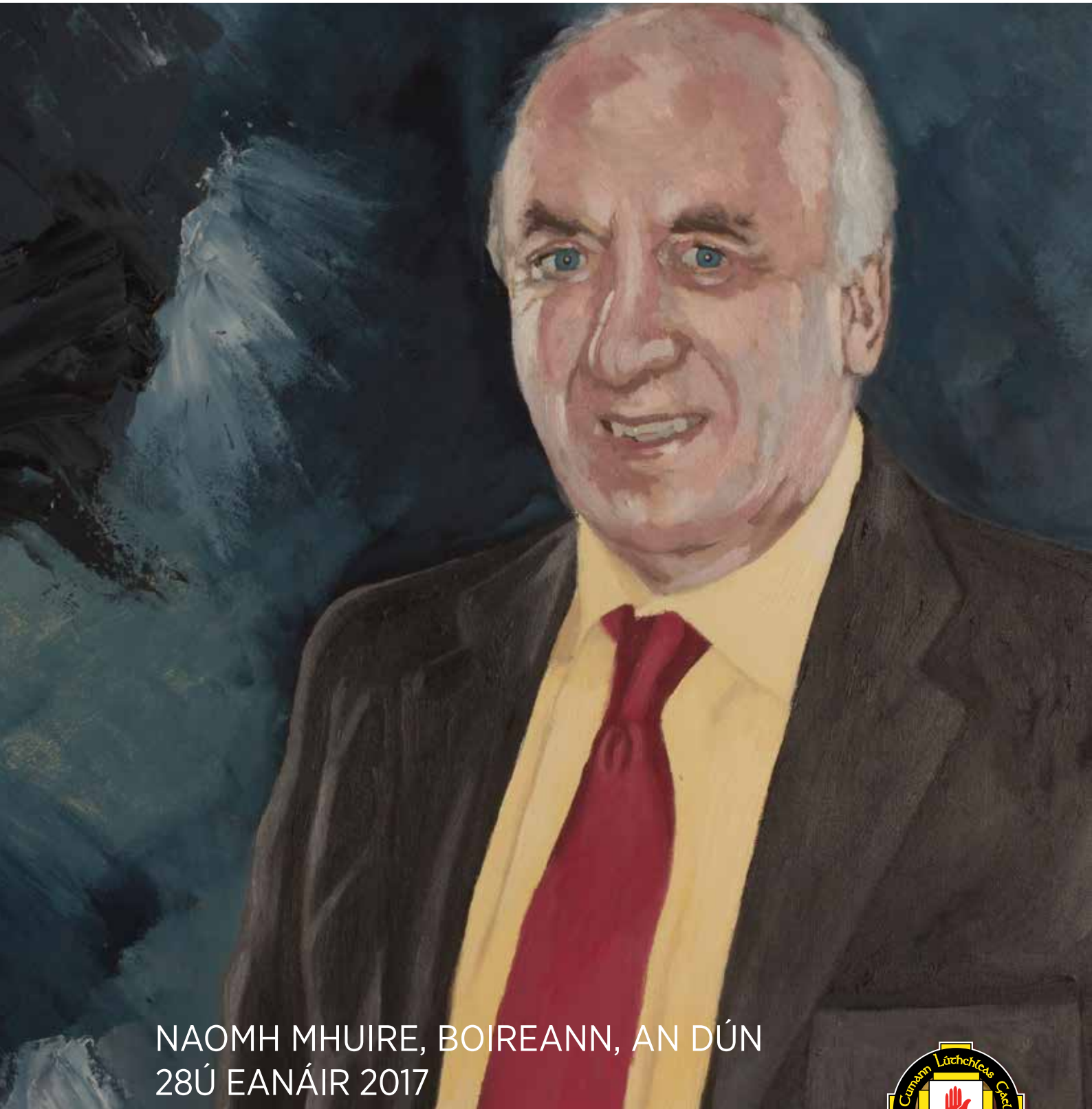


# CLG ULADH

An Chomhdháil Bhliantúil 2017



NAOMH MHUIRE, BOIREANN, AN DÚN  
28Ú Eanáir 2017

CLUICHÍ | CULTÚR | TEANGA



# 05 // Tuarascáil an Rúnaí

## A chairde,

**For generation after generation the innate strength of the GAA has been its ability to attract and secure the devotion and respect of people to selflessly give of their time through a sense of loyalty to club and community.**

From its formative times the GAA ideal was to have a club in every parish and the greatest decision ever taken by GAA administrators was to place the club, the basic unit of the Association, at the heart of the local community. Basing the GAA club on the local parish has sustained the Association since its inception and explains its great strength, particularly in rural Ireland.

The GAA today is a modern, vibrant organisation that has grown immensely since its turbulent early years. It is a confident organisation that has a presence across the globe and which makes a telling and powerful contribution to the lives of the Irish diaspora.

That said, events of 2016 have cast an uncertainty which has the potential to impact on our affairs going forward. The impact of Brexit has yet to be realised but one thing is certain – Ulster will be affected more than any other province and it is important that the GAA voice, with its all island structures, is heard during the ‘negotiation’ period. Meanwhile the Trump Presidency could have repercussions for the ‘undocumented’ Irish in the USA, many of whom find great solace and support from their involvement with the GAA.

Just last month I was honoured and privileged to become the eleventh Rúnaí of Comhairle Uladh. Since its

foundation in 1903 the Ulster Council has made an indelible mark on GAA history and I look forward to working with so many talented individuals across the Ulster GAA family as we strive to build on the wonderful and unique ethos of the Association.

Big challenges lie ahead but, as we have always done, we will meet them head-on and at all times ensure that the best interests of the GAA in Ulster are protected. Ulster GAA, with its great clubs, schools and counties, is very relevant in Irish society and makes a positive contribution far and beyond the playing fields and I am committed to ensuring that Ulster GAA will continue to be the progressive and respected organisation that it is today.

## Dónall Ó Murchú

**“If a man hasn’t discovered something to die for, he isn’t fit to live”**

The year 2016 will always be remembered by the Gaels of Ulster for the death of our esteemed Rúnaí Dónall Ó Murchú. Dr. Danny Murphy served the GAA in many capacities at club, county, provincial and national levels, but most people came to know Danny through his involvement with Comhairle Uladh. He served on the Council for almost 35 years, first as a Down delegate and then as Cisteoir, Leas Uachtaráin, Uachtaráin and Rúnaí. Between 1997 and 2001 Danny was Acting Rúnaí before his appointment became permanent and for three years he served as Acting Rúnaí and President at the same time – who other than Danny could have managed to combine such challenging roles?

On 1 August Danny announced that he was standing down, though it was his intention to remain in post until 1 February 2017. I formally took up post

on 5 December 2016 and was looking forward to working alongside Danny for two months during my ‘bedding in’ period. Alas, this was not to be as nature took its course and on the morning of 7 December Danny sadly departed this world.

Danny was many things but above all he was a man of great compassion, devotion and understanding. He accomplished so much in his 67 years and left this world as he entered it – a friend of all. He was, as the saying goes, ‘some man for one man.’ In recent years Danny fought his illness with great bravery and courage and indeed his strength and steely determination undoubtedly carried him through some difficult periods during this time. He remained steadfast to the end and despite his failing health undertook engagements to the end. On 25 November he was honoured with the South Down GAA Hall of Fame and two days later attended the Ulster Club Football final in Armagh. Ten days later he left us for the last time.

In an inspirational tribute at his funeral, GAA President Aogán O Fearghail said that; ‘The Mourne mountains are made of granite and Danny was made of the same stuff.’ A man of wisdom, integrity and strength, Danny was a great Irishman and he had a wonderful love of all things Irish. He lived this to his death – how fitting are the words above of his great icon Martin Luther King!

Danny enriched the lives of those among us who were privileged to know him and his contribution to GAA life, particularly in Ulster, has been immense. Ulster GAA today is an organisation that makes a real and lasting impact into the lives of so many and has spread its wings reaching

TUARASCÁIL AN RÚNAÍ

## “IF A MAN HASN'T DISCOVERED SOMETHING TO DIE FOR, HE ISN'T FIT TO LIVE”

communities that could be described in GAA terms as being 'non traditional'. It is a very different Ulster GAA than that which Danny inherited when he became Rúnaí Comhairle Uladh and the expansive portfolio of activity is in many ways his legacy. His Honorary degree from Ulster University and his recognition at the highest levels of government, including a reception hosted by First Minister Arlene Foster and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, are testament to Danny's ground breaking work and the esteem in which he was held – he did indeed serve Ulster well.

I knew Danny from childhood – we were in fact related – and I'll miss his friendship, advice and wise counsel.

We had many great times together, not least in 1991 when as Cathaoirleach and Rúnaí of Coiste Chontae An Duin we had the honour of welcoming 'Sam Maguire' back to the Mournes after a 23 year absence. Our time together at Ulster GAA was all too short but I know Danny took comfort in his final days that the process to find his successor had been completed. I hope and trust that I will not disappoint him.

Danny's wake and funeral was a fitting testimony to his brilliant life and I wish to place on record my sincere thanks and gratitude to my colleagues at Ulster GAA, the Down County Committee, Fr. Charlie Byrne PP, the PSNI and in particular St. Mary's GAC, Burren for their co-operation, efforts

and support in ensuring that a difficult logistical operation ran smoothly from start to finish. Above all I thank and commend the Murphy family for their dignity throughout and their unstinting support for the 'GAA family' during this time.

Throughout his lifetime of involvement with the GAA Danny received the total support of his family and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude. I also thank all others, too numerous to mention, who made such a telling contribution for an occasion from which we can take great pride, even though it was tinged with great sadness.

**Sleep well dear friend!**



## 05

**CONVENTION IN BURREN**

In January 1990 I was elected as Down GAA County Secretary and later that month the Ulster GAA Convention was held at my beloved St. Mary's GAA Club in Burren. Twenty seven years later history is repeating itself as the Ulster Convention returns to Burren.

Today's venue was chosen long before I took office as Rúnaí Comhairle Uladh and would have marked the final farewell of Danny Murphy's tenure on the Council. But while Danny may not be here with us today he is all around us and it is truly fitting that we are gathered in Burren today to not only review the past year but also to remember Danny and his achievements.

Just a few short months ago the people of Burren and further afield – some of who are here today – gathered in this very same room to witness Danny being bestowed with the accolade of Honorary Life President of Burren GAA Club with the ceremony being preceded by a beautiful mass of thanksgiving at St. Mary's Church. It was an honour that Danny richly cherished and one that he valued highly in his long list of commendations.

How fitting it was that this was Down's year to host the Ulster Convention and how fitting that the Down County Committee chose Burren as the venue. Yes, it would have been lovely to have had Danny here for his final Ulster Convention and to have the formal passing of the baton of Rúnaí from one Burren man to another; from one Down man to another; from one Ulster man to another, but Danny will be looking down on us – and there will no doubt be times when we will imagine him intervening on some issue or other!

**FINANCE**

Our Championship attendances were up in 2016 on the previous year from 142, 691 to 172, 693 but this was largely due to the fact that both Senior Football Championship semi-finals necessitated replays. While accepting that these are challenging and uncertain times economically, our games remain attractive and at this stage it is important to acknowledge and thank all our patrons and supporters who continue to turn out in all-weather to attend our games.

The income of Comhairle Uladh amounted to €6,255,602 inclusive of all grants. Our gate income, €1,983,844 represented 32% of this compared to 26% of the total income in 2015. In 2016 our grant income, €1,145,378, represents 18% of our total in comparison to 23% in 2015. The expenditure amounted to €5,985,335 which led to an operating surplus of €270,267. In addition, the investment in Grounds and Infrastructure of €113,850 and currency exchange loss on the Casement Park Project of €596,164 led to a total deficit for the year of €439,747. This deficit was transferred to our accumulated funds. 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 DfC and Ard Comhairle in respect of the Casement Park Project.

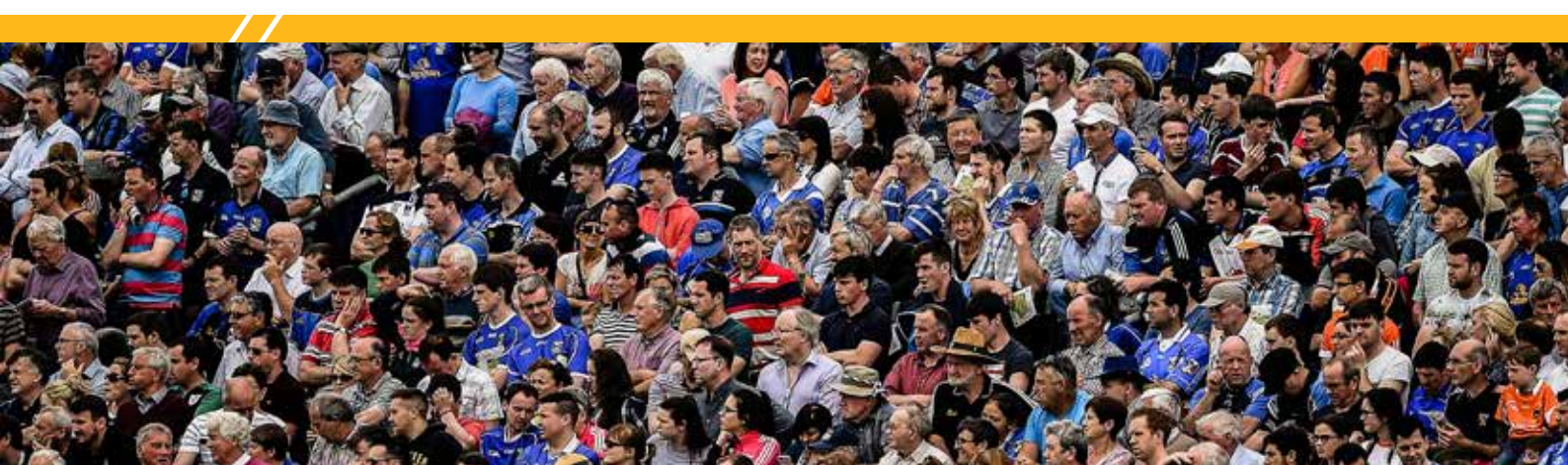
The Marketing of our games has been very substantially maintained and this in turn has seen a continued increase in online sales of tickets for games ensuring that those attending our games can pre - purchase tickets either through our units or via tickets.ie or through sponsors outlets. This is a welcome development though it must be accepted that the vast majority of our members prefer the more

traditional methods of obtaining match tickets. 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.

Our team of stewards from the Counties, the team officials and members of Comhairle Uladh have been of great assistance in organising a very substantial games programme and without their continuing efforts we would be unable to maintain major input into all aspects of the games programme. I acknowledge the dedication and commitment of all who have given so generously of their time 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 work on match days. No words can adequately convey the appreciation that these people deserve.

An Cisteoir, Ciarán Mac Lochlainn is a tremendously committed person who has rendered great work to the Council throughout the year and on many fronts. We are very grateful to him for his exemplary work on our behalf. The vital work of Michelle McAleer, our Head of Business and Finance has also been outstanding and her contribution to our work has been beyond the call of duty. Paul Sanders plays a vital role within the Finance team and his knowledge and understanding of control mechanisms and legal requirements are vital to the workings of Ulster GAA. Rose Treanor plays an important role in relation to match ticketing and makes a telling contribution to overall governance procedures within the organisation, while Rúairí Cunningham has recently joined the team.





## PROVINCIAL COMPETITIONS

In 2016, the Anglo Celt Cup was reclaimed by Tír Eoghain after a six year lapse while Aontroim again won the Liam Harvey Cup. The Ulster Club Championships continue to enthuse our players and spectators. Slaughtneil became the first Derry club to win the Ulster Hurling Club title as they defeated Loughgiel in a great final at the Athletic Grounds. Remarkably, the same club collected the Seamus McFerran Cup as they edged out Kilcoo in the football final at the Athletic Grounds in front of over 9,000 spectators. This is an unbelievable achievement for the Derry club and the fact that their camogs also won the provincial title ensures that 2016 will forever be remembered by the Robert Emmet's.

Both club finals were played as double headers illustrating the great strides that have been made in integration and working with key stakeholders throughout the province. The Ulster Hurling Club Final was played with the Ulster Camogie Final while the Ulster Football Club Final was played with the Ulster Schools' Rannafast Cup Final.

2016 saw the fifth year of the Tain Adult Club Hurling League. This initiative saw a total of 25 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. Carrickmore Eire Og (Tír Eoghain), Liatroim (An Dún) and Naomh Monnine (An Lú) emerged as the Division 1, 2 and 3 winners respectively. With regard to the Ulster Football Club League, 2016

saw a total of 32 clubs involved, with 10 teams in senior and 22 teams in intermediate. Glenullin (Doire) and Loughmacrory (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. Tír Eoghain defeated An Cabhán in the Division 2 decider, while Aontroim lost out to An Lú in the Division 4 Final. Congratulations to Tír Eoghain while An Cabhán and Aontroim will be comforted by the fact that they gained promotion and will start 2017 in a higher division. With regards to hurling, we had representation in the Ring and Rackard Finals. In the Christy Ring Final, An Mhí were deemed to have won by a point but the referees report showed that it was actually a draw and CCCC ordered a replay. Ironically, at the second time of asking An Mhí defeated Aontroim by a point in a fantastic game on a 4-21 to 5-17 scoreline and therefore, claiming the Christy Ring Cup and entry into the 2017 All Ireland Qualifiers. In the Nicky Rackard Final there was also disappointment for Ulster as Ard Mhacha were defeated 2-16 to 1-15 by Maigh Eo.

In our first competition of the year, the Dr McKenna Cup, Tír Eoghain again collected the title by defeating Doire by 1-22 to 1-17 after extra time at another well attended final at the Athletic Grounds. I also extend

my gratitude to Bank of Ireland for their continued sponsorship of this important competition in the Ulster GAA calendar.

## SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2016 Ulster Senior Football Championship commenced at Brewster Park on Sunday 15th May, where Fear Manach defeated Aontroim by 1-12 to 0-09. Seven days later, in Celtic Park, a goal burst at the end of the first half saw Tír Eoghain comfortably see off their Doire neighbours by 3-14 to 0-12. The following Sunday, An Cabhán saw off Ard Mhacha by 2-16 to 0-14 at Kingspan Breffni Park to progress to the quarter final stage.

This trend continued the following weekend as Muineachán demolished An Dún 2-22 to 0-09. In the last Ulster Senior Football Championship quarter final at the Athletic Grounds, Dún na nGall produced a brilliant second half showing as they defeated a spirited Fear Manach side on a 2-12 to 0-11 scoreline at Pairc MacCumhaill.

In the first semi final, the Ulster Championship sprung to life with An Cabhán bagging a last minute goal to earn a 3-07 to 0-16 draw against Tír Eoghain at St Tiernach's Park. The following Saturday night in Kingspan Breffni Park, Dún na nGall and Muineachán also played out a thrilling 1-11 to 0-14 draw.

The following weekend at the same venue, Dún na nGall progressed via a 0-17 to 2-10 scoreline in a thoroughly absorbing encounter. The following day, Tír Eoghain eased to a 5-18 to 2-17 victory over the Breffni men.





The Ulster Final took place two weeks later where Dún na nGall and Tír Eoghain met at St Tiernach's Park, Clones on Sunday 19th July. Over 32,000 spectators attended the Final on a day when the Ulster Senior Football Champions from 25 years previous, An Dún were honoured alongside the Tír Eoghain side of 1956 who claimed the county's first ever Anglo Celt Cup sixty years ago.

With the inclusion of honouring the successful teams from the past, Cumann na mBunscoil 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 minute.

Tír Eoghain however displayed a greater cutting edge at the death and helped by two wonder scores from Sean Cavanagh and Peter Harte emerged as 0-13 to 0-11 champions in an intriguing encounter. The scenes of jubilation at the final whistle from a county who had retained the Ulster Championship after a six-year gap were memorable and congratulations go to Tír Eoghain for a well deserved success.

The 2017 Ulster Senior Football Championship will be played over a shortened period with the Preliminary Round and the first Quarter Final taking place over the weekend of 20th / 21st May. This is a departure from a long standing tradition in the province and moving forward this is an area which I feel has potential for further streamlining and every week gained for club activity at this time of the year can only be beneficial for our clubs.

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## 05

**ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP**

The All-Ireland Senior Football Championship for Ulster representatives began on 18th June with both Ard Mhacha and Doire involved. The Oak Leaf County had a good 1-18 to 2-10 victory over An Lú at Owenbeg. Ard Mhacha travelled to Portlaoise where they were beaten by three points. However, it later emerged that Laois used more than their quota of substitutes during the game and the match was subsequently replayed. However, the outcome was the same with Laois prevailing on a 1-11 to 1-10 scoreline on 2nd July.

On 25th June, three of our counties were in action. Fear Manach travelled to Wexford and came away with a good 0-19 to 1-11 win. It took extra time to separate An Dún and Longfort and it was the Leinster side that edged it by 2-24 to 3-17 at Pairc Esler. Aontroim also exited the All Ireland Qualifiers as they lost out to Luimneach at Corrigán Park by 2-06 to 0-09.

On July 9th, four Ulster counties were involved with two of them unfortunately exiting the championship. Fear Manach, after a tremendous first half performance, were unlucky to lose out to a strong finishing burst from Maigh Eo in a 2-14 to 1-12 defeat in Castlebar. On the same evening, Muineachán were surprisingly beaten in Clones by Longfort on a 2-13 to 1-13 scoreline. On a brighter note, An Cabhán and Doire progressed at the expense of Ceatharleach and An Mhí.

In the all Ulster clash on 16th July, Doire edged out An Cabhán by 1-17 to 0-18 at Kingspan Breffni Park. They returned there one week later, only to lose out this time to Tiobraid Arann by 1-21 to 2-17 in a brilliant game of

football. In the last 12, beaten Ulster finalists Dún na nGall kicked 21 points in Croke Park to defeat Corcaigh. However, the following weekend in the All Ireland Quarter Finals back at headquarters a late Paul Mannion goal saw a gallant Dún na nGall fall to Áth Cliath by 1-15 to 1-10. The same afternoon saw the Ulster involvement end as Maigh Eo overcame Tír Eoghain by 0-13 to 0-12 in a tight affair. In relation to the 2016 GAA / GPA All Stars, I extend my congratulations to the three Ulster recipients, namely Ryan McHugh (Dún na nGall), Mattie Donnelly (Tír Eoghain) and Peter Harte (Tír Eoghain). I also commend all the recipients from our province that 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 2016 again produced another great competition. 2017 will see the final year of the Under 18 Competition but it is hoped that the Under 17 equivalent can be accommodated as per the current arrangement in this province. In the Preliminary Round, we were treated to a goal feast at Brewster Park as Aontroim beat Fear Manach by 4-10 to 2-12. In the quarter finals, there were wins for Doire, Ard Mhacha, Dún na nGall and Muineachán. In the semi-finals, Doire beat Ard Mhacha by 1-14 to 0-14 after extra time in Clones while Dún na nGall beat Muineachán by 3-15 to 2-12 in a cracking game in Kingspan Breffni Park.

The final meeting brought together Doire and Dún na nGall in a game which Dún na nGall controlled for long periods and won out by 2-10 to

1-11 to collect the Fr Murray Cup. I congratulate Dún na nGall on a well deserved success.

In the All Ireland Quarter Finals, there were contrasting fortunes for our two representatives. Doire were beaten by the eventual champions, Ciarraí on a scoreline of 1-24 to 2-10 at Croke Park. Two goals were the difference as Dún na nGall defeated Corcaigh the previous day. On 21st August, Dún na nGall lost out to Gaillimh by 2-12 to 1-11. 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 2018 this competition will become an Under 20 grade and it is important that the competition retains its current place in the GAA calendar schedule.

In the Preliminary Round on Wednesday 9th March, Doire defeated Aontroim by 0-16 to 0-11 at Celtic Park. On Wednesday 16th March, the four quarter finals took place and there were wins for Tír Eoghain, Dún na nGall, Muineachán and Ard Mhacha. In the semi finals, Tír Eoghain defeated Dún na nGall at Celtic Park and Muineachán beat Ard Mhacha at Pairc Esler.

The following week, Muineachán and Tír Eoghain played out an enthralling encounter in front of a large crowd at the Athletic Grounds in Armagh.

## THE 2016 ULSTER SENIOR HURLING FINAL WAS PLAYED AT OWENBEG ON 10TH JULY IN FRONT OF A REALLY GOOD CROWD AND THOSE IN ATTENDANCE WERE TREATED TO ANOTHER GREAT SPECTACLE OF INTER COUNTY HURLING.

Muineachán held on to win by 0-13 to 0-11 scoreline to secure their first Ulster Under 21 Football title since 1999. Congratulations to Muineachán on this historic achievement. In the All Ireland Semi Final, played in Tullamore, Corcaigh just held out to win on a 0-13 to 0-11 scoreline.

### 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, Kilcoo saw off the challenge from 2015 finalists Scotstown. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Killyclogher, Slaughtneil, Maghera and Kilcoo over Cargin, Derrygonnelly Harps, Ramor United and Glenswilly respectively.

At the Semi Final stage, Kilcoo showed their experience to outscore Maghera by 4-12 to 0-11 at Pairc Esler while in the other semi final at the Athletic Grounds, Slaughtneil did likewise as they defeated Killyclogher by 1-11 to 0-08. In the Final at the Athletic Grounds, Slaughtneil finished strongly against a well drilled Kilcoo side to claim their second title in three years, winning through on a final score of 0-12 to 0-09.

The 2016/17 All Ireland Senior Football Club Quarter Final pitted our champions, Slaughtneil against the British champions, St Kiernan's. Played on Sunday 11th December 2016, the Derry side ran out comfortable 2-11 to 0-05 winners in Greenford, London and will now play St Vincent's of Dublin in the All Ireland Semi Final in February.

The 2016 Ulster Senior Club Championship was a brilliant

competition which included a number of great games. The Intermediate and Junior Finals were played as a double header in Pairc Esler 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 2016 was no different. In the Preliminary Round, Bredagh defeated Burt at Letterkenny. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Castledawson, Pomeroy, Aghgallon and Donaghmoynne over Whitecross, Arva, Kinawley and Bredagh respectively. In the Semi Finals, we were treated to two brilliant encounters. Donaghmoynne came back from a seemingly impossible position to defeat Aghagallon by 2-14 to 3-10 while Pomeroy recovered from an early Castledawson blitz to win out by 1-16 to 2-11. In the Final, played at Pairc Esler, a tight first half left only three points in it at half time, but Pomeroy took control in the second half as they ran out convincing winners on a scoreline of 2-16 to 0-10.

In the Junior Football Championship, Tyrone winners Rock won their Preliminary Round game against Con Magees, Glenravel. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Blackhill, Downings, Newtownbutler and Rock over Clonmore, Magilligan, Drumgath and Cornafean respectively. In the Semi Finals, there were wins for Blackhill and Rock. The Junior Final was also played at Pairc Esler, and it required extra time to determine a winner as Rock claimed their third title at this level in this last decade on a 1-12 to 0-14 scoreline. Well done to all the club champions.

### 2015/16 ALL IRELAND CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

In a great game of football on 13th February 2016, Castlebar edged out Crossmaglen by 0-13 to 0-12 at

Kingspan Breffni Park in the All Ireland Senior Semi Final.

In the All Ireland Intermediate Club Championship on 24th January 2016, Loughinisland faced Hollymount Carramore and were beaten by 0-15 to 0-10 in the same venue. In the Junior grade, Rockcorry were also beaten at the Semi Final stage, on a 0-11 to 0-06 scoreline at Carrick on Shannon to end their involvement.

### SENIOR HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2016 Championship was a four county competition with the Shield including another four counties. An Cabhán did not field a senior team at any level in 2016.

In the Senior Hurling Championship Semi Finals played as a double header at the Athletic Grounds, Aontroim defeated Doire by 3-28 to 0-14 and Ard Mhacha beat An Dún by 4-12 to 0-17 on 19th June.

The 2016 Ulster Senior Hurling Final was played at Owenbeg on 10th July in front of a really good crowd and those in attendance were treated to another great spectacle of inter county hurling. Aontroim produced a late rally to retain the Liam Harvey Cup by virtue of a 6-21 to 4-14 victory over Ard Mhacha. Well done to all involved. The timing of this competition has been criticised and in 2017, the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship will be scheduled between the end of the Allianz Hurling League and the commencement of the Ring, Rackard and Meagher Cup competitions. While I will specifically deal with hurling in Ulster elsewhere in this report, it is hoped that this move will rejuvenate the Ulster Championship and counties should have the advantage of dealing with a full squad during this timeframe.





## 05

The two tier system saw the introduction of the Ulster Senior Hurling Shield involving Dún na nGall, Fear Manach, Muineachán and Tír Eoghain. Unfortunately, Tír Eoghain did not field for their semi final against Muineachán while Dún na nGall defeated Fear Manach by 3-18 to 3-14 at Brewster Park on 19th June. One week later, Dún na nGall won the Shield beating Muineachán by 5-13 to 2-14 at Brewster Park.

### ALL IRELAND HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

In the Christy Ring Cup, Aontroim, An Dún and Doire were Ulster's representatives. Doire had a really disappointing campaign and their relegation to the Rackard Cup was confirmed by a 1-21 to 1-14 to Maigh Eo at Ballinamore. An Dún were defeated by Aontroim at Loughgiel in a great game that ended 1-24 to 0-23. Aontroim faced An Mhí in the Christy Ring Cup Final, twice. On 4th June, the scoreline at the final whistle read 2-18 to 1-20 in favour of An Mhí, who were subsequently presented with the cup. However, the referee later clarified that this was incorrect and the final score was a draw.

The re-fixtured took place three weeks later, again in Croke Park and this time there was no doubt about the score, as Meath won a thrilling 4-21 to 5-17 encounter that required extra time. An unbelievable game of hurling, but an extremely disappointing end to Aontroim's season and they will again ply their trade in the Christy Ring Cup in 2017.

The Nicky Rackard Cup saw Ard Mhacha, Dún na nGall, Fear Manach, Muineachán and Tír Eoghain as the competitors from the province. Fear Manach and Muineachán were both eliminated by Dún na nGall who then

were beaten by Maigh Eo by 1-18 to 2-11 at Letterkenny. Tír Eoghain never reached the heights of 2015 and lost out by 4-17 to 3-16 to Longfort. In the final, it was heartbreak again for Ard Mhacha as Maigh Eo claimed the Nicky Rackard Cup on a 2-16 to 1-15 scoreline.

### MINOR HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Five counties competed in the Ulster Minor Hurling Championship in 2016. In the quarter final, Ard Mhacha defeated the shield winners, Dún na nGall by 3-14 to 3-07 at Middletown. In an extremely disappointing development Ard Mhacha then withdrew from the competition before their semi final clash with An Dún.

In the semi final played at Owenbeg, it took extra time to separate Aontroim and Doire. Aontroim eventually ran out 4-23 to 3-11 winners. A fortnight later, the final brought Aontroim and An Dún together, again at Owenbeg. An impressive all round display after another slow start by Aontroim saw them emerge victorious by 2-15 to 0-10. Well done to Aontroim. In the All Ireland Quarter Final, Aontroim were beaten by Gaillimh by 2-22 to 0-08 at Kingspan Breffni Park.

### 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 finish strongly to defeat An Dún by 1-21 to 1-18. The other game saw a comprehensive win for Doire over Ard Mhacha at Crossmaglen. In the final played at Loughgiel, Aontroim claimed another title winning out by 0-16 to 1-09. In the All Ireland Semi Final, Aontroim came up against Port Láirge at Thurles and were comprehensively beaten by the incoming All Ireland champions.

### ULSTER CLUB HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

In the Ulster Senior Club Championship, we were treated to some great encounters. In the quarter final, Middletown beat Lisbellaw by 2-16 to 2-10 at Crossmaglen. In the semi-finals, Slaughtneil beat Middletown while Loughgiel easily accounted for Ballygalget. The Ulster Final between Slaughtneil and Loughgiel was played as a double header with the Ulster Senior Camogie Final between the same two clubs and threw up a brilliant game of hurling. Slaughtneil were not to be denied on this occasion as they claimed an Ulster Senior Hurling Club title for the first time on a 2-14 to 1-13 scoreline. A tremendous success for the proud Derry club.

In the Intermediate Club Hurling Championship, St Brigid's, Cloughmills collected the title at Ballymena, following wins over Eire Og, Keady and Eoghan Rua, Coleraine. In the Junior Final, Lamh Dhearg edged out Mac Cumhailles by 0-16 to 0-13 in Owenbeg, in a game that was marred by violent scenes in the final minutes and which did little to enhance the reputation of the game of hurling in the province. 2015/16 All Ireland Club Hurling Championship

Ruairi Og Cushendall were Ulster's representatives in the All Ireland Senior Club Championship, having won the 2015 Ulster Club Championship. In the All Ireland Semi Final they met Sarsfields from Galway and playing some breathtaking hurling recorded a memorable 3-12 to 1-06 win at Navan. Unfortunately, on St Patrick's Day, the huge Ruairi Og contingent went home disappointed after an outstanding team display from Na Piarsaigh of Limerick saw the Munster champions claim the Tommy Moore Cup at Croke Park.

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After collecting the Ulster title last October, Kickhams Creggan represented Ulster in the All Ireland series. On 24th January they were beaten by Abbeyknockmoy at Navan by 1-13 to 0-09.

In the Junior grade, Eoghan Rua Coleraine defeated Sylane at Ballyshannon in the All Ireland Semi Final on 24th January to secure their place in Croke Park. Unfortunately, they were just edged out by Kilkenny side Glenmore by 2-08 to 0-12 but they had an eventful journey and have every reason to be proud of their season.

### INTER PROVINCIAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Inter Provincial Championships in both football and hurling remained on the games programme in 2016. Ulster are delighted that this was included in the fixture calendar in 2016 as we faced Munster in both semi finals on Sunday 11th December (having been postponed for a day due to the funeral of our esteemed Rúnaí Danny Murphy). I thank the CCCC and the other provinces for their understanding in accommodating our re-fixture request. The hurlers put in a great first half display but eventually lost out by 3-21 to 0-15 at Semple Stadium, Thurles against a very strong Munster side.

The football side played Munster in Parnell Park and a 2-7 scoring blitz before half time saw our lads emerge 3-17 to 1-15 winners. In the final six days later against Connacht, played at Pairc Mac Diarmada, Carrick on Shannon, Ulster recovered from conceding two early goals to reduce the deficit to two points at the break. A Charlie Vernon goal twenty minutes from time proved to be the key score of the game and Ulster proceeded to win through on a 2-16 to 3-10 scoreline and it was a proud captain Eoin

Donnelly who had the honour of being only the second Fermanagh man to raise aloft this famous trophy, as Ulster won the title for the 32nd time.

That he dedicated the victory to Danny Murphy, a proud exponent of the inter-provincial competition, was a fine and fitting gesture.

I wish to thank both Peter McGrath and Terence McNaughton and their respective management teams for their efforts in preparing both teams. The untimely death of Danny meant some last minute re-scheduling of fixtures and arrangements but the management teams and players took it in their stride and did Ulster proud by their performance.

I thank all the players who made themselves available for the inter-provincial Games and anyone who was present in Carrick on Shannon were left in no doubt of the importance of this competition for those players who wish to play in it. It was a highly competitive final played by two teams who clearly wanted the honour of winning an inter-provincial medal.

Much has been written about the worth and future viability of this competition. We must remember however we now live in a very different era from the halcyon days of the Railway Cup in the 1940's and 1950's when thousands flocked to Croke Park for the finals every St. Patrick's Day. These were the days of pre televised games and pre qualifiers and, apart from the train, modes of transportation were not what they are today.

But just like the railways, the inter-provincial competitions have declined in recent times but that in itself is not sufficient reason for discontinuing them. A proper place must be found

for the competition in the GAA calendar and while the crowds may not come as they once did and the TV stations may not wish to include it on their schedules, the competition has a long and cherished history and that should remain the case. It could be argued that the inter-provincial matches provided some of the best entertainment of the year, and as one Railway Cup winning captain recently said to me; 'How else would I have got the opportunity to play with such great footballers.' It's time to reclaim the competition; not to bury it!

### REFEREES

I wish to thank our match officials and thank all our referees for their time, commitment and involvement in the delivery of our games programme which included 328 games in 25 different competitions in 2016. Without referees, there are simply no games. All of our referees make themselves available and some at very short notice. On behalf of Ulster GAA I say thank you to all of our referees for their continued support.

It is unacceptable to verbally or physically abuse a referee and players and mentors, no matter how they feel about a decision, should always treat the referee like they would expect to be treated themselves. Equally, being a referee does not entitle one to a bagful of hubris and when dealing with players and officials they too should behave with courtesy, while not in any way compromising their authority.

Ulster GAA is well served by Stephen Donnelly who gives an outstanding service to Coiste Cheannais na Chomortaisi, our Counties, Referees, Clubs and to other fixture making bodies as required. His task is an onerous one but he undertakes his duties with the minimum of fuss and his hard work is greatly appreciated. I thank also the Referees Committee



## THE EXPLOITS OF THE SLAUGHTNEIL IN WINNING PROVINCIAL CLUB SENIOR TITLES IN FOOTBALL, HURLING AND CAMOGIE IS TRULY REMARKABLE AND NO WORDS OF MINE WILL EVER DO FULL JUSTICE TO THE HEROICS OF THIS GREAT GAA CLUB FROM SOUTH DERRY.

and in particular the work carried out by Chair Jim Murray and Secretary Jim O'Rourke in ensuring that our referees are provided with high levels of support and that our games are adequately covered with match officials.

### SLAUGHTNEIL

The exploits of the Slaughtneil Robert Emmet's Club in winning provincial club senior titles in football, hurling and Camogie is truly remarkable and no words of mine will ever do full justice to the heroics of this great GAA club from South Derry. So massive and unprecedented is their accomplishment that I believe that it is without question the greatest achievement ever by any club in a single year since the foundation of the Association over 130 years ago.

The Ulster Club hurling success was not only a first for Slaughtneil but a first for Derry and to follow this up with victories in Camogie and football left it a truly momentous year for the club.

There was however a tinge of sadness to the triumvirate of victories with the death of club stalwart Thomas Cassidy in the week of the hurling and Camogie finals (which were played as a double bill in Armagh). Thomas devoted his life to Slaughtneil and to hurling in particular and it was clear from the off that Loughgiel, even with all their experience of winning provincial titles, were going to have to produce something special to deny Slaughtneil. In the end the intensity of the Derry men's hurling won through and it was an emotional Chrissy McKaigue who devoted the club's inaugural win to his late mentor.

The spirit of the hurlers was also evident with the camogs earlier in

the day as Slaughtneil fought back to earn a replay and they were not to be denied at the second time of asking a week later. How fitting it was that Thomas's daughter Aoife, one of three Cassidy sisters on the team, should have been the team captain in a year that was truly historic for the club.

### ULSTER SCHOOLS

The amalgamation of Ulster Colleges and Ulster Vocational Schools into one entity is a positive development and one which will enhance even further the quality of competition that emanates from this sector. That said, the contribution of Ulster colleges and Ulster Vocational schools over many years should never be forgotten and they can take great pride in the legacy they have left behind and the tremendous contribution they have made to the furtherance of gaelic games.

With over 70 hurling and football competitions at secondary level – over 30 of which are completed during the first term – this is one of the growth sectors of the GAA in Ulster and no praise is too high for Jimmy Smyth, Seamus Woods and their hard working team. Indeed so great has the workload and volume of fixtures become that Ulster GAA have recruited Niall Muldoon to our Games Administration team to work alongside Stephen Donnelly and much of the schools portfolio will fall on his desk.

While the high profile competitions such as the MacRory Cup, Mageean Cup and Rannafast Cup understandably receive most of the profile, the contribution of lower division schools must be applauded. Gaelic Games are a relatively new addition to some schools and this is an area where potential for further growth exists as we endeavour to introduce

more young people to our sports. In congratulating all winners of Ulster Schools Competitions I believe that the recent success of Drumragh Integrated School in winning the Danske Bank JJ Reilly Cup is worthy of special mention, given the fact that it is the first time that an integrated school has won an Ulster Schools competition.

### ULSTER HURLING DEVELOPMENT

Hurling continues to provide a challenge throughout our Province. The drive to raise standards and to increase the number of games is ongoing and in 2016 it has seen many new challenges along with new initiatives to help improve the game. It is however sad to see the interest in the Ulster Championship decline due mainly to the fact that our counties participate in the Ring, Rackard and Meagher Cups, which they regard as their premier championships. Following a review it has been decided to re-schedule the Ulster Championship to a short window in the calendar between completion of the National Leagues and commencement of the aforementioned national competitions.

The Ulster Senior Hurling Championship may not have the same appeal as it had in the 1990's but is still the top hurling competition in the province and every effort must be made to preserve it and give it a status worthy of its name.

This is however only a start as I believe that hurling at inter-county level in the province is in need of dramatic intervention. Antrim have lost their McCarthy Cup status and in 2017 will once again find themselves playing in the Christy Ring Cup.

Annually the Ulster Minor and U-21



Hurling champions compete in the All-Ireland series at quarter-final and semi-final stages respectively and annually they suffer a heavy defeat. Granted, Antrim did overcome Wexford in the 2013 U-21 semi-final with a fine display of hurling – but it proved to be a false dawn and they lost by 22 points to Clare in the All-Ireland final.

I ask the question what is the point of the Ulster Minor and U-21 champions continuing to compete outside of the province at a level which is beyond them?

Antrim are the undoubted powerhouse of the game in the province having won the last 15 Ulster Senior titles, 15 of the last 16 minor titles and 2007 was the last year in which they failed to capture the U-21 title on the field of play.

There is a compelling case for change and options need to be explored as a matter of urgency. I pose a few questions. Might Antrim also compete in the round robin section of the Leinster Senior Hurling Championship in an effort to get more competitive games and improve standards? Might participation in Leinster also be extended to the Minor and U-21 Championships or should the Ulster Minor and U-21 champions compete at 'B' level on the All-Ireland stage? The time for the debate is now.

The new Celtic Challenge proved to be beneficial in providing more games

at U-17 level but also challenging as the time of year for playing the Group games did not suit all our counties. This resulted in the northern counties opting to play in March rather than May. This had an impact on the Ulster Minor Hurling league, which, despite a demand from our counties to play after the Celtic Challenge, proved to be difficult to complete the games programme. Other challenges for improving this competition include the matching of ability levels of teams throughout the games programme to ensure competitive competition. The Táin Hurling league continued with four divisions of competition but it proved difficult to get all fixtures played while the Ulster counties continued to be represented in Academy Squad competitions at U-14, U-15 and U-16 levels. The top U-16 Academy Squads were once again selected to attend the Players' Academy at Jordanstown in July and then competed in their annual fixtures against Connacht opposition at the Connacht Provincial Centre. Seven counties held a poc fada event with Fermanagh amalgamating with Cavan for their event. Tyrone hosted the Ulster Final at the Pigeon Top and Down's Karol Keating won his first Ulster Senior title and Dominic McEnhill from Antrim won the U-16 title.

Once again there has been development of the Schools programme to bring amalgamated squads into the Mageean Cup competition. Squads from Belfast,

Derry and An Dún competed this year. Other county squads were set up at different age levels in an attempt to reintroduce or develop hurling in schools where the game has struggled in recent times.

With the increase in the number of teams that are now playing in the national Féile each year the provincial event is now much smaller than before. Following discussion at the Ulster Hurling Development Committee, it was decided to invite the two weakest teams from each county to enter the Provincial Féile event which was held at Owenbeg on Saturday 18th June, while two new club league competitions at U-16 and Minor levels with ten teams participating in each competition.

Ulster GAA staff work earnestly in the development of hurling and have delivered many games development opportunities across all age groups and also coach education sessions in a vast range of developmental topics. A hurling development conference was held in February, while a clubs hurling seminar was held on 26th October. Almost 50 people attended the event and feedback has been collated and developed into an action plan for the development of hurling over the next four years, which will be driven by our Hurling Chairman, Oliver Galligan and the Ulster Hurling Development Committee.



### ULSTER GAA STRATEGIC PLAN

In November Ulster GAA published its fourth strategic plan which is entitled 'Leading, Supporting and Enriching Communities.'

The plan identifies nine key goals across strategic themes such as volunteering, integration, governance, excellence, leadership, respect and inclusivity which have been earmarked as priority areas for Ulster GAA over the next four years. There is a particular emphasis on the need to protect and support clubs during these challenging times when the role of the volunteer is more vital than ever and it is apt that the protection and growth of the volunteer base has been identified as a priority.

I wish to thank the many people who played a part in formulating the plan which has the ultimate aim of creating a better GAA for all in Ulster and which charts a pathway for enriching the lives for the entire 'GAA family' and wider community. In particular can I thank the officers of Comhairle Uladh for their role in bringing the strategic Plan to fruition and may I pay special thanks to Dr Eugene Young for the key co-ordination role that he played throughout the entire process.

Ulster GAA recently responded to the NI Executive draft Programme for Government consultation setting

out how the work of the GAA in Ulster delivers across many of the 14 outcomes and 42 indicators which they have identified as the key issues for the Executive during this Assembly mandate and we look forward to working in partnership with the government as we make a lasting and meaningful contribution to community life across the north. In many respects the same mission identified in the draft Programme for Government is mirrored by the overarching desire in our Strategic Plan – to generate community confidence and improve the overall health and wellbeing of our people.

Ulster GAA has also built relationships with local authorities in Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan and with my Council colleagues I intend to explore with them on how the measures outlined in the 'Programme for a Partnership Government' can be mutually beneficial for all.

### PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

In my short period in post I have witnessed and recognised the dedication, effort and commitment of volunteer officers from across the nine counties of Ulster who are working earnestly for the promotion of Gaelic Games and culture in the province. Be it on full council or through serving on sub committees the contribution of these individuals as immense

and we are forever grateful to them. Comhairle Uladh staff collectively ensure that we are addressing the issues and challenges that are placed before us, while at the same time offering their services in support of counties, clubs, members and volunteers throughout Ulster.

Micheal Ó hOsain has completed his first term as Uachtarán Comhairle Uladh. I personally thank him for the tremendous support he has given to me during my first weeks in office and, more generally, Michael has served the Council diligently over the past year and is a respected member of numerous committees including Coiste Bainisti Naisunta and Ard Comhairle. A strong supporter of hurling, he gives generously of his time and if his diary permits he will without hesitation represent the Council at functions across Ulster and beyond as he works tirelessly to promote our affairs. He is a tremendous leader of a well respected and outward looking organisation.

Leas Uachtarán Oilibhear Ó Gealagain is a tremendous ambassador for the GAA in Ulster and has proved to be a very capable deputy to our president over the past year. Oliver is a true Gael and is totally committed to the furtherance of the GAA in the province. As Chair of the Hurling Committee he has worked earnestly to improve the



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IN MY SHORT PERIOD IN POST I HAVE WITNESSED AND RECOGNISED THE DEDICATION, EFFORT AND COMMITMENT OF VOLUNTEER OFFICERS FROM ACROSS THE NINE COUNTIES OF ULSTER WHO ARE WORKING EARNESTLY FOR THE PROMOTION OF GAELIC GAMES AND CULTURE IN THE PROVINCE.

lot of the 'Ulster hurler' and his efforts are truly appreciated.

Ciarán Mac Lochlainn has been a tremendous asset to the Council during his first year as Cisteoir and his financial acumen and understanding has been a great benefit to our work. As Chair of the Finance Committee he has steadfastly ensured that governance and best practice are at the core of our affairs and I am indebted to him for his work in both Council affairs and in the provision of support for our counties.

Since becoming Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí last January, Micheál Mag Eochagáin has earnestly protected the image of the GAA in Ulster and has been to the fore in ensuring that our affairs receive the coverage and recognition they merit across media outlets. Michael deals with the media in a courteous and effective manner and offers wise and solid support to all Council staff and in particular the Information Technology, Marketing and Public Relations team. I think him for his efforts in promoting our affairs.

I thank also the Chairs', Secretaries' and members of all our sub-committees for their ongoing efforts and trust that I will be forgiven for making particular reference to the work of Coiste Éisteachta which is chaired by Eamonn Mac Mathúna, with Seán Mac Cionna as Rúnaí. Every organisation needs rules and the application of discipline throughout it is a core plank in the proper conduct of its affairs. There are times when they are faced with heavy caseloads and difficult and contentious cases but without prejudice, fear or favour they adjudicate to the best of their ability and we thank them for their work in this key area of activity.

A number of members today say farewell to the Council after varying years of service and I thank them all for their outstanding contribution to the furtherance of our affairs. Iar Uachtarán Mairtin MacAibhne has served Comhairle Uladh for an incredible 30 years. Firstly as a delegate from Monaghan and then as PRO, Treasurer, Vice President, President and Past President he has made a meaningful and lasting impression on GAA issues in the province and we are grateful for his enthusiasm and commitment. Martin will no doubt continue to play an active role in GAA matters and I wish him well in his future endeavours.

Pádraig Ó Connachain has expertly chaired the Irish and Heritage Committee and has been a valued and trusted member of Coiste Bainistí and plays a key supportive role in full Council meetings which are conducted as gaeilge. His love of the GAA and the Irish language and culture is second to none and his valued input will be missed and I thank him for his wonderful contribution to Comhairle Uladh.

I also recognise the outstanding contribution of Michael Harvey, Harry Traynor, Fr Rory Coyle and Ryan Feeney who leave the Ulster Council following Convention and thank them for the service they have given at provincial level. They have represented their counties with distinction and I know that they will continue to play an active role in our great organisation.

I would also like to recognise and appreciate the work of the Senior Staff team and thank them for their continued dedication to the GAA and their support and loyalty to me since taking up post. I have relied and will continue to rely heavily on their

detailed knowledge of their respective fields and truly appreciate their tremendous contribution to the GAA in Ulster. I therefore give a big thank you to Eugene Young (Director Coaching and Games), Michelle McAleer (Head of Finance, HR and Business), Diarmaid Marsden (Head of Community Development) and Stephen McGeehan (Project Sponsor, Casement Park) and their respective teams and indeed to all the staff in Ulster GAA for their dedication and support.

I hope I will be forgiven for making special reference to my PA Geraldine McKavanagh whose commitment to the GAA in Ulster knows no bounds. She worked alongside Danny during his tenure as Rúnaí and she was fervent in her loyalty, support, commitment and dedication to him and the Ulster GAA family. Danny's passing was particularly hard on Geraldine given the close working bond they enjoyed but I know she will continue to give the same service to me and the GAA in the province and we are all the richer for having her as a key member of the Council staff.

### CASEMENT PARK

The Ulster Council GAA and Project Board led by Chairman and Project Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) Tomas O Dalaigh and Board members have overseen significant progress during 2016. The project team has brought the development from a project re-start to the brink of a fresh planning application submission coinciding with the timing of this convention.

Following the decision of the High Court which culminated in the withdrawal of planning permission one of the key tasks for the rest of the year was, via the Funding Agreement between the Department of Culture,



THE APPROACH FROM THE GAA TEAM HAS BEEN A FOCUSSED ON HAVING A GENUINE DESIRE TO LISTEN TO ALL OF THE VIEWS ON THE RE-DEVELOPMENT (POSITIVE AND SOME NEGATIVE) TO ENSURE WE DO ALL WE CAN TO RESPECT THE VIEWS OF THE COMMUNITY AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS.

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Arts and Leisure (now Department for Communities), to secure a continuing exchequer funding to support project expenditure for the period to submission of planning permission. This was achieved.

The GAA has now concluded its pre-application community consultation process for the project. After a period in excess of 30 weeks with almost 5,000 individuals and organisations contributing to the process we have been putting the final touches to our planning submission material and ensuring that the views of all respondents have been considered.

The approach from the GAA team has been a focussed on having a genuine desire to listen to all of the views on the re-development (positive and some negative) to ensure we do all we can to respect the views of the community and other stakeholders. Changes have been made to the scale, height and mass and to the access and egress of the proposed stadium to take account of the various issues which arose from the outcome of the High Court Case and the stakeholder engagement. These changes have been welcomed by a majority of people in the local area.

Recently the Ulster GAA opened a new site office on the Andersonstown Road opposite Casement Park as part of the ongoing engagement process and the reaction from local community has been hugely positive with a significant majority in the area offering their support to see the project taken forward. This has enthused the GAA team as they work studiously to bring the proposals forward.

The Project Board set four key strategic pillars for the delivery team for the project, these are:

- Develop and deliver a world class provincial sized 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
- Contribute to the economic and social development of Belfast and Ulster

The work of the delivery team in enhancing the design for the stadium, its safety compliance, the impact of the stadium in the local context and of course its associated environmental and socio-economic contributions for the long term will be well served by the detailed submissions which are well advanced and articulately described in the planning application. The adjustments to the Stadium design have met with a very favourable reaction from within the GAA and from the wider community. Key changes include increasing roof cover to 100% of capacity, converting the south stand from a seated to a covered standing/terraced area, some changes to roof structural design, a reduction to a capacity just short of 35,000, the creation of an internal roadway on the GAA-owned site and more evenly distributed entrances/exits.

The past year proved highly successful for the messaging around the project and specifically around the community engagement process. Stephen McGeehan led out on this aspect from the project team with excellent professional support from Aiken PR. While there much fair and balanced coverage, not all coverage was of this quality with a BBC Spotlight programme, not in keeping with the high standards normally associated with this production, in particular focussing negatively on obsolete

matters relating to the previous project at a time when the new consultation process was about to begin in earnest, and offering no new insights which is traditionally the trademark of an investigative programme. The GAA and the project were represented with integrity and professionalism by Stephen McGeehan in that programme and the feedback created a wave of positivity for the project and the team which subsequently benefitted the project.

Significant work and resource has been allocated to the GAA's interactions with the Safety Technical Group (STG) chaired by Danny McSorley during the year. Progress has been particularly positive on advancing the code compliance aspects of the stadium design and associated safety management plans and we recognise the work of the secretariat of the group provided by Department for Communities.

Rory Miskelly has been a positive influence in his first year as Project Director working closely with the Board Chair/SRO and linking in with the statutory authorities assisting to steer the project ahead during the period with the benefit of his experience on large capital projects.

Similarly, Professor John Cole and Michael McGuckin in their first year as independent members of the Project Board have played an influential role in various aspects and brought a freshness to many of the complex matters faced by the project.

Michael McGuckin, has led out on a significant piece of work bringing forward the relationship with the Casement Social Club, alongside Antrim Co. Committee, and a working group which has now put in place all



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the required lease agreements and heads of terms necessary to ensure a smooth transition and business continuity for the Social Club. This work will bear fruit during 2017 as matters progress on site and a temporary facility, registrations, and license consents are concluded. On behalf of the Ulster GAA I want to thank the Casement Social Club and recognise their renewed partnerships with Antrim GAA in a wider context also.

Colin Donnelly, in his first year as Antrim Chairman with other newly elected officers and Frankie Quinn as Secretary have continued to work with the Council and Project Board in an enthusiastic and determined fashion. There was positive engagement between the Project Board, Antrim and Comhairle Uladh during 2016 to resolve a range of issues which had arisen due to the unforeseen length of the closure of Casement Park. Chairman Tomas O Dalaigh has once again worked diligently during this period. At a time when on the Board and indeed within the Ulster Council itself there have been significant changes, Tom has remained focussed and energetic to bring Casement Park forward and he should be commended for his determination in that regard. I thank also the Casement Park Trustees for their ongoing support for the project.

Our Stadium Project Steering Group is led by Stephen McGeehan, the Project Sponsor, supported by our Technical Advisor, Tim Harkin. This group is supported by Oliver Galligan, and Michelle McAleer. Paul McGurk and Claire Collender in their new roles during 2016 have both provided support to the communications and consultation processes during the year and I acknowledge their efforts. Geraldine McKavanagh, as Stadium

Administrator, is worthy of a special mention as she continues to ensure, in her typically effective, efficient and business-like manner, that all the various strands of the administration and governance structures work together.

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of our Uachtaran Michael Hasson, who represents the Council on the DfC Sponsor Board with Tomas O'Dalaigh, Project SRO and to Stephen McGeehan, again who has been representing our interests at Programme Board level. I wish also to acknowledge the significant contributions of our Project Board members, Project Steering Group members and to the external representatives from DfC and CPD who contribute at those levels. It would be remiss not to mention at this stage John O Reilly who has stepped down from our Project Board in recent times. As ever John made a valuable contribution and we thank him for that.

I acknowledge the immense support offered at Board level and on all project aspects by Paraic Duffy and his team at Croke Park as and when required. During 2017, as the stadium moves through the planning process, the focus will shift to the operational readiness and the support of Alan Gallagher and others at Croke Park level will be both necessary and invaluable.

Politically there were significant changes following the 2016 Assembly elections. Governmental re-structuring led to a reduction in departments, with most of DCAL's functions, including the stadia projects, transferred to the newly created Department for Communities. The last DCAL Minister Carál Ní Chuilín, MLA was a great advocate for the GAA and Casement Park and we thank her sincerely for all

her support during a difficult period for the project.

I welcome Paul Givan, MLA to his role as Communities Minister and during early engagements he has been unequivocal about his admiration for the GAA as a sporting organisation and for his genuine desire to see the Casement Park project delivered during his mandate. I wish him well in his tenure as Minister.

I acknowledge the leadership of Ian Maye in the Department as Programme Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) and his colleagues Jacqueline Fearon, Denise Stockman and Andrew Dadley and the Programme Team for their support and partnership on the project. It would be remiss not to mention the specific input of Steven Trainor who during the year transferred to another post within the civil service and I thank him for his contribution over many years.

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 Dowe. On the contracting side the Heron Buckingham (HBJV) team remain engaged and we thank Managing Director Damian Heron for his team's commitment to the job. I look forward to 2017 being a year of real progress for the Casement Park redevelopment project.

While not directly involved in the day to day affairs of the Casement Park project I also wish to acknowledge and thank Liam Nelis for the guidance and support he provides to the Council in relation to ground safety on a generic level.

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**DUNSILLY**

The past year saw the opening of the Antrim GAA Centre at Dunsilly and I commend all those who worked earnestly to bring this project to fruition. I thank the staff of the former Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and in particular Minister Carál Ní Chuilín for the provision of much needed funding for the project and to the officers and staff of both the Ulster Council and the Antrim County Committee for their efforts in securing the investment and in bringing forward the development.

**CHILD PROTECTION**

2016 has not been without its challenges in this vital area of operations; however it has also been a year in which the work we do has progressed to a new level to the benefit of all within the Association in Ulster.

**Access NI Vetting**

The introduction of the Online Case Management Tracking System and Online Applications in 2015 has been very efficient and a welcome addition to our Access NI Vetting procedures. Our new database has been implemented to phase one stage, and in 2017 we will move to phase two, permitting club users secure access to their clubs information and the ability to upload information as required.

Single Certificate came into effect as anticipated last November and we are grateful to our applicants for their assistance and compliance with the new policies that we were required to implement to deal with this change. We had expected the update service to be operational by now, however we understand that this has been delayed until at least the spring of 2017. We are encouraged by the number of volunteers in our Association who have

completed their Access NI, with over 20,000 through the process to date, and we remind all of our constituent units of the requirement to ensure that all of those who work with children and young people must be vetted prior to commencement of their work in the position applied.

**National Vetting Bureau Bill**

The National Vetting Bureau Bill commenced on the 29th April 2016, and as expected the Association were one of the first organisations to move to the E-Vetting system. This has been a welcome move forward and our experience of this system to date has been very positive, and where all of our communications with applicants take place electronically. The focus to date has been placed on retrospective vetting, to ensure that all those working with children have been vetted as appropriate and we will move to re-vetting volunteers in the southern counties in due course on a county by county basis.

**Safeguarding Event 2016**

Ulster GAA hosted a historic event on Thursday 27th November 2016 in the Canal Court Hotel in Newry, where a gathering of County Designated Officers and Children's Officers were present to hear from the officers in the PSNI, and An Garda Síochána. The event was a huge success, providing an opportunity to those present to hear about the work that these two bodies carry out, creating awareness of the need to have fully implemented our robust safeguarding policies and procedures in all of our clubs and constituent units and reinforced the need for us all to work together to create and maintain a safe environment in which our children can participate in Gaelic Games and Activities.

I wish to acknowledge the support that Ulster GAA receives from the GAA's National Children's Officer Gearóid O Maoilmhichil and from the government departments and statutory agencies north and south and I look forward to developing our links further with these key partners in the days and months ahead as we strive for excellence in terms of Safeguarding in Ulster GAA.

**Audit**

Coiste Banistíochta Uladh in conjunction with an Coiste Cód Eitice agus Dea commissioned an Audit of all clubs in Ulster in 2015 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. This was a very worthwhile task and will now be completed on a yearly basis given the success of last year's audit process.

**Feile 2017**

Ulster GAA will again play host to Feile Peile na nOg in 2017 and preparations are already well under way in the host counties of Cavan, Monaghan and Fermanagh. We have begun to work with our counties to identify host families early in a bid to ensure they are all through the appropriate vetting process well in advance of the events. It is vital that all units involved comply with legal and best practice requirements placed on them as participants in the Feile Competitions and indeed host families and we appreciate your assistance in this matter.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE VALUABLE ROLE THAT PARENTS HAVE TO PLAY IN THE EFFECTIVE RUNNING OF OUR GAMES AND ACTIVITIES AND IN ENSURING THAT THEIR CHILDREN REACH THEIR MAXIMUM POTENTIAL IN A FUN ENVIRONMENT.



#### **Save our Smiles Campaign**

During the first week of October 2016, Ulster GAA weighed in behind the National Parent in Sport Week, where we introduced our Save our Smiles Campaign to promote the positive involvement of parents in the GAA. This is a fantastic initiative that has been very well received by our clubs and counties and promoted accordingly. We acknowledge the valuable role that Parents have to play in the effective running of our games and activities and in ensuring that their children reach their maximum potential in a fun environment. We have found this to be an excellent initiative that we will continue to develop and promote.

#### **Tackling Bullying**

We continued to promote our Tackling Bullying Programme throughout the year, placing focus around the National

Anti Bullying Week in November 2016, 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, to create a culture where that type of behaviour is totally unacceptable and to deal with incidents of bullying in line with our guidelines.

#### **Training**

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. The audit process carried out in 2015 saw an increase in demand for these workshops, with 202 courses completed in 2016, adding to our

growing database which now sits at over 38,000 participants.

All nine counties in Ulster have hosted at least one Childrens Officer Workshop by the end of 2016, with further scheduled for 2017. This course has been a valuable addition to our training resources as it provides specific training for all club childrens officers, who have the ultimate responsibility of implementing all of our Safeguarding policies and procedures.

Bernie Fox, assisted by Kathy Kelly and Paul McKillop provide clear leadership and guidance in the sensitive but crucial area of child protection and we are truly appreciative and thankful for their efforts.



TUARASCÁIL AN RÚNAÍ

## 05

**COACHING AND GAMES DEVELOPMENT**

The Coaching and Games Development Section is a core tenet of Ulster GAA in that they service the entire spectrum of GAA playing activity, be it through giving young children their first taste of gaelic games, to helping develop the skills of those people who are choosing to play our games, to the innovative use of sports science to help achieve optimum performance for those players who are competing at high performance levels.

The greatest concentration in quantitative terms through the Curriculum Key Stage 1 literacy and numeracy programme which has been in place since the restoration of devolution in 2007.

Forby introducing young children in the 4-8 age spectrum to gaelic games the Key Stage 1 Programme teaches important life concepts such as co-ordination, focus and balance. The overall contribution of the Key Stage 1 coaches cannot be underestimated and they deserve the highest of plaudits for their ongoing work in not only promoting gaelic games in our schools but in offering early stage life skills support to our children.

The Programme engages some 300 schools, 15,000 children and 600 teachers and provides a level of self-confidence to all those who engage and highlights the importance of exercise as part of an overall healthy lifestyle.

The Programme Co-Ordinator Terence McWilliams retired in July 2016 after 10 years of working with Ulster GAA and there are many young people across the north that has very good reason to be thankful of the contribution that Terence and

his team have made to their lives. I offer Terence my best wishes in his retirement and commend him for the contribution he has made in furthering the ideals of Cumann Luthchleas Gael during his time at Ulster GAA. Ryan Mellon, with excellent support from Ashlene Groogan, has helped drive the Programme and I look forward to working with them moving forward.

Unfortunately year on year, and also in-year, reductions in departmental budget allocations have impacted on the scale of the Programme in recent times. Several years ago we had over 30 Key Stage 1 coaches and that figure has now been reduced to 25. Funding uncertainties, coupled with the short-term nature of contracts, has resulted in higher levels of staff turnover from this programme than elsewhere in Ulster GAA but it also must be borne in mind that this Programme has an additional aim of providing a stepping stone to those individuals who wish to achieve career progression within the education sector, and in this respect it has proved to be quite successful.

At the time of writing Ulster GAA is awaiting confirmation on funding levels for the programme for the remainder of this Assembly mandate. Since its inception the programme has more than paid its worth and it is vital that it continues to have the support of government given the important contribution it makes not only to gaelic games but to key government indicators such as improving child development, improving educational outcomes and improving health and wellbeing.

The GAA for All Programme is all encompassing and has taken on a new dimension in 2015-2016 through the wheelchair hurling programme within schools. This programme targeted

schools that have young people with disabilities. The coaches introduce able bodied classmates to the chairs and they compete with the wheelchair users in their class. The mobility of the programme has been enhanced by the purchase of two vans (supported by Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure) and we thank them for this funding. The programme addressed a key departmental priority of promoting equality and tackling social exclusion.

I thank Paul Callaghan and Shane McCann for their ongoing work with the Inter-Provincial Wheelchair Team who were rewarded by winning the league and getting to the final of the championship and I trust that this really worthwhile initiative will continue to grow in popularity in the years ahead.

In a time when the consequences of head injuries in contact sport are becoming increasingly apparent and, rightly, are receiving increased media attention, the GAA's Concussion Awareness programme is becoming more and more relevant and in the past year some 120 workshops have been delivered to clubs. While the education process needs to be ongoing, there is a clear onus on clubs, schools and counties to ensure that their coaching staff and team mentors are familiar with the signs of concussion and that they are fully cognisant with the return to play protocol. It is vital that they are aware of the horrific repercussions of 'second impact syndrome' and it must be instilled in mentors and officials across the board that player safety and wellbeing outweighs the result of any game.

Ulster GAA continues to offer support to Camogie, Ladies Football and Handball and there is evidence of

## IT IS IMPORTANT THAT PEOPLE OF ALL AGES CAN BE AT ACCOMMODATED AT THE LEVEL BEST SUITED TO THEM AND FOR MANY THIS WILL BE IN A NON-COMPETITIVE OR RECREATIONAL ARENA...

increasing support for one wall schools handball, with over seven schools in Cavan and Monaghan and 14 teams competing in the October tournament. Gary Mallon offers ongoing support to Ladies Football in the organisation of their tournaments, while the Regional Hurling Officers, assisted by Kevin Kelly, have delivered a comprehensive indoor hurling programme at underage levels from Under six and upwards.

It is important that people of all ages can be at accommodated at the level best suited to them and for many this will be in a non-competitive or recreational arena, but to be all inclusive and to cater for as wide a spectrum as possible it is important that we cater for all abilities as far as is practically possible. Therefore the 'Inclusion Programme' aimed at targeting social need is an encouraging development and again met a key Executive priority focus. Ulster GAA's Active Clubs Co-ordinators Shane McCann and Paul Callaghan have been recruiting new players from schools and linking them into clubs.

In particular they have been targeting females and people with disability. The programme supported by Sport NI, has also been engaging people who have become inactive and motivating them to get involved in coaching or other health related activity in the clubs. Gael Active has been driven to encourage those that are inactive to become active. Gary Mallon and Tony Scullion have provided support within the Youth Justice System delivering Gaelic Games to young offenders. Having had previous experience of working in the justice sector I fully appreciate the value of such interventions.

The Further and Higher Education sector is supported by Gary Mallon with Ulster GAA at the centre of

helping to establish Academies for the further education students. Ulster GAA now supports the provision of coaches at Queen's University, Ulster University and St. Mary's Teacher Training College. In many respects third level competition does not command the same level of support or engender the same level of interest as other academic level competitions but they are an important facet of the association and the GAA college community plays an important role in supporting young students, most of whom are away from home for the first time. The increasing number of students attending Higher Education presents a challenge for Gaelic games and particularly at a time when third level college budgets are being dramatically reduced and clubs and their administrators are challenged to resource, finance and field multiple teams. Our funding to the development officers in this sector is therefore designed to assist in this process and I know is greatly appreciated by the respective institutions.

The Ulster U-17 Player Academy is supported by Roger Keenan, Ryan Mellon, Tony Scullion and Kevin Kelly and is an important component in the overall progression of the player who has the potential to compete at the highest levels within the Association. A support mechanism is also in place for talented young players with a dozen volunteers actively working with them and helping them address issues which could potentially impact on them reaching optimum performance. The Sports Institute are supporting the programme, providing training and development for the officers through a series of workshops. Ryan Mellon drives this programme with additional support coming through the National Player Welfare Officer.

The Ulster GAA Referees Academy is delivered in partnership with the Referees Committee and Ryan Mellon has worked closely with them in organising a full medical examination and this health check is an important tool in the support armoury for officials, given the increasing levels of fitness of our players and the stresses and pressures that referees face in what can often be a difficult and pressurised environment.

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.

The Sports Institute have been to the forefront in assisting Kevin McGuigan in the development of competent Performance Analysts within the club environment and in the overall development of sports science initiatives. While senior county teams are encouraged to engage with Kevin in this developing area not all counties choose to avail this service, with some, as is their right, choosing to provide the service internally.

Just last month Ulster GAA however received disappointing news from Sport NI, the parent body of the Sports Institute, that the provision of funding for a Sports Science post was not being included in their provisional allocations for the next four years under the Sporting Clubs Programme, while support is also being withdrawn from elite handballers Aisling Reilly and Charlie Shanks on the basis that the GAA at national level does not specifically support handballers who compete on the international stage. Ulster GAA are in discussions with SportNI on these matters.



The 13th O'Neills Coaching and Games Development Conference was held in Cavan and was a huge success with some 400 coaches attending. The theme of the conference was 'Club and Player Pathway' and the delegates were not disappointed and they participated in a range of focussed sessions and heard from keynote speakers Eddie Brennan and Jack O'Connor.

I acknowledge the outstanding work being undertaken by our Coaching and Games Development Committee. They do a remarkable amount of work on our behalf and the GAA in Ulster has great reason to be grateful for their efforts. In particular I thank Chairman P.J. McGowan and Secretary Danny McLernon for their efforts and for the commitment and leadership they have given to such a key area of work. Dr Eugene Young continues to lead by example and he is owed a huge debt of gratitude for his unstinting work across the entire remit of coaching and games development and I thank also the entire staff in our Games Development team for their ongoing contribution to the furtherance of Gaelic Games in Ulster.

## CLUB AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Club Maith continues to be the recognised brand for club excellence among GAA clubs in Ulster. Seven clubs have been accredited in 2016, six of which received Gold awards, with one attaining the Platinum Award. Training was made available in May for all current Club Maith facilitators and those newly recruited to the programme. These voluntary facilitators remain the back-bone of the assessment stage of the programme, and are commended for their commitment to the role.

The Club Maith website is a useful online resource to clubs compiling their Club Maith Portfolios, and indeed to any club with a club development query. Training and courses developed by the Community Department are placed on the site to keep club officials abreast of new initiatives. Since its inception in 2007 fifty-eight clubs have now been accredited with the Club Maith Status and it is a target of our recently launched strategy that each club across the Province should be accredited by 2020.

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 2017. By 2020 it is our intention to have a club development plan in place in every club, in line with club planning programme guidelines.

Club Officer Training Programme was rolled out for its seventh consecutive year in 2016 to help build the capacity of club volunteers providing club officers with essential information, opportunity for an exploration of key issues and a forum for discussion.

The programme in 2016 formed the initial stages of the newly created Volunteer Development Pathway:-





Entry Level, Club Officer Induction Award: 93 volunteers from across all nine counties attended this training on Saturday 9th January in Holy Trinity College, Cookstown. This event provided role specific training for club officers new to their role. Seven workshops were held as part of this session: Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, PRO, Development Officer, Cultural Officer, and Children's Officer.

The Level 1 Club Officer Development Programme was held on a regional basis in four different venues in January; 327 volunteers attended the training which was delivered in Newry, Magherafelt, Clones and Ballybofey.

The training provided club officers with all essential information for the year ahead. In 2016, Ulster GAA identified 4 Key Areas of work to deliver on based on feedback provided in previous years and issues that may have arisen in 2015. Workshops focused on the areas of Critical Response, Raising funds within your Club Community, Digital Communications, and Online Safety.

An additional element to our volunteer training in 2016 was the introduction of the Elevate Level 2 Award. Nine Clubs were selected to participate in training across four weekends in February and March. This programme offered 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 led as tutors for this programme, 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.

Our working partnership alongside Irish Football Association and Ulster Rugby has continued in 2016 through the Department for Communities funded programme 'Sport: A home for lifelong Volunteering'

Through this programme a great amount of joint work has been undertaken to promote volunteerism, build capacity and enhance community relations. Club members from both codes have come together to build knowledge across a number of related themes. The diversity of knowledge across the three organisations will undoubtedly bear fruit for each as the information is put into practice at Club level.

A key event of the past year was the Joint Volunteering Forum entitled 'Strength in numbers; building strong teams off the field'. This took place at the end of August and showcased some of the excellent work being done at club level, providing advice and support on recruiting, involving, rewarding and retaining volunteers. Various aspects of volunteering were detailed by experts across the three Governing Bodies, while case studies were presented by Randalstown RFC, Ballinamallard FC and Killeavy St. Moninna's GAC on how they have grown strong and sustainable

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volunteer bases. The event concluded with a very interactive panel discussion with attendees asking a raft of questions which will assist them in their roles within their clubs. The lasting impression of the event was of the hugely enthusiastic club volunteers who are already giving so generously of their time in helping their clubs and communities.

Ulster GAA continues to reach out across community divides and as outlined in our new strategy we will endeavour to “Promote sport for social good”. Our relationship with Ulster Rugby and the Irish FA continues to develop and strengthen, and our Joint Strategic Framework “Sport Uniting Communities” has been used as a template to showcase the positive impact that sport can have in people’s lives.

Ulster GAA has delivered Game of Three Halves (GO3H) events as and when required, and remain as partners in the Sport for Change Working Group, who are responsible for the delivery of GO3H events. The Belfast Interface Games are the main programme in this regard, held over a fortnight in July across four three-day camps in Belfast. Over 200 young people from all backgrounds participated in the camps, many playing Gaelic games for the first time. The fortnight culminated in a Flagship event at Queens PEC on 29th July.

Ulster GAA coaching staff delivered coaching at other GO3H events through-out the year, an important aspect of the cross-community work being undertaken by Ulster GAA.

The multi-sport partnership of Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and IFA are currently in the process of submitting an application to the Special European

Union Programme Body (SEUPB) for Peace IV funding under the theme of “Building Positive Relations”. This application if successful will enhance and increase cross community and cross border activities throughout Ulster using sport as a vehicle to build positive relations.

The annual Ulster GAA Cúchulainn Cup took place at the Meadowbank Sports Arena on Wednesday 16th March 2016. Magherafelt Cúchulainns, Banbridge Cúchulainns, and Ballymena Cúchulainns were the participating teams.

Schools were given “GAA Taster Sessions” in the basic skills of Gaelic Football and Hurling, with over 150 pupils getting an opportunity to sample what the GAA has to offer. “Getting to Know the GAA” presentations were delivered to over 120 pupils promoting greater understanding and respect for other cultures; a key aim of the Cúchulainn Cup programme. Magherafelt Cúchulainns made-up of Rainey Endowed, St Mary’s Grammar, and St Pius X College were crowned champions and were chosen to travel to London to compete in the All British Championships in July. The team trained in earnest for the competition, and visited London in July while also visiting Croke Park in order to learn more about our Association.

In London, competing at the U16 level, the Magherafelt Cúchulainns faced teams from Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Lancashire, London, Warwickshire and Yorkshire. Despite being a team made-up of players who had little experience playing Gaelic games, the Magherafelt Cúchulainns represented themselves with distinction showing some incredible skills, passion, and team-work. They

narrowly missed-out on a semi-final spot, coming-up against club teams who have had years of experience playing together. While in London the young men also had a chance to tour London City, spent a day in Thorpe Park, and did some shopping. The real value of such an experience was profoundly seen on the young men, as they forged meaningful and lasting friendships. Praise must go to the school-teachers who accompanied their pupils, and staff from Ulster GAA who made it possible for the young men to become involved in the experience.

Through links with the PSNI, Ulster GAA have been invited to give educational talks about our Association to PSNI cadets. Typically the talks take place every 4-6 weeks and afford Ulster GAA the opportunity to educate and inform cadets about the GAA. The Club and Community Development Department have also delivered information presentations on the GAA to diverse groups such as Young Farmers, Stranmillis College Health and Physical Activity students and the US Ambassador to Ireland Kevin F. O’Malley and the US Consul General Daniel J. Lawton.

More and more external agencies are now recognising Sport as a hugely beneficial way of getting key messages to young people and the wider population. The multisport partnership has been key in all of this. The Probation Board (PBNI), the Prison Service (NIPS), Department of Foreign Affairs, Local Government, PSNI, Nexus, Public Health Agency and numerous Government Departments have all made links with Ulster GAA to explore potential partnerships.

## THERE ARE FEW AMONGST US THAT HAVE NOT BEEN AFFECTED IN SOME WAY BY ROAD DEATHS OVER THE YEARS BUT DESPITE THE IMPROVEMENTS IN ROAD AND CAR SAFETY IT IS STILL A MAJOR ISSUE FOR SOCIETY.

### HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Health and Wellbeing continues to be an increasingly important role within our GAA units. Ulster GAA is represented on the National Health and Wellbeing Committee through the Community Health & Wellbeing Manager. County Health & Wellbeing Committees (HWC) Action Plans for 2015/2016 delivery have been largely completed. With the many competing priorities of County Committees it can at times be a struggle to have this item high on the agenda of County Committees, given their volume of work but there can be no doubting the spirit and endeavour of the HWC's in our counties. As with most things there are some counties that are further along their journey than others and Ulster GAA continues to support all nine County HWCs, particularly those facing the greatest obstacles. The Ulster HWC meets quarterly and is chaired by Cathal Hand, with representation for each of the counties.

Phase II of the Healthy Club Programme began in November 2016, and is going from strength-to-strength. In total 19 clubs across Ulster are involved, and each county represented. Through this programme clubs undertake a range of health and wellbeing activities, from smoke-free club grounds, couch to 5k programmes, social initiative activities, to name a few.

The Primary School Road Safety Programme – the 'Live To Play' Oscars was held in the spring 2016. The programme aimed to raise awareness of road safety issues with primary school children. Schools were asked to develop a Demonstration of Learning short film evidencing how primary schools have continued to use the excellent Ulster GAA Live To Play Kidszone which is available from

the Ulster GAA website and the four winning schools were presented with 'Live To Play' playing kits.

Ulster GAA's 'Live To Play' Programme and Primary Schools Initiative was acknowledged nationally by receiving awards at the CRASH NI Road Safety Awards in November, and the Irish Road Safety Awards in December. I commend the Club and Community Development team for their ongoing efforts in this significant area of work and it is a proud testament to your efforts that this area of activity has received such public recognition. I particularly wish to acknowledge the efforts of Fionntan O'Dowd in for the role he played in preparing the nominations for both of these prestigious awards.

There are few amongst us that have not been affected in some way by road deaths over the years but despite the improvements in road and car safety it is still a major issue for society. 255 people lost their lives on Irish roads in 2016, 88 of them on Ulster roads. We all have a role to play in helping to improve road safety and through our 'Live to play' campaign Ulster GAA will continue to play its part in educating young people on this issue of fundamental importance.

Ulster GAA's Blood Sub campaign was promoted at the Ulster Senior Football Championship Football Final in Clones on Sunday 17th July. The Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service, and the Irish Blood Transfusion Service provided details of local upcoming blood donation clinics which people could avail of. Patrons were directed to Ulster GAA's Blood Sub campaign website page, where clubs are encouraged to host a blood donation clinic of their own. Tyrone Manager Mickey Harte, Donegal Manager

Rory Gallagher, Chair of the National HWC Ciarán McLaughlin, and Ulster President Michael Hasson were on-hand with the Anglo Celt Cup to lend their support to the campaign.

The 'Drink, Drugs, and Sausage-rolls' campaign is for third-level students advising them about health and lifestyle issues that are particularly relevant to students, possibly living away from home for the first time. The campaign was rolled-out at Freshers Fayres in UU Coleraine, UU Jordanstown, UU Magee, Queens, St Marys College, and Belfast Metropolitan College.

Ulster GAA staff availed of refresher training in the summer, enabling them to deliver Heartstart training as and when required. All Ulster Ladies Gaelic Football referees availed of the training as part of their referee development. Trained tutors in St Mary's, Rasharkin also delivered training over a number of weeks to club and community members

The Department of Justice Minister Claire Sugden has approached Ulster GAA, the IFA and Ulster Rugby to become involved in a Domestic Violence campaign in autumn 2016. The campaign is particularly focused on raising awareness and confidence within victims of domestic abuse to seek help. The campaign is progressing in partnership with Ulster Ladies Gaelic Football and Ulster Camogie.

Ulster GAA are in the process of developing a "One Punch Can Kill" campaign aimed mainly at young males, advising them about responsible behaviour both on and off the pitch in relation to the consequences of one punch. This programme has been developed in conjunction with Coaching & Games





Department to include important messages around concussion, and on-field behaviour. The programme will be available for delivery to interested groups in spring 2017.

The Health and Wellbeing and Child Protection units within Ulster GAA are working together to look at the issues of online safety, sexting, and consent issues. The online safety aspect has been delivered in a number of workshops during 2016, and has been very well-received. Campaigns around the other areas are being developed, and due to the sensitive nature of the content this programme will be rolled-out with involvement from both

the child protection and health and wellbeing units within Ulster GAA, where necessary.

The Club and Community Development Department delivered a very successful Club and volunteer Conference, which was held in Cookstown at the end of October with just under 200 delegates attended on the day and had informative engagements from our key note speakers Aaron Kernan and Barry McElduff as well as the opportunity to attend some of the club focussed workshops on offer. Delegates were also given a comprehensive update on the Casement Park development project by Stephen McGeehan.

I thank Diarmaid Marsden, Aileen Cummins, Maura McMenamin, Sharon Haughey-Grimley, Fionntan O'Dowd and laterally Ashelene Groogan for their outstanding work across a wide remit of activities.

They play a key role in the Comhairle Uladh work programme and on many occasions they are the public face of the organisation. Aileen left Ulster GAA at the end of December to take up a new post and I wish her well in her future career path and thank her for her eleven years of service to the GAA in Ulster.

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**GAEILGE AGUS OIÐHREACHTA**

The past year was the pivotal year in the so called 'Decade of Centenaries' with the hundredth anniversary of the Easter Rising and The Battle of the Somme recognised through numerous events at home and abroad. The GAA paid a fitting and appropriate tribute to the memory of the Easter Rising, 100 years to the day from its commencement, with an engaging commemoration entitled 'Laochra' in Croke Park following the National Football League final. The production recognised the contribution of the GAA to Irish society and the mature and significant role it has played in the shaping of modern Ireland. In Ulster a short pageant was held at the Ulster final while Uachtarán Cumann Luthchleas Gael Aogán Ó Fearghail was among the gathering who participated in a talk on '1916 and the GAA in Ulster.'

The annual Seamus De Faoite Irish Language School in Downings, Co. Donegal was once again a great success and I commend all those involved in the organisation of this great annual gathering. Opportunities should always be available for members to speak the Irish language in a social setting. With this in mind, Comhairle Uladh since 2014, in the absence of a similar national competition, has organised its own Irish language quiz for clubs as part of Seachtain na Gaeilge and in 2016 Bredagh (Down) collected the honours.

Ulster GAA is committed to promoting and supporting the Irish Language and Culture through our provincial structures, our County Boards and our Clubs. Through our strategic planning process there was a designated workgroup focussed on Irish Language and this is reflected in our strategy Goal 7 "Develop and

promote the Irish Language, our activities and our culture". Ulster GAA is committed to recruit and appoint an officer to coordinate all aspects of Irish Language and Culture within the council but also to provide guidance and direction to our counties and clubs. We are currently engaged in discussions with potential funders to assist in this process. It is also worthy of note that the Irish Government in their 'Programme for A Partnership Government' published following the formation of the new government highlights the need to implement the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language in order to increase visibility of the language in everyday life and to encourage greater usage of it.

**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. The importance of traditional Irish music, dancing and song is clearly outlined in the GAA's Official Guide and it is still a cause for concern that close on 50 years since it was created that there are many clubs who do not embrace Scór and participate in it. Given our community ethos, it is an important element in adhering to the aims and ideals of our identity and our Association.

Ulster had a successful year on the All-Ireland stage with ten winners in all. In Scór na nÓg, Rince Foirne was won by Silverbridge Harps, Gavin Gribben (Mayobridge) was victorious in Solo Singing, St. Patrick's, Cullyhanna were victors in Léiriú and St. Patrick's, Donaghmore were winners in Ballad Group. In Scór Sinsear, Derrytresk were the champions in Instrumental Music while Truagh Gaels and St. Patrick's, Saul emerged

victorious in Léiriú and Ballad Group respectively. I congratulate them all on such tremendous success and also commend those acts which won out at provincial and county levels.

I acknowledge the work of Ailís Nic an tSaoi and Danny McLernon who made a great contribution to the promotion of Scór over many years and to the membership of the Coiste Scór Uladh. They provide enthusiastic leadership and an efficient delivery of our Ulster competitions and for this we are very grateful. Claire Collender provides great support to the work of the committee and I know that this is greatly appreciated by its membership.

2017 will be a big year for Scór in Ulster, and particularly in Antrim, when the national finals of both Scór na nÓg and Scór Sinsear will be held in Belfast in February and May respectively and I have no doubt that the Ulster hospitality will once again be to the fore as we welcome our friends from across Ireland to our 'second city.'

**INTEGRATION**

In keeping with the aims of the Association, Ulster GAA has a positive working relationship with our sister organisations in the Ladies Football and Camogie and the Handball and Rounders Associations, under our Uachtarán Michael Hasson and active Integration Committee is in place and, as was the case with the Ulster Club Camogie final in 2016 where practical ladies games are scheduled with high profile football or Hurling games.

I look forward to working with the representatives of each of these partnership organisations during my tenure as Provincial Secretary and I thank the members of the Committee for their ongoing efforts.



2017 WILL BE A BIG YEAR FOR SCÓR IN ULSTER, AND PARTICULARLY IN ANTRIM, WHEN THE NATIONAL FINALS OF BOTH SCÓR NA NOG AND SCÓR SINSEAR WILL BE HELD IN BELFAST IN FEBRUARY AND MAY RESPECTIVELY ...





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**ASSOCIATION ISSUES**

The past year has witnessed the formation of a second Players body with the Club Players Association (CPA) created to provide a voice for the club player, particularly in relation to fixtures. The vast majority of players never progress to inter-county level and anything that can be done to better their cause should be welcomed. We await with interest further detail on the proposed workings of this organisation.

The Gaelic Players Association continues to represent the interests of what they term the 'elite amateur athlete' and in fairness they have never pretended to be anything other than the representatives of the inter-county hurler and footballer. Recently they announced details of their latest grant scheme which they negotiated with the Irish Government. It provides a fair recompense to players who make many personal sacrifices to play at the top level of their game and this scheme is an important recognition by the state of the part they play in improving the lives of so many people across the island. At this juncture it is important to give due recognition to the GAA personnel who participated in the detailed negotiations which led to the finalising of these arrangements and for the very thorough manner in which they carried out their remit.

However it must always be remembered that the greatest strength of the Association is its amateur ethos – in many respects it is the bind that permeates throughout its entire fabric and keeps it intact. It is important therefore that there is no blurring of lines between 'amateurism' and 'semi-professionalism' or between what payments are classified as legitimate 'allowances' and those which are not. If we don't maintain clear blue

water between the two, there is the risk of diluting our core values with repercussions that could be potentially damaging.

Once again the Category II infraction, more commonly referred to as the 'black card', has generated plenty of airwave time and column inches over the past year and there is widespread consensus that it is not working as originally intended. That it is code specific is one area of contention, though the greatest cause of angst relates to consistency of interpretation.

I don't think anyone disputes the fact that there needs to be a form of sanction for what is deemed 'cynical behaviour.' I believe however the rule as currently drafted creates confusion by the use of the word 'deliberately' in relation to the three 'black card' playing offences and this is making life even more difficult for match officials. The rule equates 'cynical' fouling and 'deliberate' fouling as if they are one and the same, but they are not. All cynical fouls are deliberate but all deliberate fouls are not cynical.

Personally I believe that there needs to be a change of wording in the rule and I don't believe that the debarment of the remainder of the game is an appropriate penalty for 'cynical' behaviour as, in many instances, it leads to no meaningful sanction for the 'team,' given that a replacement can come on during the next break in play. I contend that a yellow card plus a 13 metre free in front of the goal (unless the offence is committed in the square when a penalty would be awarded), irrespective of where on the field that the offence occurs, is a more appropriate penalty following a 'cynical' foul as it will almost certainly result in the concession of a score.

The GAA last month announced details of its Media Rights Agreement from this year until 2022. The televising of championship fixtures is similar to the previous arrangements with RTE and Sky TV securing rights to live games, with BBC also able to simultaneously broadcast Ulster Championship games being televised live by RTE. This arrangement does not apply to such games being televised live by Sky TV, while games not being covered live by either station can be shown on a deferred basis.

While RTE Radio has secured commentary rights for all championship games, existing arrangements remain in place with local radio stations and this is to be welcomed. A major change, and indeed a highly positive one, is that the GAA has now retained clipping rights for its own games and can use them across all its platforms as part of its overall digital content strategy. It is wholly proper that GAA should have immediate access to footage from its own games for showing on its own platforms as we want to create a situation where GAA platforms are the default for GAA fans across the globe wanting to catch highlights of the day's games. I strongly welcome this new development.

Ireland's bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023 has met great enthusiasm across the sporting fraternity and none better than the GAA who have agreed to host many of their fixtures at some of their major stadia in the event of the bid being successful. Presently a long list of 12 potential venues to host games has been agreed by the bid team, with eight of the venues being GAA stadia. Within Ulster both Casement Park and Celtic Park have been included.

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Clearly without the GAA support in providing venues for the bid, the staging of the event wholly in Ireland would not be possible and the new Casement Park, which would likely host matches up to and including the quarter-final stage of the competition, is particularly crucial to the bid. Indeed what a tribute it would be to the Ulster Council and especially our esteemed Iar Rúnaí and leader Danny Murphy if the GAA's beacon of friendship and shared future could be globally recognised on such a scale in 2023. I wish the Irish bid team every success and hope and trust that November 2017 will bring great tidings of great joy to them when the host nation is selected. Ireland faces competition from France and South Africa for the right to stage the event.

The Association is privileged to have a man of such vision and impeccable credentials as its Ard Stuirthoir Páraic O Dufaigh and even in the short time since taking up post he has been a source of tremendous support and comfort to me. He provides clear and effective leadership for our organisation and I look forward to working with him in the years to come. We have another Ulster man at the head of the Association in GAA President Aogán O Fearghail and his commitment and leadership is well recognised and has been rightly praised. I have known Aogán for many years and I value his wise counsel and I thank him for his ongoing efforts in the furtherance of the aims and ethos of the GAA throughout Ireland and beyond.

There is a healthy working relationship between Ulster GAA and Ard Comhairle and I thank the Croke Park staff for their ongoing support, advice and guidance. Most of my interactions to date have been with Tom Ryan, Pat

Daly, Peter McKenna, Fergal McGill, Patrick Doherty, Kathy Slattery, Alan Milton, Noel Quinn and the staff of the Ard Stuirthoir's office and I thank them and all the central staff for their assistance and co-operation across their particular sphere of operation.

The co-operation between Comhairle Uladh and our counties and clubs continues to be highly positive across the large remit of GAA activities and I acknowledge the tremendous commitment of our club and county officers in delivering the key elements of the Association's work throughout the province. In particular I thank the County Chairmen, Secretaries, Treasurers and other officers who tirelessly give of their time in promoting the ideals of Cumann Luthchleas Gael. On a personal level I commend the County Secretaries, with whom I have the majority of dealings, and I look forward to working with you moving forward.

#### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND MARKETING

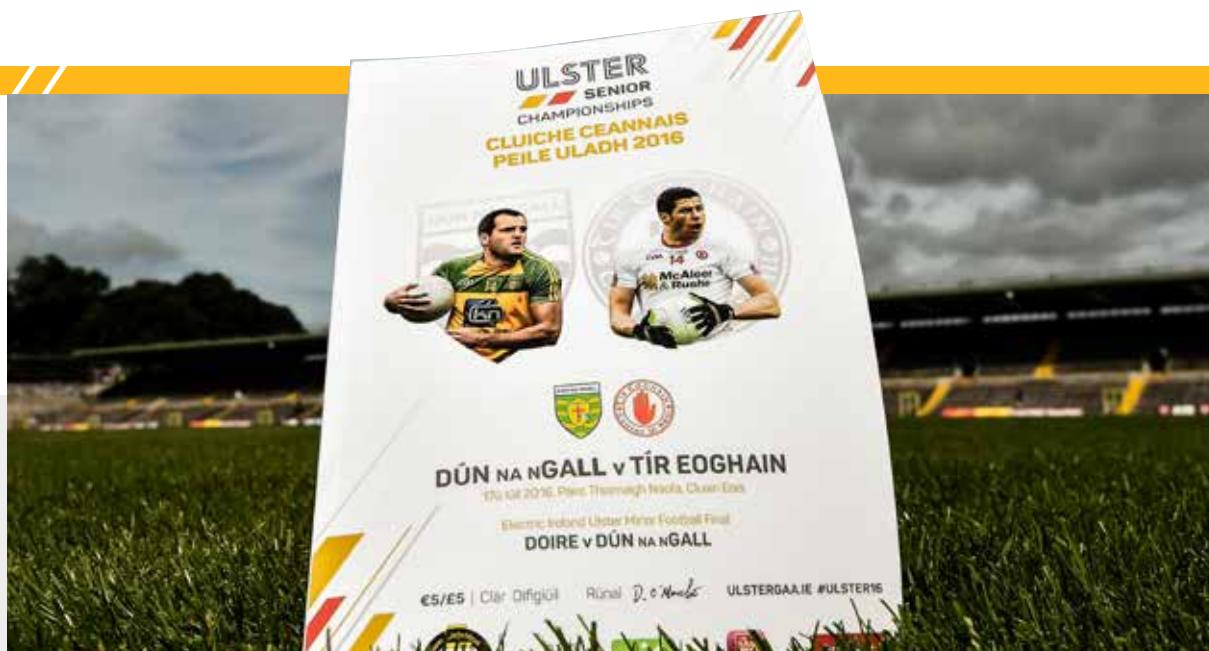
Our social media channels have again proved to be our primary means for communicating our messages about our brand, our games and our initiatives. Our two main communities have seen strong growth, with our Twitter followers rising by 27% to over 57k and our Facebook fans rising by 19% to 33k. We achieved around 16m impressions via these channels in the year to the end of December. New platforms were also launched during the year to keep Ulster GAA relevant to different audiences, with Periscope and Snapchat used to deliver real-time communications from games and events. The levels of communities that we now possess give us a very cost effective means of issuing our key messages and presents us with valuable marketing and commercial opportunities going forward.

The Ulster GAA website contains a wealth of information from right across the Association in Ulster and our user statistics for the year reinforces the need for a strong presence on this platform. Up to the end of December, we have had almost 800k page views, or an average of 65k views per month. During the key summer Championship period, we increased our pages views by 24% versus last year. Seventy per cent of our total web traffic now access the site via their smart phones or tablets.

During the year, Cavan adopted the Club & County website network to join Tyrone, Fermanagh, Donegal, Monaghan, Armagh as well as Ulster GAA and a number of clubs. The project, managed by Lairdesign, provides an excellent means to issue a consistent, targeted message across the network. The website is built using a Wordpress template and allows county to showcase their own branding around their key county games.

Our Buy Early and Save Championship marketing campaign was again very successful in 2016. The vast majority of our sales now come from advance purchases - a significant change to the spectator culture in Ulster in the last four years. Eighty-four per cent of total sales were completed before arriving at the ground - an increase of 14% on 2015. This growth can be attributed to improved understanding of the Buy Early & Save campaign from increased communications of online ticket availability, sizeable cost savings, and targeted county specific marketing.

Despite living in an increasingly digital focussed time, we acknowledge that there remains a market that consumes their GAA and other information in a non-digital way.



Traditional print advertising was still a core element of our marketing strategy in 2016 via The Irish News and North West News Group.

To assist the media in providing relevant content on our games, we facilitated easier access to our players and managers throughout the year, by way of media launches and press calls around key competitions. We also met with key media groups to listen and gain their feedback. We will endeavour to improve provision for media at our games and will look at means to improve our match day communications protocol in 2017 and beyond.

The IT, Marketing & PR committee, that includes all county PROs, is dynamic and focussed to keep pace with the ever changing environment that is the norm in the Marketing and Communications field. Their excellent work is under the leadership of Michael Geoghegan and we recognise his numerous contributions since his election last year.

Our commercial and sponsorship revenues increased for the fifth consecutive year in 2016, which reflects the recognition that Ulster GAA can provide excellent marketing opportunities for appropriate partners, given the wide popularity of our games.

I would like to thank the following fourteen corporate partners that supported our Association during the year: Bank of Ireland, O'Neills, NITB,

Donnelly Group, Glenavon House Hotel, Lairdesign, Subway, Tughan's, BBC, UTV, Gaelic Life, The Irish News, 3fivetwo Group and The GAA Store. We are also delighted to welcome on board new corporate partners for 2017 – Translink and Irwin's. In particular, I would like to thank the team at the Bank of Ireland for their sponsorship of the Bank of Ireland Dr McKenna Cup as we enter the third year of our current three-year corporate partner agreement. I would encourage members to support all our sponsors and partners throughout the year.

### MEDIA

The media landscape has changed dramatically in recent times with the advent of digital media and so quickly is the environment changing that most people now consume news online rather than via traditional methods. Broadcasters and newspapers also have digital platforms, though in today's era of social media anyone with a compatible device can make public comment on our affairs. Traditional media however continue to play an important role in their coverage of GAA affairs and for the greater part we enjoy a healthy relationship with both newspaper and broadcast journalists. Where however we find we have reason to take issue we will not hesitate to challenge to ensure fair and balanced coverage.

I commend 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. They give us a great service and their efforts are appreciated. My thanks go out to our Public Relations Officer Michael Geoghegan who has developed an excellent working relationship with the media during his first year in post.

A re-structuring of Ulster GAA communications has seen the creation of two new posts and in since taking up employment in the spring both Paul McGurk and Claire Collander have had a positive and meaningful impact on our public relations activities. They have assisted me in many ways and always represents the Association in the very best traditions of the Ulster Council. I thank also Stephen McGeehan, Stephen Donnelly and Sharon Haughey-Grimley for their work in dealing with the media when appropriate and for ensuring that the voice of Ulster GAA is heard when required.

### COMHBHRÓN

Once again the past year has brought about the death of many great GAA stalwarts and I offer my condolences and those of the GAA in Ulster to all those who lost loved ones during this period. I have paid tribute to our own Dónall Ó Murchú earlier in my report and during a ten day period in May we bade farewell to former GAA Presidents Jack Boothman and Joe McDonagh. Jack was a larger than life figure in every way while Joe, as well as being a gifted hurler, was one



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of the greatest orators the Association has known. Both men have left a great legacy from which we continue to benefit. Frank Kennedy gave a lifetime service to Comhairle Uladh as a steward and indeed was on duty just two days before falling gravely ill. His death occurred a short time after his brother Seamus, who was also an Ulster Council steward, passed away.

Down's three times All-Ireland medal winner, and 1968 team captain, Joe Lennon died after a short illness, as did his 1968 team colleague Brendan Sloan. Both men enriched the lives of GAA followers all over Ireland and nowhere more so than in their native county. 1946 All-Ireland Junior Medal winner Paddy O'Hagan was also called to his eternal reward and GAA Gaels throughout Ulster were also saddened to learn of the death of former county player Peter Turley.

We were all shocked to learn of the death of respected broadcaster and journalist Séamus Mac Géidigh who did so much for the promotion of GAA and cultural affairs.

Long serving Antrim GAA Secretary Gerry Barry and former Armagh GAA Chairman Joe Jordan, both great servants of the Association, were also called to their eternal reward as was Phil Brady, a former Cavan GAA Chairman and another devoted Gael.

Shea Daly an Ulster Championship winner with Tyrone and Dan McCaffrey, winner of an All-Ireland minor championship medal in 1947 also died, as did Anna McCaughey, the first female member of the Tyrone County Executive.

Former Derry Irish Language and Cultural Officer Lughaidh MacGiolla Bhrighde was called to his eternal

reward during the past year as were Eoin and Mick Gribben, two brothers from that great Derry footballing family. Former Derry Hurling Selector Sean O'Hara also died and the death of Thomas Cassidy in the week of the Ulster Club Hurling and Camogie Finals was particularly poignant.

Former Monaghan County Board delegate Niall McAdam passed away as did four Fermanagh Clerics who were lifelong GAA supporters namely Canon Edward Murphy, Canon John McCabe, Canon Tom Marron and Fr. Peter McGuinness. Former County Players John James Tracey and John Maguire who were members of the 1959 All-Ireland Junior winning team also died during the past year. Death is always painful but when it is a young person the sense of loss can at times be even more palpable and I particularly remember all the young GAA people who have died in the past year.

I extend my sympathy to the family and friends of all members of the GAA family in Ulster who have died in 2016. A great strength of the GAA is the sense of solidarity and togetherness at times of bereavement and I know that this is always a great comfort to the family of the deceased. The Sacrifice of the Mass will be celebrated for all the deceased members of the Association in St. Mary's Church Burren at 11:00am on the morning of Convention.

### CONCLUSION

I can think of few people, other than perhaps Lyndon B Johnson, who's first duty on taking office was to oversee the funeral arrangements of their predecessor. This is a report I wish I didn't have to write but such was my fate and I trust that it is a fair and accurate reflection of the past year and does justice to Danny and his legacy. Writing it would not

have been possible without the help, contributions and support of many staff and volunteers and I thank them for their input.

Writing in 2009, on the 125th anniversary of the founding of the GAA, Iar Uachtaráin na hEireann Mary McAleese said; "camaraderie like no other, craic like no other and community like no other – that is my GAA." It is also my GAA and it's a GAA which is shared and understood by many people who are privileged, honoured and, in many ways, fortunate to be part of what is a truly great and caring movement. I wonder if we really appreciate the benefits that come from being part of this terrific organisation. It is a movement of the people, by the people and for the people.

It is the soul of many communities and the heartbeat of the nation and with renewed vigour and energy we can build on its infectious energy and bring it to new people and new places, both on the island of Ireland and abroad, and ensure that its heart continues to beat both stronger and faster. Our past achievements should serve as a stimulus for ongoing progression and it should be a desire of us all to move the Association forward in a spirit of inclusiveness and togetherness.

**Is mise, le meas,**



**BRIAN MAC FHÍOBHUÍ**  
Rúnaí