colin Donnelly as Chairman every success for the future. The Council and Antrim will need to continue to work closely together to ensure the success for the project and whilst there will undoubtedly be many challenges, with combined interests and commitments we can navigate our way through most.

Our Stadium Project Board led by our enthusiastic Chairman Tomas Ó Dalaigh has worked courageously and with forthrightness in advancing the project through difficult and at times extremely challenging issues to ensure that we have a project that is viable and achieves our desired outcome. Rory Miskelly has been added as a Project Director over recent weeks and will assist both Tom and myself in the oversight of the project and in particular pushing on with our new planning application.

Our Stadium Project Steering Group which is the critical operational side of our delivery is led by Stephen McGeehan, the Project Sponsor, supported by our Technical Advisor, Tim Harkin. This group is supported by Oliver Galligan (Cisteoir), Michelle McAleer and Ryan Feeney. The administration of the various stadium works-streams continues to be managed by Geraldine McKavanagh as Stadium Administrator and is vital to the delivery of the project within challenging time scales.

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of our Leas Uachtaran Michael Hasson, who represents the Council on the DCAL Sponsor Board. I wish also to acknowledge significant contributions of our Project Board members, Project Steering Group members and to the external representatives from DCAL and CPD who contribute at those levels.

We acknowledge the support from our President, Aogan Ó Fearghail and Paraic

Duffy as a very active and engaged member of our Project Board for their invaluable support from Central Council level. I wish to mention the support to our project team from Peter McKenna and in particular Alan Gallagher from a stadium operation perspective who continue to assist on that front. To the Antrim County Committee and in particular to Jim Murray formerly and now Colin Donnelly and the ever present Frankie Quinn for their co-operation and support, we thank them for their efforts. At Departmental level we convey our ongoing appreciation to Carál Ní Chuilín, MLA Minister for DCAL and her officials led by Ian Maye as the new Programme Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) in the Programme Team for their support, inputs and on-going financial resource.

I wish to thank our two contracted teams who remain fully involved and integrated in the Design and Build process namely Mott MacDonald on the Design side and in particular to their Belfast Divisional Director Bill Dowey. On the contracting side the Heron Buckingham Joint Venture (HBJV) team has been active on the site in recent weeks and we acknowledge in particular the contribution of their Managing Director Damian Heron.

GAMES DEVELOPMENT

The Coaching and Games Development Department continues to develop, support and innovate all aspects of games development. The central purpose is to encourage, support and work with volunteers through the all of our GAA Codes and with Coaches, Managers, Players and the Officials in all our games. We work closely with our Community team to embed the key messages of Live to Play and Health and Wellness and our Cross Community focus with coaching engagement throughout the programmes. This is within the concept of the whole family for the whole life.

The Curriculum Sports Key Stage 1 programme is now in place since 2007 and continues to flourish. It has taken a significant hit in funding in this period, resulting in the loss of six coaches. The

programme continues to engage over 30,000 children each week as well as 600 teachers. It is designed to build their competencies and capacities and makes a huge contribution to embedding lifestyle habits that will contribute to a reduction in obesity in later years. The coaches have worked within counties to embed schools practice within the clubs. This work provides an important bridge for the children and it makes this programme unique. Thanks to Terence McWilliams with the help of Ryan Mellon for driving this programme so successfully.

Games Development continue to be rolled out for hurling, football and handball and we also continue to support the delivery for both Camogie and Ladies Football. Go Games, Super Touch Games and Super Games Centres target participation. A fifty eight percent drop off from fourteen to eighteen years has been reported. This sends a clear message that young people decide that they do not want the competitive facility provided by clubs but do want to play GAA on a recreational level. There has been a significant increase in activity in hurling and our Regional Hurling staff divide both indoor and outdoor hurling activity through blitzes and regional academy squads. Activity through the integrated schools programme is now well embedded with three different blitzes throughout the year.

Other activity in handball through the schools one wall programme and the wheelchair hurling schools programme present a sample of how healthy our games are at present.

High Performance Support and the Sports Institute remains a key partner in the promotion and development of the overall high performance environment. There are three significant strands namely player lifestyle, performance analysis and elite handball player development. We have negotiated and supported the player development services for World Champion Aisling Reilly and Charlie Shanks and we have set up training programmes for four performance analysts dispatched to the counties and nine player lifestyle officers working with each county. Senior County teams are encouraged to engage with Kevin McGuigan and take full advantage of the sports science services offered by the Province but we are disappointed that not all counties take advantage of this service.

Ulster GAA Coach Academy is supported by the Performance Focus Programme from Sport NI, This programme is driven by Kevin Kelly, Tony Scullion and Sheena Kelly. The coaches involved have welcomed the opportunity to engage in small groups with some of the GAA's top coaches. They have had an opportunity

to debate with Eamonn Ryan (Cork) and Mick Dempsey (Kilkenny) and all coaches have been involved in both residential and one day workshops over the twelve month period. Recruitment to the programme is through application. The challenge is to ensure we recruit coaches who are putting something back into their county set up.

Ulster GAA Referees Academy is delivered in partnership with the Referees Committee and Ryan Mellon has worked closely with the Chairman Patsy Mullan and Secretary Jim O'Rourke. Many of the young referees who have been on previous programmes are now on the National register. Barry Cassidy (Derry) was one of our first graduates and he took control of this year's Ulster Senior Club Final. We welcomed the inclusion of the 3fivetwo health check as part of the programme and the results clearly indicate the need for this check to happen prior to their season to support our officials in what can be a stressful and unfortunately, a hostile environment.

3fivetwo Ulster GAA Player Academy has this year expanded to include 12 of our top young handballers and fifteen of our Inter Provincial Wheelchair Hurlers. The hurling and football teams went on to represent the Province in fixtures against Galway and Dublin and the young handballers and wheelchair





Ulster GAA President Martin McAviney with Inter Firms players at the 2015 Launch of the Ulster InterFirms.



Mel Boyce, from Crossmaglen Rangers, after the AIB Ulster GAA Senior Club Football Championship, Quarter-Finals.



Laura Finlay, from Ballybay, Co. Monaghan, congratulates Conor McManus after the Ulster GAA Football Senior Championship Semi-Final game.



players also went on to represent Ulster in the National League and ALL Ireland Championship. The Academy gave them an opportunity to feel what it is like to operate in a high performance environment.

Player Welfare Programme has been driven by Ryan Mellon who has worked closely with the Sports Institute in training Player Welfare Officers for each county. These volunteers were challenged initially to deliver a presentation to the academy players and parents in their own county. This was supported by Ryan Mellon who also went into the second level schools to deliver key messages to young players around life style, concussion and anti-doping. The programme was not only received by GAA players within the some schools, but also some players from other sports. The programme will again be supported by the Sports Institute for 2016 and an additional nine Player Lifestyle Officers targeted for support within counties.

Inclusion and Integration: continues to be central to the work of the Council and the Community and Coaching and Games Departments. Coaching and Games support to the Interface games, the Cuchullians Programme, the Game of Three Halves and within the Integrated Education sectors has been ongoing. In addition excellent work was carried out by Diarmaid Marsden in Hydebank Young Offenders Centre, through both coaching and a games opportunities supported by other staff. Ulster continues to open the door and invite people in to try our games. The success of the integrated schools sector blitzes is an excellent example of this. In addition the creation of four disability hubs and the purchase of wheelchairs, means that Ulster GAA can now expand their disability programme. The Schools Road show in December provided an opportunity for able bodied students to engage in meaningful activity with their classmates who are wheelchair bound.

Active Clubs Programme is a new initiative that has been developed to target disability, young women and areas of high social need. Shane

McCann and Paul Callaghan have targeted Belfast and Derry and Strabane with this programme. They work in after schools programme and the engagement of a local club coach to bridge the gap between school and club remains the challenge. They are challenged to build capacity within the club to ensure that they have coaching and games structures that are fit for purpose. Diarmaid Marsden has been central to this work advising and supporting the clubs to create efficient and effective structures to take on any additional members.

Further and Higher Education sectors is supported by Gary Mallon with Ulster at the centre of helping to establish Academies for the further education students. This piece of work goes unnoticed but it was for a long time a forgotten sector with many young GAA people going into the Colleges and getting very little if any GAA activity. The higher education sector faces new challenges as there is pressure now for many institutes to merge campuses and field one team. The increasing number of students attending Higher Education presents a challenge for Gaelic games. The clubs and their administrators are challenged to resource, finance and field multiple teams. Our funding to the development officers in this sector is designed to assist in this process.

O'Neills Ulster GAA Coaching and Games Development Conference had over three hundred and twenty delegates in attendance in 2015. We are delighted that O'Neills through our relationship with Kieran Kennedy has continued their support. Dermot Early and John McEntee were the key note speakers and both spoke passionately about their roles that with Club and Country presenting some of the challenges and issues within the coaching environment.

OCN Coaching Accredited Programmes provides the accreditation of programmes through an external agency has now been running for five years and present an option for a volunteer to gain an externally recognised qualification for their

work. Programmes at Level 3 in GAA Performance Coaching, GAA Team Management and Performance Analysis have been ongoing and plans to look at additional areas such as Athlete Development is ongoing.

GAA Level 2 Awards will in 2016 see the introduction of the mandatory coaching awards for counties and clubs. All county based squads from fourteen to senior require an Award 2 coach. Where this is not in place counties are encouraged to access the Assimilation process for experienced coaches or set up a level 2 course in their county. Thanks to Roger Keenan, who continues to drive the Coach Education Programmes embedding best practice and standards in games development throughout Ulster.

Within the context of Coaches and Managers Values there has been much debate about overtraining and burnout issues and the need to address fixtures and schedules. There may well be a case here, however, ultimately the load and burden on players comes down to the player, the coach and the appropriate manager of the teams. We all have to reflect on our values and beliefs as coaches and begin to put the welfare of the player at the centre of all decisions. Education programmes in anti-doping and concussion awareness are high on the priority list for 2016. There is also a need to move away from this focus on strength and conditioning to one of player development. A focus on the skills and the development of game sense and decision making both required to play our games. The welfare of our officials our coaches and our managers as well as club and county volunteers remains a priority. As the bar and the prizes have been raised, the stress and pressure has risen in tandem and as an Association we have a duty of care to create a safe and secure environment for everyone to allow them to be involved in our games at an acceptable and appropriate level.

We acknowledge the outstanding work being undertaken by our Coaching and Games Development Committee. They do a remarkable amount of work on our behalf. We appreciate the work

of Gerry Duffy, who as Chairperson of the Committee has given the level of leadership required for such an important aspect of our work. We also acknowledge the outstanding work of Eugene Young who continues to give effective leadership to the whole field of games development and we are indebted to him for his forward planning and vision in the area that has such a critical function for all our players and teams. We pay tribute to all the staff in Games Development for the work that they do.

ULSTER HURLING DEVELOPMENT

The past year has seen a lot of work going in to the development of hurling in the province with considerable progress made in many areas yet regression in others. Quite often the development of hurling sees 'two steps forward then three steps back' but the fight goes on to ensure that our national game continues to grow within our province.

The expansion of the Táin Hurling League in 2014 proved to be challenging and in 2015 the withdrawal of the Derry clubs led to that league being reduced to three divisions with 24 clubs participating. The further withdrawal of a number of clubs during the season led to 78% of the scheduled games being played. The scheduling of games during the spring and summer months has proved to be a big success and this will be repeated in future years. However the day when the best clubs in Ulster will be competing against each other in a league format is still a long way off.

Our province was once again honoured to host the annual Féile na nGael event in June, our Vice President, Michael Hasson, and his dedicated organising committee worked tirelessly to deliver a very successful event involving 104 hurling and 84 camogie clubs. In total 254 hurling, 204 camogie and 61 handball games were played over the weekend. Ulster GAA is grateful for all the assistance received from County Boards and clubs throughout the province in making this event such a huge success.

The deployment of six Regional Hurling Development Officers continues to contribute significantly to the development of hurling in each county. Those staff have now been allocated up to 20 clubs to develop and they will carry out a needs analysis for each club before delivering a number of interventions to assist the club in developing hurling in their local area. Examples of the level of support available includes club coaching, developing links between the club and local schools, coach education, organising new games opportunities through go games blitzes and delivery of coaching courses. Over the year many activities have been organised and in some areas where the game is struggling, school based games have attracted many new players to the game, for example regional indoor events that saw 7,973 participants involved in 25 events across the province. However the next challenge is to stimulate interest in developing new clubs to cater for the children that want to play the game.

Throughout the year Ulster staff have worked to deliver academy squad competitive opportunities at U.14 and U.16 levels. However it is disappointing to see that in some cases counties cannot field teams for the events and indeed one county failed to play in a single academy squad event in 2015. This is cause for concern for the future of the game in that county. Counties travelled to play in the National Blitz Day, at the end of August to various locations throughout the county and indeed they competed well with their peers.

The best players at under 16 level once again were treated to the experience of the annual camp at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown. The advent of a new sponsor led to the camp being rebranded as the 3fivetwo Group Ulster GAA Player Academy 2015.

The annual Players Academy involved 45 young hurlers from across the province. During the two day camp the players were exposed to an intensive training and development programme. The squad then participated in a number of training sessions before

selection of two teams to play in the annual challenge games against Galway and Connacht, which took place in Garvaghey, County Tyrone.

The Ulster Poc Fada took place over Hen Mountain in the Mourne's and we are grateful to the Clonduff Club and Chontae an Dún for their support in delivering an excellent event. Despite highlighting that not all our counties embraced the national guidelines last year, it was once again disappointing to see that some counties are still not meeting their obligations in relation to the organisation of a county event in Poc Fada.

Following the success of the Tri County League Monaghan formed their own U.16 competition in 2015, which led to the event only being played at U.14. This has been a very successful project for Cavan, Fermanagh and Monaghan and the time is now right for those counties to organise the event for themselves and so complete the development of the project.

The Coaches Academy has been organised jointly with Gaelic Football and Ladies Football and has led to the development of a number of coaches, who in future years will commit their time and effort into developing academy and county squads. The qualification at Award Two level of these coaches is seen as a major advancement in meeting National targets for coach education. With the time fast approaching for counties to have Award Two qualified coaches in their management teams the work in this area will prove to be invaluable to our counties into the future.

GAEILGE AGUS OIÐHREACHTA

The work of this Coiste continues to expand and their work is fully supported by the GAA in Ulster. The Cursai de Faoite was an outstanding example of how our Language and its related heritage are in need of our support and encouragement. We need to see our language vibrant and community centred. To this end, Cursai de Faoite has reinvigorated everyone involved and will contribute to ensuring that the language of the



millennia will contribute to the future of Ireland and her Diaspora.

Gaeilge sa gClub is a programme organised by the Ulster University. It has been very successful to date and we are fully supporting this initiative. It is simple, those supported by us must use their skills in the development of our language within their own Club. This has helped develop and strengthen the Celtic Studies Department of the University and has seen engagement with the East Belfast Mission. This in turn led to Linda Ervine attending our Course in the Downings. Linda addressed the attendees on her support for the Irish Language for which she was afforded a standing ovation. This demonstrates that all aspects of our work are integral and all contribute to the whole.

We appreciate the work of Coiste Gaeilge agus Oidhreachta and the various workgroups associated with its work. The active members make a vital contribution to the greater good of the GAA. We are well served by Pádraig

O' Connacháin as Cathaoirleach of the Committee and we are indebted to him for all his help and advice to Comhairle Uladh.

CULTURE AND SCÓR

The ongoing work by our units through the cultural development of our music, song, dance and drama has contributed to a very successful sequence of Scór na nÓg and Scór competitions. It is well supported by our Clubs and members and the semi finals and finals. There is an ongoing need for all our Clubs to ensure that Scór is an integral part of their Club's activity and that it is primarily organised for enjoyment and wider involvement. It is an important element in adhering to the aims and ideals of our identity and our Association. Ulster had two winners at the All-Ireland Scór Final and we congratulate St. Monina GAC, Killeavey and St. Mary's GAC, Aghagallon on being All-Ireland Champions in Set Dancing and Ballad Group respectfully.

We acknowledge the work of Eamonn MacMathuna who has been totally

committed to the work on behalf of Scór over a long period. He has been ably assisted by Ailís Nic an tSaoi who has also contributed greatly to the development of Scór. They in conjunction with the members of Coiste Scór provide enthusiastic leadership and an efficient delivery of our Ulster competitions and for which we are very grateful. Damian Kelly and Geraldine provide the appropriate support to the work of Coiste Scór for which we acknowledge and appreciate.

ASSOCIATION ISSUES

The GAA being an Association of constituent units has at its core the strength of democracy to ensure that the greater good prevails within our Rules and the decision making process. There has been much discussion on the fixtures we organise, the period within which we play them and the multiplicity of engagements of our players at the various levels and teams. This has implications for the wellbeing of our players and we need to address the issues that are apparent to all. We need a preseason to sort out

players and teams. A playing season that needs to deliver a programme of games that ensures all aspects are provided for and we need to reduce the training requirement relative to games played. There has been much discussion on the calendar year in the context of addressing the overall problems. I believe that the calendar year of fixtures can be scheduled provided that everyone adheres to the discipline of the listed dates. The Ulster Council have been criticised for taking too long for the playing of our Championships but in nine weeks, our Counties complete the Senior Hurling and Football Championships, the Minor Championships, the Ring, Rackard and Meagher Cups plus a substantial part of the All Ireland Qualifiers in hurling and football. A more concise playing season can be agreed but it should not be to the detriment of structures and above all standards.

We are part of the wider development of the Association be it physical or games related. The ongoing engagement with the various officers has been maintained, strengthened and expanded. The working relationships between our Council and our Counties has been very good and the engagement between our Officers and their respective County Counterpart have continued to be developed. We acknowledge the work of the Chairpersons, Secretaries, Treasurers and Games Development Managers and thank them for their cordial and business like approach to the affairs of the GAA.

We have ongoing working arrangements between our staff at Comhairle Uladh with those at National level which has been very good with one or two exceptions. Likewise, there are similar arrangements in place between our Council and our Counties and all the constituent units for which we are grateful. We thank all the staff at National Level for their help, cooperation and guidance we would particularly like to acknowledge the assistance of Pat Daly, Peter McKenna for their work and input. We also thank Patrick Doherty and Fergal McGill for

their assistance in their specific sphere of operation.

Paraic Ó Dufaigh, our Ard Stiurthoir has been a tremendous support to the Association and has provided forthright and clear leadership to the GAA. We in Ulster are particularly grateful for his support and advice on a myriad of matters that arise from time to time throughout the course of the year. We too are very proud of the work of Aogan Ó Fearghail, Uachtarán Cumann Luthchleas and we see again the dedication and commitment of Aogan to the aims and ideals of our Association and he too has also provided leadership to the GAA membership at home and within the Irish Diaspora abroad. We thank Paraic and Aogan for the work they do on our behalf.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND MARKETING

In 2015 our social media channels have affirmed their position as the single most critical platform in terms of promoting our games and events, influencing public and media narrative on key organisational messaging, increasing our brand awareness, enhancing reputation and credibility, and also creating additional sales and marketing opportunities. The reach of our social media channels is very impressive, with 45k and 27.7k followers on our official Twitter and Facebook channels respectively, and the effectiveness of our social media strategy was particularly evident this summer where we achieved over 10 million social media impressions during the three months of the Ulster GAA Championship, at absolutely no additional cost at the point of delivery. We continue to lead the way within the GAA in terms of embracing the latest technologies and opportunities to enhance our communications and marketing operations.

The statistics for visitors and behaviours on our website remain fairly consistent, with over 720,000 page views in 2015, equating to approximately 60,000 page views per month. However, due to a robust

social media campaign for the Ulster Championship, we were able to increase our website traffic by 133% against the same period in 2014. In relation to the devices used to browse our site, the trend continues to shift towards mobile users, with 55% of the entire traffic in 2015 coming from smart-phone or tablet devices, so this is critical in relation to ensuring our content and structure is responsive and user-friendly. In an increasingly digital focused age, it is critical that we continue to invest in our website to ensure that we have a strong online presence to promote our various games and activities, and also as a resource to support our volunteers.

We are delighted that Armagh GAA recently came on board to join Tyrone, Donegal, Fermanagh and Monaghan as well as five Clubs and Queens GAA, as part of our 'Club & County' website network. The project, established in conjunction with Lairdesign, has seen us develop a Wordpress based website template designed on the main Ulster GAA site. All the websites feature the latest technology, a mobile responsive design, and feeds from the Servasport GAA fixtures and results system. The structure of the system means that we now have the opportunity to feed key messaging information throughout all sites on the network, and also provide County specific branding and information for games relating to the particular Counties. The Club and County project was very successful in marketing our games in 2015 and will be a crucial element of our future communications and ticket sales strategies. Ulster GAA and Lairdesign have invested heavily in this system to date, and it is hoped to roll this out publicly in early 2016 for all clubs wishing to obtain high-quality bespoke GAA websites at a reasonable cost. This is a flagship project for Ulster GAA moving forward and will be the central pillar in our overall plan to secure control over our own information channels and public narrative.

One of the major successes of 2015 was the 'Buy Early and Save' campaign during the Ulster Championship, which

encouraged the advance purchasing of match tickets. These reduced priced tickets were available to purchase via our Clubs/Counties, online and in store, and were promoted with a robust marketing campaign via our social media channels the Club & County website network. This campaign was very successful and resulted in 69.7% of total sales coming from advance sales, this is a massive and welcome shift in our purchasing culture. Going forward, we should strive to build on this change in purchasing culture by reinforcing the cost savings and backing this up with County specific marketing.

This Committee are innovative, motivated and focused on what we, as an Association, need to do to keep our GAA brand readily identified and continually refreshed. Information Technology is now firmly established as the main communication facility we use in many aspects of our daily written communications within the Association, the media and the general public. We acknowledge the excellent work of the Committee and its related Workgroups. Sean Ó Conghaile has given leadership to the work that has been undertaken. We also appreciate the work of Damian Kelly in advancing our IT, Website and the functionality of our systems.

MEDIA

The media is a significant part of our interaction with the public. We deal with them across all elements of our Association's affairs. Most times we work closely with them. The work that the media do is important to us. We only require fair treatment and on the wide spectrum of matters from games and related items to news and public affairs this has been the case. However, the sensational reporting of evidence being given to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee linking the GAA to events at Hillsborough were inaccurate, unfair and offensive and totally lacking in research. In general we have a good working relationship with the media and we do appreciate the input of the written, visual, spoken and photographic coverage of our games

and other related matters but we will challenge those that do not operate fair reporting procedures.

We pay tribute to the journalists, photographers, radio and television personnel for bringing the excitement around the build up to our games, reporting on the events and on occasions and recording for posterity our great occasions and events. Our thanks are due to Sean Ó Conghaile for his work as our Public Relations Officer. He has assisted me in many ways and always represents the Association in the very best traditions of the Ulster Council. Our thanks are also due to Stephen Donnelly, Damian Kelly, Ryan Feeney and Sharon Haughey – Grimley for their work in dealing with the media on a daily basis and also for their ongoing support to our Council in this area of our engagement with our members, supporters, the public and all aspects of the media.

COMHBHRÓN

Once again this year has witnessed many bereavements that have impacted on many of our members and friends. The death of Malachy Mahon robbed us all of an outstanding leader for all matters pertaining to our Association. We offer our sympathy to his family, Club and the GAA in Fermanagh on the passing of another great administrator. Monaghan too lost two former Chairmen who had given courageous leadership to the GAA. The deaths of Peter Sherry and Aidan Quigley demonstrated the total dedication of those who represent the true ethos of our volunteer Officers. Vincie Savage died after a lifetime of service to his Club, County and the Association as an administrator and steward. Death is no respecter of age and we bade farewell to Shane Mulholland and Aaron Devlin who are measured by how they lived rather than the length of day. We extend our sympathy to everyone who suffered bereavement and particular to the family and friends of those who died within the past year. There have been many occasions where we have felt the sense of loss most acutely as we attended funerals and wakes to show

our solidarity with the family of the deceased who were all well known to the GAA family.

The Sacrifice of the Mass will be offered for all the deceased members of our Association in The Main Administration Building, at Owenbeg 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

Today we are at a critical point in the history of the GAA. We need to remember that there are four vital aspects of what we are about. Families are still the centre of our organisation and that is encompassed within the theme of 'the whole family for the whole life'. Facilities are central to our future and again this year we are being hosted by a wonderful facility controlled by the County Committee. Finance is important insofar as we have to pay our way now and into the future. Fixtures are the current centre of discussion and are important to the overall stability of the Association. We need a preseason, competitive season and a post season. Many stresses are apparent but the real issue is, have we the necessary discipline to adhere to our own decisions? If we do, then everything is possible and a bright future awaits the GAA.

Is mise, le meas,



DÓNALL Ó MURCHÚ
Rúnaí