

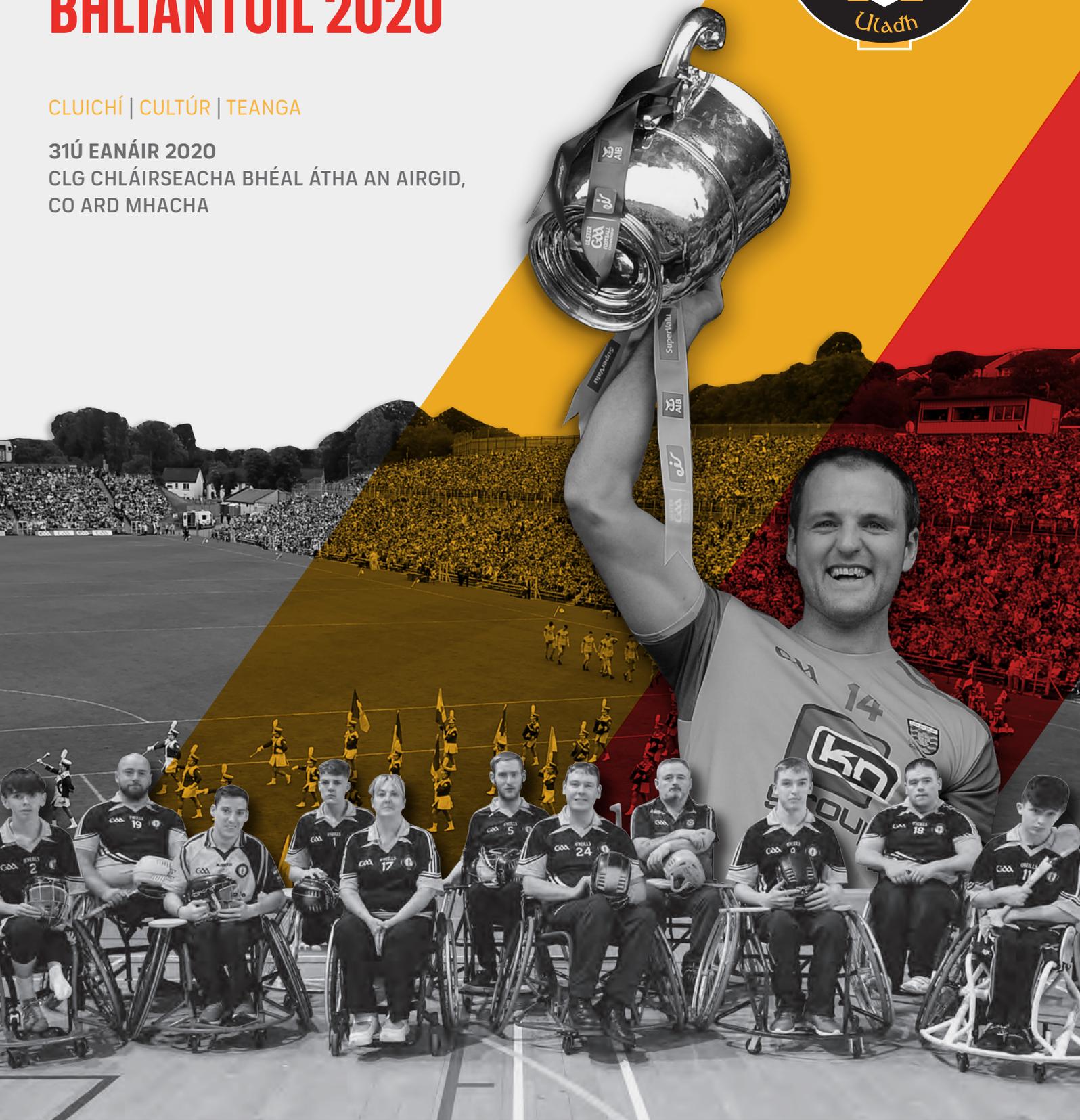
CLG ULADH AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL 2020



CLUICHÍ | CULTÚR | TEANGA

31Ú EANÁIR 2020

CLG CHLÁIRSEACHA BHÉAL ÁTHA AN AIRGID,
CO ARD MHACHA



05

In just 14 years' time the GAA will celebrate its 150th birthday. It will be an important milestone in our great Association and while for some it may still seem a while away, as we all know well it will come upon us quite quickly. Almost certainly there are members of the Ulster Council today who will still be on the Council on this great anniversary – that's how close it is! I reference this as more than ever people are beginning to examine in greater detail the role of the Provincial Councils, which have been a core fundamental of the GAA since the early years of the 20th century.

Former GAA President Aogán Ó Fearghaíl established a committee to examine where the Association should be in 2034 and their report "Towards 2034 – the 150th Anniversary of the GAA", was completed in 2018 but never published. That said much of the report is in the public domain, including a recommendation that Provincial Councils be replaced by new administrative hubs called Regional Councils, with regions to be decided by agreed criteria such as population and geographical proximity.

The recently published "Report of The Fixtures Calendar Review Task Force" has again brought into focus the remit of the Provincial Council, specifically in relation to competitions. The Report provides for three options in relation to the future structure of the inter-county senior football championship, two of which would have a fundamental impact on the four provincial football championships. Presently having the most competitive provincial championship, the impact of any change would be greatest within Ulster. Option Three of the report opts for the status quo – with proposed changes elsewhere – while Option

Two explores the National League format for the championship and envisages standalone Provincial Championships, with the Ulster Championship comprising two groups of five teams (which would include one county from Leinster). This is a format I couldn't support under any circumstances. We can all learn from the past and the experience from Hurling tells us that the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship effectively 'died' the day it was de-coupled from the All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship. When played as a standalone competition it failed to capture the imagination of the public and indeed many players. I fear the same fate would befall Football if this were to be the agreed way forward.

Option One of The Taskforce Report proposes a maintenance of the link with the All-Ireland series but with a re-structuring of the Provincial Championships to comprise eight teams each. This would mean that two teams from Leinster and one from Ulster would compete in a different Provincial Championship.

The Provincial Championships are a core tenet of the GAA and ending them would be a grave mistake which would erode part of our core fabric. I penned a strong defence of the Provincial Championships in the 2019 Ulster Senior Football Final match programme and those words ring as true today as they did seven months ago.

The Taskforce Report deserves a mature debate and this will happen in the coming months. The history, uniqueness and competitiveness of the Ulster Championship must be central to this debate. We can at times all benefit from change and there is some merit in this proposal.

Any change however must be for the overall betterment of the Association and it would be detrimental to the province as a whole if all our counties didn't have the opportunity of winning the Anglo-Celt Cup in any given year.

2019 GAMES ACTIVITY

In 2019, the Anglo Celt Cup was retained by Dún na nGall while the Ulster Club Championships in both Hurling and Football continue to enthuse our players and spectators alike. Slaughtneil, Naomh Éanna and Eoghan Rua Coleraine collected the respective titles in hurling and congratulations to all involved. The Ulster Hurling Club Final between Slaughtneil and Dunloy took place in Páirc Esler, Newry with almost 5,000 spectators in attendance.

The Ulster Senior Football Club Championship always delivers quality fare and this year's final saw the unique pairing of Naomh Conaill and Kilcoo. Kilcoo, just like Gaoth Dobhair in 2018, became first time winners of the Seamus MacFerran Cup. Well done also to Magheraclone and Blackhill who collected the Intermediate and Junior titles respectively.

The Ulster Football Club League in 2019 saw a total of 37 clubs involved, with 16 teams in senior, 12 teams in intermediate and nine in junior. This year saw the introduction of the junior grade and this was well received and ensured that all teams received games at their own level. Kilcoo (An Dún), Tír na nÓg Randalstown (Aontroim) and Brocagh (Tír Eoghain) won the Senior, Intermediate and Junior Finals respectively. This competition again provided clubs with competitive action at their



appropriate level prior to the commencement of their internal county games programmes.

The Allianz Football League had contrasting fortunes for the Ulster counties. Dún na nGall secured the Division Two title and promotion to Division One with victory over An Mhí. Doire bounced back from Division Four at the first time of asking by securing the League title with a final victory over Liatroim.

It was a disappointing year for our counties in the Allianz Hurling Leagues. Dún na nGall were relegated to Division 3A, Doire lost the 2B final to Wicklow and Ard Mhacha lost the 3A Final to Ros Comain. In the Nicky Rackard Cup Final Ard Mhacha lost out to Sligeach while An Mhí defeated An Dún in the Christy Ring Cup Final.

BOI DR. MCKENNA CUP

In our first competition of the year, the Dr McKenna Cup, Tír Eoghain claimed the title after a 12 month hiatus. They defeated Ard Mhacha in an entertaining final at the Athletic Grounds by 0-16 to 0-14 in front of 11,318 spectators. I wish to compliment the understanding from our counties and universities during the campaign as weather played havoc with the schedule. I also extend my gratitude to Bank of Ireland for their continued sponsorship of this important competition in the Ulster GAA calendar. 2020 sees a massive change to the format with the three universities no longer involved as a direct consequence of the tightening of the fixture plan with the Sigerson Cup now being played in January. The involvement of the university

teams enhanced the Dr McKenna Cup as a competition and their parting is a major disappointment, though one which couldn't in all reality have been avoided. I thank them for their participation and wish them every success in the inter-varsity competition.

SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2019 Ulster Senior Football Championship commenced at Healy Park, Omagh on Sunday 12th May, where Tír Eoghain overcame Doire by 1-19 to 1-13. The following weekend, An Cabhán defeated Muineachán by 1-13 to 0-12 at Kingspan Breffni and Ard Mhacha edged out An Dún by 2-17 to 3-13 in an exciting tussle at Páirc Esler. One week later, Tír Eoghain overcame Aontroim at the Athletic Grounds on a 2-23 to 2-09 scoreline while Dún na nGall beat their neighbours Fear Manach at Brewster Park on a 0-15 to 0-9 scoreline.

In the first semi-final, played at Clones on Sunday 2nd June, An Cabhán and Ard Mhacha could not be separated, even after extra time. The following weekend a strong Dún na nGall performance defeated Tír Eoghain by 1-16 to 0-15 at Kingspan Breffni and An Cabhán emerged victorious over Ard Mhacha by 0-23 to 0-17.

The Ulster Final took place two weeks later where Dún na nGall and An Cabhán met at this stage for the first time since 1983, at St Tiernach's Park, Clones. A sell-out 28,778 spectators attended this unique final where An Dún, the Ulster and All Ireland Senior Football Champions from 25 years previous, were honoured. With the inclusion of honouring these successful teams from the past, Cumann na mBunscol exhibition

05



games, band entertainment and the Senior showpiece, the Ulster Final day continues to be a celebration of our great Association in the province. The game was a step too far for An Cabhán, as Dún na nGall assumed total control for long spells and emerged as 1-24 to 2-16 champions. Congratulations go to Dún na nGall for claiming back to back titles.

Some commentators questioned the quality of football in the Ulster Championship and there were occasions when I wondered had they watched the same game as me. Both semi-finals between Cavan and Armagh were particularly exciting – 40 points were scored in the replay – while a record 43 scores were served up in the Ulster Final.

The 2019 Ulster Senior Football Championship was, for the second year, played over a shortened period with the four Quarter Final games

taking place over two weekends and counties were playing every two weeks as they remained in the hunt for the Anglo Celt. Sunday 23rd June seemed an early conclusion to our Ulster Championship but is a positive development for all our clubs.

ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The All-Ireland Senior Football Championship for Ulster representatives began on 8th June with five of our counties involved over that weekend. Doire travelled to Wexford and came away with a convincing 4-16 to 0-10 win. Aontroim also collected a good win on their travels as they recorded a 2-16 to 1-11 win over Louth. Muineachán edged out Fear Manach in Clones and An Dún finished strongly to beat Tiobrad Arann in Páirc Esler. In Round 2 of the Qualifiers there were wins for two of our five competing counties. Tír Eoghain defeated Longfort away and

Ard Mhacha had a comprehensive victory over Muineachán in Clones. Aontroim were defeated at home to Cill Dara and An Dún were beaten by Maigh Eo in Páirc Esler.

Qualifier Round 3 on 29th June saw Tír Eoghain travel to Newbridge and Ard Mhacha make the journey to Castlebar. Tír Eoghain recorded a 2-22 to 1-15 victory over Cill Dara while Ard Mhacha just lost out to Maigh Eo by 2-13 to 1-15. Qualifier Round 4 pitted An Cabhán and Tír Eoghain together in Clones and the Red Hand County emerged as comfortable winners by 1-20 to 0-7 and joined Dún na nGall in the All Ireland Quarter Finals.

Tír Eoghain emerged from their group as a consequence of wins over Corcaigh and Ros Comain while they lost out to Baile Átha Cliath in their Round 3 fixture. Dún na nGall won their Round 1 game at home to An Mhí and drew their Round 2 game against



Ciarraí to set up a winner takes all game in Castlebar. Unfortunately, on a wet evening in McHale Park, Maigh Eo progressed on a 1-13 to 1-10 scoreline and eliminated the Ulster champions. In the All Ireland Semi Final, Tír Eoghain got themselves into a great position at half time against Ciarraí but a strong second half showing from The Kingdom ended Tír Eoghain and indeed Ulster's involvement in the All Ireland series on a 1-18 to 0-18 scoreline.

MINOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Ulster Minor Football Championship for the second successive year is a Under 17 Championship and as the counties had voted for a 'back door' championship, beaten teams got a second chance up to the semi-final stage. Subsequently, only one Minor

game was played as a curtain raiser to a senior game and that was when Down played Tyrone prior to the Down v Armagh match in Páirc Esler.

In the Preliminary Round, Muineachán, thanks to a strong finish, edged out An Dún at Clones and in the First Round there were wins for Doire, Tír Eoghain, An Cabhán and Muineachán. In Qualifier Round One, Ard Mhacha ended the involvement of Aontroim at the Athletic Grounds on a 1-14 to 1-9 scoreline. Round Two saw the four Round One winners play each other where Muineachán defeated Tír Eoghain and Doire beat An Cabhán. Qualifier Round 2 saw wins for An Dún and Dún na nGall over Fear Manach and Ard Mhacha respectively. The following weekend, Tír Eoghain beat An Dún in Páirc Esler and Dún na nGall came away from Kingspan Breffni with a 1-18 to 2-07 victory.

The competition took a break during the exam period with the semi-finals taking place on Friday 21st June. In two entertaining games, Tír Eoghain saw off Doire by 1-14 to 0-10 at the Athletic Grounds while Dún na nGall lost out to Muineachán on a 5-10 to 2-11 scoreline. In a well-attended final, played as a double header with the Under 20 Final at the Athletic Grounds, it was Muineachán who again collected the Fr Murray Cup on a 1-13 to 1-11 final score. Well done to all involved.

Both minor finalists qualified for the All Ireland Quarter Finals and both exited at this stage in O'Connor Park, Tullamore. Muineachán were beaten by eventual winners, Corcáigh 3-19 to 2-10 and Tír Eoghain lost out to Ciarraí by 1-12 to 0-9.

05

UNDER 20 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

2019 saw the introduction of Regional Leagues for this age grade with the majority of Ulster counties taking part in the Leo Murphy Cup. Fittingly, An Dún claimed this title by beating An Cabhán in the final. Dún na nGall and Tír Eoghain participated in the Philly McGuinness Cup with Tír Eoghain collecting the title by defeating Sligeach in the decider.

The Ulster Under 20 Football Championship was played during the months of June, July and August. In the Preliminary Round, An Dún beat Aontroim, in what was a curtain raiser to the Ulster Senior Football Championship Final, in Clones by 1-16 to 0-11. The quarter final stages saw victories for An Cabhán, Tír Eoghain, Fear Manach and Doire. The first semi-final saw Doire finish strongly to see off a very good Fear Manach side by 1-14 to 1-11 at Healy Park. The other semi-final saw An Cabhán and Tír Eoghain meet as a curtain raiser to the All-Ireland SFC Qualifier between the same two counties at St Tiernach's Park. Tír Eoghain emerged victorious on a 0-13 to 0-09 scoreline. The final was played as a double header with the Minor Football Final

in what turned out to be a wonderful occasion in the Athletic Grounds in Armagh on Sunday 14th July, which attracted 5,743 spectators. A blistering attacking display by Tír Eoghain, particularly in the first half, secured the Corn Donall Ó Murchu on a 4-13 to 1-10 scoreline.

ULSTER CLUB FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Ulster Club Championship still has that lure for our supporters and the local aspect means that clubs at all levels can aspire to the greatest stage in the province and beyond. In the Preliminary Round, Derrygonnelly defeated Cargin and in the Quarter Finals there were wins for Clontibret, Derrygonnelly, Naomh Conaill and Kilcoo. Derrygonnelly's victory over Trillick required extra time and penalties, as per the Winner on the Day protocols. In the semi-final, Derrygonnelly rued a raft of missed chances as they lost by 1-8 to 0-9 to Kilcoo at the Athletic Grounds. In the other semi-final Naomh Conaill produced a very controlled performance to defeat Clontibret at Healy Park, Omagh. In the final which was also played at Healy Park the patrons were treated to a brilliant spectacle of club football with Kilcoo, backboned by five Branagan brothers,

deservingly edging out Naomh Conaill by 2-11 to 2-09 to claim their first ever Seamus McFerran Cup. Well done to all involved on this historic achievement. It was a case of third time lucky for 'The Magpies' having lost out in their previous two Ulster Final appearances and another managerial triumph for the mercurial Mickey Moran.

The Intermediate Football Club Championship remains an extremely competitive grade and 2019 was no different. In the Preliminary Round, Galbally defeated Grange at Crossmaglen. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Glenn, Magheraclone, St Nauls and Galbally. In the Semi Finals, Magheraclone overcame Glenn while Galbally defeated St Nauls. In the Final played at the Athletic Grounds on Saturday 30th November, a strong Magheraclone side claimed the Patrick McCully Cup with a 1-15 to 0-13 win over the Tyrone champions, Galbally. The achievement marks a major milestone for the club which have to train and play on other club grounds due to the collapse of a disused mine in September 2018, which has rendered their club facilities unusable. Their victory was universally welcomed across the province. In the Junior Football Championship, Armagh winners Collegeland won their Preliminary Round game against St Patrick's Lisburn. In the Quarter Finals, there were wins for Rock, Blackhill, Bunrana and Killinkere. In the Semi Finals Blackhill overcame Killinkere after extra time at the Athletic Grounds on the same night that history was made in Celtic Park when Bunrana and Rock could not be separated after extra time, as they were tied at 2-11 to 1-14. A penalty competition then ensued and it was the Donegal champions that prevailed 4-3.





The Junior Final was played at Healy Park, with Blackhill producing a massive second half to emerge as 1-11 to 0-09 winners and collect the Paul Kerr Cup for the first time ever. They went onto defeat the British champions, Thomas McCurtain's in the Twinning Final in Ruislip on 8th December by 2-11 to 0-10 to progress to the All-Ireland Semi-Finals in early 2020.

HURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Antrim turned in some great sterling performances in the Joe McDonagh Cup and can count themselves highly unfortunate not to qualify for the final. The Saffrons continue to be the standard bearers for hurling in the province and now under the charge of Darren Gleeson they'll be hoping in 2020 to make the breakthrough and once again get to compete in the Liam McCarthy Cup.

Doire, An Dún and Dún na nGall all competed in the same Christy Ring Cup in 2019. An Dún topped the group to reach the final but lost out to An Mhí by 4-19 to 2-15.

Ard Mhacha, Muineachán and Tír Eoghain all competed in the Nicky Rackard Cup with contrasting fortunes. Ard Mhacha topped their group with Muineachán finishing bottom while Tír Eoghain finished third in their group. In the final, Ard Mhacha lost out by the narrowest of margins to Sligeach on a 2-14 to 2-13 scoreline.

In the Lory Meagher Cup, Fear Manach and An Cabhán again competed strongly with the meeting between these two sides being played as a curtain raiser to the Ulster Senior Football Quarter Final between An Cabhán and Muineachán at Kingspan Breffni. Fear Manach then just lost out on a final place on score difference.

The lower tier hurling competitions are crucially important both for the development of the game and for all those who participate in them. They do however suffer from a lack of meaningful exposure and the promotion of these tiers of hurling needs to be a component factor in any future television rights negotiations.

Like its senior counterpart the Ulster Minor Hurling Championship has been discontinued for a three-year period (2018 -2020) and following discussions with Comhairle Laighean, the province was again permitted to enter teams into the Leinster Minor Hurling Championship. An Dún were defeated by An Mhí, Ceatharleach and Cill Dara while Aontroim beat Iar Mhí but lost out to Cill Dara and Laois in the group stage of the competition. They still however qualified for the knockout stages where they lost out by 3-17 to 2-12 to a good An Mhí team.

Comhairle Laighean agreed to accommodate one Ulster county in the 2019 Leinster Under 21 Hurling Championship. Aontroim and An Dún indicated that they wished to compete for this place and played a qualifier in March 2019. Antrim proved much too strong winning out on a 3-27 to 1-13 scoreline at Páirc Esler. They progressed to the Leinster Championship where, for the second consecutive season, they were defeated by Ceatharlach by 0-25 to 2-16 after extra time.

05

ULSTER CLUB HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

In the Ulster Senior Hurling Club Semi-Finals, Slaughtneil faced Armagh champions, Middleton, at the Athletic Grounds and ran out convincing 1-17 to 0-08 winners. In the other semi-final, Dunloy also ran out comfortable winners defeating Ballycran as part of the double header. The Ulster Final between Slaughtneil and Dunloy was played in Páirc Esler where Slaughtneil produced a marvellous team display to win their third Ulster Hurling title in four years on a 1-15 to 0-10 scoreline. Their All-Ireland Club semi-final against Ballyhale Shamrocks (Kilkenny) has been fixed for Páirc Esler in Newry and this will be a great occasion for hurling in the province. It's an all too rare occurrence now for All-Ireland hurling medallists to be playing competitively in the province and I've no doubt the brave decision of CCC to fix the game for a northern venue will be totally vindicated.

The Intermediate Club Hurling Championship was an outstanding six team competition. There were quarter final wins for Eoghan Ruadh, Dungannon and Keady. In the Semi-Finals we were treated to two brilliant games with Eoghan Ruadh just edging out Keady and Naomh Éanna beating Bredagh by two points after extra-time. In the final, played at Celtic Park, history was made with Eoghan Ruadh and Naomh Éanna, still level after the playing of extra-time, had to revert to penalties to find a victor. Naomh Éanna emerged victorious, winning 1-0 in the most dramatic fashion. It was the first GAA Championship Final decided on penalties and many have questioned if the Winner on The Day protocols should apply to finals. Some people

erroneously thought that this was a condition applied by Comhairle Uladh when in fact it's Association wide and determined by rule. While fully understanding the merits of 'Winner on The Day' games, it is a particularly difficult way to lose a final and there is merit in giving consideration to allowing replays (which should be decided on the day) if a championship final finishes in a draw after extra-time.

In the Junior Club Hurling Championship, there were quarter final wins for Inniskeen, Gort na Mona, Eoghan Rua, Coleraine and Newry Shamrocks. The semi-finals saw Eoghan Rua defeat Inniskeen and Newry Shamrocks overcome Gort na Mona. The Junior Final played in the fine surrounds of Eoghan Ruadh, Dungannon saw a strong Eoghan Rua side claim their second Ulster title in five years by defeating Newry Shamrocks by 1-16 to 0-11. They went onto defeat the British champions, John Mitchel's in the Twinning Final in Celtic Park on 24th November by 3-19 to 0-7 to progress to the All-Ireland Semi Finals in early 2020

CONOR MCGURK CUP

Down were crowned Conor McGurk Cup champions defeating Ulster University in a very exciting contest at The Dub. This competition has now expanded from six to nine teams in 2020 with Louth and Longford joining for the first time and Antrim returning after a one-year absence. This competition is now becoming an increasingly important fixture in the Ulster GAA calendar and in the absence of an Ulster Senior Hurling Championship, it's the only competition in which Ulster hurling counties can all compete against each other.



05

Given that this competition begins in early December the teams from Queen's University and Ulster University are able to compete. I thank Queen's University for their efforts in prompting and hosting this competition and given the growing status it is enjoying, it is hoped to have a formal sponsor for the competition in place for next year.

OTHER HURLING COMPETITIONS

As was the case with the championships, there were a few near misses for the Ulster sides who had got themselves into contention for promotion. Antrim just failed to reach the Division 2A Final. Derry were narrowly defeated in the Division 2B Final by Wicklow and Armagh lost out to Roscommon in the Division 3A Final.

All 32 counties were represented in the Celtic Challenge, with 44 teams participating in total. Ulster had success at two grades with Derry winning back to back Corn William Robinson (Div 3) titles after a narrow victory over Galway Tribesmen in an exciting final, while Antrim claimed the Corn Michael Feery (Div 5) trophy following a four points victory over Cill Dara.

2019 saw the introduction of the U-15 Hibernia Cup, with 27 Teams participating. All Ulster Counties entered and were rewarded with a significant games programme. If there is to be a renaissance of hurling in the province it is important that young players get the opportunity to compete at a meaningful level. The Ulster Poc Fada took place at Shane O'Neill's GAC, Glenarm. The four Ulster Champions, along with the senior men's runner up, progressed to the All-Ireland Finals, with Ulster Champion Gareth Johnson (Down) finishing sixth. In the Senior Ladies Louise Duggan (Derry) finished fourth, with Ulster doing particularly well in the underage categories where Antrim's Orla Laverty and Oisín Marley (Donegal) both finished second overall. Permission has been given to The



National Hurling Development Committee (HDC) to organise a Cross-County Hurling Competition for Adult Hurling Clubs in 2020. This new competition will enhance the development of clubs in Tier 3, 4, and 5 hurling counties and give them the opportunity to compete against a range of clubs of similar standard from different counties.

The Ulster Óg Sport Hurling event took place in Owenbeg, Dungiven. Eight clubs participated in the event with the honours going to Aodh Ruadh, Ballyshannon (Cup) and Padraig Sairseil, Belfast (Shield). Feile Uladh was held in Woodlands, Belfast with 13 teams participating. The Táin Óg competition provided over 200 games across U-13 to U-15 levels inclusive and continues to grow in

popularity. The competing teams were drawn from 15 counties, across three provinces, with the finals taking place in Kingspan Breffni Park.

The theme of a very successful Ulster Coaching Conference, which was held at Owenbeg in mid-October, was 'Developing Hurling and Camogie Performance' and it turned out to be a sell-out event with over 250 in attendance. Former Waterford manager Derek McGrath and Cork Camogie management duo of Paudie and Kevin Murray were the star attractions in what was a high quality speaker list.

RETIREMENTS

The post championship season has witnessed the retirement from inter-county football of some of the

greatest and most dedicated players from the province to have worn their respective county jerseys. Charlie Vernon departed the inter-county scene after 14 seasons with the Orchard County, winning Ulster Senior Football Championship medals in 2006 and 2008. The Armagh Harps stalwart has been a great ambassador for his county and province and he will be fondly remembered for his immense contribution to the Armagh jersey.

Frank McGlynn also made his inter-county debut in 2006 and has had a stellar career with Donegal. Playing in what has been a golden era for the Tir Conaill men, Frank won five Ulster Senior Football Championship medals, a National Football League medal in 2007 and, most famously

05

of all, an All-Ireland Senior football Championship medal in 2012. An All-Star winner in the latter year, Frank's thought of mind and great burst of speed marked him out as a footballer who almost seamlessly could turn defence into attack. His great presence of mind and all-round ability is something that will live long in the memory.

At the end of November those two great Monaghan stalwarts Vinny Corey and Dessie Mone announced that their inter-county careers were at an end. The Clontibret duo, who had a great season at club level, when Monaghan Senior Championship honours came their way, had represented the Farney County since 2003 and 2004 respectively. Two great servants of the game, they played for many years with little by way of reward other than the pride in wearing their beloved Monaghan jersey but their efforts were finally rewarded when an Ulster title came their way in 2013. Another followed in 2015 and famously in 2018 they were part of the Monaghan side that came so close to reaching the county's first All-Ireland final since 1930. Magheraclone's Gavan Doogan also called an end to his inter-county career, though he hadn't featured on Monaghan teams with any degree of regularity in recent years. The man who guided Monaghan during these glory years, Malachy O'Rourke, also stepped down after the 2019 campaign. They have left us with some memorable moments.

The dynamic Cavan and Castlerahan forward Cian Mackey called time on his inter-county career after 15 years in the Cavan senior set up. Cian represented his county with

distinction and it was fitting that in his final year in the Breffni jersey he saw his team reach the Ulster Final. Cian came off the bench in a number of games in the 2019 Championship making a number of significant contributions, most tellingly in the drawn semi-final against Armagh. His last appearance in the Cavan jersey was in the fourth round qualifier defeat to Tyrone.

On the hurling front the St. John's and Antrim stalwart Simon McCrory called his inter-county career to an end after more than a decade playing with 'The Saffrons.' A very talented player, Simon has the distinction of being the last player to lift the Liam Harvey Cup when he captained Antrim to victory over Armagh in the 2017 Ulster Senior Hurling Final.

TIMING OF THE U-20 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

At last year's Ulster Convention the timing of the U-20 Football Championship was raised by a



number of counties. There is no doubt that playing the U-20 season simultaneous with the senior inter-county season created challenges but bringing forward the U-20 championship to February/March has merely replaced one problem with a bigger one.

These are obvious issues for counties in playing this competition alongside the senior inter-county championship. That goes without saying. However the U-20 Championship is primarily a developmental competition, yet costs were also cited as one reason for bringing forward the playing season. Much of these costs could have been averted had counties adhered to the 'collective training' start date of 1st March, which if the truth be told was largely ignored. It must be stated however that 'a blind eye' was turned to this, largely due to the fact that there was no stated penalty for a breach of this rule.

While moving the start date forward may address the cost and 'senior clash' scenarios, it certainly didn't address the issue of player welfare and young players being pulled from 'pillar to post'. It actually compounds the problem. The timing of the U-20 Championship now puts it on a direct collision course with Sigerson, Freshers and second level football competitions. Sigerson will be completed in the month of January at the very time when county U-20 squads are at the height of their Championship preparations. Freshers football is also being played at the same time as the U-20 Championship, while the provincial second level schools' competitions are also at the business end as the U-20 Championship gets underway.

Without some change the situation could have become unmanageable so Central Council subsequently made the decision, on the recommendation of CCCC, to decree that players involved with second level schools at 'A' and 'B' levels could not play for their county until their school has been eliminated from its competition. This is far from an ideal solution but in the circumstances it was probably the best on offer. The bigger issue remains however and while there was an unfairness in the previous timing of this competition, it is even more unfair now and especially for the player himself. A solution must be found, perhaps through the scheduling of provincial championship games mid-week in April, so there would be minimal interference with weekend club fixtures.

REFEREES

In concluding my summary of games activity in 2019, 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 304 games in 19 different competitions in 2019. Without referees, there are simply no games. Our referees make themselves available - some at very short notice. On behalf of Ulster GAA I say thank you to all of our referees for their continued support. I congratulate all our referees who refereed finals at any grade and make special reference to those from the province who refereed national finals during the past year. These were Noel Mooney (All-Ireland Minor Football Final),



05

Colum Cunnning (Joe McDonagh Cup Final), James Connors (Nicky Rackard Cup Final), Barry Cassidy (All-Ireland Senior Club Football Final) and Paul Falloon (All-Ireland Junior Club Football Final).

I wish to record my thanks to Nicola McKeever – wife of the late Paul – and the McKeever family for donating a trophy in his memory to be presented annually to the Uster Academy Referee of the Year. Fittingly, in its inaugural year the winner was from Antrim and I congratulate Conal Roberts on being the first recipient of the trophy.

TALENT ACADEMY REPORT

The “Talent Academy and Player Development Review Committee Report” was launched in late November in each of the four provinces. It’s a thoroughly researched and reasoned report which in time could prove to be among one of the most important documents that the GAA have produced. For this to be achieved it will require ‘buy-in’ at all levels.

The GAA has produced numerous reports down the years on fixtures reform, player welfare, player burnout but what was missing was a proper pathway for a player to achieve their own potential. Every player and every coach likes to win – that goes without saying – but it is fair to say that we’ve probably all become somewhat guilty of placing too much emphasis on underage success. This report however points out that there is limited correlation between underage success and senior success. Underage success can at times be distorted by the presence of one or two very talented players, plus the fact that young people physically develop at different ages, and it is

the ‘good’ underage player who often finds it the most difficult to make the transition from juvenile to adult level.

The prevalence of well intentioned, but largely non evidence based underage development squads, has led to an ‘elitist culture’ amongst some at an early age. This is unhealthy. The evidence across a range of sports indicates that it is the ‘late developer’ to ‘elite level’ who has the best chance of succeeding at the top levels of their sport. This is because their work ethic tends to be higher, given that they’ve had to work that bit harder throughout their development pathway.

This report outlines a clear Player Pathway Framework which charts a journey through eight stages for players from introduction at Foundation level to Elite (senior inter-county) level. The report recognises that the majority of players won’t progress beyond the third stage (Foundation 3 level) and therefore, crucially, places the club and not the county at the centre of the player’s developmental pathway. The report makes clear that the club is best placed to lead on player development, with support as required from school and county level.

This Player Framework is underpinned by three further pillars, namely Governance, Stakeholder Education and a regular Games Programme and only when these four elements work in synchronisation will full potential be realised.

In order to bring synergy between club and inter-county competitions, the report recommends that all counties prioritise competitions at U-13, U-15 and U-17 levels with at

least one underage grade above U-17, preferably at U-19 level. A clear distinction is therefore made at U-17 level, as no player playing at this grade can play at adult level. It also recommends that the first All-Ireland inter-county level is at U-17, though it does recommend a tiered competition at this level.

It is vital that the findings and recommendations of this report are not overshadowed by the ongoing debate around age grades. The uneven grades are based on having a clear distinction between U-17 and over 17, with two-year gaps deemed to be the optimum to allow a player to develop at their own level. It is accepted that there are many who prefer the even age grade system, citing the importance of U-18 level when many are in their final year of second level school. There is no perfect solution but what is undisputable is the alarming drop-out rates of players above the age of 18. This report provides scientific basis for its conclusions – it deserves to be given a chance.

PLAYING RULE CHANGES

The Special Congress held at Páirc Uí Chaoimh in mid-October passed a number of football rule changes which had been trialled during last year’s pre-season and Allianz League competitions. The introduction of the ‘sin bin’ for black card offences is a greater deterrent for cynical play than what was previously the case, though there is a danger that some players may be tempted to ‘feign’ injury during the period that their colleague is in the bin, given that the penalty is ten minutes in total as opposed to ten minutes of playing time. It will therefore place an additional onus on referees to be vigilant in this regard.

While there have been concerns expressed about the ‘advanced mark’ it worked well in trials and it has the aim of encouraging higher levels of ‘direct’ football. Similar concerns were expressed when the ‘kick-out mark’ was first introduced but it has proved to be one of the most successful rule changes implemented by the Association in recent times. The restrictions on when the ‘advanced mark’ can be taken may cause some initial confusion, though as players and referees become more accustomed to it there will be greater clarity with regard to its effectiveness.

There will also be occasions when it will be difficult for the ‘inside’ players to know exactly if the ball has been delivered from inside or outside the 45m line and this will result in players calling for ‘the mark’ but not being given it. Only time will tell however if it will prove to be as successful as the ‘kick-out mark.’

The idea of two referees is something that has gained traction in recent times. Higher levels of fitness amongst players, particularly at inter-county level, appear to strengthen the case. Research by the Standing Committee on Playing Rules during last year’s Allianz Leagues show that there is an average of four sideline balls per football game. I just wonder is this the best use of these two officials? I accept that they have other duties, such as bringing infractions to the attention of the referee, but surely there is an arguable case for two referees and no linesmen – you would actually reduce the number of officials needed on match day (the fourth official could act as stand-by referee if required).

I would contend that two referees – one in either half – would reduce the amount of “off the ball” incidents as each referee would be policing their half of the field and therefore, unlike the linesmen, not have to follow the play. I only believe that there would be a need for two referees at senior inter-county and, perhaps, senior club championship level and I believe that it is something worthy of consideration during the next playing rules experiment.

Any rule that is not enforceable shouldn’t be in statute and one rule in football that is rarely, if ever, enforced is the rule which states that the ball may be carried “for a maximum of four consecutive steps...” indeed if any referee tried to enforce this rule chaos would ensue and the game would turn into a farce. This rule relates to a time when the ‘running game’ was not as prevalent as it is today and the rule is no longer fit for purpose in the modern game. Quite simply the rule has not kept pace with the changing science of the game. This needs to be urgently addressed. There may be varying views as to what the appropriate number of steps may be, but I would have thought that six would be an absolute minimum.

MATCH ATTENDANCES

In 2018 Ulster Championship attendances fell below 100,000 for the first time in many years. As I highlighted in my report last year there were a variety of reasons for this and most of these factors still remain. However when the draw for the 2019 Ulster Championship was made I predicted that there would be a rise in attendances and that proved to be the case. Almost 135,000 patrons passed through our gates, although the drawn semi-final between Cavan and Armagh

necessitated a replay. However even without this unexpected ‘boost’ our Ulster Championship attendances exceeded 113,600.

TELEVISION GAMES

Over the past year Ulster GAA has liaised closely with Croke Park and GAA broadcasters to gain optimum exposure for games within the province. It must be remembered that television rights for the inter-county championships rest with RTE and Sky and for the Club Championships they rest with TG4 and RTE. Therefore no other broadcaster has the rights to televise any of these games. Once again Ulster GAA helped broker an agreement where the BBC were able to simulcast any game in the Ulster Championship that RTE was showing ‘live’ and, additionally, we were able to negotiate a position that the BBC were able to show ‘live’ two other Ulster Championship games that were not being televised by either RTE or Sky Television. In order to achieve this however the throw-in times of these games had to be scheduled to avoid any direct clash with RTE’s or Sky’s coverage of other games. In addition the BBC were given permission to show full deferred coverage of each Ulster Championship game that wasn’t screened ‘live.’

As Sky TV screened one game in the Ulster Championship, five of our nine games in 2019 were shown ‘live’ on TV, with the other four given full deferred coverage. No other province can boast this level of exposure.

On the club front three Ulster Club Championship games were shown ‘live’ (TG4 two and RTE one) and the BBC have greatly enhanced their digital content, as we continue to

05

explore a range of options which will allow for greater exposure on that network. Included in this increased digital coverage was the 'live' streaming of the Ulster Club Football Championship fixture between Crossmaglen Rangers and Clontibret. The inclusion of Ulster Championship games screened by the BBC on the BBC iPlayer allows for games to be viewed back from the Tuesday morning after it is played and this is a development which is to be welcomed, as is their increased coverage of club championship games played across the nine counties.

COACHING AND GAMES DEVELOPMENT

The Coaching and Games Development team continue to work across the Association supporting the championship, cross-community work and concentrating on coaching and games development programmes. Ulster GAA also recruited Eoin McNicholl in Sports Science and his work has already extended into the Championship Referees Academy, the Key Stage 2 Primary School Coaching and the development of the new athletic development programmes.

We continue to challenge staff and support them with opportunities for staff development in-house. They are also encouraged to pursue additional qualifications externally with some currently finishing their degree qualification. As we wait for the outcome of the National HR Review, we see the importance of valuing our employees as a resource core to what we do.

2019 has been a busy period with over 142,000 individual programme engagements, through 2,170 events which involved coaches, referees,



players, volunteers and coach developers. The primary focus was on providing support directly in the club. This reinforces our desire to ensure that what we continue to deliver and support our grassroots in clubs. The participation blitzes and tournaments, the coach education engagement and the volunteer development programmes are designed to help our clubs be better organised and provide a top-class experience for our player. The emergence of the new Talent Academy Report, which I referred to earlier in my report, will place an even greater emphasis on the club and the requirement to provide a quality experience and developmental environment for all players.

The diversity of programmes is constantly evaluated and this is proper in order to deliver optimum service to our membership. It is important that we continue to challenge ourselves to be at the

cutting edge in providing activity to both our participation and performance base. I continue to value the support offered through the Department for Education, National GAA and our sponsors. A strong relationship with Sport NI has provided us with an opportunity to target areas of high social need, engage with people with both learning and physical disabilities and increase female participation. There was great delight when the Ulster GAA Wheelchair Hurling Programme received the top prize at the National Lottery 25th Anniversary Awards in London and they later featured on the BBC's One Show. Much credit must go to Shane McCann and Paul Callaghan for the effort they put into this increasingly popular programme and three members of the team played on the first ever Irish Wheelchair Hurling team when they competed in an international tournament in The Netherlands. The Ulster team were

also winners of the Inter-Provincial League and I congratulate them on that achievement.

Over the period of the year we have been engaging intermittently with the Sports Institute NI. They have supported some workshops and provided mentoring for some of our staff. Engaging our high-performance county managers and coaches however remains a challenge, with many of our counties displaying a lack of willingness to engage and preferring an in-house approach. That said, there has been tremendous co-operation in sharing video footage between counties and this is working to the benefit of all.

I extend my thanks to the Director of Coaching & Games Dr Eugene Young, his senior staff Roger Keenan (Coach Education), Kevin Kelly (Hurling Development), Jimmy Darragh (Games Manager) and their respective staff teams for their co-operation and for the co-ordination of their various programmes. Thanks also go out to the Chairman of the Coaching & Games Committee John Connolly for his excellent work in driving the work of the Coaching and Games team and to Danny McLernon (Secretary) and the other committee members for capturing the essence of the wide portfolio of activity and having informed and mature debate in relation to same.

CURRICULUM SPORTS PROGRAMME

At last year's Convention we were lamenting the loss of the Key Stage 1 Curriculum Sports Programme which had operated for over a decade. This year there is a more positive outlook with the creation in the summer of a new Curriculum Sports Programme,

this time aimed at the older Key Stage 2 (Primary 5-7) age bracket.

This Programme has a greater emphasis on wellbeing and nutrition and it aims to raise the resilience, confidence and self-esteem of young children, many of whom are living in areas of social deprivation. The Programme aims to better the lives of over 24,000 children across almost 300 schools. It is a partnership initiative between Ulster GAA, the Irish Football Association, the Department of Education and the Education Authority and it is presently operating at a scale which is around 50% of the previous KS1 Programme. It has enabled Ulster GAA to employ 11 new staff members.

The 'shared future' element of the Programme is another example of Ulster GAA helping to deliver on a key Executive priority and is a further manifestation of how sport can bring people together. I thank all those who worked tirelessly to re-institute a primary schools programme and I hope and trust that sufficient funding will be found to enable the Programme to continue beyond March 2020.

CLUB AUDIT

Ulster GAA is presently undertaking a questionnaire audit of all the clubs in the province in order to capture key data which we don't presently hold. This is a gap which needs to be addressed and as well as providing core information to the Council, the subsequent feedback will help clubs and counties plan for the future with the benefit of key baseline information. It will also be highly beneficial to units applying for any future funding programmes that may arise.

The information obtained from the audit will help inform Ulster GAA's next Strategic Plan, which is presently in developmental stage. I commend the county staff who are working with Ulster GAA staff in gathering the information and thank the clubs and counties for their support for this vital and important area of work.

DERRY CITY

Derry is Ireland's fourth largest city and on taking office at the end of 2016, I identified the development of gaelic games in the city as a priority for Ulster GAA. It was a view shared by the Council and in 2018 a Strategic Working Group was established to identify and prioritise the requirements necessary to enhance our games in the city.

The Workgroup, which had a membership from a wide stakeholder group from both within and outside the city, presented their initial findings to the Ulster Council at the end of 2018. From the extensive research undertaken by the group it was clear to the Council that there was a serious gaelic games deficit in the city and the group were tasked with identifying priorities and exploring potential funding opportunities.

Derry is a city that has a projected population growth over the next twenty years and the finalised report, which was presented in the early autumn of 2019 and is entitled "The GAA's 2020 Vision for Derry City", makes a compelling case for additional resources to grow and foster gaelic games in the city.

I thank the committee under the Chair of John Keenan for the forensic manner in which they conducted their business and I make special

05

reference to the efforts of Bobby Farren in compiling the report, which has had a sympathetic hearing at county, provincial and national levels.

SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

Once again the Ulster schools Committee delivered a games programme that catered for over 70 competitions across both hurling and football. The third level institutions in the province continued to compete and be competitive at all levels and there can be no doubting the influence that both second and third level colleges can have on the development of young people across many facets of life. I thank everyone involved in both the coaching and administration of the games in these institutions and commend you highly for your ongoing devotion to Gaelic Games.

Earlier in my report I referred to the "Report of The Fixtures Calendar Review Task Force" and the impact it could have on the inter-county game and it will also impact significantly on the playing of games at both second and third levels. The recommendation that the All-Ireland Schools Finals should be completed by the last weekend in January (Football) and the weekend after St. Patrick's Day (Hurling) will be challenging and will call for a radical re-think in how senior second level games are timetabled. Within Ulster it may result in, for example, the Mageean Cup being played in a February/early March slot, rather than in its traditional autumn slot.

The Third Level Committee has brought forward the finishing dates for the Sigerson and Fitzgibbon Cups in 2020 and are well inside the Task Force recommendation to have these competitions completed by the fifth and seventh Sundays' of the Year respectively.

Whatever the final outcome of the changes, it is vital that schools and third level teams have 'first call' on their players during their designated competition times. This is to the benefit of not only the schools/colleges but also our clubs and counties – and, most importantly of all, the player. In a province where football is the predominant gaelic sport, this in reality means the months of December and January. Surely this is not too much to ask.

SAFEGUARDING & CHILD PROTECTION

2019 has shown that this continues to be a very challenging area of our Governance work. On a daily basis we are providing assistance to our constituent units as they navigate very complex and sensitive matters in their work and continue to be a source of advice and guidance to them as they manage these issues. We have wonderful volunteers within our clubs and counties who give up so much of their time freely to the benefit of others. It is imperative that they are adequately trained and appropriately vetted before they take up their role working with children within the Association and are then supported by club committees as they carry out their functions.

Club Chairpersons', ably assisted by their Club Childrens Officers' must continue to lead on Safeguarding matters and ensure that they are compliant with legal and best practice requirements so as to create and maintain a safe, fun and enjoyable environment in which our children and young people can participate and flourish in Gaelic Games and Activities.

I welcome and encourage that all members continue to respectfully challenge behaviour that they know not to be appropriate through the channels that exist within the structures of the Associations and are never afraid to raise issues particularly in relation to matters of a Safeguarding nature.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the Ulster GAA Safeguarding team, the members of an An Chomhthéarma Slánchumhdaithe Uladh, chaired by Anne Fortune, whose leadership

ensures that the work of the Safeguarding team across Ulster continues to be to the fore. All this is possible due to the diligence and expertise of the Ulster GAA Safeguarding Team, who I will personally reference later in my report. I commend also our County Chairpersons' and Childrens Officers' and all of those who support them in this challenging but vital area of work.

INFRASTRUCTURE

During 2019 Ulster Council GAA has worked closely with our County Committees in bringing forward development proposals for the improvement of various projects in the Province.

Our Provincial representative on the National Infrastructure and Health & Safety Committee, Stephen McGeehan has assisted our units to bring forward proposals for Corrigan Park, Belfast; Polo Grounds Centre for Excellence, Cavan; Down GAA Training Centre at Ballykinlar and Fermanagh GAA Training Centre at Lissan.

In early 2020 further developmental training centre projects in Armagh and Tyrone and improvements at St Tiernach's Park, Clones will be brought forward. This is important and necessary work. In relation to designated venues in the North, I am delighted to announce that through the work of Stephen, supported by Liam Nelis, we have also recently secured investment from Sport Northern Ireland for some CCTV and PA improvements at some of our smaller, but no less important venues where club, county and provincial fixtures are played. This is a very welcome development. I wish venue operators well with these works that

will be completed before the end of March 2020.

Over the past 10 years Ulster GAA has developed expertise in our team in respect of safety certification and compliance and it was very useful for our colleagues in London and Britain GAA in 2019 as we have offered support to assist them in their dealings with local authorities and the Sports Grounds Safety Authority in achieving a safety certificate for Ruislip following its recent modernisation. This support will continue in 2020.

I wish to congratulate our Counties for the tremendous physical assets that they provide for the GAA in this Province and recognise their continuous appetite to invest and improve in both county grounds and training centres.

CASEMENT PARK PROJECT

On our major strategic Provincial Council capital project at Casement Park, 2019 comes to an end much like the previous year, in that, we are once again responding to a request for Further Environmental Information from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI).

It is almost three years since the planning application was lodged and we have recently written to every unit of the GAA in Ulster to respond directly to the understandable frustration that is building up amongst our membership.

I am greatly encouraged with the response we have received to our communication and the support that has come from Gaels across the Province, who fully realise that we must do all we can to





05

bring the Casement Park project to a successful conclusion. It was particularly noteworthy that Kilcoo captain Conor Lavery directly referenced this in his victory speech after his club's Ulster Club Football championship winning performance on 1st December 2019.

The target for decision making ordinarily on planning decisions for regionally significant projects in the North is six months. Whilst Ulster GAA recognises that the Casement Park application is a complex submission dealing with a number of planning and environmental issues, it goes without saying that DfI have well and truly failed to meet their own target on this application. The fact that our application has coincided with the absence of devolved government at Stormont is most unhelpful, as the lack of Ministerial direction has been a key factor in the decision-making vacuum that has ensued.

Indeed a Report on 'Major Capital Projects' by the Northern Ireland Audit Office in December 2019 highlighted the fact that none of the seven flagship infrastructure projects identified by the Executive in 2015 - including the Regional Stadia Programme of which the Casement Park re-development is a part - had been delivered in line with original time and budget estimates. While the reasons behind this are varied the Auditor General concludes that current governance and delivery structures within the public sector are cumbersome and his decision to commission a further study on the "efficiency and effectiveness of the Northern Ireland planning service" can only be applauded.

Our latest Full Business Case for the project is currently with the Department for Communities (DfC) and in early 2020 will make its way through the inter-departmental processes to the Department of

Finance (DoF) for their consideration. Earlier in 2019, the potential cost implications of the five-year delay that the project has suffered was made public. The total estimated project cost, now in the region of €110m, and Ulster GAA will seek significant additional funding from the public purse to deliver the stadium. What is also clear is that further delay will only lead to this cost increasing. Without an outcome on the planning application, however, this is all of course academic.

The recent restoration of the devolved institutions is however an extremely positive development and the presence of a Minister will remove the uncertainty from the decision making process.

I wish to record Ulster GAA appreciation to the ongoing diligence of the Safety Technical Group (STG) and Sports Grounds Authority (SGSA) for their time, expertise and

commitment to the Casement Park safety management and design development over this past four years. I wish to acknowledge the work of the Independent Chair Danny McSorley and our members on that forum, namely Jim Murray and Stephen McGeehan for their participation on this committee.

Aiken PR have continued to support the work of our team on the communication and public relations team working alongside Paul Mc Gurk and the Ulster GAA communications team.

I wish to thank Ciaran McCavana (Chairperson) and Frankie Quinn (Secretary) from Antrim GAA who sit on our Project Board and Steering Group structures and make valuable contributions to our work. The continuing unavailability of the venue for Antrim GAA has been extremely difficult and that is why Ulster GAA has been so supportive of and a contributor to the re-development works at Corrigan Park, which in the short-term will provide a greatly needed Belfast base for county fixtures.

Our Project Board Chairman Tomás Ó Dalaigh continues to lead our Board and remains a source of energy, enthusiasm and wisdom having been with this project from the 'get go'. As Provincial CEO, I rely heavily on his leadership of our team and I thank him for all he does.

The Stadium Project Team lead internally by Stephen McGeehan with the direct project resource of Rory Miskelly (SIB) as Project Director and Tim Harkin as Technical Advisor continue to work exceptionally hard at operational level responding

to the various pressures on the project. This group is supported by Alec McQuillan, and Brian Mallon at Steering Group and Council level. Geraldine McKavanagh provides the co-ordination and management of all administrative functions connected with Board and Steering Group and carries out these tasks with maximum efficiency and minimum fuss.

Thanks to all Project Board members and Project Steering Group members who contribute to our work and I also acknowledge the ongoing support of Ard Stiurthoir Tom Ryan and Uachtarán John Horan, who are on hand to support our work as and when required.

I wish to thank Moira Doherty (Stadia Programme SRO) from the Department for Communities for her support for our project and to the wider team including Jacqueline Fearon and James Macauley in the Programme Team, alongside the inputs of Emma McCracken, from CPD.

Ulster GAA also wish to thank our two contracting parties who remain engaged with the project, namely Mott MacDonald, Belfast and Heron Buckingham Joint Venture.

SCÓR

Scór continues to be an outstanding showcase of national talent with an excellent display from Ulster Gaels who represented the province brilliantly at all levels in 2019. Bhí an lucht féachana faoi dhraíocht leis an tallann iontach a chonaic siad ar stáitse. Scór Caoga was celebrated in 2019 also, with an excellent showcase concert in Dún Uladh when All Ireland Champions from all counties in Ulster took to the stage at the Celebration Concert.

After some tremendous performances seven new Ulster champions were crowned at the Scór Sinsir Finals in Galbally, representing six counties, with Doire also awarded the Patsy Nugent Cup. The category winners were as follows;

Rince Foirne/Ceili Dancing:

Watty Graham's, Glen (Doire)

Amhránaíocht Aonair/Solo

Singing: Amelia Murphy, Emyvale (Muineachán)

Aithriseoireacht/Recitation: Michael

McGibney, Cornafean (An Cabhán)

Bailéad Ghrúpa/Ballad Group:

Carrickcruppen (Ard Mhacha)

Léiriú Stáitse/Stage Presentation:

Letterkenny Gaels (Dún na nGall)

Ceol Uirlise/Instrumental Music:

Moneyglass St Ergnats (Aontroim)

Rince Seit/ Set Dancing:

Watty Graham's, Glen (Doire)

Comhghairdeas ó chroí le buaiteoirí

Scór na nÓg Uladh 2019 chomh maith.

Scór na nÓg Uladh saw another season of the talented youth of CLG Uladh taking to the stage. The Ulster champions were:

Rince Foirne/ Ceili Dancing: St Mary's, Aghagallon (Antrim)

Amhránaíocht Aonair/ Solo Singing:

Aoife Trainor, Clonduff GAC (Down)

Aithriseoireacht/ Recitation:

Mary Kate Bonnes, Tir na nÓg, Randalstown (Antrim)

Bailéad Grúpa/ Ballad Group:

Watty Graham's, Glen (Derry)

Léiriú Stáitse/ Stage Presentation:

St Mary's, Aghagallon (Antrim)

Ceol Uirlise/ Instrumental Group:

Madden Raparees (Armagh)

Rince Seit/ Set Dancing:

Glenullin (Derry)

The winners of Scór na nÓg and Scór Sinsir Uladh advanced to Scór na hÉireann and represented their province excellently, with Ulster

05

securing a remarkable five national titles at Scór na nÓg. Comhghairdeas arís to our All-Ireland Champions for 2019. It was a great day for St Mary's, Aghagallon who won titles in both Ceili Dancing and Léiriú Stáitse while the other Ulster successes went to Mary Kate Bonnes in Recitation and Aoife Trainor in Solo Singing. The fifth national title came in Tráth na gCeist when Cornafean (Cavan) claimed the title for the second consecutive year and so continued the great tradition of successful Question Time teams from the club.

In Scór Sinsir there was further success for Cornafean when Ulster's only national success came to Michael McGibney in Recitation for his excellent rendition of 'The Blight'. It was Michael's second time winning this title, his previous one coming in 2006.

2019 saw the return after several years of the national Tráth na gCeist (Thráth na gCeist Bord) competition which was held in Croke Park in mid-December. Burren, Eglisish and Aodh Ruadh, Ballyshannon qualified from the Ulster competition, which was held in Armagh in March, to represent the province at the national event.

INTEGRATION

Ulster GAA Vice-Chair Ciaran McLaughlin led the Provincial Integration Committee in 2019, assisted by secretary Eamonn McMahon. Three meetings took place which focused on common areas of work including Fixtures, Championship Double Headers, the promotion of handball in Ulster and the possibility of a common leisurewear Ulster Jersey which would accommodate all codes. The Integration Committee is an

important conduit in ensuring that the affairs of each organisation are catered for in a way which allows for the optimum promotion of all codes.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Ulster GAA's Human Resources Committee has been very active over the past year bringing forward a range of new and updated policies to reflect ongoing changes in employment law and workforce best practice. I thank the committee members for their commitment and dedication to what is a very specialist field of work.

Ulster GAA staff and volunteers are participating in the ongoing association HR Review which is looking at the GAA's Employment and reporting structures, employment policies and practices, roles and responsibilities and the employment conditions of staff. It has become apparent that this is an area where as an Association we are deficient and I trust that the findings will prove helpful as we aim to enhance our knowledge and understanding of this work area.

CLUB AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CLUB SUPPORT

Clubs continued to receive support and guidance on relevant funding programmes. 35 Clubs across Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal were successful in their applications for Sports Capital Programme Funding, which was announced in November. Ulster GAA hosted clinics for clubs applying for this fund in 2019 and 13 of the clubs that availed of these sessions were successful. In 2020 it is anticipated that there may be a capital funding programme open with Sport NI and we will of course provide

guidance and advice for clubs should this become a reality.

CLUB MAITH

Club Maith continues to be the recognised brand for club excellence among GAA clubs in Ulster with 10 clubs being accredited in 2019. The Club Maith website continues to be an excellent online resource to clubs compiling their Club Maith Portfolios and the introduction of a bespoke portal for uploading documents has made the process more user friendly for our clubs.

Training was held for Club Maith Facilitators in September 2019 and 24 volunteers from across the Province attended to receive an update on the current programme and how they can assist clubs in achieving accreditation.

CLUB PLANNING

Planning within the Association has long been recognised as a vital component of our continued growth and development. This is particularly true at Club level where a plan provides direction to look beyond the day-to-day operations. Through the National GAA Club Planning Programme assistance and guidance is available to clubs through trained club planners within their county. 24 volunteers from across all nine counties attended a Club Planner training day in September and they are currently assisting 15 clubs in the development of their three-year plans.

COUNTY PLANNING

Ulster GAA continues to provide support and guidance to counties in their strategic development. In May, as part of our twinning arrangements, Ulster GAA staff facilitated a Strategic Plan Workshop for Scotland GAA in

Glasgow. This aided in identifying themes and objectives for their three-year plan, which was officially launched in September at Clydebank Community Hub. Fermanagh GAA launched their three-year plan at their convention in December with Antrim and Cavan due to follow suit in early 2020. Ulster GAA also facilitated a workshop for the GAA units in Canada last month, on the day prior to the Canadian GAA Convention.

VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS ACCREDITATION

Ulster GAA successfully retained the highly prestigious Investing in Volunteers Standard in October 2019 for the third successive term. This followed a full review and update of Volunteer policies and procedures. A lengthy assessment process involved 27 volunteers and staff members

across Ulster GAA committees and work areas.

Ulster GAA continue to promote Volunteering opportunities and recognition for our youth members. More and more we can see the contributions that young people make to their clubs in activities outside of playing our games.

GOLDMARK

Ulster GAA is a delivery partner for the Millennium Volunteers GoldMark Programme, which promotes and encourages young people aged 14-24 years old to volunteer in sport. Ulster GAA works with clubs to manage this programme through club co-ordinators. In 2019, 233 young people registered for the GoldMark Programme, with a further 129 registered through the Peace IV Programme - therefore a total of 362 new young GAA members

signed up to participate in the programme. This means almost 2,000 young people are currently volunteering in their club and working towards GoldMark accreditation for their efforts. This is a wonderful achievement.

Over 210 young people achieved awards in 2019 for their volunteering efforts, 103 achieved 50 hours, 72 achieved 100 hours and 31 young club members were awarded the Award of Excellence for 200 hours volunteering.

Ulster GAA, as a delivery partner of GoldMark, work closely with Volunteer Now on volunteer development and recruitment issues. In 2019 Ulster GAA officially supported Volunteer Now in a public consultation about future delivery of the programme.

GAISCE/DUKE OF EDINBURGH JOINT AWARD

In July 2019, Ulster GAA embarked on a one-year programme to deliver the Joint Award; offering our young volunteers the opportunity to achieve Bronze, Silver, Gold in either Gaisce - The President's Award, Duke of Edinburgh or Duke of Edinburgh International Award, through the Joint Award Initiative. 31 young GAA members have registered for this reputable programme and are working through their sections within their GAA clubs across Volunteering, Skills Development and Physical.

YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAMME

Ulster GAA delivered its Young Leaders Academy for the second consecutive year across four days at the end of July, start of August 2019. The Programme's aim is to develop the skills and knowledge of young GAA volunteers who will be future leaders in the GAA across



05

their clubs and counties. The programme is designed to build capacity of young volunteers and encourage them to volunteer back in their GAA club, developing their skills and knowledge. 36 young GAA Volunteers accepted their place on the programme and participated in the Academy.

The young people undertook intensive training across nine GAA/ Sports focused modules; including: Science; Nutrition and Lifestyle; Volunteer Management; Sports Communications; Heartstart; Event Management; GAA for ALL; Child Protection and Safeguarding; GAA Coaching Foundation Course. They were also enrolled in Millennium Volunteers GoldMark Programme and offered the opportunity to register for the Joint Award Initiative which will lead to an award in either Gaisce, the President's Award or Duke of Edinburgh. To date 28 young volunteers have taken up this opportunity.

The Academy is part of Ulster GAA's flagship Young Leaders Programme which develops future leaders of the GAA. All participants committed to taking part in the six-month programme, which includes volunteering in their own GAA club.

TRANSLINK YOUNG VOLUNTEER AWARDS

Ulster GAA, in partnership with Translink, run a volunteer recognition programme which highlights the good work being done by young GAA volunteers in clubs across Ulster. Each month Ulster GAA asks clubs to nominate an outstanding young person who has been involved in volunteering in their club. The winners receive a framed certificate

and a return enterprise journey from Translink. The monthly winners and their volunteering stories are widely promoted through Ulster GAA and Translink media platforms.

VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

Ulster GAA has an established Volunteer Development Pathway which includes three key steps: Club Officer Induction, Club Officer Development Programme and the Elevate Club Leadership Award.

The Club Officer Induction is role specific training for all new club officers across Ulster for Chairpersons, Secretaries, Treasurers, PROs, Development Officers, Children's Officers, Coaching Officers, Cultural Officers. In 2019, Ulster GAA ran this induction programme in association with National GAA to complement the National Club Leadership Development Programme. 103 Club officers participated in this induction across 58 Clubs.

The Club Officer Development Programme delivered training for club officers across priority issues facing clubs. The workshop topics dealt with in 2019 were Club Maith & Planning; Health & Lifestyle; Language & Culture and Office 365. 217 club officers attended the Level 1: Club Officer Development Programme, with 102 clubs represented from across Ulster's nine counties.

Ulster GAA's Elevate Programme 2019 was the fourth year this Club Leadership Award was delivered. Involvement in the programme is on a whole club basis with volunteers attending modules that are relevant to their role or interest. Issues explored through this programme

include: Leadership, Management, Club and Community Planning, Marketing and promoting your club, Financial Management, Fundraising, Capital Projects and Partnerships. All Elevate Tutors are volunteers who have expertise in the subject and seven clubs achieved the Elevate Award in 2019.

SPORT – A HOME FOR LIFELONG VOLUNTEERING

"Sport - A Home for Lifelong Volunteering" continues to be the primary programme through which club and volunteer development is delivered through Ulster GAA. This programme is jointly delivered with the Irish FA and Ulster Rugby and is funded by the Department for Communities. The initiatives, which are a combination of GAA specific and joint ones, are as follows;

- Inter-Organisational Volunteering Opportunities: Ulster GAA provided a number of volunteering opportunities for IFA and Ulster Rugby volunteers to experience volunteering in the GAA. Ulster GAA volunteers have participated in volunteering at Ulster Rugby and Windsor Park.
- Volunteer Charter: Ulster GAA clubs continue to sign up to the multi-sport volunteer charter.
- A Multisport Youth Forum which was held in February at the Kingspan Stadium. Young volunteers from the three sports explored key issues facing volunteers in sport.
- Schools Roadshow: Ulster GAA, Irish FA and Ulster Rugby hosted schools roadshows for Lower Sixth Students in three schools in 2019: St Pius X Magherafelt, the Royal School Armagh, St Louise's College

Belfast. St Patrick's High School, Keady also came to the Armagh event. Health and Wellbeing was the primary focus of the roadshows, with workshops on 'Live to Play' Roadsafety with NIFS, 'One Punch Can Kill' with PSNI and Addictions with Oisín McConville from Sporting Chance.

- Lifelong Learning Volunteer Workshops: State of Readiness Workshops delivered in Belfast, Dungannon and Magherafelt with 46 GAA clubs represented in total.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Ulster GAA's Health & Wellbeing Committee continues to operate and deliver at a high level with quarterly meetings taking place in February, May, September and November. Generally, the meetings are well attended and serve the purpose of updating members on activities at National and Provincial level, while affording counties the opportunity to report back on activities within their county. It is also an opportunity for counties to help direct and support the work of the Ulster GAA Health & Wellbeing Programme.

It is vital that all County Committees' fully engage with their HMC's and that they are given their opportunity to report at County Committee meetings, as a fully constituted sub-committee. Unfortunately, a small number of counties have struggled to put a HWC in place. Support has been offered to these counties from both provincial and national levels and hopefully the problem will be rectified in the coming year. There

is a clear requirement for counties, under Rule 3.20 of the Official Guide, to establish a HWC and I would stress to defaulting committees to make this an immediate priority so that health and wellbeing issues in your county are adequately addressed.

HEALTHY CLUB PROGRAMME

Ulster has 43 clubs involved in the Healthy Club Programme, with all counties represented. Applications for Phase 4 opened in early October, with the new phase beginning in January 2021. It is hoped that Ulster will be well represented with considerable interest being shown by Ulster clubs. Ulster GAA is represented on the Healthy Club Steering Group by the Community & Health Manager.

WELLBEING IN SPORT FORUM

This Forum hosted by Sport NI and Public Health Agency (PHA) launched their Action Plan which aims to improve mental health and wellbeing for people involved in sport. The Forum meets quarterly, and many GAA clubs have benefitted from the roll-out of a pilot programme which offers free workshops to clubs in the area of mental health and addiction through one of three workshops, namely; MindFit (AWARE), Mind Set (AMH), and Sporting Chance.

HEALTH SHOWCASE EVENT

Given the volume and variety of health and wellbeing activity on offer it was decided to host a Showcase Event for clubs that would enable them to get a flavour of how to go about getting involved. The event

originally planned for Saturday 23rd March was postponed due to the tragic and far-reaching impact of the Greenvale Hotel incident and was re-scheduled for the 11th May. Feedback from clubs and partner agencies was very positive, on what was a successful and worthwhile event.

CHARITY PARTNER 2019

Ulster GAA has supported Prostate Cancer Research through Queen's University Belfast, and the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology. Consultant Oncologist and Clinical Lecturer Dr Aidan Cole is the lead contact within QUB and kindly offered to speak to groups on prostate cancer. He is a former Rostrevor and Down footballer. A very successful event took place on 13th November in Garvaghey hosted by Tyrone's HWC.

05

MENTAL HEALTH

Ulster GAA welcomes financial support from the PHA which enables work in the area of health improvement and emotional wellbeing. For three years now this programme has been built around the "Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing" campaign. This year has seen the roll-out of pitch-side signage for clubs promoting the message of "Ask, Listen, Talk".

Links with partner agencies has created a range of workshops which are available to clubs. MindFit delivery through AWARE continues, while Samaritans are linking with clubs to upskill members in active listening. Through the PHA, clubs have availed of Take 5 Champions training. SafeTALK and Mental Health First Aid continues to be made available to clubs as appropriate. 2019 has also seen the introduction of "The Huddle" concept with the Samaritans. This

10-15 minute pitch-side intervention is initially supported by a Samaritans Liaison Officer, and then carried-on by the club themselves. As the variety of mental health support options for clubs increases, Ulster GAA have created a mental health pathway which makes it clearer to clubs about which level of information and support is most suited to them, while enabling clubs to begin by developing strong foundations before moving onto more serious delivery.

**LIFESTYLE PROGRAMMES
LIVE TO PLAY**

A 'Live To Play' social media campaign was launched during Road Safety Week in November 2019, after funding was secured from Department of Justice ARCS scheme. Important road safety messages and a personal story were relayed by our nine county Ambassadors and Críostóir MacSuibhne (Ghaoth Dobhair) for

their enthusiastic involvement in promoting road safety. Our Live To Play Ambassador are: Neil McManus, Antrim; Niall Grimley, Armagh; Killian Clarke, Cavan; Chrissy McKaigue, Derry; Jamie Brennan, Donegal; Darren O'Hagan, Down; James McMahan, Fermanagh; Conor McManus, Monaghan; Neamh Woods, Tyrone.

Live To Play was promoted at several Ulster Championship games this year, with road safety messages relayed and live to play merchandise distributed to patrons attending games.

**ONE PUNCH CAMPAIGN / USE YOUR
BRAIN NOT YOUR FISTS (UYBNFY)**

Members of the PSNI and An Garda Síochana jointly presented on this campaign at the Ulster GAA Health Showcase event in May. The workshop, which aims to educate people on the possible devastating

impact of one punch scenarios on the victim and perpetrator and tackles the implications of on-field violence, is available to clubs. Feedback from the small number of workshops delivered has been very positive.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Clubs are encouraged to become smoke-free areas and many have worked together to get agreement to become a smoke-free club. Once signed-up clubs can avail of signage from the PHA in conjunction with national GAA.

ASTHMA CAMPAIGN

Thanks are extended to Peter Canavan for his involvement in an asthma awareness campaign. Created by the family of Rachel Williamson, who sadly passed away due to an asthma attack, a workshop for schools and sports clubs is available with the aim of raising awareness of what can be a life-threatening condition.

RNLI

Ulster GAA used the Fermanagh v Donegal Ulster Championship Quarter-final to promote the GAA's partnership with the RNLI on the "Respect the Water" campaign. Thanks are extended to the Health and Wellbeing Committees in Fermanagh and Donegal for their support on that occasion. Clubs can now avail of a water safety workshop delivered by RNLI as part of the partnership.

GAMBLING AWARENESS

Officially launched in August, Ulster has a number of tutors available to deliver this hour-long workshop to raise awareness of the dangers of problem gambling. The workshop

also enlightens club members about what they can do to reduce the risk of problem gambling within their club. Delivery has taken place in clubs and colleges with excellent feedback.

DONATION CAMPAIGNS

Ulster GAA have been working closely with organ donation, blood donation, and stem cell donation organisations with the aim that GAA clubs can encourage their community to support these very worthy causes. Already this year has seen the successful matching of stem cell donors from GAA recruitment for a needy recipient. The GAA can continue to play a vital role in these essential donation campaigns.

FIRST AID & HEART START

The GAA in Ulster continues to be an excellent vehicle for the delivery of community first aid, and provision of defibrillators. Ulster GAA continues to be a licensed Heartstart Scheme and has worked closely with the British Heart Foundation this year to roll-out Call Push Rescue training. Over 800 young players were trained in Call Push Rescue at Tyrone GAA summer camps, and Sport for Peace days in Fermanagh.

**CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PLANS
(CIRP)**

This programme continues to be promoted to clubs and counties. Unfortunately the past year has seen a number of critical incidents which have affected our clubs and members. Thankfully many of the clubs affected had their CIRP in place and were best placed to deal with the serious and extraordinary position in which they found themselves. A special word of mention must go to our County HWC members who were a vital support to clubs going

through extremely difficult situations. It cannot be emphasised enough the importance of clubs and counties in having their CIRP in place, and also the need for County Executive to be the lead group in supporting their clubs through such incidents.

CÚCHULAINN INITIATIVE

The Cúchulainn Initiative aims to afford young people from different backgrounds the opportunity to engage with one another and to educate people not traditionally involved with the GAA.

Taking part in the Boys' section for the first time were Lisburn, with Antrim, Enniskillen and the 2018 winners Ballymoney returning once again. In the girls' competition 2018 winners Belfast participated alongside Banbridge, Foyle and following in the footsteps of their male counterparts, Ballymoney entered a Girls' team for the first time.

In preparation for the Cúchulainn Cup Blitz, schools were given six "GAA Taster Sessions" in which pupils who had never played Gaelic Games, or had very little interaction with the Games, were taught the basic skills of Gaelic Football and Hurling. Taster Sessions were provided in 15 schools with over 500 Year 11 boys and girls getting an opportunity to sample what the GAA has to offer. In addition, "Getting to Know the GAA" presentations were delivered to participating schools which helped to promote greater understanding and respect for other cultures; a key aim of the Cúchulainn Initiative.

The Cúchulainn Cup Blitz took place on Wednesday 10th April in Meadowbank Arena, Magherafelt. After a very enjoyable day of games





there was double delight for the town of Ballymoney with success in both the boys and girls competitions. Young boys and girls from Ballymoney and Antrim created memories together in July as they travelled to London to represent their schools and towns in the All Britain Competition, as part of their involvement in Ulster GAA's Cúchulainn Initiative.

The Ballymoney Cúchulainns' made up of girls from Our Lady of Lourdes School and Dalriada School participated in the U16 Girls competition, whilst the Antrim Cúchulainns consisted of boys from Parkhall Integrated College and Crumlin Integrated College. Despite being a team made-up of players who had little or no experience playing Gaelic games, the Ballymoney and Antrim Cúchulainns' represented themselves with distinction showing some incredible skills, passion, and team-work as they came up against club teams who have had several years of experience playing together. The Girls' team reached the semi-final

of their competition and were most unfortunate not to qualify for the final. Away from the playing field, the group were invited to Clarence House before being hosted at the Embassy of Ireland by Adrian O'Neill, Ireland's Ambassador to the UK, who praised the schools and players for their engagement in the Cúchulainn Initiative.

The real value of such an experience was profoundly seen on the young boys and girls, as they forged meaningful and lasting friendships. Praise must go to the school-teachers who accompanied their pupils alongside Ulster GAA staff, making it possible for these young people to have such an experience. This initiative has been funded by The Executive Office through their Good Relations Funding Programme.

IRISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

This provincial committee is headed by Cathaoirleach Jarlath Burns and is compiled of Oifigigh Cultúrtha from each county. The Coiste supports and

promotes the initiatives of Oifigeach Gaeilge na Comhairle, the provincial Irish Language Officer, and is a vital link in the communicational structure of promoting Gaeilge agus Cultúr throughout the GAA in Ulster.

CLG Uladh has made great strides in improving the level of Gaeilge visible across all of our social media platforms, and on our website under the new 'Cultúr agus Gaeilge' microsite, where all initiatives and resources are displayed for our membership. All clubs in Ulster have received free Irish language signage from Páirc an Chrócaigh in order to further the visibility of Gaeilge in all clubs, and further digital resources will be released in 2020, including a bilingual podcast for members, for which our Oifigeach Gaeilge has undertaken broadcasting training with Raidió Fáilte in Belfast.

IRISH LANGUAGE AUDIT

Ulster GAA carried out an audit in the Summer of 2019 to ascertain both the status and the current need for

05

resources regarding the promotion of Gaeilge across clubs in Ulster. The survey was well received with almost 200 responses recorded. This research proved invaluable in the compiling of new resources to assist our clubs and has showed us the main areas in which clubs are excelling and require assistance.

Ba léir ón iniúchadh go bhfuil gá le hacmhainní do chlubanna an Chúige, agus tá CLG Uladh anois in ann tacú lenár mbaill mar gheall ar an léargas atá faighte ón suirbhé seo.

The majority of clubs who responded to the club survey identified a need for assistance with the teaching of Gaeilge and access to educational

resources to provide this service for their members. We have since conceived The Education Pathway Project to provide our members with access to Gaeilge in a controlled, instructive manner. Beidh plean teagaisc ar fáil ag leibhéal an chlub, i gcompháirtíocht le hOllscoil Uladh. Ulster GAA has partnered with Ulster University to provide this resource for clubs, with hopes of branching out to other Irish language organisations throughout its compilation. This will be launched in 2020.

GAEILGE SA CHLUB

The Gaeilge sa Chlub ('Irish in the Club') scholarship for adult learners of Gaeilge is a joint initiative from CLG Uladh and Ulster University in order to promote the use of Gaeilge within



05

clubs throughout Cúige Uladh. CLG Uladh provides financial assistance to GAA members who sign up for a Diploma in Irish Language and assists them in organising a project in their clubs to promote Gaeilge.

Foghlaimíonn mic Léinn an dioplóma léamh agus scríobh na Gaeilge, agus úsáideann siad an Ghaeilge atá foghlamtha acu ina gclubanna féin agus iad ag teagasc ranganna, ag eagrú imeachtaí, ag obair mar Oifigeach Gaeilge, nó ag cuidiú le coistí an chlub.

Tá ar ár scoláirí tionscadail a eagrú ina gclubanna féin mar chuid den scéim seo. Each year, our 'Gaeilge sa Chlub' recipients organise an Irish Language event in their club. These imeachtaí promote and encourage Gaeilge at grass-roots level of An CLG in Uladh. Our 24 recipients from 2018 have organised a variety of imeachtaí agus tionscadail (projects), including Cócaireacht trí Ghaeilge / Cooking through Irish, Club Óige, Ranganna / Classes and Lá Spóirt / Sports Days.

The 2019-2020 academic year will see 26 students avail of the bursary.

CÚRSA SEAMUS DE FAOITE

2019 saw the 31st year of the annual CLG Uladh Cúrsa de Faoite sna Dúnaibh, Dún na nGall, with over 120 CLG Uladh members attending to improve their Gaeilge or begin their journey with the language.

Five class levels were made available to course attendees so as to cater to all abilities. In addition, activities and entertainment were organised for attendees and locals of Na Dúnaibh each evening. Bhí foghlaim na Gaeilge ag croílár an lae, agus siamsaíocht

curtha ar fáil do bhaill an chúrsa agus do mhuintir na háite sna hoícheanta.

USFC PROGRAMMES AND COIRNÉAL NA GAEILGE

The 'Coirnéal na Gaeilge' initiative was introduced throughout the Ulster Championship Series 2019. This provision for Gaeilgeoirí received extensive media coverage on stations such as BBC Blás, Raidió Fáilte and RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta. Over 230 attendees used the 'Coirnéal' to converse as Gaeilge throughout the games, or to experience the game through Gaeilge by hearing those around them using the language. Ulster GAA will build on the success of this initiative in 2020 and will be continually encouraging clubs to employ this concept at club level.

A new approach was adopted for Gaeilge sna Cláir at championship games. One player or team representative was photographed with their Fáinne and a short quote on their experience with Gaeilge, building on the National 'Caith an Fáinne' campaign. One female club volunteer from each county was also photographed, showcasing their volunteering with Gaeilge, including coaches, committee members and Oifigigh Cultúrtha.

COMMUNITY LINKS / LIONRÚ POBAIL

An important part of promoting Irish is ensuring that we, as an organisation, interact with and support community-based Irish language groups. Ulster GAA has created links with Glór na nGael as they continue to provide their outstanding Joe McDonagh Foundation service, a project that

successfully guides GAA clubs through a process of language acquisition and promotion in order to achieve a high standard of Irish within their club. Ulster GAA'S Oifigeach Gaeilge works closely with Glór na nGael as an assessor for clubs going through the Foundation process.

Ulster GAA has also forged links with several community organisations, including Aonach Mhacha, Armagh's new Cultúrlann, and Gaeilge speaking GAA teams, such as Belfast's Laochra Loch Lao. Ulster GAA has formed a strong partnership with funders Foras na Gaeilge and also works closely with Conradh na Gaeilge, after sponsoring their annual Comórtas Peile as part of the Ard Fheis celebrations in 2019. Ulster GAA will continue to connect and work with the Irish language community both in and out of the GAA family and encourage such organisations to contact us to create these links.

SEACHTAIN NA GAEILGE

Bhí CLG Uladh rannpháirteach in Seachtain na Gaeilge 2019. Ulster GAA launched the 'Caith an Fáinne' campaign, in conjunction with National GAA, for Seachtain na Gaeilge 2019. Le linn Sheachtain na Gaeilge, bhí pictiúir ó bhaill éagsúla an Chumainn á bpostáil ag CLG Uladh ar na meáin shóisialta. Daily photographs of current and former players from all codes in Ulster showcasing their experience with the language and whether they have the Fáinne Óir (Gold Fáinne), Fainne Airgid (Silver Fáinne) or just a 'Cúpla Focal' were posted across all social media platforms. This campaign culminated in players from both MacRory Cup final teams on Lá Fhéile Pádraig and their 'Fáinní' proudly displayed.

We encouraged clubs to promote Gaeilge throughout Seachtain na Gaeilge and provided recommendations on our website with the haischlib #SnaG19 agus #GAAGaeilge, in order to follow the efforts of Ulster clubs in the campaign.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Community outreach work is primarily delivered as part of our "Sport Uniting Communities", Peace IV programme. This is a joint project between Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby & the IFA and is funded through European Regional Development Funding from SEUPB. The programme is designed to support peace and reconciliation within the nine counties of Ulster, with a clear cross community and cross border focus.

Nine Community Development officers (three from each sporting body) deliver twelve joint projects and three individual projects each year all with the aim to help build positive relations with people from different communities and backgrounds.

The following activities are delivered on an ongoing basis;

- Club Sport for Peace Days
- Game of Three Halves
- Have a Go days
- Volunteer Development Programme
- Youth Leadership
- Club Educational Visits
- Getting to Know the GAA

BREXIT

Having failed to achieve their three previous Brexit target dates in March, April and October 2019 the UK Government, thanks to a resounding mandate from the December General Election, finally got the endorsement of the House of Commons on December 20th for their 'European

Union Withdrawal Agreement Bill' and at 11 pm this evening (31 January 2020) the UK will cease to be a member of the European Union.

For the next 11 months there will be a transition period which will allow the UK Government and the EU to work out their future relationship. As I have written previously, any semblance of a 'hard border' on the island of Ireland will have dire consequences across many facets of society, including the GAA. It has been avoided for now but the outcome of the negotiations between now and the end of the year will be crucial to so many aspects of our lives.

GAMBLING LEGISLATION

The archaic gambling laws in Northern Ireland dates from 1985 but is essentially modelled on GB legislation from the 1960's and which has been long since updated. During the course of the year a number of our units have had formal complaints made against draws they were holding and this led to the subsequent intervention of the PSNI. Under the current legislation all lotteries are unlawful unless they are Small Lotteries which happen at a particular event (e.g. bazaar, sale of work), a Private Lottery, a Societies' Lottery or the National Lottery (which is covered by separate legislation).

There is no limit on the cost of a Private Lottery ticket but the total proceeds from the sale of tickets cannot exceed £1,000. The most common form of raffle held is a Societies' Lottery, which must be registered with the local council. However, at present the maximum price that can be charged for a ticket in a Society Lottery is £1 and no prize may exceed £25,000 (or the equivalent in value) or 10% of the

proceeds. In any event the total value of tickets sold should not exceed £80,000. The current legislation also requires that each chance in a lottery must be the same price, so it is illegal, for example, to sell a book of six tickets for say £5.

Just before Christmas the Department for Communities launched a consultation on the regulation of gambling in NI and this runs until 21 February 2020. Given that the legislation impacts on every GAA unit in the north I would urge all our units in that jurisdiction to respond to it and to express their views on how the law needs to be brought into line with current thinking. In GB there is currently no restriction on the price of a ticket with ticket sales of up to £4m permitted, though the maximum prize fund cannot be greater than £400,000.

I would also call upon our political representatives to make the reform of the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 a priority in the next Programme for Government. The current restrictive and outdated legislation inhibits the development capability of many organisations across society, including the sporting and charitable sectors, and needs to be updated without delay.



MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

A huge debt of gratitude is owed to the print and broadcast media journalists who for many years have fostered and promoted Gaelic Games. For many it was more than a job – it was an absolute labour of love and this shone through in their reporting of our games and activities. This form of 'traditional' reporting will continue to serve us well but as an Association we have to be wary of changing trends and how people consume their media.

Every one of us is now a potential journalist – we can be if we wish to be. It is therefore incumbent of all our members to exercise caution when passing comment on some topical GAA issues and particularly when doing so in an official capacity. The public – and young people in particular – increasingly use digital media as their only news source and modern technological advances allows news and information to be fed directly to the consumer. As an organisation we have to embrace technology and, without abandoning

our traditional communication methods, use the technology that is available to communicate directly with our membership and the wider public.

Media platforms such as GAANOW allows us to showcase the best GAA action to both indigenous and world audiences, while GAAGO is a great asset to our members and supporters abroad. The GAA has never been more accessible – it is vital that we maximise the opportunities that this presents.

The streaming of our games continues to grow in popularity but however well-intentioned our units must be cognisant of what it is and isn't possible to broadcast, as many of our competitions are subject to central media agreements. I thank all those who continue to promote our games and I thank AV Browne for their help and guidance as our Communications partner over the past two years and I now look forward to working with our new partner Kaizen Brand Evolution.

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL & STAFF

After 23 years as a member, Michael Hasson this evening steps down from the Provincial Council. Through the years Michael has served the Association with distinction and is highly respected across Ulster and beyond. Michael joined the Council in 1997 as a delegate from Antrim and he later served in the roles as PRO, Treasurer, Leas-Uachtarán, Uachtarán and Iar-Uachtarán. On behalf of the gaels of Ulster I thank him sincerely for his unstinting service and wish him well in his future endeavours, both within the GAA and outside of it.

Oliver Galligan has completed his first year as President and he has undoubtedly hit the ground running. He is totally immersed in the work of the Council, where he has demonstrated total leadership and dedication. He represents the interests of the province on Coiste Bainistí Naisunta and Ard Comhairle and I thank him for his guidance, loyalty and support.

05

Leas-Uachtarán Ciaran McLaughlin has somehow managed to combine his duties as Chair of The Hurling Development Committee, Integration Committee and Human Resources Committee with that of Chair of the National Games Development Committee. He is an inspirational volunteer and a tireless and diligent worker who is totally focussed on the task in hand.

Treasurer Michael Geoghegan continues to give excellent support to the work of the Council, particularly in the financial aspects of our affairs. He also represents the interests of Comhairle Uladh on the Belfast Partnership Board and his experience and insightful knowledge is highly valued.

Declan Woods was elected as PRO at last year's Annual Convention and he has worked tirelessly to promote the affairs of Ulster GAA through both traditional and new communication methods. An excellent communicator, he has dealt with the media in a highly professional manner and we are highly indebted to his enthusiasm and expertise.

Our officers are supported by a highly efficient Council membership. I thank every member of the Council for their commitment and dedication and make particular reference to those members who leave the Council tonight, namely Eddie Hughes, Tom Reilly, Stephen Barker, Ed Byrne, Michael McArdle, Maureen O'Higgins, Brian Armitage and Adrian O'Kane. They have represented their counties with distinction and I wish them well in their future GAA endeavours. I welcome to the fold the new Council representatives from their respective counties and look forward to working with them as part of Team Ulster in the coming year.

During the year Peter Finn and Paul Maxwell relinquished their posts as Third and Second Level Education representatives respectively. I thank them for their service and their ongoing commitment to the Association and welcome their replacements Andrew McFadden and Garrett Coyle to the table.

The Ulster Council has some 24 sub-committees and several workgroups – a testimony to the wide, varied and diverse remit we hold. I pay tribute to the many people who voluntarily give of their valuable time to serve on these committees – without you Ulster GAA could not function. While all committees serve a particular remit, I trust I will be forgiven for making special reference to the Hearings Committee under the leadership of George Cartwright (Chair) and Sean McKenna (Secretary) who are often called into action at very short notice. Indeed on three occasions in recent months they were summoned on Saturday night for Sunday morning hearings.

I commend our management committee for their advice, guidance and oversight and make particular reference to our Independent Members Ann Garvey and Páraic Duffy.

All our committees are serviced by a loyal, dedicated and enthusiastic workforce. I thank our senior staff members Eugene Young, Stephen McGeehan, Brian Mallon (who replaced Michelle McAleer in March as she undertook a secondment to Páirc an Chrocaigh Teoranta), Diarmaid Marsden and their respective departmental teams for their ongoing efforts in furthering the cause of the GAA in the province. I also thank them for their personal

assistance and support.

My own Office is served by a hardworking Games Management team of Stephen Donnelly and Niall Muldoon, while Bernie Fox provides clear leadership and direction in the challenging field of Safeguarding and Child Protection. Bernie has excelled in what has been a particularly difficult year and she is ably assisted by Conn Stevenson and Kathy Kelly. Kathy is now in the role of HR Co-Ordinator and she has worked tirelessly in bringing forward a raft of new policies which have been approved by Coiste Bainistíochta Uladh and her general HR advice is greatly valued by both Ulster GAA and our counties.

The PR & Marketing Team of Paul McGurk, Claire Curran and Seamus Donnelly keep Ulster GAA to the forefront of the sporting agenda and are responsible for high quality content delivery and strong event management production.

Where does one start to commend the work of my Personal Secretary Geraldine McKavanagh? There is no aspect of Ulster GAA affairs that she is not across and her empathy, understanding and all-round knowledge and ability is something which makes her held in high esteem. Ulster GAA are so lucky to have her as one of us and I thank her for her continued loyalty, support and friendship.

CONGRATULATIONS

Two years after surprising the nation by winning the Sigerson Cup, St. Mary's, Belfast, who by far have the smallest pool of players of any team in the competition, once again made everyone sit up and take notice when they again qualified for the final. However in a final played mid-week in

05

Portlaoise they went under to a strong University College, Cork team but only after putting up a valiant performance.

There was Ryan Cup success for Ulster University at the latter end of the year. Following on from the great victory of St. Ronan's, Lurgan in 2018, Ulster had another first time Hogan Cup winner in 2019 when St. Michael's, Enniskillen displayed tremendous resolve to withstand a late challenge from Naas CBS, who were also appearing in their first final, to lift the honours and bring much deserved success to the Erne County.

It was another successful year for the province on the All-Ireland Scór stage, particularly at Scór na nÓg, and our national winners have been acknowledged elsewhere in this report.

There was Ulster success at the annual MacNamee Awards with the Derry County Committee picking

up the coveted 'Best Digital Award' which featured the All-Ireland winning team of 1993 on the 25th anniversary of their historic success. Entitled 'The Men Who Won Maguire' the digital production amongst other things featured those Derry players reciting that great Seamus Heaney poem 'Markings', rekindling memories of the start of many a GAA career.

Sean Tracey (Fermanagh), Hugh Duggan (Armagh and San Francisco) and Deirdre McGrath (Down) were all honoured with President's Awards by the Uachtaran CLG John Horan, a fitting tribute to three individuals who in their own way have made a lifelong and telling contribution to Gaelic Games and, in the case of Deirdre, its sister game of camogie.

On the Inter-County Awards front there were three All-Stars for the province with the dynamic Tyrone duo of Ronan McNamee and Cathal

McShane filling the full-back and full-forward positions respectively, while the mercurial Donegal captain Michael Murphy picked up his third award, adding to his honours in 2012 and 2014, when he was selected for the left-half-forward berth.

There was a quintet of Ulster winners on the Ring/Rackard/Meagher 'Champions 15' selection with the coveted trophies going to Armagh goalkeeper Simon Doherty, Down defender Caolan Teggart and forwards Damien Casey (Tyrone), Dáithí Sands (Down) and Sé McGuigan (Derry).

That passionate Cushendall and Antrim stalwart Terence 'Sambo' McNaughton was inducted into the GAA's Hall of Fame, a fitting tribute on the thirtieth anniversary of Antrim's much heralded All-Ireland Hurling Final appearance.

Tyrone's towering full-forward Sean Óg McAleer was named as the Eirgrid U-20 Provincial Player of the Championship and he was joined by his team colleagues Conal Grimes, Conor Quinn and Darragh Canavan on the Eirgrid 20 U-20 selection. At Minor level Ronan Boyle (Monaghan) and James Donaghy (Tyrone) were named on the Electric Ireland Team of The Year.

The 3rd of March is a date that will live long in the annals of Ulster Camogie as Slaughtneil defeated St. Martin's, Wexford to complete a magnificent three-in-a-row of All-Ireland Senior Club titles, while earlier in the day Clonduff completed the first part of an historic Ulster 'double' by holding off the late challenge of Gailltír (Waterford) to win a first All-Ireland Intermediate Club title for the club.

OBITUARIES

The year began with the tragic deaths of four young Donegal men in a road accident near Magheraroarty in the Donegal Gaeltacht area. The Clougheneely and Gaoth Dobhair Clubs and the entire county were traumatised by the tragic deaths of Micheál 'Roysee' Roarty, John Harley, Shaun Harkin and Daniel Scott. Just weeks after Gaoth Dobhair had won their first Ulster Club Football title the death of one of their extended panel of players aptly demonstrated how joy can easily turn to sorrow and it was poignant to witness the Seamus McFerran Cup, The Dr Gallagher Cup and the Donegal Senior League trophy (all won by Gaoth Dobhair in 2018) being carried in front of the hearse bearing the remains of Micheál Roarty at his funeral.

Down said farewell to long serving administrator Bertie Leckey who served the county and his native Aghaderg over many years and former Down hurling manager James 'Bo' Dynes was also called to his eternal reward. That great footballer John Nallen, who had the unique distinction of playing for four counties (including Cavan), was also called to his eternal reward.

February saw the untimely death of John Morrison, an Armagh native and coach exemplar who in many respects was a coach ahead of his time. A former Antrim manager, John also coached his native Armagh, Mayo, Donegal, Derry and Leitrim, as well as numerous other teams and he was a valued member of Ulster GAA Coaching Committees over the years. A regular visitor to our Abbey Street offices, John was an Ulster GAA Master Tutor and many an aspiring coach throughout the province and

beyond have benefitted largely from John's wisdom, insight and tactical awareness.

Frank Higgins, a stalwart of the breakthrough Tyrone Ulster Senior Football championship winning teams of 1956 and 1957 also passed away in February, as did Martin McGranaghan whose death was all the more poignant given that it occurred 50 years after he played on Antrim's only All-Ireland U-21 winning football team.

The gael of Tyrone in March bade farewell to John Mulgrew, a tremendous stalwart of club and county. The Donaghmore man worked tirelessly behind the scenes for the GAA in Tyrone – and did likewise with numerous other community and charitable organisations – and was until his death a key figure in Club Tyrone.

The tragic events at the Greenvale Hotel in Cookstown on the night of 17th March will live long in our memory with three young people taken from us all too soon. The deaths of Lauren Bullock, Connor Currie and Morgan Barnard cast a long shadow over the community but in this time of grief the goodness of the GAA shone through. Much credit must go to the GAA in Tyrone, led by their Health & Wellbeing Committee with support from their Ulster GAA colleagues, who stepped up to the mark in the aftermath of the deaths and provided comfort and solace to those affected by the tragedy, many of whom were present in Cookstown on St. Patrick's night.

St. Patrick's weekend was also a traumatic one for the Bryansford Club when club members Ruth Maguire, Martin Patterson and Shane

McAnallen lost their lives in two separate incidents in Carlingford and less than two months later Siobhan McCann, a former Down LGFA player and member of the St. John's Club, finally lost her battle with cancer after a brave and courageous fight.

Cushendall and Antrim were dealt a severe blow with the passing of Tommy Campbell during the last week in March. Just four months earlier the genial Ruairi Og's Clubman had been elected Vice-Chairman of the Antrim County Committee but he passed away after a short illness. A great friend of the community – Tommy also played football for Con Magee's, Glenravel and was both a keen golfer and quizzier – he remained as positive until the end and attended a number of Antrim's Allianz Hurling League games and Ruairi Og's All-Ireland Club semi-final in the weeks before his passing. A great gael, Tommy is fondly remembered by all who knew him.

Two great former inter-county managers passed away in early May. Eugene McGee, best remembered as the Offaly manager who thwarted Kerry's five-in-a-row bid in 1982 and who also managed Cavan, was called to his eternal reward after taking ill following a family wedding, while Fr Sean Hegarty was manager of both the Armagh and Derry teams and he also managed Errigal Ciaran, a club he helped found, to their first Ulster Club title win in 1993. His brother Seamus also passed away later in the year.

23 June was a great day for Donegal when they retained their Ulster Senior Football title for just the second time but the historic victory was somewhat overshadowed by the tragic death earlier that day of Manus 'Mandy' Kelly, who had just weeks earlier been



05



elected to Donegal County Council. The Glenswilly man was a personal friend of Donegal captain Michael Murphy and it was no doubt a difficult time for Michael when news of the death was relayed to him shortly after he had received the Anglo Celt Cup.

The world of gaelic games lost a great ambassador with the death of Brídín Uí Mhaolagáin in early July. Although Dublin born and bred, Brídín had strong Antrim links (both her parents were from Dunloy) and she had the honour of being both President of The Camogie Association and the Ladies Handball Association. Another link with that great All-Ireland Cavan winning team of 1952 was broken with the death of Fr. Seamus Hetherington, who worked most of his ministerial life in Engalnd.

We were deeply shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Brian Conlon, the CEO and founder of First Derivatives, at the end of July following a short illness. Just weeks earlier he had attended

Down's Championship games against Armagh and Mayo in Páirc Esler and he was a friend of the GAA in every respect, though never courted publicity or sought the limelight. As an enterprising 20-year-old he played for Down in the 1986 Ulster Final but just seven months later his promising inter-county and indeed club career came to an abrupt end with a serious injury sustained in the Sigerson Cup. The vigour, energy and enthusiasm that he brought to the football field was replicated in his approach to business and through his innovation and entrepreneurship he went on to create a successful global company which has given employment to many young people and provided them opportunities to work either at home or abroad. Brian may be no longer around but his legacy continues to live on.

The GAA community was shocked to learn of the sudden and tragic death of young Saul footballer Niall Laverty, a fresher student at the Ulster University. Just six months

before his untimely passing young Niall had celebrated a McLernon Cup victory with his school St. Patrick's, Downpatrick. He has departed this life all too soon and his presence will be missed by all who knew him, and none more so that his grieving family and his many friends and colleagues.

There was further heartbreak for the Mourne County when news broke in the early afternoon of 9th October that twice All-Ireland medalist and former county senior manager Eamonn Burns had passed away. His sudden parting rocked the county and the many tributes that followed his passing aptly illustrated the high level of esteem in which he was held. The "true son of Down" will be forever remembered as a key playing member of the 1991 and 1994 All-Ireland winning teams, his two points on either side of half-time proving particularly crucial in that epic 1991 triumph. Eamonn also managed his native Bryansford to their 2003 County Title and when Down were without a manager in

late 2015 Eamonn came calling to aid his beloved county in their hour of need. His greatest day as Down manager came in June 2017 when he led them to a famous victory over Monaghan in the Ulster semi-final in Armagh, reversing the 22 points hammering that the Farney men had inflicted upon Down the previous year. Quiet spoken, people listened when Eamonn talked - he always had something interesting to say. How poignant it was when on the day following his funeral, his sons Cathal and Thomas led his All-Ireland winning colleagues onto the Páirc Esler turf at the Down County Final and a minute's silence was impeccably observed in memory of the Down sporting legend and hero.

Just a couple of months earlier Bryansford had lost another great stalwart in Thomas Walsh, who was their club representative on the County Committee. Tyrone lost a great stalwart in Pat Fahy, a solicitor and family man who rose to great prominence due to his tireless

championing of human rights over six decades. Pat was also a great community man and seldom happier than when watching his native Wolfe Tones, Drumquin for which he served as Club Chairman. A devoted Tyrone supporter Pat also played minor football for the county and was a key figure in the Club Tyrone Project until his death.

In early November Monsignor Ambrose MacAuley was called to his eternal reward. The Cushendall native was synonymous with Gaelic Games in Queen's University, serving as President of the Gaelic Football Club for half a century.

We were all saddened on the morning of 12 November to learn of the death of Tommy McCabe, who died late the previous night. Tommy was 'Mr. St. Tiernach's Park' and for some 32 years he ensured that the Clones ground was in immaculate condition for the many major games it hosted. Tommy took great pride in his work and he treated every person who entered the

ground with the utmost courtesy and respect. Ulster Final Day was the 'big day' in Tommy's calendar and it was fitting that he was honoured by the Ulster Council at the 2019 Ulster Final for his devotion and dedication to St. Tiernach's Park. Clones just won't be the same without him.

For almost thirty years P.J. McKeefry acted as Sports Editor of 'The Irish News' and under his stewardship he ensured that Gaelic Games was to the forefront of their coverage. The early 1990's was a golden one for the Association in the province but one date particularly resonated with P.J.- 19 September 1993. That was the day that Sam Maguire came to his beloved county for the first and, to date, only time. He was a lifelong member of the Michael Davitt's Club in Swatragh, where he also served as Club Secretary.

Another link with that much acclaimed Armagh Senior football team of 1953 was broken with the death of Patsy McCreech in November. Patsy, who had served on the Cullville Blues Committee for over 40 years and was Club President at the time of his death, was the last surviving member of the club's 1951 Armagh Junior Football Championship winning team. Earlier in the year the Cullville Club also said farewell to their former Chairman Owenie O'Neill.

Lamh Dearg and Antrim lost a great stalwart with the passing of Michael Herron. Michael comes from a family stepped in the GAA tradition and he was Vice Chair of the South Antrim Board at the time of his death.

It was with great sadness that we learned last month of the death of Canon Patrick Lonergan, a native of



Monaghan but best known within GAA circles as a long serving player with Devenish. He also served for many years as Vice-Chairman of the Fermanagh County Committee and also represented The Erne County on the Ulster Council.

There was shock and sadness at the sudden death of Blackhill clubman and referee Patrick Caulfield who officiated at numerous Ulster Club League games earlier in 2019 and he also refereed the Monaghan Senior Football Championship semi-final between Clontibret and Latton.

In what was a particular tragic year for deaths of young people there was further bad news in December with the death of young Atticall player and St. Mark's, Warrenpoint pupil James Grant, while young Ardara footballer Mary Ellen Molloy met her death in a freak accident in Australia, where she was working as a nurse. Mary Ellen, who is a niece of Donegal's 1992 All-Ireland winning captain Anthony Molloy, was a playing member of the St. Kevin's Club in Melbourne at the time of her passing.

I extend my deepest sympathy to all GAA members in the province who lost loved ones in 2019. In time may you be comforted by precious memories. I trust I will be forgiven for making specific mention to four people closely associated with Ulster GAA who lost their partners during this time; our sincerest condolences go out to Sean McKenna on the death of his wife Valerie, to Aideen Gillen on the death of her husband Martin, to Pat Connaghan on the death of his wife Mary and to Ulster Scór Cathaoirleach Paula Magee on the death of her father.

THANKS

I place on record my deepest gratitude to the many volunteers in our clubs and counties who continue to give of their valuable time in the furtherance of this great organisation. In my role as Provincial Secretary I meet many inspirational people and I am fully appreciative of your guidance and support. I thank especially our team of stewards and gatemen who week after week turn out to work for Ulster GAA. I thank in particular Chief Steward Michael McCarney and Deputy Chief Steward Terence McShea for their dedication and commitment.

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 GAA President John Horan, Ard Stiurthoir Tom Ryan and the staff of Croke Park who are so generous with their time and always make themselves available when guidance or clarification is needed. I thank also my fellow Provincial Secretaries for their ongoing counsel and support.

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. Of course, if it wasn't for the players and their coaches there would be no games, so as an Association we owe you a massive debt of gratitude.

I thank also our colleagues in Ulster Camogie and Ulster Ladies GAA for their support and understanding and trust that we will continue to work together on matters of mutual interest.

In 2020 Ulster GAA will publish its next Strategic Plan. Much of the research has already been undertaken and I thank Committee Chair David Hassan and the members of the committee, which has representation from all GAA codes in the province, for their diligence and hard work. Early in the New Year a number of stakeholder engagement events will take place, ahead of the finalisation of the plan.

I thank also all members of the Ulster GAA team for their unstinting support and loyalty and last, but certainly not least, I thank the team at home, without whose support I could not properly function in this role. My wife Deirdre has been an ever present at my side and I thank her for her continued support and understanding. Thanks also go out to my children Étain, Ardán and Malacháí for their ongoing help. To you all I say a big Thank You!



BRIAN MAC FHÍOBHÚÍ
RÚNAÍ