



CLG ULADH

AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL 2018

CLUICHÍ | CULTÚR | TEANGA

26Ú Eanáir 2018

ÓSTÁN AN VILLA ROSE | mBEALACH FÉICH



05 // Tuarascáil an Rúnaí

Thart fá'n am seo anuraidh, bhí CLG Uladh fós ag teacht chun téarmaí le bás ár Rúnaí Cúige a raibh meas mór againn air, an Dr Danny Murphy. D'fhreastail sé ar chomhairle Uladh ar feadh beagnach 35 bliain. Bhí Danny mar Rúnaí i gcáil ghníomhach nó buan ar feadh 20 bliain. Mar thoradh ar a bhás bhí caillteanais mhóra ar thaithí, ar eolas agus ar oidhreacht na seirbhíse sa CLG in Uladh agus ar fud na tíre.

Ós rud é go bhfuil an chéad chomóradh de bhás Danny anois thart, is é seo an t-am do CLG Uladh machnamh a dhéanamh ar an tslí is fearr a féidir linn rannchuidiú le cur chun cinn agus cothabháil CLG sa chúige a mheabharrú mar is oiriúnach ina chuimhne. Thug Danny an oiread sin dá chuid ama do dhaoine eile go bhfuil sé oiriúnach go dtabharfaidh muid rud éigin ar ais chun a chuimhne agus a chuid éachtaí a bheith ina foinse inspioráide do na glúnta atá ann faoi láthair agus na glúnta atá le teacht. Dá bhrí sin, caithfidh sé a bheith mar thosaíocht don Chomhairle atá ag teacht isteach chun aghaidh a thabhairt ar an gceist seo agus ómós

oiriúnach a aontú i gcuimhne Danny; ceann inar féidir linn, agus go háirithe teaghlach Ó Murchaidh, a bheith bróduil as.

Bhí an chéad bhliain den CLG in Uladh indiaidh thréimhse Danny ar cheann suntasach ar go leor bealaí. Cé nach dtáinig mór-onóracha ar bith go Cúige Uladh, bhí sraith de eachtaí an chead uair acu a fiú tagairt a dhéanadh orthú. Bhain Tír Eoghain an comórtas Peile faoi-17 'aon-uair' a eagraíodh chun freastal ar imreoirí óga a d'fhéadfadh a chailliúint as an deis chun ionadaíocht a dhéanamh ar a gcontae mar gheall ar an laghdú ar an ngrúpa aoise idir-contae ó Faoi - 18 go dtí Faoi -17 i 2018; Ba í Maggie Farrelly an chéad bhean, ní hamháin in Uladh ach in Éirinn chun réiteoireacht ar chluiche ceannais chlub cúige nuair roghnú í mar réiteoir do'n chluiche ceannais Peile Sóisearach idir Naomh Colmcille agus Bealach na Léice; Do'n chéad uair ariamh bhí seisear chontae éagsúla i gcraobhchomórtais peile na gclub cúige agus fosta do'n chead uair, theip ar Chlub as Contae Aontroma a bheith i gcluiche ceanna is Iománaíochta Uladh.

Ní raibh aon ádh ar Aontroim a thoirlead i gcluichí na scoileanna agus, do'n chead uair fosta, ní bhfuair foireann as Aontroim fhad le cluiche ceannais Corn Mhic Gíotháin, an príomh-chomórtas iománaíochta do scoileanna in Uladh agus bhí "an chéad uair ariamh" fosta eile in san comhpháirtí peile, Corn Mhic Ruairí, a bhain Naomh Muire, Machaire Fíolta don chéad uair. I liathróid láimhe, bhain Charly Shanks as Ard Mhacha a chéad teideal 40 x 20 Aonair Uile-Éireann, agus é anois ach an dara imreoir as cúige Uladh indiaidh Paul Brady an t-imeacht mhór seo a bhaint amach.

GNÍOMHAÍOCHT CLUICHÍ 2017

Sa bhliain 2017, d'aisghabháil Tír Eoghain Corn Anglo Celt don dara bliain as a cheile agus bhuail Aontroim arís Corn Liam Harvey. Lean Craobhchomórtais Chlub Uladh ar aghaidh ag mothú ár n-imreoirí agus ár lucht féachana. D'fhreastail breis is 5,500 lucht féachana ar Chluiche leath cheannais Iomána Uladh idir Dún Lathaí agus Sleacht Néill ag An Abhainn Beag. Lean Slaughtneil ar a gcead dteideal i 2016 le dhá cheann i ndiaidh a chéile nuair a bhuail siad Baile Mhic Uileagóid sa chluiche ceannais i bPáirc na Lúthchleasaíochta in Ard Mhacha. Imríodh cluichí ceannais na gclubanna Uladh Iomána agus camógaíochta arís mar cheannteideal dúbailte a léiríonn an dul chun cinn mór a rinneadh i gcomhtháthú agus ag obair le príomhghéallsealbhóirí ar fud an chúige.

Go suntasach, bhailigh an club céanna (Sleacht Néill) Corn Seamus McFerran don dara bliain as a chéile nuair a bhí an bua acu thar Gaeil an Chabháin i gcluiche ceannais na peile os comhair 7,500 lucht féachana in Ard Mhacha.

Is éacht do-chreidte é seo do chlub Dhoire an teideal cúige





a bhaint sa pheil, iománaíocht, agus camógaíochta dhá bhliain i ndiaidh a chéile. Tiocfaidh mé ar ais go dtí scéal iontach rath Sleacht Neill níos faide siar i mo thuarascáil.

Ba é 2017 an séú bliain de'n Sráth Táin iománaíochta na gClubanna do Dhaoine Fásta. Bhí 22 fhoireann san iomlán ar fud chúige Uladh chomh maith le foirne ó Lú. Cuireadh na clubanna as cúige Chonnachta a d'iomaiigh an chéad uair isteach sa rannóg Chonnachta arís. Bhí trí roinn go h-iomlán ann. Tháinig An Céide (Ard Mhacha) agus Baile na Lorgan (Muineachán) chun cinn mar bhuaiteoirí Rannáin 1 agus 2

faoi seach. Maidir le Rannán 3, tá trí fhoireann ceangailte ag barr na sraithe agus tá socrúithe in áit na cluichí atá fágtha a imirt ag tús séasúr 2018. Tá an comórtas seo i gceist le neamhchomhlíonadh cluichí agus is gá athchóiriú mór a dhéanamh air. Táthar á scrúdú faoi láthair.

Bhí 28 club páirteach i Sraith Club Peile Uladh i 2017 le 11 foirne sinsearacha agus 17 club ag leibheal idirmheánacha. Bhain Eoghan Rua Cúil Rathain (Doire) agus Gortín (Tír Eoghain) na cluichí ceannais Sinsearacha agus Idirmheánacha, agus bhí an dá chluiche ceannais go h-iontach ar fad. Thug an comórtas seo deis do clubanna cluichí

a imirt sula gcuirfí a gclár inmheánacha cluichí contae ar bun. Tá laghdú tagtha ar líon na gclubanna le blianta beaga anuas, ach tá roinnt spreagadh ann ó na hiontrálacha a fuarthas don chomórtas 2018.

Bhí Comórtas Peile Allianz ina chomórtas díomá do chontaetha Uladh gan aon foireann as an cúige in sna cluichí ceannais agus gan ardú céim ar bith. Maidir le hiománaíocht, bhuail Aontroim Ceatharlach agus bhian Dún na nGall in éidean Tír Eoghain i gcluiche ceannais uile Uladh chun na teidil Srath Allianz a bhailiú i Roinn 2A agus 3A faoi seach.

Bhí ionadaíocht againn sna Féilirí Uí Rinn agus Mac Ríocaird. I gCluiche Corn Chríostóir Uí Rinn chaill Aontroim i gcluiche iontach le Ceatharlach ar scór líne 5-23 go 4-15. Ba é cluiche uile Uladh a bhí i gCluiche Ceannais Corn Níoclás Mhic Ríocaird nuair a bhuail Doire Ard Mhacha ar scór líne 3-23 go 2-15.

Is mise, le meas,



BRIAN MAC FHIOBHÚÍ
Rúnaí

05 // Tuarascáil an Rúnaí

This time last year Ulster GAA was still coming to terms with the death of our esteemed Provincial Secretary Dr. Danny Murphy. An ever present on the Ulster Council for close on 35 years, Danny had served as Rúnaí in an acting or permanent capacity for 20 of those years. With him died a wealth of knowledge and experience and a legacy of service to the GAA in Ulster and beyond.

Given that the first anniversary of Danny's death has now passed, it is now the time for Ulster GAA to reflect on how Danny's contribution to the promotion and fostering of the GAA in the province can be adequately remembered. Danny gave so much of his time to others that it is fitting we give something back in order for his memory and his achievements to be a source of inspiration to the current and future generations. It must therefore be a priority for the incoming Council to address this issue and agree an appropriate tribute to Danny's memory; one in which we, and particularly the Murphy family, can look upon with a great sense of pride.

The first year of the GAA in Ulster in the post Danny era has been a notable one in many respects. While major honours may not have come to Ulster there were a series of firsts which are worthy of reference. Tyrone won the 'one-off' All-Ireland U-17 Football competition which was organised to accommodate young players who may miss out on the opportunity to represent their county due to the reduction in the minor inter-county age-group from U-18 to U-17 in 2018; Maggie Farrelly became the first female not only in Ulster but in Ireland to referee a provincial club final when she took charge of Junior Football Final between Naomh Colmcille and

Belnaleck and there was another refereeing first when two brothers took charge of county senior finals in different counties in the same year; for the first time ever six different counties were represented in our provincial club football finals and also for the first time an Antrim Club failed to contest the provincial club hurling decider.

Antrim had no luck on the schools' front either as, also for the first time, no Antrim side reached the final of the Mageean Cup, the premier hurling competition for schools in Ulster and there was another first in its football counterpart, the MacRory Cup, which was won by St. Mary's, Magherafelt for the first time.

In handball Armagh's Charly Shanks won his first All Ireland Men's Singles 40 x 20 title, becoming only the second Ulster player after Paul Brady to win this prestigious event.

FINANCE

It was a successful year financially for Comhairle Uladh and while football championship attendances 2017 were down from 172,693 to 124,651 on the previous year it must be remembered that both 2016 semi-finals ended in a draw and had to be replayed, while there were no replays in 2017. Average gate receipts remained consistent and I wish to acknowledge the many patrons who continue to support our games in such encouraging numbers.

Once again online ticket sales have proved very popular and more and more of our patrons are choosing this as their preferred method of purchase. However most supporters still prefer to purchase through their club or county and I thank the ticket administrators in each of our counties for their ongoing efforts. It is encouraging that our

patrons are increasingly availing of the 'Buy Early & Save' ticket purchase option which provides discounts on tickets bought prior to match-day. Just two years ago this accounted for less than 70% of our ticket sales but in 2017 almost 90% of people attending our games bought tickets in advance. Our Cisteoir Ciaran McLaughlin and the Ulster GAA Finance team of Michelle McAleer, Ruairi Cunningham and Paul Sanders continue to operate in an exemplary fashion, while a huge debt of gratitude is also due to Ashelene Groogan, Rose Treanor and Bernie Fox for their herculean efforts in the co-ordination and distribution of ticket sales over the past year. Ticket prices were again frozen by Ulster GAA in 2017 but this needs to be reviewed in 2018 as Ulster prices are now well below that of the other provinces for comparable fixtures. For example, a stand ticket for other provincial finals was on average 17% more expensive than in Ulster, while provincial final terrace tickets were 38% more expensive in the other provinces.

2017 GAMES ACTIVITY

In 2017, the Anglo Celt Cup was reclaimed by Tír Eoghain for the second successive year while Aontroim again won the Liam Harvey Cup. The Ulster Club Championships continue to enthuse our players and spectators. Over 5,500 spectators attended the Ulster Hurling Semi Final between Dunloy and Slaughtneil at Owenbeg. Slaughtneil followed up their 2016 maiden title with a two in a row by beating Ballygalget in the final at the Athletic Grounds. The Ulster Hurling Club Final and Ulster Camogie Final were again played as a double header illustrating the great strides that have been made in integration and working with key stakeholders throughout the province.

Remarkably, the same club collected the Seamus McFerran Cup for the second successive year as they overcame Cavan Gaels in the football final at the Athletic Grounds in front of over 7,500 spectators. This is an unbelievable achievement for the Derry club and the fact that their camogs also won the provincial title ensures that the Ulster club treble was secured two years in a row. I will come back to the wonderful Slaughtneil success story later in my report.

2017 saw the sixth year of the Táin Adult Club Hurling League. This initiative saw a total of 22 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. Keady (Ard Mhacha) and Castleblayney (Muineachán) emerged as the Division 1 and 2 winners respectively. With

regard to Division 3, three teams are tied at the top of the league and have agreed to play off for the title at the beginning of the 2018 season. This competition is littered with the non-fulfilment of games and is in need of a major overhaul. This is currently being examined by the Council.

The Ulster Football Club League in 2017 saw a total of 28 clubs involved, with 11 teams in senior and 17 teams in intermediate. Eoghan Rua Coleraine (Doire) and Gortin (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. However, the uptake by clubs has declined in recent times, though there is some encouragement to be gleaned from the entries received for the 2018 competition. The Allianz

Football League was a disappointing competition for the Ulster counties with no finalists or promotions. In hurling Antrim defeated Carlow and Donegal defeated Tyrone in an all Ulster final to collect the Allianz League titles in Division 2A and 3A respectively. We had representation in both the Ring and Rackard Finals. In the Christy Ring Final, Aontroim were defeated in a brilliant game by Carlow by 5-23 to 4-15. It was an Ulster derby in the Nicky Rackard Final where Derry overcame Armagh on a 3-23 to 2-15 scoreline.

DR MCKENNA CUP

In our first competition of the year, the Dr McKenna Cup, Tyrone again collected the title for the sixth successive year by defeating Doire by 2-13 to 1-07 at Páirc Esler. I extend my gratitude to Bank of Ireland for their continued sponsorship of this important competition in the Ulster GAA calendar. The Dr. McKenna Cup



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Competition ticket continues to be very popular and at £20/€25 provides unbeatable value for money. Just over 1200 tickets were purchased for the 2017 competition.

SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2017 Ulster Senior Football Championship commenced at St Tiernach's Park, Clones on Saturday 20th May, where Muineachán overcame Fear Manach 1-20 to 1-11. The following day, a strong Dún na nGall team performance comfortably saw off Aontroim by 3-19 to 1-09. One week later, neighbours Doire and Tír Eoghain went head to head for the second consecutive year in Celtic Park with a similar outcome, Doire 0-11 Tír Eoghain 0-22. The eagerly awaited derby between An Dún and Ard Mhacha took place on Sunday 4th June as the home side edged out winners by 0-15 to 2-07 in an exciting encounter. In the last Ulster Senior Football Championship quarter final, played at Kingspan Breffni, a late Conor McManus goal was the difference as Muineachán won by 1-15 to 0-15.

In the first semi-final, played at St Tiernach's Park saw Tír Eoghain surprisingly easily defeat Dún na nGall by 1-21 to 1-12. The following Saturday night in the Athletic Grounds, Darragh O'Hanlon's penalty goal proved to be just enough as An Dún held on to beat Muineachán by 1-14 to 0-15 in what was the upset of the Championship.

The Ulster Final took place three weeks later where An Dún and Tír Eoghain met at St Tiernach's Park, Clones on Sunday 16th July. Over 32,000 spectators attended the Final on a day when the Ulster Senior Football Champions from 25 years previous, Dún na nGall were honoured. With the inclusion of honouring the successful teams from the past, Cumann na mBunscol exhibition games, band entertainment, the Minor Football Final and the Senior showpiece, Ulster Final day continues to be a celebration of our great Association in the province of Ulster. The game was evenly balanced in the first half but Tír Eoghain assumed total control after the short whistle and emerged as 2-17 to 0-15 champions.

Congratulations go to Tír Eoghain on a deserved success.

The 2018 Ulster Senior Football Championship will be played over a shortened period with the four Quarter Final games taking place over two weekends and counties will be playing every two weeks should they remain in the hunt for the Anglo Celt.

ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The All-Ireland Senior Football Championship for Ulster representatives began on 17th June with both Aontroim and Doire involved. Aontroim lost out in a titanic struggle away to Sligeach by 0-22 to 3-07. Doire fared better on the road as they emerged victorious in Port Lairge by virtue of a 1-17 to 0-13 win.

On 25th June, two of our counties were in action while the very successful Féile Peile na nOg event was being hosted across An Cabhán, Fear Manach and Muineachán. The Breffni County came away from Tullamore with a good four point victory over the home side while Ard Mhacha ended the year for Fear Manach on a 0-20 to 0-11 scoreline in front of over 8,000 spectators in the Athletic Grounds.

The following weekend, Doire almost pulled off a seismic shock in Castlebar. However, a late comeback in normal time and extra time domination saw Maigh Eo record a 2-21 to 1-13 victory. Dún na nGall defeated Longford at Ballybofey as they attempted to get their season back on track. Seven days later, An Cabhán were overcome by a serious second half display by Tiobraid Arann at Kingspan Breffni while there were positive results for Muineachán, Dún na nGall and Ard Mhacha on their travels in Leinster. The Farney men had a facile win in Loch Garman, Dún na





nGall won by a point away to An Mhí while Ard Mhacha recorded a five point win away to Iar Mhí. Ard Mhacha and Muineachán continued this good form with further victories away to Tiobrad Arann and Ceatharlach respectively. By Round Four there were five Ulster counties remaining in the All Ireland series, including the Ulster champions, Tír Eoghain. In a most un-Donagall like performance, Gaillimh ran out impressive 4-17 to 0-14 winners at Markievicz Park. Muineachán exacted revenge on An Dún at Croke Park as they finished strongly to win by 1-24 to 1-16. On the same double bill, Ard Mhacha continued their journey in a tense victory over Cill Dara by 1-17 to 0-17. In the all Ulster clash between Armagh and Tyrone on 5th August we were reminded of the numerous clashes in the noughties between these great neighbours. However, this time around the game lacked the intensity of old and Tyrone ran out convincing winners on a 3-17 to 0-08 scoreline. Immediately afterwards, Dublin again demonstrated their continuing dominance in a 1-19 to 0-12 victory over Monaghan. These results set up an eagerly awaited All Ireland Semi Final between the Leinster and Ulster champions on Sunday 27th August. However, the Áth Cliath juggernaut

continued as they easily disposed of Tír Eoghain by 2-17 to 0-11, en route to collecting another Sam Maguire.

MINOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Ulster Minor Football Championship continues to excite and entertain. These games were fitting curtain raisers on championship days and 2017 again produced another great competition. 2017 saw the final year of the Under 18 Competition and is being replaced by an Under 17 Championship. The Ulster counties have now voted for a 'back door' championship within the province and this will be introduced in the year ahead.

In the Preliminary Round, Muineachán finished strongly to ease out 1-17 to 2-07 winners over Fear Manach. In the quarter finals, we were treated to four brilliant games. Aontroim recorded an extra time victory away to Dún na nGall, An Cabhán overcame Muineachán, Doire beat Tír Eoghain by a point while a late penalty save saw An Dún defeat Ard Mhacha. In the semi-finals, Doire beat Aontroim by 3-17 to 0-09 in Clones while An Cabhán defeated An Dún by 0-15 to 2-07 at the Athletic Grounds, Armagh. The final meeting brought together

Doire and an Cabhán in a game which Doire controlled for long periods and won out by 1-22 to 2-12 to collect the Fr Murray Cup. Congratulations to Doire on their victory.

In the All Ireland Quarter Finals, there were good wins for both our two representatives. Doire edged out Sligeach by a point while An Cabhán had a great win over Gaillimh by 1-11 to 0-11. In the semi-finals, Ciarraí ended the Breffni County hopes with a 2-22 to 2-10 win while Doire marched on with a brilliant 0-17 to 0-14 win over Áth Cliath.

In the All Ireland Final, they met a team at the top of their powers as a David Clifford inspired Ciarraí ran out convincing 6-17 to 1-08 winners. 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.

The Special Under 17 Competition was organised in 2017 for those players who would miss out on Under 18 Championship in 2018. I am pleased to report that after collecting the

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Ulster title, Tír Eoghain would go on to claim the All Ireland by defeating Ros Comain at Croke Park. Well done to all involved.

UNDER 21 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

This Championship continued to thrive in its usual Wednesday night slot in the fixture programme, where it did not directly impinge on counties preparations for National Football Leagues and also benefited from an increased interest from our spectators. In 2018, this competition will become an Under 20 Grade and as per the Official Guide, must be played during the months of June, July and August, though Comhairle Uladh will bring a motion to Congress – subject to approval at the provincial convention – to allow the competition to commence on the last weekend in May.

In the Preliminary Round on Wednesday 8th March, Muineachán required a late comeback to overcome

Aontroim at Upper Malone, Belfast. On Wednesday 15th March, the four quarter finals took place and there were wins for Doire, An Cabhán and Ard Mhacha. Tír Eoghain and Dún na nGall could not be separated after extra time in Healy Park and one week later, it was Dún na nGall who progressed via a 0-18 to 1-09 scoreline. Adverse weather conditions meant the postponement of both semi-finals and this unfortunately led to a congested conclusion to the competition with the Ulster final having to be re-scheduled to a Monday evening. It took place five days after the re-fixed semi-finals and five days before the All-Ireland semi-final. A request by Comhairle Uladh to postpone the All-Ireland semi-final was rejected by the Central Competitions Control Committee.

In the Ulster semi-finals, Doire required extra time to defeat Ard Mhacha in Celtic Park while Dún na nGall had a big win over An Cabhán at Brewster Park. In the final, Dún na nGall and

Doire played out a lively encounter in front of a large crowd at the Athletic Grounds in Armagh. Dún na nGall recorded an impressive 3-17 to 0-13 win to claim the Irish News Cup. Congratulations to Dún na nGall on this historic achievement. In the All Ireland Semi Final, played in Kingspan Breffni, they lost out to Áth Cliath by 1-13 to 0-9.

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. The Senior and Intermediate Club Finals were played as a double header in the Athletic Grounds while the Junior Final took place the previous evening. In the Preliminary Round of the Senior Championship, which was a repeat of the 2016 Ulster Final, Slaughtneil narrowly saw off the challenge from



Kilcoo. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Cavan Gaels, Derrygonnelly, Kilcar and Slaughtneil.

At the Semi Final stage, we were treated to a brilliant spectacle of club activity in this province. Slaughtneil and Kilcar served up a swashbuckling 2-17 to 0-17 affair in Healy Park, Omagh in a game that was covered live on TG4. It was one of the games of the year and a demonstration of Ulster football at its best. The other semi-final had to be settled at the second time of asking and what a thriller the replay was with Cavan Gaels just getting the better of Derrygonnelly Harps with an injury time three-pointer in a seven goal thriller. In the Final at the Athletic Grounds, Slaughtneil were in total control from start to finish as they outscored their valiant Breffni opponents by 1-15 to 0-10 to retain the Seamus McFerran Cup.

The Intermediate Football Club Championship remains an extremely competitive grade and 2017 was no different. In the Preliminary Round, Newbridge defeated Shercock in Kingspan Breffni. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Moy, Milford, Rostrevor and Newbridge. In the Semi Finals, we were treated to two brilliant encounters. Moy produced a brilliant second half in a 2-16 to 1-09 win over Newbridge while Rostrevor edged out Milford, 0-12 to 0-11. In the Final, Moy just about did enough to defeat the Down champions by 0-9 to 0-8 in a tight tussle.

In the Junior Football Championship, Cavan winners Ballymachugh won their Preliminary Round game against Patrick Sarsfields. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Belnaleck, Tattyreagh, Naomh Colmcille and Doire Trasna. In the Semi Finals, there were wins for Belnaleck and Naomh

Colmcille. The Junior Final was played at Celtic Park, and it turned on a goal with fifteen minutes to go as Naomh Colmcille emerged as 1-09 to 0-06 winners. Well done to all the club champions.

ALL IRELAND CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

In a great game of football on 11th February 2017, Slaughtneil recorded a historic 0-12 to 0-10 win over Leinster kingpins, St Vincents at Pairc Esler in the All Ireland Senior Semi Final. On St Patrick's Day, the Derry and Ulster champions just fell short as Dr Crokes claimed the Andy Merrigan Cup by 1-09 to 1-07.

In the All Ireland Intermediate Club Championship on 29th January, Pomeroy were involved in another outstanding game of football. This time, they were on the wrong end as St Colmcilles from An Mhí won out by 3-11 to 2-13 at the Athletic Grounds. In the Junior grade, Rock won their Semi Final against the British champions, Dunedin Connolly's but lost out in the final to Glenbeigh-Glencar (Ciarraí), on a 1-14 to 1-11 scoreline at Croke Park. The 2017/18 All Ireland Junior Football Club Quarter Final pitted our champions, Naomh Colmcille against the British champions, Dunedin Connolly's of Edinburgh. Played on Saturday 9th December 2017, the Donegal and Ulster champions remained in the All Ireland hunt with a narrow 1-10 to 2-06 victory.

SENIOR HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2017 Championship was a four county competition with the Shield including another four counties. An Cabhán did not enter, although they did compete in the Lory Meagher Cup after a short absence.

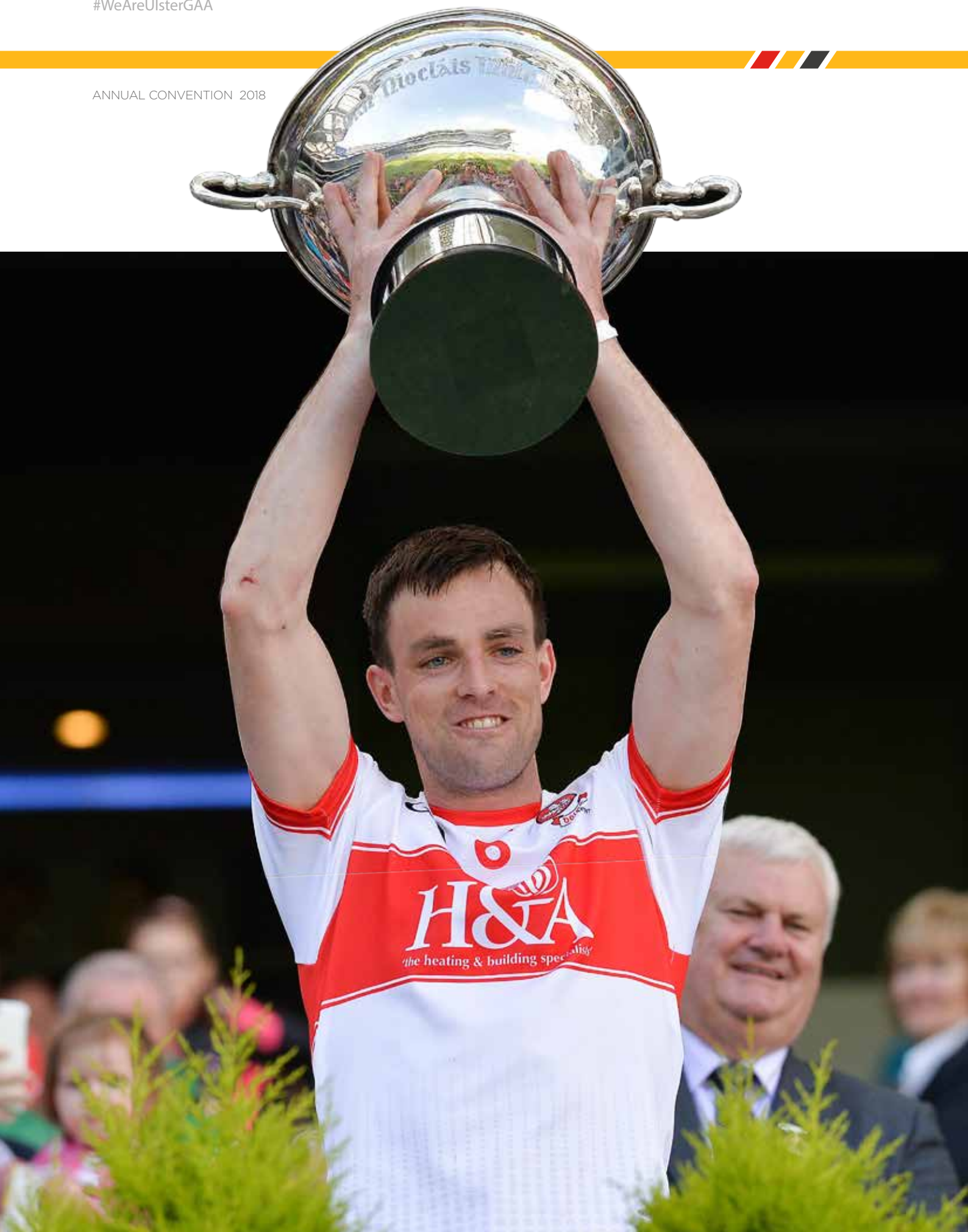
In the Senior Hurling Championship Semi-Finals played on 8th April, Ard Mhacha defeated An Dún by 1-17 to 2-12 at Inniskeen while Aontroim beat Dún na nGall by 3-24 to 1-08 at Celtic Park. The 2017 Ulster Senior Hurling Final was played at Owenbeg on 16th April. Aontroim produced a strong display to retain the Liam Harvey Cup by virtue of a 5-22 to 1-12 victory over Ard Mhacha. Well done to all involved.

The two tier system saw the Ulster Senior Hurling Shield include Dún na nGall, Fear Manach, Muineachán and Tír Eoghain. Tír Eoghain overcame Fear Manach by 4-19 to 0-10 while Doire ousted Muineachán on a 6-28 to 0-09 scoreline. One week later, Doire won the Shield beating Tír Eoghain at the fantastic new Carrickmore Eire Óg club ground by 1-17 to 1-12. Congratulations.

The restructuring of the national competitions aims to provide a high number of games for Ulster counties at their own level while the apathy towards the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship in recent times has been obvious. Therefore, with a heavy heart, the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship has been discontinued for a three-year period (2018 -2020). Again, I will address this issue in greater detail later in my report.

ALL IRELAND HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

In the Christy Ring Cup, Aontroim and An Dún were Ulster's representatives. An Dún began their campaign with a home win against Ros Comáin and in Round Two they lost out away to Aontroim on a 3-15 to 0-12 scoreline. In the quarter finals, they beat Londáin away but Aontroim were once again their nemesis in a semi-final defeat at Cushendall on a 4-23 to 0-15 scoreline. Aontroim reached the Christy Ring





Final by virtue of wins over An Dún twice and Ceatharlach. In the final they again met the Leinster side but for the second consecutive year Antrim came up short at the last hurdle as Carlow won a thrilling 5-23 to 4-15 encounter. An unbelievable game of hurling, but an extremely disappointing end to Aontroim's season.

The Nicky Rackard Cup saw Ard Mhacha, Dún na nGall, Doire, Muineachán and Tír Eoghain as the competitors from the province. In the quarter finals Muineachán defeated Dún na nGall and Ard Mhacha easily defeated Longfort. The semi-finals saw victories for Doire and Ard Mhacha over Muineachán and Tír Eoghain respectively. In the final, it was heartbreak again for Ard Mhacha as Doire claimed the Nicky Rackard Cup on a 3-23 to 2-15 scoreline. Well done to all involved.

MINOR HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Five counties competed in the Ulster Minor Hurling Championship in 2017. In the quarter final, the shield winners, Dún na nGall had a convincing win by 4-24 to 1-08 over Ard Mhacha at Ballybofey. In the semi-final played at Corrigan Park, Aontroim disposed of An Dún on a 1-21 to 0-18 scoreline while Doire defeated Dún na nGall, 4-16 to 2-06 at Celtic Park. The following week, at Owenbeg, Aontroim emerged victorious by 3-13 to 2-08. Well done to Aontroim. In the All Ireland Quarter Final, Aontroim were well beaten by Áth Cliath by 2-22 to 0-11 at Pairc Esler. Well done to Dún na nGall who secured the Ulster Minor Hurling Shield by defeating Tír Eoghain in the final by 3-19 to 0-05. The Ulster Minor Hurling Championship has been discontinued for a three year period (2018 -2020). A decision of Special Congress now allows for

Ulster counties of a suitable standard to enter the Leinster Minor Hurling Championship and Antrim and Down have entered the competition for 2018.

UNDER 21 HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Four Ulster counties competed in the Under 21 Championship, which was again played on a knock out basis. The semi-finals saw a major surprise as Doire beat Aontroim by 2-11 to 3-06 at Owenbeg. The other game saw a comprehensive win for An Dún over Ard Mhacha at the Athletic Grounds. In the final played at Corrigan Park, Doire claimed the title by virtue of a 3-17 to 1-09 win over An Dún. Congratulations to the Oak Leaf county. However, the All Ireland Semi Final epitomised the urgent need to restructure the Under 21 Hurling Championship as Cill Channaigh annihilated the Ulster champions by 8-35 to 0-07 at Semple Stadium.

Comhairle Laighean have agreed to accommodate one Ulster county in the 2018 Leinster Under 21 Hurling Championship. Aontroim and An Dún have confirmed that they wish to compete for this place. The winners will progress to the Leinster Championship while the losers of this play off will participate in the All Ireland B competition along with the other Ulster counties who have entered.

ULSTER CLUB HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

In the Ulster Senior Club Championship, we were treated to some great encounters. Slaughtneil recovered from an early Dunloy blitz to run out 1-18 to 2-08 winners. In the other semi-final, Ballygalget overcame Lisbellaw 2-26 to 0-8 at Corrigan Park. The Ulster Final was played as a double header with the Ulster Senior Camogie

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Final and Slaughtneil emerged victorious in both games, the hurling success over Ballygalget coming on a 2-21 to 1-12 scoreline.

The Intermediate Club Hurling Championship was a brilliant six team competition. There were quarter final wins for Patrick Sarsfields and Lavey. In the Semi-Finals, Middletown and Lavey had great wins over Eire Og Carrickmore and Patrick Sarsfields respectively. Middletown collected the title at Corrigan Park defeating Lavey in a brilliant final that ebbed and flowed from start to finish. 2-16 to 2-13 was the final score.

In the Junior Club Hurling Championship, there were quarter final wins for Na Magha, Setanta, Mullahoran and Gort na Mona, albeit after a replay. The semi-finals saw Na Magha defeat Mullahoran and Setanta beat Gort na Mona. The Junior Final produced a great spectacle as Setanta just edged out the Derry champions by 2-17 to 3-11 at Pairc MacCumhaill.

ALL IRELAND CLUB HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Slaughtneil were Ulster's representatives in the All Ireland Senior Club Championship, having won the 2016 Ulster Club Championship. In the All Ireland Semi Final they met Cuala from Dublin and were defeated 3-21 to 2-11 at the Athletic Grounds, Armagh. After collecting the Ulster Intermediate title in 2016, St Brigid's Cloughmills represented Ulster in the All Ireland series. On 14th January they were beaten by the British champions, Robert Emmett's by 0-16 to 0-14 after extra time in Greenford. In the Junior grade, Lamh Dhearg were defeated by a strong Mooncoin side in the All Ireland semi-final on 29th January by 5-11 to 0-08.

CONOR MCGURK CUP

A Special GAA Congress held on 30 September to deal with the re-organisation of the Hurling Championships and the facilitation of regular club games passed a motion barring the playing of inter-county tournaments above U-16 level. For a number of seasons Queen's University Hurling Club have organised the Conor McGurk Cup, named in honour of one of their former players, as a pre-season tournament prior to the commencement of the Allianz Hurling leagues. Rather than see the demise of the tournament, Ulster GAA have now taken this tournament under their auspices and will organise it in conjunction with Queen's University. This is a positive development and Bank of Ireland have kindly agreed to sponsor it, as they do with its football counterpart the Dr. McKenna Cup. It is hoped that the tournament will grow in strength in the coming years and become a permanent fixture of the GAA's winter games schedule.

INTER PROVINCIAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The Inter Provincial Championships in both football and hurling did not take place in 2017. Ulster are the current holders of the Football competition and with a record 33 wins it is a competition that the province has always been very committed to. While fully accepting the constraints of the overall fixtures programme, the inter-provincial championships have a long and proud tradition and it will be a sad day if it is decided that these two great competitions are no longer worthy of a place in the GAA calendar.

ULSTER HURLING

At its November meeting the Ulster Council's Competition Control Committee took the decision to discontinue with the Ulster Hurling

Championships at Senior, U-21 and Minor levels for a three-year period, to co-incide with the pilot period of the significant hurling changes which were agreed at the Special Congress in Croke Park on 30 September. While the Ulster Hurling Championships have a special place in all of our hearts the decision was taken in the best interests of hurling in Ulster.

In 2017 the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship was moved to an April slot at the behest of the counties but it failed to capture the imagination of either the players or the public, with a combined attendance of just around 1,000 people at its three games. I said last year that it made no sense for the Ulster Champions at U-21 and Minor level to compete in the All-Ireland semi-finals and quarter-finals respectively. If anyone needed to be convinced otherwise the truth was surely brought home with a massive dose of reality when Derry went under by the massive margin of 52 points to Kilkenny in the All-Ireland U-21 semi-final in Thurles. This was a result which did little for the competition, most surely done nothing for Derry and ultimately did nothing for Kilkenny as they were beaten by Limerick in the decider.

Antrim were also heavily defeated by Dublin in the All-Ireland minor quarter-final and indeed failed to field against the same opposition in the one-off U-17 semi-final. This was hugely disappointing, especially as other counties may have availed of the opportunity had more time been available to them. That said, given the U-21 and Minor experiences it's doubtful if anything other than another heavy defeat would have been the result for the Ulster champions. The new round robin format of the Joe McDonagh (Tier 2), Christy Ring,

Nicky Rackard and Lory Meagher Cups will give more meaningful games to Ulster counties at their own level, while the opportunity now exists for Ulster teams to compete in the Leinster Championship at U-21 and Minor level.

An U-21 B Hurling Competition is now a prospect open to Ulster counties which was not previously an option and in 2018 three Ulster counties will

take part in this competition, while one Ulster county will participate in the Leinster Championship. While the Leinster U-21 Championship is organised on a seeded knock-out basis, their Minor Championship is run on a seeded round robin basis and this year both Down and Antrim will have the opportunity to compete

against team of similar standard in Leinster and hopefully in time this will bear fruit as we aim to make a lasting and telling improvement to hurling levels in the province.

With all 32 counties represented in the Celtic Challenge, Ulster counties were very successful in five counties reaching the finals and Antrim (Division 2), Down (Division 3) and



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Tyrone (Division 6) winning. Ulster GAA remain determined to provide a games programme for clubs, especially for those in the developing counties of Ulster and beyond. In 2017, regional competitions were ran at U16 (nine team league) and U18 (12 team league). Indoor hurling continues to grow in participation. Our regional hurling staff are linking with counties to provide weekly competition for clubs in their local areas. Unfortunately, the Táin league is in need of a transformation. Currently in its sixth year, there was participation by 22 teams played over three divisions. Each year it has proved difficult to ensure a full commitment from clubs in this competition and there is consistently a battle to get the fixtures played. This is currently being examined, although the day when all clubs in Ulster will be competing against each other in a structured league format is still a long way off. Over 100 people attended the Ulster Póc Fada Final on Cuilcagh Mountain,

which was kindly hosted by the local Shannon Gaels Club. The senior competition was won by Antrim's Donal McKernan, Ciaran Watson from Down claimed the Under 16 title and the Camogie competitions were won by Orlagh O'Hara (senior) and Roisin McCormick (U16), both of whom are from Antrim. Congratulations to all the winners.

Much effort is going into hurling academy teams. In order to develop an appealing games programme, we have once again gone outside our provincial boundaries and this has certainly been a huge benefit. The activity has been streamlined to set dates to lessen the burden on clubs and especially dual players. All age grades now culminate with the National tournaments in August, with the annual 'Peter O'Keefe Cup', in Ballyshannon, becoming a national tournament in 2018.

The Subway Players Academy, at Ulster University in Jordanstown had

representation from all nine Counties in the 45 man Hurling squad.

Within schools hurling, the highlight was the Mageenan Cup final where St Patrick's Maghera defeated An Dún in the final played in the Arena Stadium at the Dub. The game was streamed live on facebook and received over 10,000 views.

I would like to thank Ulster Hurling Development Officer Kevin Kelly (and Jimmy Darragh before him) for their efforts in promoting the game in the province and I also pay great credit to the National Hurling Development Manager Martin Fogarty for his help and assistance throughout the year and particularly for his input into our provincial hurling workshops.

Also, congratulations to St Mary's CBGS Belfast in setting a new Guinness World Record for the largest ever hurling lesson. I was privileged to be present for part of the proceedings and the joy and enthusiasm of the



pupils, staff and coaches was truly something special.

SLAUGHTNEIL

In my report to last year's Convention I applauded the tremendous achievement of the Slaughtneil Emmet's Club in winning senior provincial titles across the three codes of Camogie, Gaelic Football and Hurling, stating that it was undoubtedly the greatest achievement by any club ever in a single calendar year. Now they have repeated the 'treble' and few would wager against this great community centred South Derry Club adding to their already impressive trophy collection. Words really fail to adequately describe what this club has achieved over the past two years as time after time they have risen to the occasion for 'the honour of the little village.'

The Camogs added to their Ulster crown by going on to lift All-Ireland honours, while the hurlers lost out to a strong Cuala side in the All-Ireland semi-final. The footballers were most unlucky to go under to Dr Crokes on St. Patrick's Day but no doubt both the footballers and the hurlers will give their all as they aim to emulate the achievements of their camogie sisters in securing national honours.

ULSTER FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP DRAW

I had occasion to attend my first All Ireland Championship draw back in October and one thing that struck me was that Ulster was the only province that does not have some form of 'conditions' attached to their draw. There is seeding in both Leinster and Munster, while in Connaught the teams which play London and New York are decided on a rotational basis. In Leinster the semi-finalists from the previous year are excluded from the



First Round draw and in Munster Cork and Kerry cannot meet before the semi-final stage.

Ulster therefore is the only truly 'open draw' championship and this has served us well over many years. But it also places a great emphasis on 'luck' and some counties have been 'luckier' than others. It has been well documented that for 17 consecutive years Down were drawn away in the First Round of the Ulster Championship, while now Antrim have not been drawn at home since 2010. Given the relatively competitive nature of the Ulster Championship any form of seeding would be impractical and in any event it's not an avenue that I have any desire to pursue. Nor should we be proscriptive about home and away games, though they can lead to a degree of 'unfairness' as highlighted by the examples referred to above. There is however one area where some level of equilibrium could be contemplated. It is well known that the track record of teams that play in the Preliminary Round of the Ulster Championship is not impressive when it comes to winning the title, though Donegal did win the All-Ireland from that starting position in 2012.

It is therefore an advantage to avoid the Preliminary Round. While every Ulster county has played in the Preliminary Round since the millennium, some have been more 'unfortunate' than others. This year, for example, will see Cavan's seventh appearance since 2000, while Derry have appeared just twice. I believe that there is merit in introducing a scenario whereby a team that is drawn to play in the Preliminary Round in a given year should be exempt for a period of time from playing in it again. An exemption for two or three years would be reasonable, though there would be potential for extending this to four years if there was the consensus to do so. I certainly believe that this is something that merits further debate.

SCHEDULING OF COUNTY FINALS

County final day is the blue riband event in the annual GAA calendar for our County Committees and followers of gaelic games within the counties. There is something special about the day and while the competing clubs obviously take centre stage, it is also a celebration for the entire county as it marks the highlight of the club

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scene within it. In an era when the promotion and coverage of our games is arguably more important than ever, it is important for counties to maximise their potential.

We didn't do this to great effect in 2017 when five of the nine County Football Finals in Ulster were played on the same day and to compound matters the Preliminary Round of the Ulster Club Championship between Kilcoo and Slaughtneil was also on that date. Due to such a spread of games opportunities were lost but the revision of the fixtures calendar, which includes a later start to the Ulster Club championship, provides new opportunities for a co-ordinated approach to fixture scheduling. This is a matter that we will discuss further with counties in the coming weeks.

SEAN AND KARL

While a number of high profile inter-county players hung up their boots in 2017 and I thank them all for the entertainment they have provided us with over the years. I hope I will be

forgiven if I make special reference to two players whose performances have lit up the playing fields of Ireland over many years

Sean Cavanagh made 89 championship appearances for Tyrone and this is a record for an outfield player. Since bursting onto the scene in 2002 he has enthralled us with his exploits up, down and across the playing pitches of Ireland. From his initial championship outing in a drawn encounter against Armagh in Clones in 2002 (his first of many great battles against his neighbours from across the River Blackwater and where he scored his first championship goal) to his last encounter against Dublin in Croke Park in the All-Ireland semi-final Sean Cavanagh gave his all for his beloved county.

His three All-Ireland and six Ulster senior medals sit nicely alongside his two National League medals and five All-Star awards. A former Footballer of the Year, he is among that elite band of Gaelic footballers who have captained

their country in the International Rules series against Australia.

He is undoubtedly one of the greatest exponents of the game in Ulster and while he may have been disappointed in missing out on one last All-Ireland final appearance he can take great joy in the fact that he captained Tyrone to back-to-back Ulster titles in his final two seasons and more so in that he has left a legacy which will hopefully inspire generations of young players for many years to come.

Sean finished the year by playing a pivotal role in Moy Tir Na nOg's annexing of the Ulster Intermediate Club Championship and wouldn't it be a fitting reward for this great gaelic star if he could add an All-Ireland Club medal to his wonderful array of inter-county medallions.

Karl Lacey made 65 championship appearances for Donegal (a record he shares with Christy Teye) and after 14 seasons with the Tir Conaill men he has decided to retire from



inter-county football. The dashing defender from the Four Masters Club twice represented Ireland on the International Rules stage, won four All-Star awards and was, most notably, named Footballer of The Year in 2012 when 'Sam' came to 'The Hills' for a second time. He also won a National Football League medal in 2007 and is the proud holder of three Ulster Senior Football Championship medals. Karl will continue to play with his club and is also involved with underage development squads in Donegal, so the next generation of Donegal footballers will have the opportunity to benefit from his knowledge and understanding of the game. He has also recently joined the Donegal senior team management and they will no doubt benefit from his vast experience as a player. I thank Sean and Karl and indeed all the inter-county players who retired in 2017 for their efforts and for helping to make our lives that bit more enjoyable. Thanks for the memories.

REFEREES

In concluding my summary of games activity in 2017, I wish to thank our match officials. I thank all our referees for their time, commitment and involvement in the delivery of our games programme which included 380 games in 25 different competitions in 2017. 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. We all are well aware that refereeing is no easy task and some of the difficulties faced by referees – and counties trying to recruit referees – were excellently portrayed by Fermanagh Referees' Administrator Martin Higgins in his report to the Erne County's Annual Convention last month.

Like players and team officials, referees will make mistakes and while there are times while we may feel aggrieved by decisions taken by the man in the middle, there can be absolutely no justification for any abuse, verbal or physical, of any match official. Such actions are indefensible and also make it more difficult to attract people to 'take up the whistle.' In such a scenario there are no winners as without referees there are no games.

ASSOCIATION MATTERS

The Special Congress on 30 September agreed a range of changes which will significantly benefit the club player in both hurling and football. The fixtures issue has been an issue that has generated more column inches and hours of debate over many years and, given the complexities of the requirement to find an acceptable mix between club/county, hurling/football and the different grades in the respective codes, it is fair to say that there is no utopia or no solution that will receive universal acceptance. However only the most partial of commentators could conclude that the changes adopted on 30 September will not benefit the club player. Not only is the month of April now free for club activity (apart from the Allianz League Division 1 and 2 Finals on 1 April) but there are eight additional weekends free from inter-county activity in 2018 than there were in 2017. By digging a little deeper we discover that in 2017 there were 63 adult inter-county fixtures played in April – in 2018 there will just be the two referred to above.

The month of September is also virtually free for club activity – in 2017 there were six adult inter-county games played in September and this will reduce to just one in 2018 and if it were not for the unavailability of Croke

Park on the last weekend in August there would be none at all. For the vast majority of counties August will also be totally free to play club games for after the first weekend of that month just two counties will remain in the hurling championship and four in the football championship. County Committees will need to remain firm with team managers to ensure that county players are available to clubs for the maximum possible time and especially during the month of April. Start as you mean to continue and if you get it right in Year One life will be much more comfortable moving forward.

Last year in my first Provincial Secretary's Report I highlighted the difficulties being caused by a lack of consistency in the interpretation to 'black card' offences and in particular those which fall under the category of 'deliberate' fouling. I suggested then that for such fouls the black card should be replaced by a yellow card and a 13m free awarded, irrespective of where on the field the foul occurred (unless it happened in the 'large square' when a penalty would be awarded).

Nothing I have seen in the last twelve months has changed my opinion – the problem still remains and, arguably, has got even worse. There were occasions over the summer when players were 'black carded' and even with the most liberal interpretation of the rule, the offence could not be considered as being in any way consistent with the 'deliberate' benchmark. The 'black card' places an additional burden on referees. The key word is 'deliberate' and while the task of the referee and his officials is not an easy one, before they terminate a player's involvement in a game they must be absolutely certain in their own

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minds that the act was 'deliberate.' A referee can show a player a 'red card' if he deems the action by the player warrants it, irrespective of whether or not he believes (or doesn't know) if the action was deliberate. With the 'black card' the referee doesn't have this 'luxury.'

CASEMENT PARK

A fresh planning application for the Casement park re-development was lodged with Belfast City Council on 28th February 2017. Less than two months later the application was subsequently 'called in' by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) as it was determined to be a project of regional significance.

The community consultation period (32 weeks) that preceded the submission of the planning application was unprecedented for a project of this scale and the application has been the subject of some 1500 public comments and contributions from a dozen statutory consultees in the intervening period.

The majority of representations made are supportive of the GAA's proposals for the site. The changing dynamic locally is best evidenced by progress made with local community and voluntary sectors, local businesses and traders on the Andersonstown Road and other interest groups such as the Andersonstown Regeneration Committee and Gaels for Casement, who are lending their support for the fresh planning application. To this end, credit must also be given to the Antrim County Committee and the Casement Park Social Club who are working together with members and local Gaels to ensure that the GAA family is having its voice heard of the undoubted need and benefits for the GAA in the county should the planning permission be

granted in due course.

The Mooreland and Owenvaragh Residents Association (MORA) remain opposed to seeing the site developed in the way that the GAA require to serve as a Provincial Stadium under the NI Executive approved Programme for Government (PfG) priority for Regional Sports Stadia. That said it is accepted and recognised widely the lengths to which the GAA have gone during public consultation and how they have responded pragmatically to the issues raised during that consultation, to which over 5,000 people contributed.

The planning assessment process should soon be coming to a close with the GAA's project team having responded to a request for Further Environmental Information (FEI) and it is anticipated that the outcome of the application will be announced in Spring 2018. However, it remains a concern that there is currently no Minister (Local or Direct Rule) for the planners to make a recommendation to.

The legal position regarding the ability of Senior Civil Servants to take decisions on regionally significant planning applications is the matter of a judicial process on the ARC 21 incinerator project, which is due for hearing next month. It will be interesting and potentially relevant for the outcome on the Casement Park application but it would be most unfortunate, and even ironic, that given all the delays that the project has endured that it could be delayed further by political inactivity when the project itself is politically driven under a PfG commitment.

The Ulster Council and the Project Board led by Chairman and Project Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) Tom Daly and Board members put

in significant work during 2017 in overseeing the project team work on the planning application, environmental statements and the ongoing fresh business case for the project which has been submitted to the Department for Communities (DfC) for consideration.

The current focus of the Board in the context of the significant delay arising from the former Department for the Environment (DOE) being successfully challenged on the previous planning application is on ensuring the necessary funding will be in place to see through the delivery of the stadium. Given the delay it will come as no surprise to anyone that costs will now be in excess of the initially projected £77.5m funding envelope but ongoing discussions indicate a willingness and commitment from both the GAA and from Government to deliver on the obligations of funding agreements and commercial contracts to deliver the stadium.

The Ulster Council of the GAA and the Project Board remain committed to the stadium and the four key pillars of success, namely:

- 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

During 2017 the work of the GAA members, project team and consultants with the Safety Technical Group (STG) was particularly noteworthy and has increased significantly

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confidence levels for the delivery of the project. A pre-planning application assurance report from the STG to the DFC Programme Board gave assurances that the GAA and the STG had reached a consensus on a viable design that was sufficiently developed and provided a sound basis for the GAA's target capacity of circa 34,500. Given the history of issues around these once contested matters this represented a very welcome endorsement of the stadium plan.

Furthermore, at the request of the emergency services further work was done in the summer and reported on in September from independent movement consultants (AECOM) that the GAA's plans for dealing with specific emergency based worst case scenarios were reasonable and proportionate based on extensive analysis which was undertaken. Work is ongoing with the PSNI and the emergency services testing the resilience of event and emergency plans, this work is recognised as exemplary by the Safe Sports Grounds Authority and above and beyond what would typically be expected at this stage of a stadium construction process. I record my appreciation to Jim Murray and Stephen McGeehan who represent the GAA on the STG group.

Aiken PR were successful in securing the PR and Communications commission early in 2017 and have continued to work with the project team in messaging the positive aspects of the project during the year successfully. There is frustration at times that much of this work is undertaken against the backdrop of a downbeat and at times negative narrative by some media. The 3D Flythrough produced during the summer by the Stadium Designers



Populous was a highlight of the year with our Ulster Final in Clones and All Ireland Finals in Hurling and Football showcasing the new look Casement Park to thousands of GAA Supporters. Much work has gone in to securing planning representations being made to the planners from GAA members and I would ask Counties, Clubs and members to continue to register their support for the project as we move in to 2018. Let's have no regrets that the GAA voice has been heard on the need for a new Casement Park.

The Casement Park stadium must and will be a positive catalyst for the Gaels of Ulster but in particular a 'shot in the arm' for Belfast as Ireland's second city. There will of course also be significant benefit for the GAA in Antrim and to this end Ulster GAA are particularly appreciative of the support of their County Committee led by Colin Donnelly, Terry Reilly, Pol MacCana and Frankie Quinn. The past year has brought resolution to historic issues around transition arrangements and forward-looking workgroups made up of personnel from Croke Park, Ulster

GAA and Antrim GAA are actively preparing the ground to ensure that the new Casement Park will deliver fully for the city, county, province and community as envisaged.

Chairman Tom Daly continues to lead our Board and during the year retired from his considerable duties with the HSE. We record our thanks to him and wish him well as he splits his new time found between Ballyshannon and Belfast striving to deliver the project for the GAA in Ulster.

Our Stadium Project Team deserves thanks for their diligence on the important work during the year and this includes Rory Miskelly, Stephen McGeehan and Tim Harkin. This group is supported by Oliver Galligan, and Michelle McAleer at PSG and Council level. The communications work is supported by Paul McGurk and Claire Curran. Geraldine McKavanagh continues to serve the Board, the Project Steering Group and the general administration of the project. Her work and attention to detail is outstanding. I thank also Feargal McCormack, Mick

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McGuckin and John Cole for their ongoing support and advice.

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Stephen McGeehan, who has been representing our interests at The Department for Communities (DFC) 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 the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) who contribute at those levels.

I acknowledge the immense support offered at Board level and on all project aspects by Paraic Duffy during his time on the Board. As he is soon to depart the Director General's office I thank him specifically for his inputs to the Casement Park project where his commitment and support for the project even at its most difficult stage has been unstinting and above and beyond the call of duty.

At DFC there was a significant loss during the year when the Deputy Permanent Secretary Ian Maye RIP sadly passed away. His death was a shock for all who knew him and I had the privilege of working alongside him in the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) for several years. I had a very positive meeting with him just days before his untimely death and I record my condolences and those of Ulster GAA to his partner, son and colleagues. I welcome the appointment of the new Programme SRO Ian Snowden and record my thanks to his colleagues Jacqueline Fearon, Denise Stockman, Andrew Dudley and James McCauley in the Programme Team for their support and partnership on the project.

I also wish to thank our two contracted teams who remain fully involved and integrated in the Design and Build process, namely Mott MacDonald on the Design side and, in particular

to their Belfast Divisional Director Bill Dowey. On the contracting side the Heron Buckingham (HBJV) team remain engaged and we thank Managing Director Damian Heron for his team's commitment to the project.

SAFEGUARDING & CHILD PROTECTION

2017 has again been a challenging period and a time of change in this area of our Governance. Sadly, Pat Darcy, Cathaoirleach of an Choiste Cód Eticie agus Dea-chleachtadh, passed away in July of this year after a short battle with illness. During his seven year tenure as Chair, Pat left an indelible mark on Safeguarding in the Association, particularly in Ulster and we will be forever indebted to him for his work.

Our Safeguarding team continue to provide advice, support and services to our clubs and constituent units across the province and throughout both jurisdictions to ensure they are



compliant with Safeguarding legal and best practice requirements and to help them deal with issues as they arise. This work is key to ensuring that we help our clubs and members create and maintain a safe, fun and enjoyable environment in which our children and young people can participate in Gaelic Games and Activities.

VETTING & TRAINING

In line with legal and best practice requirements, Association policy requires all those who work with children and young people in the GAA to be suitably trained and appropriately vetted prior to commencement of position. We are encouraged by the number of volunteers in our Association in Ulster who have completed their vetting either through Access NI or Garda Vetting, with over 34,000 through the process to date. Our basic awareness course participant's database continues to grow with over 43,000 members who have completed this course to date. Our suite of Safeguarding training that is available to clubs is a very popular resource that focuses on upskilling and training those who work specifically in this area of work and is vital to ensuring implementation of policies and procedures and dealing with issues is as effective as possible.

CHILDREN FIRST

The implementation of the Children First Legislation in the South on the 1st December 2017 will require some changes for our clubs in Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal. Ulster GAA are working with the association at national level to ensure that our clubs are informed and resourced to ensure they are compliant with this legislation.

The introduction of this change will now leave us for the first time in

the position where Safeguarding legislation is stronger in the South than it is in the North, and while we automatically default to the highest standard in terms of Association policy.

It is my hope that the legislation in the North can be reviewed and amended to ensure consistency across both jurisdictions.

FÉILE

The 2017 National John West Féile Peile na nÓg was hosted by counties Cavan, Fermanagh and Monaghan and it was a truly wonderful festival of football as almost 5,000 boys and girls participated across 10 divisions in boys' football and six divisions in girls' football. It was a joy to behold as children from across Ireland, Britain and the USA were hosted by the three said counties in a spirit of friendship and sportsmanship.

There were a number of incidents where the competitive nature of sport subsumed the spirit and ethos of Féile and the scenes that happened in Breffni Park and at Lissan on finals day were less than edifying. That said these isolated incidents should not detract from what was a wonderful exhibition of sport that is a manifestation of the GAA at its best.

Féile is a wonderful event and from the founding of Féile na nGael in 1971 until the present day it has undergone significant transformation. It has however become a victim of its own success and has become too big for a weekend event.

While accepting that the weekend has been an integral part of Féile, the requirements and expectations of today's world now requires logistical arrangements that could not have been imagined at the outset of the festival. Some 3,000 people who were

hosting visiting children had to be 'cleared' by either the Garda Vetting Bureau or Access NI. The amount of work this placed on host clubs and Ulster Council staff, who had to process each application, was staggering and a sincere debt of gratitude is due to the clubs and to Bernie Fox, Kathy Kelly and Paul McKillop who devoted many hours of time and effort to ensure all possible safeguards to visiting children. Thanks are also due to the officers and host families in clubs, to the members of an Choiste Cód Eitice agus Dea-Chleachtadh, our County Chairs' and Childrens Officers' and the many people who supported them in this crucial area of work.

The National Féile Committee was brilliantly supported by a Local Organising Committee led by Ulster GAA Vice-President Oliver Galligan and serviced by Jimmy Darragh.

This committee worked diligently over many months to ensure a successful weekend and I thank Oliver, Jimmy and all the committee for their sterling efforts.

With 252 participating teams it is unsurprising that there were plenty of fixtures – 607 to be exact – and that doesn't happen without a lot of effort, time and co-ordination so a big thanks to Jimmy Darragh, Stephen Donnelly and Niall Muldoon for co-ordinating this, organising referees and generally ensuring that things happened as smoothly as possible.

The Féile Programme was a mammoth task but Claire Curran left no stone unturned in producing a booklet that will be treasured for many years to come by the children, mentors and parents who participated in Féile Peile na nÓg 2017. To the host clubs, the referees, club co-ordinators and indeed

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everyone who played a part, I say a massive thank you. Without you a successful event on this scale could not and would not have happened. This year it is the turn of Down, Louth and Meath to host in a new development which sees two provinces hosting for the first time.

Looking beyond this year it is time for a major re-think on Féile. The co-ordination of the weekend requires so much time and effort that one must ask the question does it represent value for money. Even with all the Garda and PSNI checks there remains a risk that, given the numbers involved, the safety of a child could be compromised. This is an issue that that the Association needs to think seriously about.

The past number of years have witnessed regional hurling and football Féile competitions taking place across the country on the Saturday of Féile weekend. Indeed this year the Premier Regional Féile Peile na nÓg (which was won by Burren who defeated O'Donovan Rossa, Magherafelt in an all Ulster Final) took place in Sligo and other Regional Féiles' took place on the same day. Surely there is merit in this as a way forward for Féile. County winners at different ability levels could come together for a Provincial/ Regional Féile with the respective winners progressing to a National Féile final where they would be joined by overseas units. Such a scenario reduces the need for overnight stays and the bureaucracy that accompanies this and reduces the burden on organisers and referees in having to schedule so many games over the course of a weekend.

COACHING AND GAMES DEVELOPMENT

A wide and varied programme has been presented in the past year with

clear focus on disability, targeting social need, female participation and participation levels in hurling, handball, football and ladies football blitz and super games programmes. Our programmes continue to develop around the LISPA (Life Long Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity) framework. Programme design has specifically targeted our memberships across the spectrum from High Performance to Performance through to Organised Activity and Active Living.

The delivery of these programmes is due to the investment by the GAA as well as key partners such as Sport NI, The Department of Education and the Department for Communities. Ulster GAA continues to be recognised as an excellent vehicle that can be used to deliver not only activity but it can be used to build social capital through our volunteers. Learning opportunities have been provided for Player, Coaches and Referees Academy programmes. The opportunity has been extended to both male and female participants. Our close working relationships with Camogie, Ladies Football and Handball is evident given the number of joint coaching and games projects and programmes that we have delivered. These learning and participation opportunities are extended through the excellent relationships with our Counties. In particular the work of our County Coaching Officers and the Games Development Managers and Officers, drive National Programmes such as Academy Programmes, GAA Coaching Awards, the ever increasing popular Cúl Camps, Super Games Centres and the 5 Star Challenge.

Coaching and Games staff are passionate about what they do. They are challenged to ensure that our volunteers inform what we do

and how well we do it. The Provincial Coaching and Games Committee under the stewardship of PJ McGowan and the members of the Coaching Committee has been challenged to work within National Policy guidelines. At the same time, they are required to deliver programmes and games schedules that are relevant and meaningful. Good examples of this has been the success of the Regional and Provincial Hurling Blitzes, the Inter-County Academy Programmes and the Celtic Challenge. The excellent working relationships with the Community and Marketing Departments allows Coaching and Games to deliver key messages such as Concussion Awareness, Anti-Doping, One Punch and Live to Play to our players and volunteers in a professional manner.

Our Sports Science Officer Kevin McGuigan has been a key member of staff over the past eight years but he will leave us at the end of the month to take up a new post in a related field. Kevin has been instrumental in raising the profile of sports science and elite performance and Ulster GAA and the counties in the province have derived great benefit from his expertise. I wish him well in his future career. He has had the opportunity to work in an environment where there has been significant progress, innovation and development and this will no doubt stand them in good stead. Ryan Mellon is presently on secondment to Rugby Players Ireland and I have no doubt that the players he is currently working with will benefit from his vast experience, both as a member of staff of Ulster GAA and as a footballer who has played at the highest level. He will no doubt learn from his time in this new working environment and I trust that he will bring some of his new found learning back to Ulster GAA when he returns later in the year.

The continued commitment of our volunteers in the support of our programmes is central to the success in Ulster. Success should never be measured by silverware alone. A good sign is the continued growth in interest in our schools and clubs and we welcome the continued support from all stakeholders as we move forward.

Eugene Young has been working closely with the Antrim County Committee, the Ard Stiurthoir, the National Games Development Committee and the coaching section in Croke Park in relation to the creation of a plan for the development of gaelic games in Belfast. This exciting proposal is close to finalisation and it is expected that details will be formally announced in the near future. It is vital that gaelic games occupies a greater role in its sporting repertoire of our second city and hopefully the out-workings of the plan, which will maximise the use of hubs by engaging locally with schools and clubs, coupled with a redeveloped Casement Park will

inspire more and more kids to take up our great games.

KS1 CURRICULUM SPORTS PROGRAMME

In this period, we fought hard to retain the Key Stage 1 Curriculum Sports Programme. In place for ten years and having secured a major award in 2014, we had cross-political support for the retention of this Programme within the Department of Education budget. Unfortunately budgetary pressures within the department resulted in Ulster GAA being advised in July that the Programme would be terminated on 31 October 2017.

Following a concerted campaign – organised jointly with our colleagues in the Irish Football Association (IFA) who found themselves in a similar situation – the scheme was rescued at the eleventh hour as funding was found in the October Monitoring Round which enabled the Programme to continue until the end of the current financial year. However given the

timing of the 'rescue package' many of our well established and experienced staff had already taken the decision to seek alternative employment (some of which was within Ulster GAA) and it was therefore necessary to embark on a recruitment drive for 18 new staff members and they took up post at the start of December. I wish them well in their posts. I also extend my thanks to our colleagues who have embarked on a new career path. I commend them for their contribution to improving the lives of children during their time working on the Curriculum Sports Programme and wish them well in their future endeavours.

I wish to place on record my sincere thanks to all those who gave their support to help sustain the Programme. In particular I thank the many schoolteachers and GAA clubs who wrote to The Department of Education, to the politicians from all sides who recognised the overall value of the Programme and to the Head of the Civil Service David Sterling for



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lending a sympathetic ear to both the IFA and ourselves and for identifying easements in other departments which allowed additional money to be secured for the Department of Education.

As we move forward to 2018, the key is to sustain the work at KS1 in schools and clubs. This is the future of our Association and the young children at this stage need high quality coaching and experiences. There is an ever ending need to reassess and strive to keep it simple for our volunteers. At the same time, we are challenged to provide quality experiences for our young people and to offer a meaningful programme of games for all abilities.

SCÓR

For the first time since 2013, when Derry celebrated its 'City of Culture', Ulster hosted the All-Ireland finals in both Scór Na nÓg and Scór Sinsir.

Belfast's Waterfront Hall was the venue for both events and they showcased all that is great in the cultural life of the GAA.

Ulster clubs excelled in both finals with four Scór Na nÓg and three Scór Sinsir titles coming to the province. In Scór Na nÓg the national titles were won by St. Cillian's, Whitecross (Ceili Dancing), St. Patrick's, Donaghmore (Instrumental Music), Niamh McDowell, St. Mary's, Glasdrumman (Solo Singing) and Naomh Columba (Question Time), while the Scór Sinsir winners were Gweedore (Leiru), Clonduff (Ballad Group) and Omagh, St. Enda's, (Set Dancing). A notable feature of the Gweedore success was that their act was conducted entirely in the Irish language. A big well done to them and all the winners from Ulster. I wish to thank the National Scór Committee for selecting Ulster to host the 2017 finals and I know that your faith in us to deliver was well justified. I wish to thank my colleagues

in Ulster GAA and the Antrim County Committee who worked closely with the National Committee in the organisation of both events, with particular thanks to Bronagh Lennon, Geraldine McKavanagh and Claire Curran for their many hours of hard work and commitment to the staging of both Finals.

Participating figures from across Ireland demonstrate that vastly more clubs from Ulster participate in Scór than any other province. This year some 200 of the clubs in Ulster took part in Scór Na nÓg, while over 140 participated in Scór Sinsir (excluding the table quiz). These are excellent figures and I commend all those who foster the tradition of Scór on the province and thank them for their ongoing efforts.

ULSTER SCHOOLS

Once again Ulster Schools under the expert leadership of Jimmy Smyth



(Chair) and Seamus Woods (Secretary) have organised a cadre of games catering for 138 schools and some 700 teams across more than 70 competitions in hurling and football. They are assisted in the organisation of fixtures by Ulster GAA's Niall Muldoon and I thank him, the entire committee of Ulster Schools and the teachers and fixture co-ordinators for each of the numerous competition groups, for their unstinting efforts in promoting such worthwhile games, most of which fail to get the true recognition they deserve.

Late last year the Department for Infrastructure in the north announced proposals which will require "anyone who is paid while driving, or is driving a minibus as a consequence of their employment, cannot be regarded as a volunteer and must have a D1 (minibus driving) licence". This is a major departure from the current position which allows regular car licence holders to drive minibuses in this situation. While in no way wishing to compromise the safety of anyone, the impact of this change will put severe pressure on already challenging school budgets. As well as requiring the full D1 Minibus drivers will now also need to obtain the Driver Certificate of Professional Competence which will place even further costs on schools.

Many schools rely on the use of minibuses for their curricular and extra-curricular activities and I fear that this new requirement could have an adverse effect on our games in both the primary and post-primary sectors. While I understand that this is an EU Directive that has existed for a period of time, it is somewhat ironic that it is being introduced at a time when we're about to leave the EU. I ask the Department not to proceed with these measures at this time to allow

for further discussions to ascertain what the consequences will be for schools and other affected bodies, such as some charities, and to offer some meaningful assistance should it be deemed appropriate to proceed with the new guidelines.

ULSTER HANDBALL

Comhairle Uladh found it necessary to review the circumstances surrounding the Annual General Meeting of Ulster Handball which was held in Kelly's Inn, Garvaghey in January of last year. The review team of Oliver Galligan, Michael Geoghegan and myself found that the AGM had not been undertaken in accordance with the Handball Constitution and a new AGM was arranged for early April.

The officer team are now working with the full support of Ulster GAA, with the Games and Coaching and Public Relations Section in particular providing ongoing assistance and advice. Additionally, meetings of the Ulster Handball Council are now held on the premises of Ulster GAA in Armagh.

It was a successful year on the courts with Charly Shanks taking pride of place in winning the All-Ireland 40 x 20 men's singles title, with the doubles title going to well renowned Cavan duo Paul Brady and Michael Finnegan. I extend my congratulations to them all.

CLUB AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Club and Community Development Department lead the way in engagement with external organisations in the wider community as well as our internal club units. It is imperative that Ulster GAA creates and maintains links with a range of external agencies and organisations to highlight the good work that is currently

ongoing, but also to identify new ways of partnership working in the future. The Community Department has overseen the production of an updated Public Affairs information brochure and attended the NI Local Govt Association conference in October. They also played a key role in the organisation of Ulster GAA's Engagement Forum in Armagh City Hotel in November. Ulster GAA, in partnership with Ulster Rugby and the Irish FA, have secured funding through the Peace IV European funding programme with a project entitled "Sport Uniting Communities". This four-year programme will use sport as a vehicle to "Build Positive Relations" as well as developing capacity within our club units. The programme will deliver a series of joint activities in partnership with Ulster Rugby and IFA and also deliver GAA specific "Taster sessions" and "Getting to know the GAA" presentations.

The Multi Sport Partnership continue to deliver targets associated with the DfC funded programme, and also in discussions are involved with the Department of Justice in promoting a campaign to raise awareness around Domestic Violence.

Ulster GAA has also created a partnership with the Belfast Giants Ice Hockey team and has explored the links between Hurling and Ice Hockey. Part of this engagement surrounded the "Friendship Four" college Ice Hockey tournament where all GAA clubs in Ulster were offered free tickets for young club members to attend the ice hockey games and the college players were offered an opportunity to try out hurling.

Government departments, both north and south, provide advice for Clubs on Governance and Funding and one

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of the highlights was the successful funding applications received by clubs through the 2017 Sports Capital Programme. 24 out of the 33 clubs in Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan that attended the Ulster GAA advice clinics were successful in acquiring funding.

CLUB MAITH

Club Maith continues to be the recognised brand for club excellence among GAA clubs in Ulster. Three clubs have been accredited in 2017, all of which received Gold awards – they were Roslea Shamrocks (Fermanagh), O'Donovan Rossa, Magherafelt (Derry) and St. Joseph's, Ballycran (Down) – and I extend my congratulations to them. The Club Maith website continues to be an excellent 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, 61 clubs have now been achieved Club Maith Status. A new introduction to the scheme in 2017 was an online function being provided for clubs to upload their evidence. It is hoped that this will encourage more clubs to become accredited and this been evident with 53 clubs registering an interest since November.

CLUB PLANNING

The Club Planning Programme continues to be a key process in enabling clubs to better prepare themselves for the future. The programme has been reviewed at National Level and going forward there will be a focus on three year development plans rather than the previous 5 year model. This programme is rolled-out through Ulster GAA in conjunction with County Development Officers. A bank of

Club Planners attended training in Croke Park in October, and 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 2018.

VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT

Club Officer Training Programme was rolled out for its eighth consecutive year in 2017 to help build capacity for providing club officers with essential information and to provide the opportunity for a discussion forum within the Association.

ENTRY LEVEL, CLUB OFFICER INDUCTION AWARD

150 volunteers from across all nine counties attended this training on Saturday 7th January in Holy Trinity College, Cookstown. This event provided role specific training for

club officers new to their role. Eight workshops were held as part of this session:

- **Level 1, Club Officer Development Programme:** This training programme was held on a regional basis in four different venues in January, 214 volunteers attended training delivered in Bessbrook, Magherafelt, Clones and Ballybofey.

The training provided club officers with all essential information for the year ahead. In 2017, Ulster GAA identified four Key Areas of work to deliver on based on feedback provided in previous years and issues that arose in 2016. Workshops focused on the areas of Club Facility Management, Health and Wellbeing, Volunteering and Funding.

- **Level 2, Elevate Award:** Following the success of the Elevate Award in 2016 it was delivered once again in 2017. Ten 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 acted as tutors for this programme, sharing their experiences in relevant areas of work. New areas of volunteer recognition and development have been identified, such as the inaugural Provincial Youth Forum in November, where young people from the nine counties came together to discuss GAA topics and receive some information and guidance on Health and Wellbeing and Time Management. Our partnership with Translink rewards

a Young Volunteer of the Month and this has proven extremely popular. An exciting development has been the acquisition of funding through the Coca Cola Fund to deliver a Young Leaders Programme and this will take place in Summer 2018.

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

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 learning is put into practice at Club level.

The Multi Sport Volunteering Forum 'Stay in the Game – Promoting Lifelong Wellbeing in Sport' was held in the Athletic Grounds, Armagh on Thursday 31st August 2017. The aim of the forum was to bring together sports volunteers from football, rugby and GAA to explore how to keep older volunteers active in their clubs. The Forum heard from a number of agencies who provided an overview of health programmes which can be implemented in sports clubs. It also heard at first hand from local sports clubs who are leading the way in this area.

GAME OF THREE HALVES

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 during 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 Girdwood Community Hub on 28th 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.

CÚCHULAINN INITIATIVE

The annual Ulster GAA Cúchulainn Cup took place at the Meadowbank Sports Arena on Wednesday 15th March 2017. Magherafelt Cúchulainns, Banbridge Cúchulainns, Dungannon 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 400 pupils promoting greater understanding and respect for other cultures; a key aim of the Cúchulainn Cup programme. Banbridge Cúchulainns made-up of St Patrick's College, Banbridge High School and Newbridge Integrated College were crowned champions and were chosen to travel to London to compete in the All Britain Competition 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,

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Warwickshire and Yorkshire. Despite being a team made-up of players who had little experience playing Gaelic games. They 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. 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. I also thank Diarmaid Marsden, Fionntan O'Dowd and Garreth Thornton for their efforts in helping to prepare the team and making the weekend such an enjoyable experience for all. I am also extremely grateful to The Executive Office

for their continued support for this project which is an integral part of our outreach programme.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Ulster GAA's Health & Wellbeing Committee continues to operate and deliver at a high level. The Committee, under the leadership of Cathal Hand, have performed a valuable service in shaping the way forward for health and wellbeing within Ulster GAA; influencing Ulster GAA campaigns, and supporting their roll-out in counties.

All nine County Health & Wellbeing Committees are established and embedded, to varying degrees, in core county activity. A sustained and committed effort is required on the part of all counties in order to fully realise the potential the health and wellbeing agenda can make to our clubs and communities. Health and Wellbeing should not be considered

as "additional" to GAA activity but rather a core activity of our units. This is a challenge which the Health and Wellbeing Committees at national, Ulster, county and indeed club level all face. It is hoped that as the benefits of health and wellbeing become realised in our clubs, which will take some time, that this challenge will be diminished.

I wish to thank our nine County Health and Wellbeing Chairpersons and also Ciaran McLaughlin who offers great support as Chairperson of the National Health & Wellbeing Committee. It is also worth noting the invaluable support our County Health & Wellbeing Committees have been to clubs who have encountered critical incidents in the past year. Their diligence and care shown to the families, clubs, and communities affected have been invaluable at the hardest of times. I also wish to place on record my sincere thanks to Ulster GAA's Health and Wellbeing Manager Maura McMenamin



for her endless efforts in promoting this most valuable of initiatives.

NATIONAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING COMMITTEE

Ulster GAA continue to be represented on this Committee and are heavily involved in shaping the direction of health and wellbeing through-out the GAA. Two important areas of work in 2017 have been Critical Incident Response Planning, and Gambling Awareness. A Critical Incident Response Plan (CIRP) has been devised to help clubs and counties to respond to situations which overwhelm the club's / county's natural ability to respond. The CIRP aims to:

1. Promote a sense of safety
2. Promote a sense of calm
3. Promote a sense of self-efficacy (ability to cope)
4. Promote connectedness
5. Promote hope

A presentation and training for Critical Incident Response Planning (CIRP) has been developed and delivered to County Health & Wellbeing Chairpersons in November; the aim being that all GAA units develop and adopt a CIRP and training will be made available in counties in early 2018.

Gambling Awareness has been on the agenda of the National Health & Wellbeing Committee for a number of years. 2016 figures from the GPA counselling service highlights gambling addiction as the number one area of help-seeking by its members. Research, albeit limited for the island of Ireland, shows a worrying trend in relation to problem gambling. National Community Health Manager made a presentation to 2017 Congress on the issue, and the National Health & Wellbeing Committee have sought support from experts in developing a presentation on the area of

gambling awareness. Versions of this have been delivered at the Tyrone Health & Wellbeing Seminar and the presentation will be widely available from early 2018.

HEALTHY CLUB PROGRAMME

Phase II of the Healthy Club Programme began in November 2016, and is going from strength-to-strength. In total 17 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 19 Ulster Healthy Clubs are as follows:

- An Caisleán Glas, Cumann Naomh Padraig GAA Club (Tyrone)
- Omagh, St. Enda's GAA Club (Tyrone)
- Castleblayney Faughs GAA Club (Monaghan)
- Derrygonnelly Harps GAA Club (Fermanagh)
- Erne Gaels GAC Belleek GAA Club (Fermanagh)
- Cumann Chluain Daimh GAA Club (Down)
- St. Peter's Warrenpoint GAA Club (Down)
- St. John's Drumnaquoile GAA Club (Down)
- Michael Davitt GAA Club (Derry)
- Killygarra GAA Club (Cavan)
- Cavan Gaels GAA Club (Cavan)
- St Joseph's Glenavy GAA Club (Antrim)
- St. Marys Rasharkin GAA Club (Antrim)
- Naomh Mochua Derrynoose GAA Club (Armagh)

- Culloville Blues GAA Club (Armagh)
- St Marys, Convoy GAA Club (Donegal)
- Naomh Muire, Kincasslagh GAA Club (Donegal)

Phase III of the Healthy Club Project will begin in January 2018, when 150 clubs will become involved in the project. It is hoped that even more Ulster clubs will become involved given the large amounts of health and wellbeing activity already ongoing in our clubs. The Healthy Club Portal has been upgraded with clubs finding it much easier to report back to the National Co-ordinator. It is hoped that Phase IV of the project will be open for all clubs to achieve Healthy Club status, with criteria for this currently being agreed by the National Healthy Club Project Team.

ULSTER GAA HEALTH AND WELLBEING PROGRAMMES MENTAL HEALTH

2017 has been a year in which Ulster GAA have made great strides around the area of mental health. AWARE were named as Ulster GAA Charity Partner of the year and have been instrumental in assisting us in a number of initiatives. Most notably 2017 has seen a lot of work in developing the Ulster GAA MindFit Programme which aims to develop resilience and emotional intelligence in young people. This links with the move to make Player Welfare Officers available in each county, and that these officers should be placed on the County Health & Wellbeing Committees in order to maximise the potential of this role. Thanks to funding from the Public Health Agency a programme of MindFit will be delivered to counties in early 2018.

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TAKE 5 STEPS TO WELLBEING

Ulster GAA were successful in drawing down funding from the Public Health Agency to develop a social media campaign based on the "5 Steps to Wellbeing" model. This initiative encourages people to look after their mental health by partaking in the 5 steps to wellbeing everyday.

The five steps to wellbeing include:

1. Connect;
2. Be active;
3. Take notice;
4. Keep learning;
5. Give.

Ulster GAA's Mental Health Ambassadors Mickey Harte, Drew Wylie, Geraldine McLaughlin, Aoife Ní Chaiside, and Ronan McNamee engaged enthusiastically with the programme and added greatly to its worth. The social media campaign was launched in July 2017, with three games in the Ulster Senior Football Championship being used as opportunities to promote the campaign to a wide audience. Clubs and Counties are encouraged to

use the videos which are available on Ulster GAA's health and wellbeing microsite.

LIVE TO PLAY

The Primary School Road Safety Programme – the Live To Play Oscars was held on Friday 19th May in Tyrone GAA Centre at Garvaghey. 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. After a good response from schools six schools were selected as finalists, namely; St Patrick's & St Joseph's, Glenullin/Garvagh; St Teresa's, Belfast; St Joseph's, Galbally; St Ita's, Belfast; St Malachy's Armagh and Christ the King, Drumwiness. St Patrick's & St Joseph's, Glenullin/Garvagh ran-out overall winners and were rewarded with an O'Neills voucher for their school. Live To Play was well received at a

road safety event in Monaghan in early August. Hosted by McCaughey's 24-hour Service Station, Broomfield, The Road Safety Authority and Monaghan County Council this event coincided with a busy bank holiday weekend on our roads with Monaghan, Armagh and Tyrone all playing in Croke Park. Thanks to the organisers for including us in their plans and to Monaghan GAA, Armagh GAA, and Tyrone GAA for their support in promoting our Live To Play campaign.

DDSR

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, Queen's University, St. Mary's College, and Belfast Metropolitan College.

HEART START

Ulster GAA staff availed of refresher



training in the summer, enabling them to deliver Heartstart training as and when required. Trained tutors in St Mary's Rasharkin also delivered training over a number of weeks to club and community members. Ulster GAA staff assisted Mid Ulster District Council with "Restart a Heart Day" on Monday 16th October 2017.

PSNI - ONE PUNCH CAMPAIGN

Ulster GAA have partnered with the PSNI to develop 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. Plans are afoot to have the hour-long workshop delivered to clubs in each of our counties in early 2018. A number of clubs in Derry have already been involved in the programme, which has been very well-received.

AIR AMBULANCE

During the year Ulster GAA were pleased to lend their support to the recently launched Air Ambulance in the north. Former President of both the GAA at national level and the Ulster Council Peter Quinn sits on the Air Ambulance Board and given the broad base of the GAA in Ulster, and especially our strength in rural areas, there is a natural connection between the GAA and the Air Ambulance and this worthy and progressive development is deserving of our support. There are currently two air ambulance helicopters, based at Enniskillen and The Maze/Long Kesh, and they serve not only the six northern counties but neighbouring counties south of the border.

TWINNING ARRANGEMENTS

Last February the GAA centrally and its overseas units agreed that these units

could be best served moving forward by continuing to build on the existing twinning programme with provincial councils. Ulster GAA continues to have productive partnerships with both the Canadian County Board and the Provincial Council of Britain.

As referred to earlier in my report, Ulster GAA was delighted to once again lend their support to the All Britain Competition by sending a cross-community team to participate in the All Britain Competition. Eugene Young and Roger Keenan delivered a highly successful hybrid coaching course across Foundation, Level One and Level Two categories in London in November and it has been well received by those who attended, who were drawn from right across Britain.

This year Ulster GAA once again supported the GAA in Canada through the provision of equipment and by sending referees to their Toronto and Eastern Divisional Finals in hurling and football. Additionally, and for the first time, a referee from the province was appointed to referee the Western Divisional Finals which took place in Calgary. Unfortunately the competition had to be curtailed due to the tragic death of young Vancouver Harps player David Gavin (from Breaffy in County Mayo) and we express our deepest sympathy to his family, team-mates and his many friends.

Following a successful pilot in Ottawa, St. Mary's University College in Belfast has now agreed to send a number of placement students to coach in schools in Canada over a six weeks period as part of their teacher training module. As well as giving the children a taster in gaelic games they will train up coaches and teachers and help develop links between school and local club(s), where none already exist.

It is an exciting development and one which Ulster GAA hopes will help build a strong foundation for the future development of gaelic games in Canada.

In a further manifestation of the strong links between Ulster GAA and the Canadian County Board, the Provincial President and I attended the 2016 (held in February 2017 when it was postponed from December 2016 as a mark of respect for Danny Murphy) and 2017 Canadian Conventions in Toronto, while personnel from Ulster GAA will deliver a Level One Coaching Course to Canadian coaches with Foundation and Foundation Tutor qualifications in April. Ulster GAA will also deliver a Referees Tutor Programme for existing and new referees early in 2018.

SPORT NI

Ulster GAA was successful in securing funding of £882,794 for the period 2017-21 from Sport NI under their Sporting Clubs Programme. This funding which secures seven full or part-time posts (including two for Ulster Ladies GAA) is the highest award for any of the successful 21 sports in this Programme and it reflects the level of grassroots work that is undertaken by us in the promotion of gaelic games. Although we were not successful in securing funding for all of the posts we applied for, we welcome this recognition of our work by Sport NI.

We were ineligible to apply for funding to the Sporting Winners Programme due to criteria which excluded applications from bodies whose sports didn't have a World Championship, or which were not included in the schedules for Olympic, Paralympic or Commonwealth Games. When it became known that Cricket Ireland, The Irish Football Association

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and Ulster Rugby did apply but were unsuccessful in their bids for funding to the Sporting Winners Programme the four sports formed an alliance to challenge the policy and process of a government funded programme which failed to provide funding to four of the leading sports in the country. It seems strange that in terms of the combined level of funding for both programmes that Ulster GAA is sixth place overall, having received less than 50% of the funding awarded to the most successful sport (hockey) and behind sports such as canoeing. The position is even worse for rugby and cricket, not to mention the Irish Football Association who received no funding at all from either programme.

Just recently we have been advised by Sport NI that they are unable to re-visit the Sporting Winners allocations but they are keen to work with us moving forward in relation to future funding opportunities. While I welcome the latter development, as a collective the four sports are continuing to look at potential avenues to right what we regard as a flawed application process for Sporting Winners. One positive

development has been the decision of Sport NI to once again give Ulster GAA access to the Sports Institute and Eugene Young and his team are currently working with the Institute on a Player Pathway Programme which will be launched this year and from which all Ulster counties can benefit.

GOVERNANCE

In 2017 the GAA published a Governance Guide to cover all units of the Association. There is no doubt that the GAA is well run at all levels and this guide sets out in clear terms a set of standards for the conduct of our affairs which will protect both the Association generally and in particular the countless numbers of officials and volunteers who serve this great organisation.

Under the governance principles of Leadership, Exercising Control, Transparency & Accountability, Operating Effectively and Behaving With Integrity the guide gives practical advice to enable all units to operate at the highest standards and to ensure that all officers understand their roles and the expectations that fall therein. In November Ulster GAA held a

half-day Stakeholder Engagement workshop which was attended by over 130 people from a range of sporting, cultural and statutory organisations, north and south, and elected representatives and officials from both central and local government. The key note speaker was Professor Deirdre Heenan who enlightened the audience with her impressions of the GAA from a neutral perspective and she stressed the importance of partnership working. This event, one year into our four-year strategy, allowed the organisation to take stock of how it is performing against its key goals and the feedback and observations of the delegates will help inform our approach to the major challenges ahead.

As part of our good governance principles two independent board members were appointed to the Management Board of Comhairle Uladh during the past year. In the short time they have been with us Anne Garvey and Dr David Hassan have made an invaluable contribution to the work of the Council and the oversight and scrutiny they bring to our affairs is both welcome and refreshing. I wish them well for the remainder of their tenure.

ONE CLUB GUIDELINES

In April 2017 the Ard Stuirthoir and his counterparts in the Camogie Association and Ladies Gaelic Football Association signed-off on 'One Club Guidelines' to enable best practice in clubs which have units competing in two or more of these codes. While recognising the respective entities of each of the three codes, these guidelines chart a practical path forward for clubs. In the absence of formal integration the One Club approach to the promotion and playing of Gaelic Games at adult and juvenile

levels, this document provides practical guidance in catering for the entire GAA family in an integrated manner.

The Guidelines allow for separate committees within the club to manage the day to day running of their respective playing codes but the Club Executive Committee should have overall authority for governance, with each code appropriately represented on the Club Executive Committee. Financial affairs should be the domain for the Executive Committee, though each unit should benefit from co-ordinated fundraising activities, while Facility allocation should be shared fairly across all codes.

This model is already the case across many clubs in Ulster and at a provincial level we try as far as possible to play our part in helping to promote both the Camogie and Ladies Football codes. However the formal adoption of these Guidelines are an important development in the future direction

of the Association and if formal integration is ever proposed down the line, then a lot of the spadework has already been undertaken as GAA members, both male and female, are already working together in a co-ordinated and integrated manner.

DATA PROTECTION

In May of this year significant changes in Data Protection legislation will come into effect across the European Union. The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) will bring about changes to the law which will affect the ways in which members' personal data can be collated and used for GAA purposes. The changes will impact on every unit of the Association. Ulster GAA has established a small working group to examine the implications of the new legislative requirements for GAA units and the issue has been highlighted in the GAA Monthly Newsletter.

BREXIT

Since the June 2016 referendum much has been written about the potential impact of Brexit across Ireland. Given that a European Union land border will exist on the island of Ireland post March 2019 we know there will be repercussions but we are still unclear as to their nature and extent. The 'divorce' negotiations are taking place against a backdrop of minority governments in both London and Dublin and no government at all in Belfast, so needless to say things are far from going smoothly. But what may it all mean for the GAA?

The weakening of sterling may have impacted on attendances at some games and has undoubtedly led to increased running costs for clubs and counties in the north. In the event of industries and manufacturing plants closing or moving elsewhere there will be significant economic implications and this could potentially result in



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young people emigrating elsewhere in search of employment.

A 'hard border' would have serious consequences for the GAA. Many of us will be familiar with the days of long queues at the border and any return to that would have significant consequences for the GAA, even with a continued Common Travel Area. However the deal agreed last month between the British Government and the European Commission appears to rule this out as it provides for "full alignment with those rules of the Internal Market and the Customs Union which, now or in the future, support North-South co-operation, the all-island economy and the protection of the 1998 Agreement." Just how this will be achieved if the British Government proceed with their pledge to leave both the Single Market and the Customs Union remains something of a mystery but the unrestricted passage of people on the island of Ireland is absolutely critical from a GAA perspective. The year ahead will be a critical one.

COMMUNITY HALLS SCHEME

In the autumn of 2016 Communities

Minister Paul Givan launched a 'pilot' scheme which allowed for grants of up to £25,000 for refurbishment of halls which served as a community hub. The announcement of the scheme took place at Salterstown Orange Hall and the Communities Minister was accompanied by First Minister Arlene Foster for the announcement. While the launch took place at an Orange Hall the department made clear from the outset that applications were welcome from across the entire spectrum of community life.

The department claimed that priority would be given to organisations that had previously attracted little or no public funding and initially set aside some £500,000 for the scheme. There was huge interest and when the successful applicants were announced in early 2017 the award total had risen to £1.9m, almost quadrupling the initial budget. This figure is significant as had it exceeded £2m approval would needed to have been sought from the Department of Finance, which at the time was headed up by Sinn Féin Minister Máirtín O Muilleoir.

Eyebrows were raised when the list of

successful applicants were announced. In all 90 groups/organisations were successful and, a fact publicly admitted by the department, there was a lack of balance in the allocations with 58 'perceived' to be from the Protestant ethos, 23 'perceived' to be neutral and just nine 'perceived' to be from the Catholic community. Just two GAA clubs were successful. While accepting that the department failed to conduct an equality screening exercise prior to the launch of the 'pilot' was unusual, it seems perverse that only two clubs from the largest community based sporting organisation in the country should be successful. While in no way questioning the validity of the successful applicants, the GAA has a right to a plausible explanation as to why their units had a less than 4% success rate under the pilot.

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

I am indebted to the outstanding contribution made to the GAA in Ulster by our Provincial Council members. Our President Michael Hasson gives selflessly of his time and travels many miles in the cause of Ulster GAA. He is a steady hand at the head of our affairs and his contributions are always

meaningful and insightful.

Vice-Chairman Oliver Galligan emphasised his leadership qualities as Chair of the Féile Peile na nÓg Organising Committee and he has also proved to be a highly effective Chair of the Provincial Hurling and Integration Committees.

Ciaran McLaughlin combines his Treasurer role with that of Chair of the National Health and Wellbeing Committee. His diligent oversight of Ulster GAA's financial affairs ensures that we strive for best practice and due diligence in our operational affairs and his advice is highly valued. Public Relations Officer Michael Geoghegan continues to positively promote our wide remit of affairs and is our main point of contact with the media. Michael deals with them in a fair and professional manner and is well respected in media circles. His task can at times be onerous and in the past year Ulster GAA has had to deal with some challenging media issues. Michael at all times has ensured that our voice is heard and that our position is reflected in both press and broadcast mediums. Ulster GAA is well served by its sub-committees and I sincerely thank the membership of all of these committees for their efforts and commitment to our cause. In particular I thank the Chair and Secretaries for their time and devotion. Each and every one of you are making a vital and valued contribution. If I may be forgiven can I make special reference to the Hearings Committee that met on no fewer than 12 occasions during the past year and were also involved in three cases to the Central Appeals Committee and two to the Disputes Resolution Authority. The duty of implementing the policy of Ulster GAA largely rests with my senior staff and their teams. Ulster GAA are

privileged to have in their midst many quality people and I thank all our staff for their ongoing efforts.

Michelle McAleer has the demanding role of heading up our Finance, Human Resources and Business Development Section. She is a diligent, conscientious and committed worker and is at the core of many of our key policy issues. She leads her equally committed team by example. Dr Eugene Young leads an impressive Coaching and Games Development team which is in reality our core business area and under his leadership the coaching staff at Ulster GAA have rightly earned the reputation as being amongst the best there are around. While we have been all frustrated by the long drawn out saga that is Casement Park, Stephen McGeehan has remained steadfast throughout and while much of his work is unseen I can assure all that he has left no stone unturned as we strive for a positive outcome to our current planning application. The work of the Community Development team led by Diarmaid Marsden has rightly received many plaudits over the past year. Community is the cornerstone of the GAA and so many strands of the work of this division of Ulster GAA is making a meaningful contribution to the lives of many people.

Stephen Donnelly has the demanding task of co-ordinating the entire Ulster GAA fixtures programme but thanks to his trusting hand and sound understanding of GAA affairs throughout the province he manages to produce a series of games which is fair and balanced, yet takes account of the particular circumstances of competing teams. He is a tremendous asset to Ulster GAA.

Kathy Kelly is the Servicing Officer for both Coiste Bainisti and Senior

Staff and her administrative skills and attention to detail are apparent for all to see. Safeguarding Manager Bernie Fox performs a vital role on behalf of all the GAA clubs in Ulster and we all owe her and her team a huge debt of gratitude. At a time when child protection – and rightly so – receives ever increasing prominence we are fortunate to have a person of the calibre and experience of Bernie to oversee this important area of work. No words of thanks from me will adequately pay tribute to the work and dedication of Geraldine McKavanagh. Her loyalty, commitment and trustworthiness to me over the past year has been immense and I am truly appreciative. No one in Ulster GAA circles felt the loss of Danny more than Geraldine, yet from day one she treated me as if I'd worked with her for a lifetime and she has been a tremendous help and guidance to me in my first year in post. I thank her sincerely.

PÁRAIC DUFFY

In October Ard Stiurthoir Páraic Duffy announced that he intends to step down from his position at the end of March. During his ten years as Director General Páraic has been a man of vision and integrity who has led from the front and his imprint is firmly on all of the major reforms that the Association has undergone in the past decade. A former GAA Player Welfare Manager, this issue has remained close to his chest during his time as Ard Stiurthoir there were numerous reports on fixtures published and three reports on player welfare, culminating with the 2015 'Player Overtraining and Burnout, and the GAA Fixtures Calendar' Report which was published in November 2015. Páraic recognised the role that the non terrestrial television sector could play in the ongoing promotion and brand recognition of gaelic games

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and he was a key figure in introducing new players to the broadcast table, even though it has and continues to cause irritation in some GAA circles and amongst RTE pundits, who are not neutral in the debate.

The changes to the hurling and football championships which will be introduced on a pilot basis in 2018 are testament to his vision and the condensed inter-county calendar is predicated on his genuine desire to provide a more meaningful programme of games for the club player.

Páraic has made a valuable and lasting contribution to Cumann Luthchleas Gael. Since taking over as Rúnaí Comhairle Uadh he has been an invaluable source of guidance and advice. I thank him for that and for his wider dedication to our great association. I wish him well in his retirement and extend my best wishes to his successor.

MEDIA AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The media landscape has changed dramatically in the last decade and

continues to do so at an alarming rate. News is now a constant with digital media platforms now the medium of choice and not only with the younger generation. Social media is therefore a key component of Ulster GAA in endeavouring to ensure that our message reaches as wide an audience as possible and in the past year alone the number of followers to the Ulster GAA twitter account grew by 16% to over 61,000, while our Facebook fans increased to over 37,000 which is an increase of 12% from the previous year. After ten years as Marketing, Design and Print Consultants for Ulster GAA, Lairdesign decided to move to pastures new. Over the last decade they have been excellent partners in a changing communications environment and I thank them for the support, assistance and advice that they gave to Ulster GAA during this time. In particular I thank Niall Laird for his patience, tolerance and understanding and wish him and his team every best wish for the future. Following an open competition AV

Browne were appointed to the role. They are a company with a proven track record and the team at Ulster GAA looks forward to working with them as we aim to maximise our print and digital potential.

The changing way in which people now consume their media provides increasing challenges for the traditional print media and it was disappointing when the Observer Newspaper Group ceased publication in the spring of 2017 with the loss of 11 titles. For many years this newspaper chain served the gael of Ulster with detailed and informative GAA coverage and their demise is a significant loss to the market. When I was growing up 'The Armagh Down Observer' was the GAA paper of choice in our house and I know the same was the case for many titles in the Group. I thank them and all the reporters who contributed to their papers for their great efforts in promoting our games, especially in an era when we maybe didn't enjoy the same levels of coverage that we receive today.

The media play a significant role in our interaction with the public and I place



on record my thanks to all the print and online journalists, radio and online commentators, digital media operators, photographers and television and digital broadcasters who do much to capture the excitement of our games and bring them to an audience which stretches far and beyond the avid GAA supporter.

Ulster GAA's Public Relations Officer Michael Geoghegan works tirelessly for the GAA in the province and his cordial manner has ensured that our relationships with the media are by and large very positive. His attitude is that you "work" with the media, rather than 'deal' with the media and this is the way it should be. I thank him for his efforts and also commend Paul McGurk and Claire Curran for their ongoing engagement with the media and the public and I also thank Stephen Donnelly for his efforts in ensuring that our match day programmes are of such high quality.

It was a great night for Ulster at the annual McNamee Awards (for 2016) with Tyrone winning the Best County Final Programme award and Monaghan winning the best GAA Publication Award for their 2016 Yearbook. Armagh TV were successful in picking up the award for Best New Digital Initiative, while 'Irish News' reporter Neil Loughran picked up the National Media Award for his absorbing and insightful interview with 1991 Down All-Ireland winning full-forward Peter Withnell. I congratulate them all on achieving such well merited recognition.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to all those teams who won provincial honours at club and county level and to the clubs who achieved success within their respective counties. At national level

pride of place goes to the Tyrone U-17 team who played superbly all year to win the All-Ireland title, defeating Roscommon in the final. The story of the year was the magnificent victory of St. Mary's University College, Belfast in winning the Sigerson Cup. Falling behind to two early goals in both the semi-final and final the team showed character and resolve of the highest calibre and their victory over a star studded UCD team in the final was truly incredible.

A huge congratulations goes out to Paddy Tally and his team on achieving such a memorable victory as their efforts ensued that 2017 was 'The Year of The Ranch.' There was further northern success with the victory of the University of Ulster at Magee in the Corn Na Mac Leinne. Colm Cavanagh picked up a deserved GAA/GPA All-Star Award, while Derry's Gerald Bradley was named as the Player of the Nicky Rackard Cup. The Donegal trio of Eoghan Bán Gallagher, Michael Carroll and Michael Langan won Eirgrid U-21 Player of the Year Awards, while Derry's Conor McCluskey, Padraig McGrogan and twin brothers Oisín and Lorcan McWilliams were all honoured with selection on the Electric Ireland Minor Football team of the year, as was Cavan's Oisín Pearson.

Ulster referees continue to excel at national level with Joe McQuillan taking charge of the All-Ireland Senior Football Final and with Ciarán Branagan taking charge of the U-21 decider. We've long argued over the years that our top hurling referees have perhaps not received the recognition they deserved but maybe this is beginning to change and the appointment of Conor Cunning to referee the All-Ireland Intermediate Hurling final was therefore very much welcomed.

I commend all the winners of the Ulster GAA President's Awards and thank them for their continued commitment to the Association. There was also success for Ulster at the National President's Awards with that great servant of Derry and Ulster receiving well deserved recognition, while Monaghan's Niall Moyna picked up the Education Award for his work in the third level sector. There was also widespread acclaim when the famous McGuigan family from Ardboe received The Dermot Earley Family Award.

OBITUARIES

Over the past year we bade a sad farewell to many great friends and I express my condolences and that of the Council to all who lost loved ones during this period. In particular I express my condolences and those of the Council to our members, past and present, who lost loved ones during the past year. Included here are the mothers of two of our past Presidents', Sadie McAviney, the mother of Martin, and Kathleen Farrell, the mother of Aogán. Two great friends of the GAA, but better known in the world of politics, passed away within weeks of each other in March.

P.J. Bradley was a lifelong friend and mentor who had been an ever presence in my life since my childhood days. A founder member of both the Burren Youth Club and the Burren Athletics Club his leadership and visionary instincts were apparent to me from an early age and it was no surprise that he transferred these skills into the political sphere as he served as a councillor and MLA with distinction. A great storyteller he has recorded his many lifetime experiences in two publications and he was in the process of writing a third before his untimely death. A great GAA gael who served on both the committee of Burren

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GAC and the South Down Board he attended every All-Ireland Football Final between 1952 and 2016 inclusive and his presence is greatly missed by those who knew him.

I had the honour and privilege of working closely with Martin McGuinness when he served as Deputy First Minister and, like P.J., he was taken from us after a short illness and died all too soon. Many words have been written about Martin and no doubt many more will be in the years to come but it was an enlightening and telling experience to work so closely with someone who had diplomacy, tact, vision and warmth in equal measure. He was a great GAA supporter and a regular attendee at our games. Behind the scenes he worked tirelessly for the Association and was a crucial voice for us at the political table. His influence knew no bounds and he was able to provide important inroads for Ulster GAA and the wider Association to the corridors of power. We are all the poorer without his guiding hand.

In November we said goodbye to Brian McLernon who served as Uachtarán Comhairle Uladh between 1992 and 1995. The quiet man from Derrylaughan, who had unfortunately been in ill health for several years before his death, was gentle in deed and in nature and he led the GAA in Ulster during a golden era for the province when Donegal, Derry and Down all won All-Ireland Senior Football titles. A great supporter of all things Irish he espoused the values of the GAA and the Ulster Council was enriched by his presence.

We also lost another great Tyrone man in Tattyreagh's Pat Darcy. A former Tyrone County Chairman, Pat was Chair of Ulster GAA's Code of

Ethics Committee and a great servant of Cumann Luthchleas Gael. While quiet by nature when Pat spoke people listened and he had the honour of being County Chairman when Sam Maguire came to the O'Neill County in 2005 and 2008 and indeed in the latter year it was accompanied by the Tom Markham Cup on the only occasion that an Ulster county has won both titles in the same year. Pat gave lifelong service to the GAA and his wisdom and knowledge is sorely missed by the GAA community at large.

Former Derry County Chairman Dermot Devlin was called to his eternal reward in May. A familiar voice on BBC Radio Ulster his match reports were always clear and informative in an era when GAA affairs did not secure as much attention on the airwaves as they do today.

Just last month former Down GAA Chairman and Treasurer Harry McEvoy passed away. Harry was a founder member of both the Drumaness and Carryduff Clubs and he devoted much of his life to the promotion of GAA throughout Down and further afield. He was a great supporter of Scor and it was fitting that he was honoured for his immense contribution in that field at the 2016 All-Ireland Scór Sinsir Finals in Killarney.

The GAA world was shocked in November to learn of the sudden death of former Monaghan Chairman Liam Stirrat. A famous son of Scotstown Liam served his native Monaghan with distinction both as a player and administrator. As well as Chairman he held numerous other roles on the Monaghan County Committee including that of Treasurer and Central Council delegate and his departure is a huge loss to the GAA in Monaghan and further

afield.

Just before Christmas we were saddened to learn of the death of Dr. Maurice Hayes. A man of great intellect, Maurice was the mastermind behind Down's All-Ireland winning triumphs of 1960 and 1961, which did so much for the promotion of gaelic games in Ulster. Maurice succeeded Peadar Barry as Down County Secretary in 1956. Peadar had held the post for thirty years and I've been told that when asked who would succeed him Peadar replied;

"there's a young lad in Downpatrick and not only could he run the county but he could run the country."

How prophetic those words turned out to be as Maurice would go on to hold many top posts as a civil servant and in public life including Permanent Secretary in the Department of Health and Social Services, Chairman of the Community Relations Commission, Ombudsman, member of Seanad Éireann and, significantly, a member of the Patten Commission which led to the reform of policing in the north. Maurice attended Down games until shortly before his death and he was always available to share some of his many experiences or offer words of advice and encouragement. A peace maker and a bridge builder, Maurice's dying wish was to be buried at Down Cathedral, home of the Church of Ireland, in his beloved Downpatrick. In many ways he was and remained to the very end a man ahead of his time.

Tattyreagh suffered further loss with the tragic death of their player Dominic Earley, who was also part of Mattie McGleenan's backroom team in Cavan and Glenullin footballer Shaun Mullan was also taken from us all too soon.

Former Fermagh manager Hugh McCabe also said farewell to this world after a period of illness, as did Leo Murphy, the outstanding full-back on Down's All-Ireland winning teams of 1960 and 1961. The last link of the historic Derry National Football League winning team of 1947 was broken with the death of Roddy Gribbin, just months after the death of his equally renowned brothers Owen and Mickey.

Former back to back Ulster senior football championship winning manager Frank Kearney also passed away after a short illness. The GAA was in Frank's veins and he made a telling contribution to its many facets. Frank was a proud Derry man and a proud Maghera man and he was part of the winning Glen team which won an All-Ireland Scor Sinsir Question Time title in 1979. Former St. John's, Antrim and Ulster hurler Seamus Gallagher was also called to his eternal reward – Seamus was a whole hearted, traditional style, committed hurler and was a great stalwart of the game.

Pat Murtagh, a great stalwart of Burren and Down, died suddenly in June and his loss is greatly felt throughout the GAA community while Paddy Savage departed this world all too soon in December, just weeks after stepping down as Secretary of his beloved Ballyholland Harps, a post he had held for almost thirty years.

Also in the Mourne county Willie Coulter, who was part of Down's historic All-Ireland Junior hurling win of 1964, passed away as did Jimmy Stewart and Pete Ryan who were great stalwarts of Aghaderg and Rostrevor respectively. The community of Mayobridge was shocked and saddened by the tragic death of young Nicole Fegan in November, just hours after she had competed

in Scór Na nÓg.

Anna McCaughey who was a great servant of the GAA in Tyrone, and a strong advocate of Scór, was also called to her eternal reward, as did Paddy Devlin who served the GAA in many capacities but is probably best remembered for his services to refereeing. Among his accolades is the honour of taking charge of two All-Ireland Senior Football finals, in 1972 (replay) and 1974. Another great Tyrone stalwart who passed away in 2017, who served both his club (Derrylaughan) and county in equal measure, was Mena Devlin.

The GAA community in Donegal mourned the death of Pat Shovelin in October. The Ardara man was a popular figure in the North-West and was the goalkeeping coach for the Donegal team during their historic 2012 All-Ireland winning campaign. He performed the same role with the U-21 side which reached the All-Ireland U-21 final two years previously.

As I finalise my report I have heard of the sudden death of Pomeroy Plunkett's footballer Chris Colhoun. Chris played on the Plunkett's side that won the Ulster Intermediate Club Football Championship in 2016 and was an integral part of the team that reached the Tyrone Senior Championship semi-final in 2017.

THANKS

In conclusion I wish to thank everyone who has supported and guided me during my first year in post. I am truly grateful for your support and I am privileged to be working with and in contact with so many good people. Our team of stewards from the province and from the counties and the team officials and members of Comhairle Uladh have been of

great assistance in organising a very substantial games programme and without your continuing efforts we would be unable to be as inclusive as we currently are. 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. I sincerely thank you all.

I thank the officers of all nine Ulster counties and extend particular thanks to our County Secretaries, with whom I have most dealings. Your ongoing help and support is greatly appreciated. I thank also the Ard Stiurthoir and the staff of Croke Park who are so generous with their time and always make themselves available when guidance or clarification is needed.

Our sponsors are very much part of Ulster GAA's partnership working and I thank all our main sponsors, O'Neill's International Sportswear and Bank of Ireland, and all of our corporate sponsors for their continued generosity and commitment to gaelic games in the province.

I thank also our colleagues in Ulster Camogie and Ulster Ladies GAA for their support and understanding and I congratulate Kathleen Woods on being elected to take over as president of the Camogie Association in April. I wish her well in her new venture and I have no doubt that the Camogie Association is in safe hands with Kathleen at the helm.

As one President assumes office another departs and it would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the outgoing Uachtarán Cumann Luthchleas Gael Aogán Ó Fearghail.

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A former Ulster GAA President, Aogán has led from the front during his three years as GAA President and he has left an indelible mark on the affairs of the Association. I wish Aogán every best wish in wherever his next venture may bring him and extend my warmest congratulations to his successor John Horan and wish him every success for his term of office.

Finally, I thank the team at home, without whose support I could not fulfil this role to the best of my ability. My wife Deirdre has been a rock at my side and I thank her for her tolerance and understanding. My daughter Étain is always at hand to offer support or indeed to provide an alternative opinion and while I didn't get to see as many of Ardán and Malachai's games in 2017 as I would have liked to, they

were a useful sounding board for some of Ulster GAA's initiatives with regards to young people and young players in particular.

Looking ahead to 2018 we have a lot to be positive about but we cannot rest on our laurels as we strive to improve our player and membership participation rates. The vision of the Association is to welcome everyone to participate in our games and culture and to develop their potential so they may be inspired to keep a lifelong engagement with the GAA. If we continue to adhere to our key values of Community Identity, Amateur Status, Inclusiveness, Respect, Player Welfare and Teamwork we will go a long way towards reaching that milestone.



BRIAN MAC FHIOBHÚÍ
Rúnaí Comhairle Uladh CLG



"The vision of the Association is to welcome everyone to participate in our games and culture and to develop their potential so they may be inspired to keep a lifelong engagement with the GAA."

