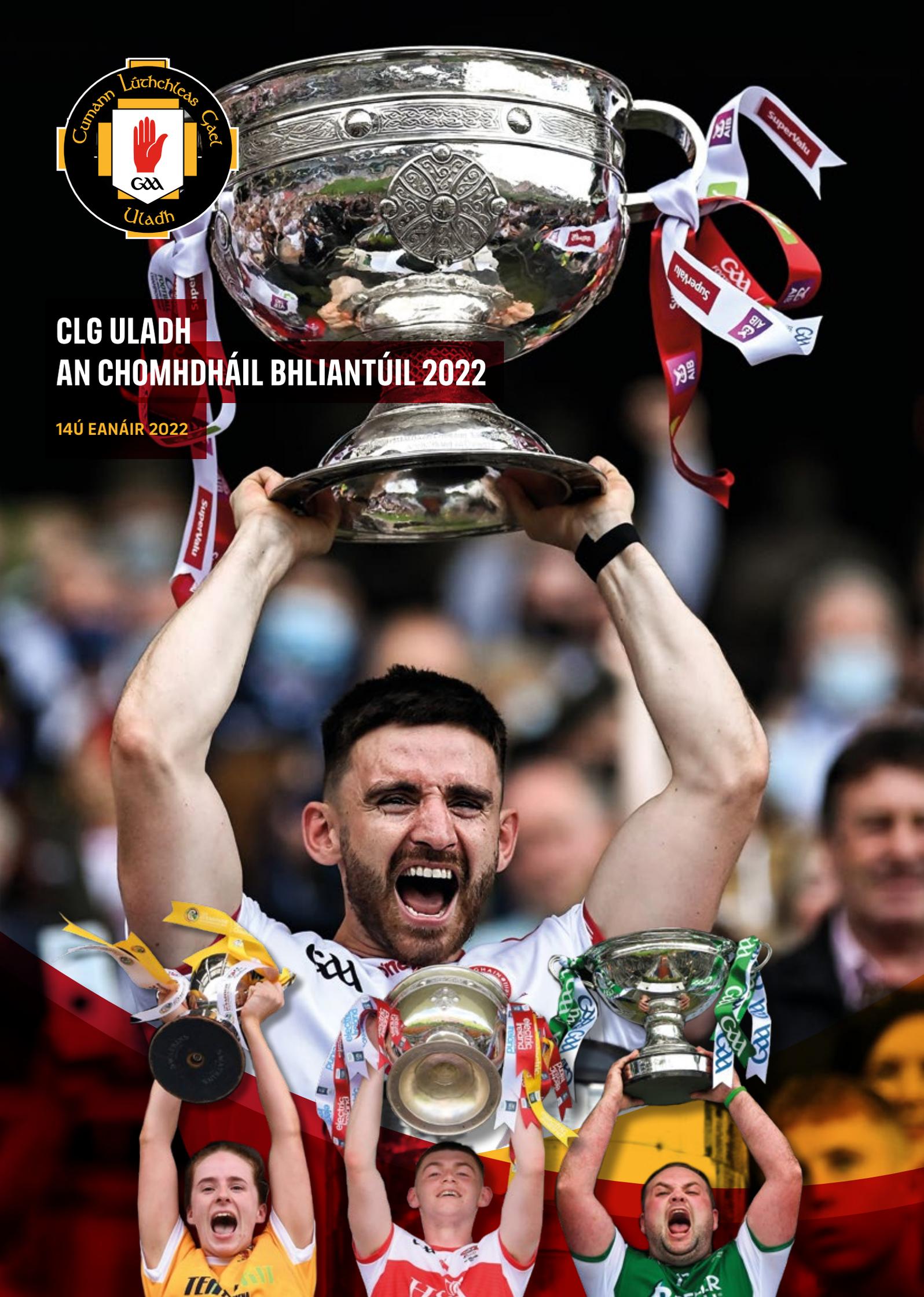




CLG ULADH AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL 2022

14Ú Eanáir 2022





05 TUARASCÁIL AN RÚNAÍ

Pride of place in the review of the past year rests with the Tyrone Senior Football team for their tremendous achievement in bringing the Sam Maguire Cup back to the province for the first time in nine years.

The O'Neill County success is a great fillip for Gaelic Football in Ulster and given the tight margins in most of the games in the 2021 provincial championship, many of our counties will undoubtedly have reasonable aspirations for the season ahead. The Tyrone success crowned a magnificent first year in charge for joint managers Fergal Logan and Brian Dooher, with Brian gaining membership of an exclusive club of just five people to have both captained and managed All-Ireland Senior Football winning sides.

Mayo, who defeated seven-in-a-row chasing Dublin (after extra-time) in the semi-final, were gallant final opponents but there was no doubt that Tyrone were fully deserving

of their victory and they now find themselves within sight of the five All-Ireland titles held by Cavan and Down, the highest for any Ulster County.

Tyrone's attention to detail and an inner self-belief were critical factors in this All-Ireland triumph. Their high-octane game, coupled with an innate belief in their own ability, were key factors in this great triumph. All-Ireland's aren't won easy and you have to make every opportunity count. Tyrone created the opportunity and weren't found wanting when it arose. The journey they made from Killarney in June to Croke Park in September was remarkable - but this is a remarkable team! Well done to all involved. Much discussion - and not a little degree of controversy - surrounded Tyrone's All-Ireland semi-final meeting with Kerry. When Tyrone played Monaghan in the Ulster Final on 31st July, four of their panel members and joint-manager Fergal

Logan were unavailable due to the fact they had either contracted COVID-19 or had been identified as close contacts,

In the days following the Ulster Final things deteriorated within the Tyrone camp and every member of the panel and background team were tested. The results showed that a significant number of panel members had tested positive, with some displaying very severe symptoms. The Central Competitions Control Committee postponed their All-Ireland semi-final by six days until 21st August. However as more and more players returned to training (though some were unable to do so immediately following their isolation period) it became clear that the effects of COVID-19 had taken their toll and on 14th August the Tyrone County Committee issued a statement stating that in the interests of player welfare and safety, they had reluctantly taken the decision that they would be unable to fulfil their All-Ireland semi-final fixture on 21st August.

It was a brave and courageous decision, based on expert medical evidence. The Tyrone players, management and County Committee knew that their players were in no physical condition to engage at the high intensity level that an All-Ireland semi-final merits.

The CCCC had a hard call to make, as the preparations of Tyrone's All-Ireland semi-final opponents Kerry and indeed All-Ireland finalists Mayo (who defeated Dublin on 14th August) would also be impacted by any further postponements. Those counties must be applauded for their co-operation and collegiality which paved the way for a solution which



was acceptable to all sides, with Tyrone being granted a further week and the All-Ireland final being moved back to 11th September. As the saying goes, the rest is history!

COVID-19

Little did we know 22 months ago how dramatically our everyday lives would be altered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many things we took for granted back then take place now in either a much-diluted form or not at all. Many of us have lost loved ones to this dreaded illness, with official figures telling us that the pandemic has claimed over 8,500 lives to date on the island of Ireland and, unfortunately, this figure will continue to rise.

The key factor in the phased 'opening up' of the country has been the vaccination roll-out, though as we have seen that even with higher levels of protection in the community the virus remains highly transmissible and still continues to cause major disruption to everyday life.

Throughout 2020 the Association was able to operate with a high degree of synchronisation across both political jurisdictions. This became more problematic over the past year as the vaccination roll-out programme differed north and south, though there were higher levels of equalisation as the year progressed. By mid-April GAA clubs in the north were allowed to train outdoors in pods of 15, with club games allowed to resume from 7 May, with limits on spectator numbers. It was a further month before club games were allowed to take place in the '26 Counties.' The decision to go 'county first' in 2021 (the reverse of the previous year) proved to be a correct

one, as the inter-county season was allowed to get underway on 15th May. At the outset of the pandemic the ethos of the GAA shone through as volunteers from all our units placed their facilities at the disposal of the authorities for use as testing centres or as ancillary centres. All over the country the GAA was at the vanguard of the community response. Also, in 2021, we were at the forefront of the Vaccination Programme as Ulster GAA, in partnership with Volunteer Now and the British Red Cross, led the volunteering effort at the Mass Vaccination Centres across the north from January – August 2021.

A total of 435 volunteers were deployed seven days per week, 12 hours per day, across six vaccination centres, spanning all NI Health Trust areas for the seven-month period. Of these, there were 162 dedicated GAA volunteers from 64 clubs and they gave a mammoth effort ensuring the centres ran efficiently, safely and effectively as possible. These volunteers gave an outstanding commitment over the seven difficult months and made a valuable contribution to the vaccine roll-out. They are unsung heroes of the COVID-19 response.

We were proud to work with our partner organisations and with our colleagues in the Health Service and local Trusts in delivering this vital vaccination programme, assisting at the Mass Vaccination Centres at: Enniskillen, Omagh, Craigavon, Foyle, Ballymena, and Belfast. In total GAA volunteers gave 12,000 volunteering hours to this project.

I wish to place on record our thanks to all those who volunteered: it has certainly been a very rewarding

programme and has highlighted the strength of Gaels and others in their desire and commitment to helping their community. I thank also the Ulster GAA team who led this initiative, giving many hours of service in ensuring its success. In particular I thank Diarmaid Marsden, Sharon Haughey-Grimley and Pierce Caherty who had the overall responsibility of scheduling rotas and co-ordinating the Ulster GAA response.

GAMES ACTIVITY 2021

In 2021, the Ulster Senior Football Championship took place in strange circumstances in a condensed six-week period. The beginning of the championship on 27th June saw only 500 supporters allowed to attend our games due to COVID-19 restrictions but by the Ulster Final on the last day of July, we had over 14,000 supporters in attendance in Croke Park. The Anglo Celt Cup returned to Tyrone for the first time since 2017 as they saw off Monaghan in a thrilling final on Saturday 31st July.

The Ulster Under 20 Football Championship was also played in the summer with Down defeating Monaghan in an emotionally charged final at the Athletic Grounds. This game was delayed by a week following the tragic death of Monaghan U20 team captain Brendan Óg Ó Dufaigh, on the night of their semi-final win over Donegal. I will cover this tragic loss to his family, club and county in greater detail later in my report.

The 2020 Ulster Minor Football Championship was completed in June with Derry winning the title and went on to win the Tom Markham Cup



which was a remarkable success. The 2021 championship was played in the same timeframe with Tyrone collecting the Fr. Murray Cup but then losing out in the All-Ireland decider.

The Allianz Football League had contrasting fortunes for the Ulster counties. All four divisions had been split into section two sections of four teams where all teams only got three games within their group. In Division 1 North, all four Ulster teams were pitted together. Donegal topped the group and along with Tyrone progressed to the semi-final. Both counties were defeated by Dublin and Kerry respectively, who ended up sharing the league title in a sign that this was no ordinary year. Down defeated Laois in a relegation play-off to retain their Division 2 status. Division 3 contained Derry, Cavan and Fermanagh and it certainly was a mixed bag for the Ulster counties. Cavan were relegated to Division 4, Fermanagh were beaten in a semi-final while Derry defeated Offaly in the Division 3 decider at Croke Park. This was the only one of the four league Finals played and was so on the basis of an agreement between both counties. Antrim were our sole representatives in Division 4 and they performed admirably to gain promotion to Division 3 as they won their semi-final but the Final against Louth didn't take place due to the fact that the Leinster side were playing in the Provincial Championship on the following weekend.

It was an encouraging year for our counties in the Allianz Hurling League. Antrim, on their return to Division 1B finished fourth in their six-team group, to retain their Division 1 status. Their results included a flagship win over Clare and a draw

against Wexford, both at Corrigan Park. In Division 2A, Down finished in third position while in Division 2B, Derry and Donegal finished in second and third respectively. In Division 3A, we had three representatives with Armagh, Tyrone and Monaghan finishing in second, third and fourth position. Finally, in Division 3B, Louth topped the group with Cavan in second and Fermanagh in third place.

The Bank of Ireland Dr McKenna Cup is a competition that did not take place in 2021 and its future looks in serious doubt as the fixture calendar sees massive changes in the coming years. A last-minute reprieve from Cental Council has ensured that the tournament will take place in January 2022. It's a competition that has served this province, and indeed our counties and universities, extremely well and it would be disappointing if it was to become another piece of our past history.

SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2021 Ulster Senior Football Championship commenced at Páirc Esler, Newry on Sunday 27th June, where Donegal produced a commanding performance to defeat Down by 2-25 to 1-12. The following weekend, we had two quarter finals, outlining the condensed nature of this year's championship. Monaghan hosted Fermanagh at St Tiernach's Park and progressed via a 1-21 to 0-14 scoreline while Armagh produced a strong second half display to defeat Antrim by 4-15 to 0-14 at the Athletic Grounds.

In the other two quarter finals, Tyrone defeated the reigning champions, Cavan by 1-18 to 0-14 while Donegal edged out a determined Derry side by

virtue of a last gasp Paddy McBrearty score.

The first semi-final saw Monaghan and Armagh meet in Páirc Esler on Saturday 17th July. This came the day after the death of Brendan Óg Ó Dufaigh and a week after the tragic loss of team sponsor, Phil Traynor so it was a really tough period for Monaghan GAA.

The game, which was played in over 30 degrees of heat, was an absolute classic and has been viewed by most pundits as the GAA game of the year. Having seemed out of it at half-time Armagh put in a storming second half, only for Monaghan to clinch victory at the death on a 4-17 to 2-21 scoreline. In the second semi-final played at Brewster Park in Enniskillen the following day, Tyrone got the better of Donegal in another gripping contest, emerging victorious on a 0-23 to 1-14 scoreline.

In order to allow as many patrons as possible to attend the game, Ulster GAA took the decision to play the



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Ulster Final in Croke Park – and a big thank you goes out to Peter McKenna and his Croke Park Stadium Team and to Fergal McGill and CCCG for their part in accommodating our request – and as a result over 14,000 spectators attended our provincial marquee game of the year. They were not disappointed. Tyrone and Monaghan played out a thrilling encounter where both goalkeepers in Rory Beggan and Niall Morgan played pivotal roles. Tyrone laid their platform for victory in the first half but Monaghan came storming back after the break but the O'Neill County just held on for victory, winning by 0-16 to 0-15 and so collected the Anglo Celt Cup.

Four Tyrone panel members and joint manager Fergal Logan were unable to be present in Croke Park on Ulster Final day due to COVID-19 related issues and, as outlined earlier, the situation in the Tyrone camp was to deteriorate rapidly in the week following the Ulster showpiece. The All-Ireland semi-final against Kerry was finally played on 28th August and in an absorbing game of football, extra time was required to separate the Ulster and Munster champions. Two goals from Conor McKenna and one from Cathal McShane was just enough to get Tyrone over the line by 3-14 to 0-22 in an epic encounter.

The All-Ireland Final paired Tyrone against Mayo on Saturday 11th September. Tyrone put in a controlled performance from start to finish. They led by 0-10 to 0-8 at half time and Tyrone's thirst for goals reaped rewards again when Cathal McShane and Darren McCurry both palmed to the net. They stayed on top in the closing stages to win out by 2-14 to 0-15 to collect their fourth Sam



Maguire. Sincere congratulations go to team managers Fergal Logan and Brian Dooher in their first year and the entire Tyrone squad for this remarkable success.

MINOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2020 Electric Ireland Ulster Minor Football Championship recommenced on 26th June 2021 with the competition at the semi-final stage. The two games proved to be worth the wait with Derry edging out Tyrone (3-10 to 2-12) and Monaghan squeezing past Fermanagh (3-10 to 2-10) in two compelling encounters. In the final, Derry withstood a late Monaghan rally to hold on and win by 1-15 to 0-15 in O'Neill's Healy Park. In the All-Ireland semi-final they saw off a strongly fancied Meath challenge in Newry, to earn a place in the 2020 All Ireland Minor Football Final.

Sunday 18th July 2021 was the date for the 2020 final and Tullamore was the venue as Derry and Kerry played out a thriller. A Kerry goal in injury time looked to have won it for the Munster champions but Derry

responded immediately and team captain Matthew Downey scored from the penalty spot to ensure a 2-12 to 1-14 victory and a first Minor Football title for Derry in 19 years. Well done to the Derry players, their manager Martin Boyle and all involved in this brilliant achievement. It was worth the wait!

No sooner had the 2020 competition ended when the 2021 version began. On Wednesday 21st July, Donegal eased past Antrim in the First Round to join the other seven counties in the Quarter-Final. Derry, ten days from claiming the 2020 All-Ireland Minor title, were defeated by Armagh in Owenbeg while there were also wins for Fermanagh, Tyrone and Donegal. In the semi-finals, Tyrone comprehensively defeated Fermanagh and Donegal edged past Armagh by two points. The final was played at Brewster Park on Friday 13th August and Tyrone produced a strong second half display to run out 2-11 to 1-7 winners.



Tyrone displayed their best team effort of the year when they outclassed Cork by 0-23 to 1-6 at Tullamore in the All-Ireland semi-final. The All-Ireland Minor Football Final was played as a curtain raiser to the Senior Football semi-final between Kerry and Tyrone and it was truly a brilliant occasion. It was a great game of football as Meath illustrated the clinical edge when it was needed the most to claim the Tom Markham Cup on a 1-12 to 1-11 scoreline.

UNDER 20 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Ulster Under 20 Football Championship, which replaced the Under 21 grade in 2018, was played on Friday nights throughout the month of July. Donegal defeated Armagh in Ballybofey by 1-17 to 0-8 in the First Round and there were quarter-final

wins for Monaghan, Down, Fermanagh and Donegal respectively.

The semi-finals' witnessed Down defeat Fermanagh by six points and Monaghan overcome a slow start to defeat Donegal by five points. The precious nature of life was seen in its fullness within hours of the final whistle in Brewster Park. The following morning word filtered through that Monaghan U-20 team captain Brendan Og Ó Dufaigh, had tragically died on the way home from the game and the news shocked the GAA world. A leader on the field of play and beyond, his passing was difficult for all to comprehend.

The Under 20 Final was subsequently delayed until 30th July and when it was played, those in attendance or those who tuned in live to watch it on

TG4, were treated to a spectacle. In an emotionally charged evening at the Athletic Grounds, Down finally emerged victorious after extra time on a 3-15 to 1-14 scoreline on a night when football brought people together, in both joy and sorrow. Down went onto play Roscommon in the All-Ireland semi-final at Kingspan Breffni the following weekend but after starting really well they were pegged back in the final quarter and were defeated by 2-13 to 1-10.

HURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Unfortunately, no league honours came the way of Ulster counties but in a reduced season due to the pandemic all nine counties maintained their existing status for 2022. However, there was much to celebrate in the performance of the Antrim hurlers in particular, who secured a memorable victory over Clare and a draw against Wexford in the course of their five fixtures.



In the Leinster Senior Hurling Championship, Antrim failed to replicate their league performances as they lost out to Dublin in the Leinster Quarter Final and then Laois in an All-Ireland Qualifier series. In the Tier Two competition, namely the Joe McDonagh Cup, Down finished second in their group, losing to Kerry and beating Meath. They lost out on a place in the final by the very narrowest of margins as the final spot was determined by the number of goals scored, the fourth determining mechanism. In the Christy Ring Cup, Derry reached the final but came up against a very strong Offaly side in Croke Park and were comprehensively defeated.

In the Nicky Rackard Cup, Ulster was represented by Armagh, Donegal and



Tyrone. The O'Neill County lost out to Mayo in the final after defeating Donegal in an epic semi-final in Carrickmore. Armagh lost out to Mayo in the other semi-final. The final was played as part of a triple header in Croke Park, along with the Ulster Senior Football Championship Final and Lory Meagher Cup Final.

In the Lory Meagher Cup final, which was played immediately after the Ulster Final, Fermanagh produced a strong attacking display in the final against Cavan, with Tom Keenan notching a hat-trick to take the title on a 3-26 to 2-17 scoreline. Monaghan had also competed in the Lory Meagher Cup but were eliminated at the quarter-final stage.

The Leinster Council agreed to accommodate one Ulster County in the 2021 Leinster Under 20 Hurling Championship. Antrim and Down indicated that they wished to compete for this place and played a qualifier in June 2021. Antrim proved much too strong winning out on a 3-17 to 1-13 scoreline at Ballycran. They progressed to the Leinster Championship where they were defeated by Laois, in Navan.

Derry played some excellent hurling to reach the final of the All-Ireland U-20 'B' Championship (Richie McElligott Cup) but they lost out to Meath in the final after an absorbing contest which was played in Newry. Antrim and Down competed in the Leinster Minor Hurling championship in 2021. The Saffrons beat the Mournemen in a qualifying tie in Portaferry on 39th June on a scoreline of 2-17 to 2-11. Unfortunately, Antrim had to concede their next game due to COVID-19 reasons, so they entered the Peadar Ó Liathain

Cup (Leinster Minor Hurling B Championship). Ironically the final of this competition turned out to be an all-Ulster affair with Antrim and Down once again crossing swords. The game was played in Corrigan Park on 21st July and in another close encounter, Antrim just edged out their neighbours by 2-11 to 0-14 after a highly entertaining contest. 2022 will see a further development when Derry will join Antrim and Down in the Leinster Championship.

In the Celtic Challenge, 37 games were played across seven divisions, with each team guaranteed a minimum of three matches. The key results for competing Ulster counties were;

- Div 1 Corn Michael Hogan: Derry 2-16 vs Wicklow 1-9; Consolation final: Antrim 4-18 v Sligo 0-10
- Div 2 Corn John Scott: Roscommon 6-20 v Tyrone 3-7; Consolation final: Mayo 2-13 v Donegal 1-13
- Div 4 Corn Michael Feery: Armagh 3-8 v Longford 0-16;
- Div 5 Corn Tom Hogan: Cavan 3-15 v Louth 2-6; Consolation final: Monaghan 3-14 v Fermanagh 1-11

While pre-season competitions in both hurling and football did not take place in 2021, the hurlers of Antrim and Down did play a one-off game for the Conor McGurk Cup, with 'The Saffrons'; emerging victorious to take home the silverware.

ULSTER JUNIOR HURLING DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE

Undoubtedly the most successful hurling competition played in the province during the past year was the South Ulster Junior Hurling Development league. Teams were graded according to ability with 27 games taking place in all. After four exciting finals, Lisbellaw St. Patrick's (Fermanagh), Omagh St. Enda's (Tyrone), Latton O'Rahilly's (Monaghan), and Letterkenny Gaels (Donegal) emerged as winners of the Cup, Shield, Bowl and plate competitions respectively.

GAA President Larry McCarthy, presented the winners of the Cup to Lisbellaw and National Hurling Development Manager Martin Fogarty presented the Shield to Omagh after their respective finals. Following on from its tremendous success, there will be an expanded Cú-Chulainn League in 2022. I thank everyone who played a part in making this such as success with Kieran Farmer, Emmett Conlon, Kevin Kelly and Ciaran McLaughlin noteworthy of special praise.

TÁIN OG YOUTH HURLING LEAGUES

This competition returned in 2021 with 58 clubs (117 Teams) across the three grades of U-13, U-15 & U-17 participating. The competition saw over 260 games played with multiple finals days across all age grades.



CLUB FOOTBALL & HURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

With no provincial or All-Ireland Club Championships taking place in 2020, it was very welcome to see these competitions return in 2021. At the time of writing the competitions have commenced with some at final stage, with the remainder at semi-final stage.

Within each county there were some memorable games, with once again the Tyrone Championship being the tightest of all, producing many memorable games. In the end the final wasn't as close as most of the games that went before it, with

Dromore winning the O'Neill Cup for the first time since 2011.

The 14th November was an emotional day in counties Antrim and Armagh, with Kickhams Creggan winning the honours in Antrim for the first time since 1954, while in Armagh the Gerry Fagan Cup went 'home' to Clann Eireann as the Lurgan side claimed their first County Title since 1963 (a team which was actually captained by Gerry Fagan).

The 'young guns' of Watty Graham's, Maghera finally got their hands on the John McLaughlin Cup as Malachy O'Rourke steered them to their first

county senior title, in his first year at the helm.

St. Eunan's, Letterkenny completed the hurling/football 'double' in Donegal for the first time since 1971, with Kilcoo footballers winning their ninth title in ten years in Down and the Slaughtneil hurlers completing a remarkable 'nine-in-a-row' in Derry.

REFEREES

In concluding my summary of games activity in 2021, I wish to reference our match officials. I thank all our referees for their time, commitment and involvement in the delivery of our games programme, which was reduced due to the coronavirus pandemic. Without referees, there are simply no game and I commend you all for your efforts and thank you for your continued support.

I make special mention of Maggie Farrelly, who became the first female in history to referee a Men's Senior Football County Final when she took charge of the Cavan SFC Replay between Ramor United and Gowna on Sunday 14th November. This was a truly landmark achievement and I give a huge congratulations to Maggie, who is a member of the Laragh United Club.

I extend my congratulations also to Joe McQuillan who refereed the All-Ireland Senior Football Final between Tyrone and Mayo. It was an historic appointment for the Kill Clubman who became the first person from Ulster to referee four All-Ireland Finals' (excluding replays). Galbally's Sean Hurson was rewarded for his performances this year when he was appointed to the All-Ireland U-20 Football final between Offaly and Roscommon and Dunloy's Colum



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Cunning became only the third referee from the province to referee an All-Ireland Minor Hurling Final, when he took charge of the encounter between Cork and Galway, which was played in Thurles.

Ulster GAA are in the process of finalising the Referees Pathway document for the province, which we hope to launch in early 2022.

FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP PROPOSALS

A major talking point of the past year surrounded the Football Championship proposals which formed part of the overall report of the Fixtures Calendar Review Task Force. The Group put forward two motions which were considered at a Special Congress in Croke park on 23 October 2021.

Proposal A would have resulted in one team from Ulster and three teams from Leinster playing round-robin championship football in Connacht and Munster under a scenario where eight teams would compete for each provincial title. This proposal failed to capture the imagination of the GAA public and wasn't debated at the Special Congress.

Proposal B would have resulted in the provincial championships being played as a standalone competition during the months of February and March, with the Allianz League doubling up as a championship, so guaranteeing all counties at least seven league/championship games. It garnered strong support and strong opposition in almost equal measure and while it won the popular vote on the day by 85 votes to 83, it fell well short of the 60 per cent required to be passed into rule.

I was a strong opponent of the proposal and my view was largely echoed across the counties in Ulster – though it is important to note that there was also opposition to the motion in many places outside of Ulster. The fundamental difficulty with the motion was that it effectively reduced the provincial championships to 'enhanced' pre-season competitions, playing them in winter/early spring and removing the link between them and the All-Ireland series. Some argued that it could be tweaked if passed – for example, under the proposal the 25th ranked county would progress to the knock-out stages of the championship, while the sixth ranked team would be eliminated – but this was merely papering over the cracks. The fundamental issue, the divorcing of the provincial championships from the All-Ireland series, remained.

While finance was also an issue, it was not the key issue. However, on figures presented by Croke Park, Proposal B was deemed to be the weakest in terms of revenue generating capacity. As a Provincial Council we believe that they had significantly over-estimated the revenue streams from the provincial championships by between £3m and £4m, so Proposal B in our view was the weakest model financially by some distance. The loss of revenue across the Association would undoubtedly have impacted negatively on some of the many initiatives delivered by GAA unites both at home and abroad.

No one is suggesting that the status quo is perfect and there is a momentum for change. Any change however must be for the better and must have broad consensus if it is to have acceptance across the board.

The first question that must be asked, is what are we trying to achieve? I don't think that this was satisfactorily addressed during the previous debate. From the many conversations I've had on the issue with people who supported Proposal B there appeared to be two constants – more top games in the summer months and a closing of the gap between the strongest and weakest teams. The former was partly achieved by the league/championship format, though it was not being played during the summer months as was being claimed. The latter was most certainly not going to be achieved under proposal B – in fact the opposite would have been the case, as the fact that the stronger teams would be playing each other week on week in a league/championship (as opposed to a league as is currently the case) would have resulted in these games being even more competitive. While the games involving the weaker teams would also have had an additional edge due to the championship element – though there would have been a lot of 'dead rubbers' in Division Four given that there was no relegation from this division - the fact that they were at a much lower standard to those in the divisions above them, would have resulted in a further widening of the gap.

In order for the lower teams to improve, they need to be playing at least some games against teams of a slightly higher standard. The change from the old 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B league system to the current system partly explains the growing imbalance in standards but the biggest factor is resources. It is no surprise that the counties that can attract the highest sponsorship and commercial revenue



are the ones around at the business end of the season. That is unlikely to change any time soon. The provincial championships are not the cause of the problem of one-sided fixtures (and there will always be one-sided fixtures, that's the nature of sport), but they are where the problem has manifested itself due to the factors I've outlined.

In the last 30 years, 22 different counties have won a provincial title, so it is something that counties can aspire to. Unfortunately, however the chances of a similar number achieving the same in the next 30 years have reduced due to the above stated factors. In 2020 COVID-19 led to a levelling of the playing field – maybe it was co-incidence, or maybe it was not - but it's hard to deny the fact that this was a contributory factor in the wonderful achievements of both Cavan and Tipperary in securing provincial honours.

By all means we can change and change is good, if it is the right change. The provincial championships mean so much to so many people and are part and parcel of the GAA's heritage. Diluting them should not be part of any change and especially given the fact that they are the out-workings of the problem, rather than the actual cause of the problem. In order for the gap to be closed counties need to have the opportunity to play teams both at their own level and teams at a level above them in games where they can be largely competitive. The provincial championships need to provide one route to the All-Ireland series – but there can be other routes, or at least other routes could act as a championship seeding mechanism. Gaining consensus is

the key to finding a solution and no one should feel alienated. While little in the GAA world is straightforward, many difficult issues have been satisfactorily resolved down the years and this should be no different.

'SPLIT SEASON'

The 'split season' was introduced in 2020 as a response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. So far it has been a huge success. The decision to go 'club first' in 2020 allowed all of our players to have 'game-time' and allowed for the playing of club championships within each county. Despite the rising numbers of COVID-19 cases in the latter part of 2020 and the imposition of further restrictions, the inter-county season (the completion of the leagues which had started earlier in the year and the playing of the championship) was able to be held 'behind closed doors.'

With many restrictions remaining in place the correct decision was also made to go 'county first' in 2021. As the inter-county season progressed the numbers permitted to attend games was able to be increased and restrictions had eased sufficiently by the time the club championships commenced in counties to permit a situation that anyone who wished to attend a club championship game was able to do so. Despite an increase in positive COVID-19 cases in the autumn, vaccine availability has ensured that club championships have been successfully completed in every county. At the time of writing the provincial championships have commenced and it is everyone's hope and desire that they, and the All-Ireland series which will follow, can also be brought to a satisfactory conclusion.



However, the question of how the 'split season' will work in a 'normal year' remains unanswered and this is where it's real stress test will come. League competitions are treated with a high level of importance in many counties and there are cases where league position determines championship status. Under the 'split season' concept it will be June at the earliest before clubs have access to their county players. There can be no question of counties waiting until the summer to commence club competitions, so fixture makers in counties may have to deploy a level of creativity in planning club fixture schedules.

Additionally, with club championships not commencing until later in the calendar, there will be increased pressure on grounds and clubs will face additional financial challenges with additional floodlighting and heating costs. In the year of COP26 we don't need any reminding of the need to reduce our carbon emissions and more than ever energy savings must become a requirement for all GAA units.

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THE 'FOUR STEPS' RULE

The GAA Rulebook permits a player in possession of the ball to "carry it in the hand for a maximum of four consecutive steps or held in the hand for no longer than the time needed to take four steps." This rule applies to both Gaelic football and Hurling. The Canadian County Committee brought forward a motion to the February 2020 Congress seeking to amend the rule by replacing "four steps" with "two seconds." The motion was heavily defeated, receiving the support of just 9 per cent of voters.

The heavy defeat was undoubtedly due to a number of factors. Firstly, and significantly, it was never likely that such a fundamental rule change would be countenanced without it first being the subject of a trial and, secondly, the motion submitted by Canada applied to both Gaelic football and Hurling.

The rule has been in place for many years and in relation to hurling it largely continues to fulfill its purpose. The same, however, cannot be said for football. It was introduced in an era when 'catch and kick' was the norm and for a player to take even four steps was something of a rarity. But the game has evolved - it has changed from a game of 'catch and kick' to a possession game and the rule has failed to keep pace with the evolution of the game.

In the modern era a player can have taken four steps before you have time to blink and if a referee in Gaelic Football attempted to implement the rule there would be chaos. They therefore, understandably, choose to ignore it. Rarely is a player in possession of the ball penalised for

'over-carrying' (other than when he is surrounded by opposition players) and the vast majority of players take at least seven or eight steps between 'toe-taps' when they are moving unimpeded.

On many occasions it's many more as we witnessed in a recent All-Ireland final.

Where a rule can't be enforced it shouldn't be there. Some players move so fast that it would be almost impossible for a referee to count steps in real time, especially when he has so many other matters of which to be mindful. A 'time-based' approach rather than a 'steps-based' approach is obviously the approach. I therefore believe that the GAA's Standing Committee on Playing Rules should consider the issue of steps in Gaelic football with a view to bringing forward a proposal for experimentation in 2022 or 2023.

ULSTER SCHOOLS

After the 2020-21 academic year was devoid of competitions, it was heartening to see Schools' activity across all levels resuming in the autumn of 2021. At the time of writing our Third Level institutions have completed their secondary competitions and are preparing for their primary competitions, which will commence in January.

As is also the case with Third Level, there will be a condensed season at Second Level going forward, with the main competitions all to be completed by mid-March. This will result in the MacRory and MacLernon Cup Finals' moving from their traditional St. Patrick's Day slot to a mid-February conclusion. At the time of writing these competitions have reached their knock-out phase (these

will commence in January 2022), while the province's premier Schools Hurling Competition, The Mageean Cup, has reached its concluding stage with St. Patrick's, Maghera and St. Patrick's, Downpatrick qualifying for the final. This is the first final appearance for 'The Red High' and given that only a few years ago Down Schools' were competing as one unit in this competition, this is testament to the great work being done in the ground in this and other schools.

I thank everyone involved in the promotion of hurling and football in our schools - while much of your work goes unseen amongst the wider GAA public it does not go unnoticed, so a big well done to you all.

HANDBALL

Just as it was in 2021, the 2021 Handball season was decimated by the coronavirus pandemic. Thankfully competitions were able to resume towards the end of the year, with some of the delayed 2020 competitions being rescheduled.

Despite the long lay-off it's clear that the country's finest handballers haven't lost their touch and it is pleasing that there has been some early Ulster success at national level. Eilise McCrory (Tyrone) scooped the Ladies Intermediate 4-Wall All-Ireland Title, while there was 'double' success for the province at Minor level, with the Ladies title going to Mairead Fox (Tyrone), while the Boys' All-Ireland honours went to Eoghan McGinnity (Monaghan). There has also been national success at numerous underage categories and I commend all our coaches and administrators who are working tirelessly to promote handball amongst our clubs.



COACHING & GAMES DEVELOPMENT

2021 was again a highly challenging year for coaching and games development within the province.

COVID-19 has continued to make life difficult with several staff furloughed or part-furloughed for much of the period. Those that were working were challenged to use new technologies and new ways of working with teachers, pupils, and club volunteers. Despite this, our schools and grassroots coaching and coach education programmes went ahead under the strict guidelines from both the Department for Education and the GAA.

Programmes were delivered from High Performance Workshops with senior county personnel, through to grassroots delivery to our clubs and schools. Ulster GAA also worked with our partners at the Department to ensure commitments were maintained and maximising our Curriculum Sports Programme resource in trying circumstances. Innovative ways of delivery were found, be it via zoom sessions into the classroom, remote delivery into the gymnasium or indeed direct links by the school into the homes of the children. When it was deemed safe for face-to-face contact to take place, they happened also. Almost

53,000 engagements took place with the pupils through 590 events in primary and post primary schools - a remarkable achievement.

The dramatic transfer in our practice from face-to-face, to online learning necessitated the immediate development of new skills and competencies in order to be able to use the emerging technologies. Ulster GAA hosted its annual Coaching and Games Conference for 2021 online and facilitated 160 online workshops, with over 15,000 participants logging in from right across the globe. Additionally, almost 2,000 volunteers took advantage of the opportunity to upgrade their safeguarding knowledge.

Ulster GAA continues to engage with the Sports Institute and Sport NI to help facilitate Performance and High-Performance opportunities. Four High Performance Workshops and eight individual county engagements took place to help bring best practice from across other sports into our senior inter-county hurling and football teams. At Performance Level over 40 volunteer coaches from the development squads were engaged in a 6-month programme, with online support and individual mentor support to assist them along the coaching journey. At a Professional Level, full-time staff coaches were

also facilitated with online training and development bespoke to them - this was facilitated with the support of Sport NI.

Coach Developer Support and GAA Coach Education Awards continued to be rolled-out through online programmes at Foundation Level and a blended course (online and face-to-face) at Level 1. A Level 2 Programme was also presented at the end of the year.

Our programmes remain wide, varied and inclusive. Support Handball (one wall), Camogie and Ladies Football, Referees, Further and Higher Education, Disability and Cross Community events are all taking place and this positively reflects our commitment and drive to ensure inclusivity across our range of delivery. Central support services such as Sports Science, Performance Analysis, Athletic Development and Performance and Lifestyle have been integrated into staff work plans, providing support and direction across all of these areas to enhance programme delivery.

Hurling development has been linked closely to the national initiatives and the regional competitions, also involving teams from North Leinster and Connacht have been a huge success. These competitions have

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provided games at the right level with the number of clubs in Ulster rising to 113. There remains the challenge to get these clubs meaningful games programmes and to sustain their existence over a long period. The recruitment and retention of coaches in hurling continues, however, to remain a challenge in parts of the province.

The Coaching and Games team have worked closely with our referees' coordinators in the support for our Academy Referees. We have lobbied strongly to get a Referees' Pathway established, properly resourced and with a meaningful curriculum. This work is well underway and we look forward to getting it completed for 2022.

The dependence on funding from external sources has, if anything, become even more apparent during this pandemic. Staff whose posts are funded by National GAA were furloughed for a considerable period, while posts funded by Sport NI and the Department for Education were retained during the period. During this time staff who remained in post often went beyond their remit and they are all to be thanked for their patience and goodwill.

The future is uncertain. In a positive development Sport NI funding has been extended by a further year until March 2023, but as I write the Department for Education funding for the Key Stage 2 Curriculum Sports Programme is due to end in March 2022. Negotiations with the Department are continuing. Whatever the outcome, there is absolutely no doubt that the Programmes delivered by Ulster GAA and IFA coaches in our schools has had a hugely

positive impact on the mental and physical wellness of our children. It would be devastating if this support programme were to be removed. National GAA has also undertaken a through HR Review, and we await the outcome of that process and the implications for Provincial structure

'OGIE'

I awoke on the morning Saturday 17th July and stared disbelievably at a message on my phone which had been delivered shortly before 2.30 am. It was from the Monaghan County Chairman Declan Flanagan. It read: "Just home from our U-20 captain's home. He tragically lost his life in a traffic accident last night! May he rest in peace."

I didn't know Brendan Óg O Dufaigh but from what I've learned of him since his tragic passing is my loss. A

son, a brother, a team-mate, a friend, a colleague, a motivator, a leader, a captain. That was 'Ógie.'

I remember him raising aloft the Father Murray Cup when Monaghan defeated Derry in the Ulster Minor Final in 2018 and who will forget how close they came to dethroning Kerry in the All-Ireland semi-final in Croke Park, with Brendan, as always, to the fore. Writing in 'The Irish Independent' on the Monday following his death, Monaghan footballing legend Dick Clerkin referenced the many qualities of 'Ógie', stating how he was idolised by his own children, who also play with Monaghan Harps. Dick also told of the maturity of Brendan and how he declined the invitation to join the county senior panel, preferring to remain with the U-20's until he was prepared to face the physical challenges of senior inter-county football. His father Brendan also spoke





of this when I visited the family home the following evening, along with other officers from Ulster GAA.

Visting the O Dufaigh house was a humbling experience. From listening to his parents Esther and Brendan and his sisters' Claire and Áine, it's not hard to explain where his leadership qualities and sense of purpose in life came from. Claire indeed attended Down's All-Ireland U-20 semi-final against Roscommon in a gesture which was universally applauded, and particularly in the Mourne County.

The GAA family united in grief with Brendan's passing. The Monaghan Harps grounds became the epicentre of GAA affairs for a few days as people from right across the GAA family came to pay their respects. These included representatives of the Down team who had qualified to play Monaghan in the Ulster Final and representatives of the Donegal team who had played Monaghan on the evening of Brendan's death. Among the tributes left at the Harps Club was a jersey signed by the Derry All-Ireland winning minor team, delivered on their way home from their great victory over Kerry in Tullamore. In his 19 short years 'Ógie' made a lasting contribution to the GAA in Monaghan. You may be gone but your legacy lives on. Sleep well 'Ógie.'

'ANTO'

On the evening of Saturday 18th September word began to filter through of the death of Anto Finnegan. The former Antrim footballer was just 48 but he left behind a legacy of kindness, inspiration and generosity. Anto initially played for Lamh Dearg before transferring to St. Paul's, with whom he won an Antrim Senior Football Championship medal in 1997. An

accomplished hurler, it was with the 'big ball' that he made his mark. A leader on and off the field of play, he captained Antrim to an All-Ireland 'B' Championship title success in 1999 and the following year he famously led Antrim to their first Ulster Championship win in 18 years when they defeated Down (and the horrific weather conditions) at Casement Park.

While Anto was an inspiration on the field, he was an even bigger one off it. In 2012 he was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease (MND) but even knowing that his illness was terminal, Anto never wavered in his desire to help others. He founded the charity 'deterMND' and over the years the charity has raised much needed funds to help research into this terrible disease. Never one to shirk a challenge to raise awareness of his charity, just four years ago he completed 90 miles of the gruelling Camino Walk in a specially adapted wheelchair.

In November 2014 Kingspan Stadium, the home of Ulster Rugby, hosted 'The Game for Anto' when an Ulster Select played Jim Gavin's Dublin team. It was a great occasion which also featured a then relatively unknown Dublin footballer by the name of Brian Fenton. Within a matter of months Brian was a household name throughout Ireland and Anto, with whom he built up a great and lasting friendship, used to 'remind' him that only for him (Anto) he would never have been heard of!

He never lost his sense of humour and whenever you met him, he always had a smile on his face. Anto left a lasting memory on all those privileged to meet him and his legacy will live on.



No words will ever do justice to him but the words of his former Antrim playing colleague Kevin Madden shortly before his death, sum up all the positives that he espoused. 'It's not the cards you're dealt but the way you played the hand. In the face of incredible adversity, I cannot even begin to describe what an inspiration Anto is. A warrior on the pitch, a warrior off it. Proud to have played with him but even prouder to call him my friend.'

SAFEGUARDING & CHILD PROTECTION

Ulster GAA has worked tirelessly throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic to ensure that this vital area of governance continues to operate to the highest possible standards. On a daily basis we are providing assistance to our members and constituent units as they navigate

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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.

2021 witnessed the first compliance audit on a 32-county basis and in May all clubs were required to provide their audit information including their Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment to the GAA. I thank all of those who worked to ensure this was achieved and to our units for their assistance in ensuring compliance across the Island. This mammoth task highlighted the need for us to ensure that all constituent units understand the legal, Association Rule and Best Practice requirements placed on them as providers of services through sport to Children and Young People, and also confirmed to our units that non-compliance will result in withdrawal from underage participation until such times as they are fully compliant. 2022 will require all of our Units to complete the Sport Ireland Audit and preparations are underway to assist with this.

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 both a legal and an Association requirement that anyone who wishes to take up a role working with children within the Association are adequately trained and appropriately vetted before doing so and are then supported by club committees as they carry out their functions. Club Chairpersons, ably assisted by their Club Childrens Officers and Designated Liaison Persons must continue to lead on Safeguarding matters and ensure that they are compliant with legal and best practice requirements.

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

I wish to acknowledge and thank the members of an Choiste Slánchumhdaithe Uladh, chaired by Anne Fortune, whose inspirational vision and leadership ensures that the work of the Safeguarding team across Ulster continues to be to the fore. I also thank our County Chairpersons, Designated Liaison Persons and Childrens Officers and all of those who support them in this area of work. Ulster GAA are fortunate to have such a knowledgeable and dedicated Safeguarding Manager in Bernie Fox who continually goes the extra mile to educate and assist all our units in this important but challenging field. I thank her sincerely and also wish to thank Shane McCann for his crucial work during the past twelve months when Bernie was unavailable. I thank also Conn Stevenson for his exceptional work as part of the Ulster GAA Safeguarding team and to the other members of staff who stepped in to assist during times of need over the past year. I can assure you all that your valued contribution is greatly appreciated. I also wish to thank Gearóid Ó Maoilmhichíl, Michelle Harte and Kayleen Iwasaki from Croke Park for their assistance throughout the year, as together we all work to make the Association a safe, fun and enjoyable environment in which our children and young people can participate and flourish in Gaelic Games and Activities.

CASEMENT PARK PROJECT

The last Ulster Convention, held online in January 2021, took place against the backdrop of an announcement in November 2020 by Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon, that she was minded to grant planning permission for the Casement Park Project.

2021 therefore began with great optimism as Ulster GAA engaged in a process with the Department for Infrastructure on the development of a Section 76 Planning Agreement. This was a lengthy and comprehensive process, taking a further six months to complete. Eventually on 28th July 2021, exactly four years and five months to the day from when our planning application was lodged, came the decision from the Minister formally granting planning permission for Casement Park re-development. This was a very welcome and positive outcome.

During the year significant progress was also made on the development of the fresh business case for the project and we were at an advanced stage of its development when, exceptionally late in the statutory window for challenge (88th of 90 days) a judicial review of the Minister's planning decision was lodged in the High Court in Belfast. While this was a disappointing development, we can take some comfort from the high level of support we subsequently received from local residents who are opposed to this legal challenge and support the stadium redevelopment.

In late November 2021, a timetable was set for the judicial review proceedings that will see the case being heard in the High Court in March 2022.



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I wish to acknowledge the leadership of our Chairperson and SRO Tom Daly and our hard-working Stadium Project Team of Stephen McGeehan, Rory Miskelly (SIB) and Tim Harkin who secured our planning permission and their ongoing work to support the legal proceedings and project structures.

Thanks to Brian Mallon, Geraldine McKavanagh and Paul McGurk for their inputs to the finance, administration and communication work.

To our partners in Antrim GAA, Ciaran McCavana (Chairperson) and Frankie Quinn (Secretary) who work closely with us to keep all units of the Association in Ulster and Antrim aligned we are grateful for their contributions.

Our enthusiastic Project Board and Project Steering Group members deserve credit for their ongoing commitment as do our Ard Stiurthoir Tom Ryan and Uachtarán Larry McCarthy for their support. I am grateful to the Department for

Communities (DfC) team led by Moira Doherty, Minister Deirdre Hargey and her Executive colleagues for their steadfast commitment to the project and their ongoing assistance to Ulster GAA.

Lastly, I thank the contracting parties who have worked with us throughout the project. We can only but hope that all legal and other hurdles will finally be cleared this year and that work can commence on a stadium that will be fitting for the GAA community in Ulster, Antrim and Belfast.

SPORTS SUSTAINABILITY FUND

In December 2020 the Sports Sustainability Fund (SSF) was launched with the aim of addressing the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sporting community.

In what was a highly challenging period for the sector, many units and clubs from across all sporting codes saw their financial and other resources severely dented as they

struggled to come to terms with what was dubbed 'the new norm.' A sum of £25m was set aside for the fund and Ulster GAA, along with other recognised governing bodies, worked with SSF administrators Sport NI, and their parent Department, the Department for Communities, on its roll-out and Ulster GAA put in place a dedicated team of staff to work with counties and clubs in the north in relation to the application process. The result was 181 GAA units in the north receiving a combined total of just over £7.3m and I know this was welcomed universally and went a long way towards ensuring that clubs could continue to deliver the range and quality of activities that they were delivering prior to the onset of the pandemic.

Ongoing support and guidance are also provided to clubs on request in relation to other external funds, north and south, with updates on potential opportunities communicated to units as appropriate.

KIERAN KENNEDY

Last summer Kieran Kennedy retired as Managing Director of O'Neill's International Sportswear after 42 years as an employee of the company which he joined at the age of 16. Kieran rose through the ranks of the company and under his stewardship it became the largest manufacturer of sportswear in Ireland and became one of the biggest employers in the north-west. An astute businessman, Kieran was also a great friend of Ulster GAA with whom he had forged a close partnership over many years. It was a privilege for us to launch our 2018 provincial senior football championship at O'Neill's headquarters in Strabane, on the occasion of the centenary of the



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company. I thank him for his loyalty and wish him, Linda and their family every best wish.

When the coronavirus pandemic reached our shores in the first quarter of 2020, Kieran and the O'Neill's company came to the fore by answering the call in transforming the plant into a manufacturing hub for PPE equipment for healthcare workers. This magnanimous gesture was recognised when Kieran was awarded an MBE in June 2021. Kieran regarded this as recognition of the efforts of the wider workforce and, true to character, on accepting the honour he said that he hoped it would send a clear message that by truly integrating as a society we can achieve more. Wonderful words which we can all echo.

COMMUNICATION & MARKETING

We live in a digital era with more and more of our communications activity being delivered through such platforms. Over the past year our digital presence has grown somewhat with Ulster GAA now having over 84k followers on Twitter (+4 per cent), over 56k followers on Facebook (+7 per cent) and over 23k followers on Instagram (+10 per cent).

The streaming of games, both live and deferred, has had a dramatic upturn since the coming of the coronavirus pandemic and it is set to grow significantly in the coming years. The development of an Ulster GAA TV strategy is a key element of Communications & Wider Civic Engagement theme in our Strategic Plan and 2021 has witnessed further expansion in our own capabilities and those of our counties.

We worked with PaircTV for coverage of the Ulster Minor and Ulster Under 20 Football Championships,

with Mobile Media Productions for coverage of the Conor McGurk Cup Final and have recently partnered with live-streaming specialists, Nemeton TV, for exclusive Ulster Club Championships coverage. I thank everyone who has played any part in date in both the development of the concept and the transmission of our games.

The current GAA media rights deal is due to expire before the 2022 Championship season commences and I would hope to see some continued flexibility in the ability of our units to deliver live stream coverage of games under their control, whilst still respecting the rights of all broadcasters. I thank Peter McKenna and Noel Quinn for their ongoing help and advice in this respect.

This is mirrored with traditional print journalism, with digital editions now a major focus of many newspaper titles – placing even tighter deadlines on journalists. I thank them for their ongoing, and mainly positive, coverage of our games. I thank also our photographers and broadcasters and truly acknowledge the help we receive at our grounds from host counties and clubs. May I be forgiven for specifically thanking Mickey McGoldrick, Graeme Campbell and Paul Heaney for their assistance. Ulster GAA has a relatively small Communications team and I thank Paul McGurk and Michael Devlin for their many hours of service and also acknowledge the assistance they receive from Stephen Donnelly, Niall Muldoon, Michelle Campbell and the Coaching & Games and Community Development Departments in relation to various aspects of their work. All of our work is undertaken under

the watchful and diligent eye of our esteemed PRO Declan Woods, who has proved to be a real champion in progressing Ulster GAA's digital agenda.

'NEWS LETTER'

Founded in 1737, The 'Belfast News Letter' rightly prides itself as the longest continuous daily newspaper in the world. The paper has the strapline 'Pride of Northern Ireland.' On September 11th 2021 the Tyrone Gaelic footballers were not only the pride of Northern Ireland but the pride of the entire island. Yet the paper did not devote a single word of coverage to the All-Ireland Final appearance or the tremendous victory by the O'Neill County.

On the Monday following the game (the paper doesn't print a Sunday edition) the 'News Letter' had 17 pages of sports coverage. The featured sports included soccer, rugby, cricket, hockey, boxing, motor cycling (road racing), horse racing and tennis and included (and rightly so) a back page photo of Emma Raducanu's amazing US Open tennis victory, achieved just hours after Tyrone's great triumph.

Several days after the All-Ireland Final the 'News Letter' ran a story quoting South Down MLA Jim Wells sating that it was not his place to congratulate Tyrone as he didn't represent the county. His part colleague and First Minister Paul Givan was among numerous political figures who had congratulated Tyrone on their success.

At the end of October the newly appointed editor of the 'News Letter' (he had been Acting Editor at the time of the All-Ireland Final) in the



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course of a BBC interview said; "we don't have a huge amount of interest or demand from our readers for GAA coverage."

The paper has covered other GAA stories and seems content to do so as long as their reporting does not extend to the coverage of games. It is clear that the paper is selective in their coverage of GAA affairs and I ask the question is this a clear editorial policy of the paper? If so, why is this the case?

It is totally accepted that the paper has a broad unionist outlook and this is a perfectly fine and legitimate position to hold. It does however have a strong rural and farming readership, with their excellent 'Farming Life' Saturday supplement popular across all sectors of the industry. The GAA has a strong farming and rural membership. No one is asking for the paper to devote pages and pages of daily coverage to our games but surely it is not too much to ask for some recognition of our games, given their breadth and popularity across the north.

SCÓR

The 2020 Ulster Final of Scór Sinsir finally took place in the magnificent Silverbridge GAA Clubrooms on 30 October 2021, more than 19 months after their scheduled date. The requirement for Executive guidance to be applicable resulted in enhanced safety measures being introduced but thanks to the Ulster Scór Committee, the team at Ulster GAA and the host venue stewards everything worked like clockwork. In a new departure the final was held in two parts, an afternoon session and an evening session, and this allowed for around 500 patrons to enjoy the wonderful

array on entertainment on display. In all there were successes for six different counties, with Derry being awarded the Patsy Nugent Cup for being the most successful county.

The category winners were as follows;

- Rince Foirne/Ceili Dancing: Watty Graham's, Glen (Derry)
- Amhránaíocht Aonair/Solo Singing: Kathryn Mullan, Slaughtneil (Derry)
- Aithriseoireacht/Recitation: Noreen McCreesh, Cullyhanna (Armagh)
- Bailéad Ghrúpa/Ballad Group: Saul (Down)
- Léiriú Stáitse/Stage Presentation: Bunrana (Donegal)
- Ceol Uirlise/Instrumental Music: Erne Eagles (Cavan)
- Rince Seit/ Set Dancing: Killyclogher (Tyrone)
- Tráth na gCeist/Question Time: Cornafean (Cavan)

The success for Erne Eagles in the Instrumental Music was historic in

that it was the first ever provincial scór title won by a Rounders Club. The Question Time had been completed in March 2020 and Cornafean, along with Aodh Ruadh (Donegal) and Bredagh (Down) had already qualified for the All-Ireland Final.

Those All-Ireland Finals were held at the magnificent dome at the Connacht Centre of excellence in Bekan, Co. Mayo on Saturday 20th November. Unfortunately, there was to be no joy for the province but all of our representatives performed excellently, with Bredagh finishing runners-up to a strong Edenderry (Offaly) team in the Question Time.

IRISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Under the watchful eye of Ulster GAA's Irish Language Officer Tricia Ní Chearra, the promotion of our native tongue amongst our units has continued apace. The Provincial Committee is headed by Cathaoirleach Iarlaith Ó Broin and is



compiled of Cultural Officers from each county. The coiste supports and promotes the initiatives of Tricia and is a vital link in the communicational structure of promoting Gaeilge agus Cultúr throughout the GAA in Ulster. I thank them all for the great work in this field and thank also Foras Na Gaeilge for their ongoing support towards the funding of the Irish Language Officer post.

Irish has been visible in all CLG Uladh programmes throughout the year, with particular effort to ensure the Ulster Final programme 2021 employed a bilingual format. CLG Uladh ensures that Gaeilge is used on all our social media platforms, as well as the voice of CLG Uladh to be heard through the medium of Irish on all topics on Irish media and radio. CLG Uladh continues to foster relationships with all of the Irish language media outlets, with regular interviews and pieces covered by BBC Gaeilge, TG4, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta and various other Irish language media outlets.

FOGHLAIM SA CHLUB AGUS OLLSCOIL ULADH / ULSTER UNIVERSITY

CLG Uladh, in partnership with Ulster University, created and launched the 'Foghlaim sa Club' teaching resource in November. Ulster University has been an excellent partner to CLG Uladh for many years with regards to promoting Irish and it is due to the success of the Gaeilge sa Club scheme, that the decision was taken to expand upon the brand and create the Foghlaim sa Club resource. It is hoped that this resource will ease pressure on our volunteers and provide a high standard of Gaeilge to all clubs. I thank the university for their ongoing support.

FEACHTAIS TEANGA / LANGUAGE CAMPAIGNS

Bothántaíocht, the Gaeilge podcast for Ulster GAA was launched as part of Seachtain na Gaeilge 2021. New episodes are added throughout the year as listening content for our members. CLG members, media personalities and those working within the Irish language sector are interviewed and the interviews are available to watch and listen to on the Gaeilge microsite and on our YouTube channel.

Ulster GAA's Irish Language Officer and Ulster Schools aim to highlight the work of Gaelscoileanna and Bunscoileanna across Ulster through the School Profile social media campaign. The profiles consist of a promotional video and accompanying article detailing interviews with both students and staff about their lives in Irish medium education.

CLG Uladh clubs vocalised a need for coaching support as Gaeilge, particularly for those who do not have Irish, but want to learn and incorporate it into their coaching. Brian Og's GAA Club in Steelstown took part in the filming of a six-episode series of videos to assist coaches in including Gaeilge in coaching at club level. This initiative is called 'Gaelpheil', and was greatly assisted by Fearghal Mag Uiginn and Eoghan Mag Uiginn (CLG Uladh) of the club and I thank them sincerely for their efforts and support.

CAIDREAMH A CHOTHÚ LE CEANNEAGRAÍOCHTAÍ NA GAEILGE / RELATIONSHIPS WITH IRISH LANGUAGE ORGANISATIONS

An important part of promoting Gaeilge is ensuring that we, as an

organisation, interact with and support community-based Irish language groups. Ulster GAA works consistently with the funders for the Oifigeach Gaeilge post, Foras na Gaeilge, and has created links with the organisations underneath the Foras na Gaeilge umbrella. An ongoing relationship exists 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, and assessed a high standard of clubs in 2021 across all four provinces.

SEACHTAIN NA GAEILGE 2021

This year saw CLG Uladh undertaking the biggest Seachtain na Gaeilge campaign to date, 'Gaeil Uladh.' The video series was made possible due to funding awarded to CLG Uladh by Seachtain na Gaeilge le Energia. Nine individual county videos were created, along with a shorter social media focused video, as well as a thirty-minute film encompassing players, volunteers, media personalities and school children representing all nine counties of Ulster.

Clubs are invited to download and use these promotional pieces at workshops, training events, club celebrations, at the gates of games etc. They are available on Ulster GAA's Gaeilge microsite.

GREEN CLUB PROGRAMME

The Green Club programme is a partnership between the GAA,



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LGFA and Camogie Association and local authorities across Ireland. As part of the nationwide GAA Green Club pilot programme 10 of the 45 clubs involved are from Ulster. There are well established links with Government Departments North and South (DAERA and Dept of Communications, Climate Action and Environment), as well as a range of expert partners.

Each club is exploring ways to address some or all of the five thematic areas of Water, Waste, Biodiversity, Transport and Energy. The Northwest Hub is a cross border pilot involving Donegal clubs Naomh Muire, Bunrana and Four Masters, as well as Strabane and Craighane. The 'Six-County' hub involves Lamh Dearg, Belcoo, Rasharkin, Crossmaglen and Culloville.

An excellent virtual Biodiversity workshop for the Ulster clubs was delivered by RSPB in May. In October, Tyrone GAA centre in Garvaghy hosted a Green Club networking event for all Ulster clubs and expert partners. The event was led by the Green Club Committee Chairperson, Míde Ní Shúilleabháin, and on the day club delegates heard about the environmental considerations in developing the Garvaghy facility, as well as hearing expert advice from Donegal County Council, DAERA and RSPB.

In recent months some clubs have had site visits from expert partners such as Action renewables and NI Water to audit their energy and water use. Clubs have also explored ways to address waste and reduce plastic while some have looked at how they can improve biodiversity at their club grounds and walkways. The pilot is scheduled to be completed

in June 2022 and a Green club toolkit developed for all clubs to use. It is fitting that while COP26 was taking place in Glasgow this year, the GAA has already been making small but significant steps in the Green Clubs Project. Diarmaid Marsden and Maura McMenamin sit on the national GAA Green Club steering board.

CLUB AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Club and Community Development Department is responsible for Club and Volunteer support, Irish Language and Culture, Health and Wellbeing of our members, and Community Outreach.

The Department plays a role in public affairs and contributes to relevant engagements with public representatives and external agencies and organisations. There are numerous bodies that request to meet Ulster GAA and likewise there are partnerships that we have established to further develop the GAA at all levels in the province. The Club and Community Development Department is a point of contact for all clubs to receive guidance on club matters and volunteer development. The Department deals with queries directly or can signpost to professional bodies as necessary.

The impact of COVID-19 has affected the normal delivery of work across all areas but with lifting of certain restrictions we have been recently able to deliver practical activity to satisfy funding bodies. This year will see the expiry of some of these funding arrangements and it is vital that we seek extension or avail of new funding opportunities to continue the important work associated with club and volunteer support, community

outreach and promotion of our language and culture.

Ulster GAA continues to make a valued contribution to public consultations and representation to Stormont committees on various pieces of legislation that will directly affect our clubs and members. In the last year we have submitted responses to the DfC Sport and Physical Activity Strategy (NI), Peace Plus consultation and Programme for Government consultation. On behalf of our clubs, we have submitted written and oral evidence to the Betting, Gaming, Lotteries and Amusements (Amendments) Bill, the Licencing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill and the Non-Domestic Rates Valuations (Coronavirus) Bill.

The Community Development Department represents Ulster GAA on the NI Human Rights and Sport Forum and attended the virtual civic conversation on Brexit with sec state for NI and Brexit Minister Frost. We continue to engage with the PSNI on areas such as "One Punch can Kill" campaign, Road safety and raising awareness of scams through our involvement in the Scamwise partnership.

The Fresh Start Through Sport Initiative is funded by the Dept for Communities in association with the Dept of Justice. It is a diversionary programme where Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby, Irish FA and Belfast Giants work in partnership to deliver workshops and practical sporting and volunteer experiences to young people from areas of high social deprivation. Ulster GAA are currently delivering modules to participants from Derry City, North Belfast and

Lurgan. Over a 16-week period the participants have an opportunity to try out each of the different sports, learn about sports volunteering, nutrition, mental health and first aid, as well as attending a game organised by each of the four sports organisations. In November, the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Kate Nicholl, attended to observe (and indeed participate in!) one of our GAA specific sessions on Wheelchair Hurling.

CLUB DEVELOPMENTS & INITIATIVES

Club Maith

Club Maith continues to be the recognised brand for club excellence among GAA clubs in Ulster. In the past 12 months 10 clubs across the Province have achieved Club Maith status; All Saints Ballymena and St John’s Belfast (Antrim), St Killian’s Whitecross and Tír na nÓg Portadown (Armagh), Burt (Donegal), Belnaleck Art McMurrroughs, Coa O’Dwyers, Derrylin O’Connells, Enniskillen Gaels and Lisnaskea Emmetts (Fermanagh). Over the Summer Ulster GAA’s officers visited each of these successful clubs along with the 2020 recipients to formally recognise for their efforts and to celebrate their success in achieving the award Ceann Creige Hurling and Camogie Club (Scotland) became the first club outside of Ulster to be accredited when they achieved the Club Maith Twinning Award in May. This is a momentous development and I offer my congratulations to the club.

Club Planning

A number of clubs engaged in the Club Planning Programme launched their Club Development Plans in 2021. Over the past year;

St James Aldergrove, Clan na Gael Lurgan, Lisnaskea Emmett’s, Owen Roes, Leckpatrick and Wolfe Tones, Greencastle have all developed plans that will give them direction over the next 3-5 years covering all areas of club business, both on and off the field.

Ulster GAA continue to have a strong working relationship with the National Officer Development Committee (NODC) and this close link has enabled the Ulster GAA Volunteer Development Pathway and National Club Leadership Development Programme to work alongside each other ensuring a more joined up process, rather than duplication of events across the province.

**VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT
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 2021, Ulster GAA ran this induction programme in association with National GAA to complement the National Club Leadership Development Programme.





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307 Club officers participated in this induction across 169 Clubs. Clubs from our partners in Britain and Canada also were in attendance. The Club Officer Development Programme delivered training for club officers across priority issues facing clubs. 89 club officers from 60 clubs attended the Level 1 Club Officer Development Programme.

Sports Inspire Award

Ulster GAA, along with Ulster Rugby and the Irish FA developed a new and exciting volunteer recognition programme to showcase young people volunteering in sport. The Sports Inspire Award was officially launched in October 2021 at St Brigid's GAA, Belfast with representatives from the three associations, including Ulster GAA President Oliver Galligan. The Award aims to recognise outstanding youth volunteering in sport for young people aged 14-24 years old. The Programme encourages young people interested in sport to get active in volunteering within their sports club. Volunteering opportunities in sport are very wide-ranging including coaching, mentoring, fundraising, administration, pitch maintenance, match officials, stewarding and helping out with catering and events. The young volunteers are required to keep a record of their volunteering hours and will be recognised with the Sports Inspire Award on achieving 50, 100 and 200 hours. A joint awards ceremony will be hosted in March 2022 to showcase the young volunteers and the impact they are making to their community through their sports club. This Award will replace the old GoldMark Award and all GoldMark Volunteers have been moved

over automatically onto the new programme to provide a seamless transition for volunteers and clubs.

Ulster GAA Young Leaders Programme

The Ulster GAA Young Leaders Programme ran from 6th July to 31st August 2021 and was fully funded by the Education Authority. 37 young people participated in the eight-week programme which included 6 online workshops, a three-day academy, a two-day canoeing expedition and a family celebration event. In addition to this, the young people undertook volunteering in their club while continuing to play Gaelic Games for the same duration.

The young people came from across Ulster and enjoyed learning about key issues facing the GAA and sport while also achieving their GAA Foundation coaching Award, GAA Safeguarding Award, Volunteer Now Youth Impact Award and they continue to work towards the Joint Award Initiative for either Gaisce - The President's Award or Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Gaisce / Joint Award / Duke of Edinburgh

Ulster GAA continued its role as a Licenced Organisation to deliver this Award, offering young GAA 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.

A call out to clubs generated 103 Young volunteers from across 30 clubs that signed up to work towards their award. To date the young people are working towards completion of each of the sections in volunteering, skills development, physical activity and a coordinated expedition.

In July 2021 Ulster GAA hosted two canoeing expeditions for the Young Leaders Group and Armagh club Clan na Gael also organised two expeditions for their group.

Inspiring Young Leaders Through Sport Programme

Alongside Irish FA and Ulster Rugby, an OCN Level 2 Award in Youth Leadership has been delivered to 30 young volunteers aged 16-24 years. Meeting online on a monthly basis this accredited course has been fully funded by The David Cross Foundation. This programme will provide participants with skills they can use in their clubs and communities as well as improving their employability and career prospects.

DfC Programme and Key Objectives

"Sport - A Home for Lifelong Volunteering" continues to be the primary programme which club and volunteer development is delivered through Ulster GAA. This programme is jointly delivered with the Irish Football Association and Ulster Rugby and is funded by the Department for Communities. There are a number of Ulster GAA specific initiatives as well as Joint initiatives for the 2021/22 programme. One of the initiatives over the past year included a Multi-Sport Volunteering Forum which included 49 participants from 46 clubs. A Multi-Sport Youth Forum is taking place this month.

Translink Awards for clubs and volunteers

In the last year Ulster GAA, in partnership with Translink, put a call out to clubs and young volunteers for two prestigious awards - Young Volunteer of the Year and the Community Club Award. The response



McMenamin who has ensured that this vital area of work is very much at the forefront of Ulster GAA's output and I thank her for her excellent work in this field.

HEALTHY CLUB PROGRAMME

Phase Four of the Healthy Club Programme came to its conclusion in 2021, with the completion of its two-year cycle. 77 clubs from Ulster completed their programme, and will remain in the ever-expanding group of Healthy Clubs. Phase Five was officially launched at the National Healthy Club Forum which took place virtually on 30th October. The Healthy Club Programme continues to produce very positive results, and it is hoped that every GAA club will attain Healthy Club status in the near future.

to both of these calls was tremendous and the calibre of youth volunteer applications and club community impacts across Ulster was extremely impressive.

Niamh Rafferty from Ballymacnab camogie club was an excellent choice for the winner of the Young Volunteer of the Year and Etain Devlin from Sean Treacy's Hurling Club was also recognised with a highly commended award in this category.

Glen Watty Graham's Maghera were fully deserving winners of the Community Club award for their enduring impact in their local community during the toughest times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Although we have become somewhat accustomed to living with COVID-19, the challenges remain in terms of getting our full complement of health and wellbeing activity delivered within clubs and counties. Again, with club facilities having been closed for long periods of the year, work had to

be delivered differently, and this was also true at Ulster level.

The Ulster Health & Wellbeing Committee, chaired by Fermanagh's Damien McHugh, met online twice during the year, in May and November. Despite challenges to some of the normal provincial activity, it is pleasing that much great work was still able to take place. It has largely been a busy year as new ways of working, and differing needs have emerged. The function of the Ulster Health & Wellbeing Committee also provided a platform of support to County Health & Wellbeing Chairpersons' as they met the many challenges that faced them through-out the year; once again, stressing the importance of having an active County Health & Wellbeing Committee in place. The key initiatives undertaken over the past year are outlined below and none of these would have happened without the hands-on approach of our Health and Wellbeing Manager Maura

CHARITY PARTNER

For the third year running Ulster GAA has supported Prostate Cancer Research through Queens University Belfast (QUB), and the Patrick G. Johnston Centre for Cancer Research. Given the restrictions on fundraising over the past many months it was felt that completing a third term would bring about the benefits normally accrued over one year for a charity partner. Promotion at the Down v Donegal Ulster Championship game gave focus to this worthy cause, combined with a Just Giving page which has raised considerable and much-needed funds for the world-renowned research which is taking place at QUB.

My thanks are extended in particular to Dr Aidan Cole, who leads out on this work, and yet still finds time to work with Ulster GAA in promoting this important partnership. It was pleasing to see NHS Organ Donation being promoted during our



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Ulster Senior Football Championships through the vibrant Donate4Dáithí campaign. The enthusiasm and generosity shown by the players, management, and county boards of all the counties involved, particularly Antrim and Armagh, as Dáithí and his parents were welcomed as our guests during their Championship encounter was exemplary and I thank them for that.

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH WITH PHA AND OTHER PARTNERS

I welcome the financial support from the Public Health Agency (PHA) which enables work in the area of health improvement and emotional wellbeing. My thanks are expressed to the PHA for once again showing flexibility around our programme owing to COVID-19. Given the success of the online Mental Health Awareness programme with Inspire last year, we were able to extend this programme in 2021, facilitating a larger number of workshops over a greater variety of topics which have become more prevalent as a result of lockdown and isolation. The programme has been very well received and will conclude in March 2022.

I was pleased that a portion of the spend was being used to undertake work in the area of strengthening collaboration between three very important committees at county level. The Health & Wellbeing Committees, Safeguarding Committees, and Coaching Committees are engaged in a programme which looks at player welfare, and how to increase capacity to assist members in need of emotional support. This is a pilot programme, taking place

in Ulster, with the aim that it will be replicable in clubs throughout the country. My thanks to Damien McHugh (Ulster Health & Wellbeing Committee Chairperson), Anne Fortune (Ulster Safeguarding Committee Chairperson) and John Connolly (Ulster Coaching Committee Chairperson) for their enthusiastic involvement in getting this important work initiated, with the support of Ulster GAA staff.

CPR

Saturday 12th June 2021 was a date which brought a lot of attention to the importance of CPR training, when Christian Eriksen collapsed while playing for Denmark in Euros 2020. Thankfully, given the legacy of Cormac McAnallen, the GAA in Ulster has been taking this issue very seriously for some time. Through our strong partnership with the British Heart Foundation (BHF), Ulster GAA hosted a hugely successful online CPR and Defibrillator Awareness event in June to highlight to clubs the importance of promoting basic CPR, and having an accessible defibrillator.

Although COVID-19 had stalled the roll-out of face-to-face training, I am thankful to the BHF for their longstanding support in us being able to deliver their "Call Push Rescue" training to clubs in the recent past and I hope that the prevailing health environment will allow this to resume again soon. I hope it will be something which we can be active in again soon. I would also like to congratulate the BHF on their successful lobbying to make basic CPR training mandatory in schools; something which Ulster GAA has been supportive of for many years.

ONE PUNCH CAMPAIGN / USE YOUR BRAIN NOT YOUR FISTS (UYBNYF)

This campaign has remained firmly on the radar this year. A draft presentation has been developed and was presented to a focus group of young people involved in the Ulster GAA Young Leaders Programme in August. As the target group for the "One Punch" message, the feedback from the group has been well-received. The programme will focus not only on "One Punch" on the street, but also on the pitch. Funding has been sought to bring the new programme to life, and at the time of completing my report, we are awaiting confirmation on the outcome. Regardless of the outcome of the funding application, Ulster GAA are committed to establishing a high-quality programme which will be made available to clubs in the coming months.

"One Punch" is only one example of programmes which fall under our Making Good Choices suite of programmes. Details of other programmes can be found on our Ulster GAA Health & Wellbeing microsite which was upgraded this year. 2021 has also seen developmental work on an Ulster GAA "Consent" programme which will be rolled out in late 2022, following the successful securing of funding to bring the programme to fruition. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our external funders who help support our important health and wellbeing work.

CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PLANS (CIRP)

This programme continues to be promoted to clubs and counties. Unfortunately, 2021 has seen a

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significant number of critical incidents which have affected our clubs and counties. Thankfully many of our units 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 played a vital supporting role to our members who experienced extremely difficult situations. It cannot be emphasised enough the importance of clubs, counties and Ulster GAA in having their CIRP in place. My sympathy goes out to all those affected by critical incidents this year, and my heartfelt thanks to all those who continue to provide support.

RECREATIONAL GAMES

I was delighted that the GAA has been increasing it's offering in relation to recreational games. Our sister Associations in Ladies Gaelic Football and Camogie have long been running a successful recreational programme. It is fair to say that "Dads & Lads" has enjoyed a successful launch this year. My thanks to St Patricks GFC, Donagh for their participation in the national launch of this worthwhile programme. I would also like to extend my thanks to all those clubs and volunteers who have engaged with the growing area of diversity and inclusion over the past 12 months. The success of this area of work continues to grow, and I look forward to seeing many more opportunities created to play through the wider Recreational Games initiative.

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. The Multi-Sport partnership is currently looking strategically at the next 3-5 years to see what areas of funding can be accessed to continue to deliver outreach work and to reflect each organisation's needs. There are other areas where we contribute to localised outreach initiatives working with local authorities and other sports such as Ulster Hockey and Belfast Giants to jointly deliver practical sessions for more people to experience our Gaelic Games.

CUCHULAINN INITIATIVE

The Cuchulainn Initiative returned in 2021, however due to restrictions it was only delivered in two areas, Lisburn (St Patrick's Academy and Fort Hill Integrated College) and Limavady (Limavady High School,

Limavady Grammar School and St Mary's Limavady). Funding from The Executive Office Central Good Relations Programme allowed for a programme of activities to be delivered to the participating schools such as coaching sessions, team building days, good relations workshops, leadership qualifications. This funding also provided the opportunity for both areas to be represented at the All-Britain Competition in London in early September. Unfortunately, the Girls' team from Limavady had to withdraw at the last minute due to COVID-19 circumstances, but the Lisburn Boys' team were able to make the trip and gave a great account of themselves in reaching the final of their competition, despite the fact that some of them had not played Gaelic Football before May of this year.

CLUB SPORT FOR PEACE DAYS

Club Sport for Peace days are activity-based events that are ran as joint projects between the three organisations. These allow children





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and young adults from various backgrounds to come together through sports participation. Participating clubs host the event and in turn promote their commitment to becoming an open and welcoming organisation to all. With the easing of restrictions throughout 2021, seven of these events successfully went ahead across the province within the project and engaged around 298 young people

GAME OF THREE HALVES

The Game of Three Halves events are joint events involving coaching sessions from each of the three sporting bodies. This event allows participants to try sports they may not have tried before whilst also working and learning with people from different communities and backgrounds. The events promote the learning of skills as well as games-based scenarios whilst promoting team work and other attributes that are important for all three sports. There were 14 Game of Three Halves events delivered in 2021 as part of the 'Peace IV Sport Uniting Communities' programme involving almost 1275 participants.

HAVE A GO DAYS

CSDO's from Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and The Irish Football association work together to deliver 'values based' coaching at our 'Have a Go' events. These events are based in areas where opportunities to take part in certain sports are minimal, and it also provides an opportunity for participants to engage with others from a different community or religious background. In 2021, 378 people took part in "Have a go" days.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

The youth leadership programme



involved the creation of youth forums where participants engaged in training in volunteering and personal development, gaining a Level 1 Qualification in Sports Leadership. 45 young people from across the three sports and various community organisations achieved a Level 1 Sports Leaders qualification in 2021, led by tutors from the Community Sports Development team.

GETTING TO KNOW THE GAA

Getting to know the GAA is a single led activity ran by Ulster GAAs' three Community Sport Development Officers. Groups from various communities and backgrounds receive a presentation and are involved in discussion about the history of Ulster GAA, its structures and its work within the community. Feedback from these events has been very positive, with many highlighting that they were unaware of the work done by the GAA outside of sport within the local community. 114 participants took part in this

deliverable over 2021.

ULSTER GAA PRESIDENT'S AWARDS

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the Ulster GAA President's Awards did not take place in 2020, but the President Oliver Galligan felt it was only fair that the main awards should be given and these were organised remotely during the past year, with the winners being announced on Ulster GAA Social Media channels. Congratulations to all the winners, who were as follows;

- Lifetime Service Award (in association with O'Neill's) – Liam Nelis (Edendork/Urney, Tyrone)
- Footballer of The Year – Raymond Galligan (Lacken Celtic, Cavan)
- Hurler of The Year – Ciaran Clarke (Ballycastle, Antrim)
- Referee of The Year – Paul Faloon (Drumgath, Down)

The 2021 Awards were able to operate at a reduced level with the Kilmore Hotel in Cavan playing host to the Awards Ceremony on 20th November.

Special recognition awards were given to 2021 All-Ireland winning teams, with the award winners being rewarded for their achievements;

- Lifetime Service Award (in association with O'Neill's) – Patsy Mullan (Ballerin, Derry)
- Footballer of The Year – Niall Morgan (Edendork, Tyrone)
- Hurler of The Year – Cormac O'Doherty (Slaughtneil, Derry)
- Referee of The Year – Joe McQuillan (Kill Shamrocks, Cavan)
- Special Recognition Awards were presented to Brendie Brien for his role in fostering Gaelic Games in Britain (twinning partner of Ulster GAA), Conor McDonnell (Handball), Kathleen Woods (Camogie), John Joe Brady (Ladies Football), Sean McGourty (Education) and John McEniff (Communications).

In the themed awards those who had excelled in the field of 'Community' were honoured, with recipients being as follows;

- Club Maith – Loughinisland (Down)
- Irish language & Culture – Mayobridge, St. Patrick's (Down)
- Outreach – East Belfast (Down)
- Healthy Club – Cushenall Ruairi Og (Antrim)
- Valuing Volunteers – Enniskillen Gaels (Fermanagh) and Eire Og (Armagh)
- Young Volunteer – Aimee Hughes (Clonoe O'Rahilly's, Tyrone)

CONGRATULATIONS

It is always nice to be recognised for your achievements but few awards in the past year were more merited than those given to four young members of the Ruairi Óg Club in Cushendall who last January were honoured

with an Electric Ireland GAA Minor Special Award. Michael Quinn, Josh Schnell, Shane McKenna and Niall Óg McGuigan received their deserved accolade for their efforts in saving the lives of a young family who had gotten into difficulties while swimming in White Park Bay in June 2020. These four 'young heroes' are pupils of St. Killian's College, Garron Tower.

Five players from the province were named on the EirGrid U-20 Football Top 20 which were announced on 20 January. Ulster champions Tyrone had four winners with Darragh Canavan, Ethan Jordan, Cormac Munroe and Tiarnán Quinn picking up the honours, while there was also a spot at the top table for Aaron Doherty from beaten Ulster finalists Donegal.

Ulster GAA themselves had reason to cheer when, on January 22nd, it was announced that they had been recognised by Disability Sport NI with an Inclusive Sport Award in recognition of our commitment to creating an inclusive sports environment for people with disabilities. The Inclusive Sport Award acknowledges the achievements of governing bodies who have improved sports provision for people with disabilities and will provide the necessary support and guidance to others who wish to work towards developing inclusivity. While an award for the entire volunteer and staff team at Ulster GAA, special mention must be made of the efforts of Shane McCann and Paul Callaghan for the parts they played in securing this award.

Ulster champions Cavan were rewarded with three slots on the 2020 PwC Football All-Stars. Team captain and goalkeeper Raymond

Galligan beat-off stiff opposition to claim the goalkeeper's berth, while his Lacken team-mate and cousin Thomas Galligan was selected at midfield, following some magnificent performances during the Ulster Championship. Cavan's third recipient was popular full-back Pádraig Faulkner from the Kingscourt Stars Club, whose defensive displays were a key factor in helping the Breffni men secure their first Ulster title since 1997.

Antrim's Joe McDonagh Cup 2020 winning captain Conor McCann was honoured with the Joe McDonagh Player of the Year and he was joined by six of his victorious colleagues on the GAA/GPA Joe McDonagh Cup Team of the Year, namely Matthew Donnelly, Stephen Rooney, Ger Walsh, Keelan Molloy, Niall McKenna and Ciaran Clarke.

There was also honour for six hurlers from the province on the combined Christy Ring Cup, Nickey Rackard Cup and Lory Meagher Cup GAA/GPA Team of the Year for 2020 with Stephen Keith (Down), Caolan Teggart (Down), Danny Cullen (Donegal), Sean McVeigh (Donegal), Conor O'Shea (Fermanagh) and Damian Casey (Tyrone) being the recipients. There was an added bonus for Danny Cullen who picked up the coveted Nickey Rackard Player of the Year Award.

The 2020 Electric Ireland All-Ireland Minor Football Championship did not conclude until 18th July 2021 and there was to be a dramatic finale with Derry captain Matthew Downey cracking home an injury time penalty (less than a minute after Derry had themselves conceded a goal) to give the Oak Leaf County their first All-Ireland title at this level since



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2002. After this great triumph for both county and province the Derry captain, who is a son of 1993 All-Ireland senior winning captain Henry, was named Electric Ireland Minor Footballer of the Year and he was joined on the Team of the Year by his colleagues Kian McGonigle, Lee Brady, Eoin McEvoy, Mark Doherty and Lachlan Murray. Monaghan's Conor Eccles was also selected on the 2020 Minor Team of the Year to make it a 'magnificent seven' awards for Ulster.

A day short of six weeks after Derry were crowned All-Ireland Minor Football champions for 2020, their neighbours Tyrone took on Meath in the 2021 decider. The Red Hands were most unlucky to lose by a single point, so back-to-back titles eluded the province. There were, however, rewards for the wonderful exploits of the young Tyrone players throughout the campaign when their team captain Cormac Devlin – son of 2003 All-Ireland medalist, Gavin – was joined by his colleagues Callan Kelly, Shea O'Hare, Ruairi McHugh and Ronan Cassidy on the 2021 Electric Ireland Minor Team of the year.

Ulster champions Down were rewarded with three places on the EirGrid Top 20 Football selection for 2021, namely Charlie Smyth, Tom Smyth and Shealan Johnston while Sean Jones from the defeated provincial finalists Monaghan made it a quartet of winners from Ulster.

It was Donegal's night at the annual Gradaim an Uachtaráin, which were filmed on location and broadcast by TG4, with both Ulster recipients coming from the Tir Conaill county. Fr Séan Ó Ghallchóir was a worthy recipient of the Ulster Volunteer Award given his services

to the Association in numerous roles over many years. Fr Séan is Honorary President of CLG Chloich Cheann Fhaola (Cloughaneely) and has at numerous times acted as an administrator, historian, referee and Scór representative. A distinguished referee he took charge of two Donegal Senior Football Championship finals and also refereed the Ulster Minor Football final of 1982. In 2020 he published the seventh edition of the 'Book of Donegal GAA Facts' which is the 'go-to' reference book of all Donegal GAA matters.

Fergus McGee was elected as a Donegal delegate to the Ulster Council at the 2020 County Convention and weeks later he was honoured by outgoing GAA President John Horan with the Gradaim Na Gaeilge. The popular St. Eunan's, Letterkenny Clubman has been a champion of the Irish language over many years and has been at the forefront of Ulster GAA's Seamas de Faoite course for many years. He is also a strong advocate of Scór and over the years has been heavily involved at county, provincial and national levels.

There was further success for the province in the 2020 MacNamee Awards (the GAA's national media and communication awards), the announcement of which was delayed until November 2021 due to the pandemic. There was 'double delight' for Armagh GAA who scooped both the 'Digital Impact Award' and the 'Best GAA Programme Award' for their excellent County Football final production. Their hard-working PRO and her PR team have every reason to be proud of this great achievement. There was also success for Conall Ó

Máirtín of BBC Radio Ulster who was a deserving winner of the 'Gradam na Gaeilge' (Irish Language Award) for his radio documentary on Bloody Sunday in 1920. There was also a strong Ulster connection to the '2020 Best Photograph Award' which was won by David Fitzgerald of 'Sportsfile' for his great picture capturing the anxiety in the faces (and a few clasped hands) of Trillick, St. McCartan's supporters during their penalty shoot-out victory over Coalisland Na Fianna in the Tyrone Senior Football Championship semi-final in Omagh.

Ulster GAA staff member Geraldine McLaughlin from Termon (Donegal) was honoured with a TG4 LGFA All-Star Award. Geraldine was the only Ulster selection and she was a highly popular winner, having lost out narrowly on a number of previous occasions.

Fermanagh Hurler Sean Corrigan picked up the Lory Meagher Cup Player of the Year and he was joined by six other representatives from the province on the GAA/GPA Champions 15 Team. They were his Fermanagh colleague Rory Porteous, Derry players Sean Cassidy and Cormac O'Doherty and Simon Doherty (Armagh), Enda Shalvey (Cavan) and Damien Casey (Tyrone).

There was also Ulster representation on the Joe McDonagh Cup GAA/GPA Team of the Year with the Down duo of Stephen Keith and Conor Woods being selected as a result of their performances in this competition. Tyrone, with eight PWC All-Star Award winners, matched the record high for an Ulster county (also achieved by Tyrone in 2005 and Donegal in 2012) with the famous statuettes going to Niall Morgan, Pádraig Hampsey,



Conor Meyler, Kieran McGeary, Peter Harte, Brian Kennedy, Niall Sludden and Darren McCurry. The prestigious Footballer of the Year accolade was won by Kieran McGeary, a tremendous and deserved honour for the Pomeroy Plunkett's clubman.

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

I am again indebted to the outstanding contribution made by so many people to the furtherance of Gaelic Games in Ulster. The debt of gratitude owed to you all is immeasurable.

Our President Oliver Galligan completes his term of office at Convention. His tenure has been severely interrupted by the coronavirus pandemic and throughout he led by example, displaying great wisdom and guidance. As well as a great leader, Oliver has been a great friend and his experience and wise counsel has been invaluable to me. He has been a great servant of the GAA in

Ulster and has served on the Council for a remarkable 21 years. He will remain on the Council for a further year and I look forward to working with him during this time and beyond and I know he will continue to make an important contribution to the Association in the province in the future.

Vice-President Ciaran McLaughlin becomes the sixth Tyrone man to assume the great honour of President of the Ulster Council. A former Chairperson of the Tyrone County Committee he is blessed with tremendous leadership qualities and has chaired numerous sub-committees at both provincial and national level. He assumes the reins at a pivotal time for the provincial council as we continue on a journey of implementation of the key deliverables from our Strategic Plan.

Michael Geoghegan's diligent oversight of our financial affairs during what has probably been the

most challenging time in our history has been exemplary and thanks in no small measure to his diligence and expertise our financial position remains vibrant.

Public Relations Officer Declan Woods has proved to be a 'natural' in the role and he is highly respected throughout the province and beyond, and in media circles. He has expertly overseen our ongoing digital roll-out and helped build Ulster GAA's digital platform with a series of new and enterprising initiatives during his tenure.

COVID-19 has impacted on us all and a time period of over 21 months elapsed (from the end of January 2020 to the start of November 2021) between in-face meetings' of the full Ulster Council. I thank all the Council members for their forbearance, patience and understanding during this time - you were always on hand to offer help and advice when required and hopefully it won't be before long that we can revert to many of our previous working arrangements.

We say a farewell to Council members Jim Tummon, Dermot McCaughey, Michael Quinn and thank them for their invaluable contribution to our affairs. The Council will be all the poorer without you. I also take this opportunity to welcome Greg Kelly, Michelle Cox and Liam Magee as new members of the Council and wish you every success during their tenure. Ulster GAA is fortunate in that it has a repertoire of willing volunteers who serve on our sub-committees. I know that COVID-19 has curtailed some activities but the fact remains that it would not be possible to work through such an extensive work programme without the commitment



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and dedication of these people and I thank them all for their efforts. Special mention goes out to our Committee Chairs' and Secretaries who undertake additional duties between meetings. I thank also the volunteers from the province who serve on National and other committees and to Ulster GAA staff members who serve on National committees.

The pandemic has dramatically changed the workplace landscape. Lockdowns and self-isolation have affected how our staff are connected and work together. The pandemic has not only changed the approach to working from home, it's had long-lasting implications on the way that we work and the way that we feel about work. Financial pressures, furlough, health concerns, feelings of isolation and adjustments to remote working have all had an impact on staff and our organisation.

It has been vital that we give our staff the help and support they need to maintain good mental health in the workplace (in this case, working from home). Ulster GAA has organised and promoted health and wellbeing through a variety of initiatives, events and campaigns at work and continue to provide information and signposting to staff to the relevant support services, if required. We also have trained staff as Health Champions to support the delivery of the Work Well Live Well Programme from NI Chest Heart & Stroke (NICHs) in our workplace.

Our Social Committee also continue to organise activities to encourage employee engagement and foster a sense of community spirit amongst staff.

The past year has also witnessed greater emphasis on a structured staff training and development programme, with a Staff Learning, Training and Development Workgroup set up. The Workgroup continues to identify training needs and put in place an ongoing inclusive training programme to support staff in the workplace and encourage personal development.

While hard to find at times, there have been a few positive initiatives that have emanated from the pandemic. Ulster GAA have agreed a blended approach to working and this will become the 'new norm' moving forward.

Many of our staff have undergone furlough, to varying levels, from April 2020 but I am pleased to report that all staff returned to full-time work in September 2021, over a month before the Job Retention Scheme formally ended at the end of October. It was a difficult time for all and I thank all staff from across all our disciplines for their patience and understanding during this very difficult period. I thank the Ulster GAA staff team for their tolerance and commitment throughout this unprecedented and challenging period; Staff have worked together and risen above the challenges presented which has shown the importance that there is 'ni neart go cur le cheile' (no strength without unity) as we emerge as a more resilient team. Your dedication and commitment are greatly appreciated and valued throughout the province.

May I be forgiven for making particular mention of some of the staff with whom I work closest on a daily basis. Brian Mallon has the

onerous task role of heading up our Finance, Human Resources and Business Development Section. A pragmatic and diligent individual, he leads a dedicated and committed team from the front. Dr. Eugene Young leads an impressive Coaching and Games Development team and under his leadership the coaching staff at Ulster GAA have earned respect far and wide. While we are all deeply frustrated by the ongoing long drawn-out saga that is Casement Park, Stephen McGeehan and his team have remained steadfast throughout and will continue to lead from the front as we aim to get the project to fruition.

The work of the Community Development team led by Diarmaid Marsden has rightly received many plaudits over 'lockdown' and if anything, the pandemic has strengthened the position of the GAA as the leading amateur community-based sporting organisation on the planet. For our own part, Ulster GAA is working across so many fronts as we aim to improve the lives of so many people we come into contact with. Apart from senior staff, I wish also to place on record my personal thanks to those staff members with whom I work closely with on a regular basis. Kathy Kelly is the Servicing Officer for both Coiste Bainistíochta and Senior Staff and she also leads of Human Resource matters for the organisation. Her excellent administrative skills and attention to detail are a great asset to us all.

As referenced earlier in my report, Safeguarding has over recent years taken on an increasing importance – and rightly so – in our affairs and in Bernie Fox we have a person of the highest calibre delivering in this important work area on our behalf.

We owe her and her team a huge debt of gratitude and I wish to pay a special thanks to Shane McCann who expertly covered this challenging work area during Bernie's absence during 2021.

Although our competitions over the past two seasons have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic, Stephen Donnelly has the demanding task of co-ordinating the entire Ulster GAA fixtures programme but thanks to his trusting hand and sound understanding of GAA affairs throughout the province he manages to produce a series of games which is fair and balanced, yet takes account of the particular circumstances of competing teams. He is a tremendous asset to Ulster GAA.

Paul McGurk heads up our PR & Marketing team. They are at the coalface of our communications network and undertake much great work in ensuring that our digital and print media platforms conform to the highest standards. The team also is on hand to deal with the many media queries we receive, while Paul leads on our sponsorship arrangements and his task has certainly not been made any easier in the current pandemic. The fact that the vast majority of our corporate partners have remained on board is a testimony to Paul's efforts and skills. I thank him for his dedication and support.

No words of thanks from me will adequately pay tribute to the work and dedication of Geraldine McKavanagh. Her loyalty, commitment, perseverance and trustworthiness are second to none and she is always there to keep me 'on-track.' The amount of 'unseen' work that Geraldine undertakes

on behalf of Ulster GAA is really phenomenal and from the bottom of my heart, I say a big 'thank-you' to Geraldine.

OBITUARIES

At the end of another year, we remember all the GAA members from the province who have passed away since we last gathered for our Annual Convention. Many of our members also lost loved ones and we also remember them and share in their loss.

In particular we remember our esteemed Vice-President Ciaran McLaughlin who said farewell to his father James over the Easter weekend. Ulster referees Advisory Committee Secretary Michael McGoldrick lost his father Owen, while Armagh County Chairman Michael Savage said goodbye to his mother Mary. Niall Erskine lost his beloved father Matt on 13 March.

On the afternoon of Tyrone's opening Ulster Championship game against defending champions Cavan, County Secretary Dominic McCaughey said farewell to his beloved mother Moira. Her death came just over a year after that of her late husband Thomas.

Sean McKenna, Secretary of the Ulster GAA Hearings Committee, suffered the death of his brother Stephen on 21st October. Stephen lived in England most of his life and was residing in Folkestone in Kent at the time of his passing.

Our esteemed colleague and Ulster GAA Safeguarding Manager Bernie Fox said farewell to her beloved mother Celine on 3rd November and the following day Tyrone Central

Council (and former Ulster Council member) Benny Hurl said goodbye to his mother Brigid.

On 2 December Ulster Ladies GAA President and member of our Management Committee Eileen Jones suffered the passing of her beloved mother Brigid (Bridie), following a period of illness.

On the morning of 7th December Peter Carty lost his brother Benny after a prolonged illness and in the early hours of the same morning our hearts went out to our dear friend in RTE Marty Morrissey after his mother lost her life in a road traffic accident. The following day Dan McCartan, former Down County Chairman and longtime friend of the GAA in the province, said goodbye to his sister Anne.

As I finalise my report, I learn that our colleague Paul Callaghan said farewell to his dear mother Delia who died on 13th December 2021.

Two great GAA gael from the priesthood died between the publication of my 2020 Annual report and the holding of the Ulster Convention. Although a native of Tandragee in Co. Armagh Dean Anthony Davies was synonymous with the GAA in County Down for over 60 years. Trophies in Camogie and Gaelic Football bear his name and he was President of both the Down Camogie Board and the Clonduff Shamrocks club at the time of his death. While a student priest at Dromantine College he won a Down Senior Football Championship medal with Glenn in 1959 and four years later managed Ballyholland, where he also played and served as Club Chairman, to a Down Intermediate title. He was



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loved wherever else and he wasn't shy about 'rolling up his sleeves' either, as you were just as likely to see him parking cars or acting in some other stewarding capacity as you were to see him watching from the sidelines.

COVID-19 unfortunately contributed to the death of Fr. Joe McKeever, the Ballyhegan native who died on the morning of 23rd January. The former parish priest of Upper Creggan, Fr. Joe was a passionate supporter of both Armagh and Crossmaglen Rangers and a strong supporter of Gaelic games more widely.

On 18th January the GAA community of Shane Uí Néill in Glenarm said farewell to former Antrim and Ulster hurler Eugene McMullan. 'Big Eugene', as he was affectionately known, wore a flat cap as he played and was well respected in Antrim GAA circles.

On 26th January we said farewell to our great friend Harry Gribbin. Harry, who was President of the Newbridge Sean O'Leary's Club, gave a lifetime of service to the GAA and especially in his beloved Derry. He actually won an Ulster Minor Championship medal with Antrim in 1950 and went on to manage the Derry U-21 footballers to All-Ireland success in 1997. He also worked alongside the late Eamon Coleman on the Derry's All-Ireland senior winning team of 1993 and the Minor winning team of ten years previous. Harry also served on both the Ulster Council and Central Council, was a Railway Cup selector and was known the length and breadth of Ireland.

'Look around and you will see his legacy' could well be said of Joe Pat Prunty who died on 29th January, the

day of the 2021 Ulster Convention. Joe Pat brought pitch development and maintenance to a new level and for many years 'Prunty Pitches' have been a term denoting high quality in GAA parlance.

The following day saw the passing of Mick Kerr, who was part of the breakthrough Tyrone Ulster Senior football Championship winning team of 1956. The Beragh man, who gave a lifetime of service to the GAA, was also a keen handballer and he was instrumental in the revival of the Brackey Club.

We were deeply shocked and saddened to learn on 12th February of the death of that great Bellaghy and Derry stalwart Tom Scullion. Tom was part of the Derry team that captured the Anglo-Celt for the Oak Leaf men for the first time in 1958 and he then managed the team to an Ulster title in 1987. He later served as Vice-Chairperson of the County Committee. The holder of a record 12 Derry Senior Football Championship medals - gained between 1956 and 1972 - his club career culminated with the glory of an All-Ireland Club Football

triumph secured at the expense of UCC. Bellaghy were in first club from the province to win the coveted Club All-Ireland, which was in its second year, and 13 years earlier, in 1959, Tom was part of another historic first as he helped Queen's University, Belfast secure their first Sigerson Cup. Indeed, his name is embedded in the echelons of Queen's GAA folklore as he kicked the winning point in the replayed final win over University College Dublin.

On the first day of March Down gaels were saddened to learn of the death of Martin McCabe. A real character, the Newry Shamrocks clubman was the Down net-minder in their 1978 Ulster Senior Football Championship success.

We were deeply saddened when news of the death of Fergal McCann filtered through on the evening of 8th March. The Augher man, who worked as a Games Promotion Officer with the Tyrone County Committee, passed away after losing his battle with cancer. The affable St. Macartan's stalwart is remembered for his role as the trainer of the Tyrone



All-Ireland winning teams of 2005 and 2008 and their Ulster Senior Championship winning teams of 2007, 2009 and 2010. Succeeding Paddy Tally as Tyrone senior team trainer was no easy feat but, along with his Augher clubman Tony Donnelly, he was an integral part of Mickey Harte's backroom team for a decade and his part in that very successful time for Tyrone football cannot be underestimated. At the age of 47 he was taken from us all too soon.

There was further anguish for the O'Neill County two days later when Paddy Gallagher, the County Committee delegate for the Drumragh Sarsfield's Club, passed away suddenly. Paddy was steeped in the club and served in many roles since its foundation in 1972 and he was never happier than when attending to affairs at his beloved Clanabogan. His son Cathal is a former colleague at Ulster GAA.

Donegal and Aodh Ruadh lost a great stalwart with the death of Alan Kane on 15th March. At the time of his death, he was Vice-President of the club but is best remembered in the Tir Conaill county for being goalkeeper on the Donegal team which won the county's first Ulster Senior Football Championship title in 1972. Three years later Alan played on the St. Joseph's team (Ballyshannon/Bundoran amalgamation) which became the first club from the county to win the Ulster Club Football Championship.

On 12 March the gaels of Armagh lost a great stalwart in James Savage. A man whose community spirit knew no bounds, he was a former Chair of Newry & Mourne District Council. While he lined out with several

Armagh GAA Clubs, he was best remembered for his association with the St. Laurence O'Toole's Club in Belleeks of which, in 1984, he was a founder member.

On 16 March we heard the sad news of the passing of Cavan and Killinkere stalwart Jimmy Stafford. He won MacRory Cup medals in 1961 and 1962 and shot to national prominence a few months after his second schools' success by scoring two goals in a surprise Ulster Senior championship Final victory over All-Ireland champions Down. He won a second Ulster Championship medal in 1964, won a Sigerson Cup medal with UCD and played for the Combined University in their unique and historic Railway Cup victory in 1973. He later served as Coaching Officer with the Cavan County Committee and was a selector with the county senior football team.

There was shock in the Antrim GAA community - and especially amongst the referees' fraternity - with the passing of Paul Hughes on St. Patrick's Day. The Jovial Cardinal O'Donnell's clubman, affectionately known as 'Morph', was a popular and highly respected referee who took great enjoyment from being 'the man in the middle.' He once joked that he sent-off the Lord Mayor of Belfast! There was a true sense of mourning in Down with the passing of Des Farley on 5 April. The former Principal of St. Malachy's High School in Castlewellan was famously the team trainer when Down captured their third Sam Maguire Cup in 1968. A native of Collegeland in Armagh, he was part of their first (and only) Armagh Senior Football Championship winning team in 1961 and four years later he added a Down

Senior Football Championship medal to his name when he lined-out for his adopted Castlewellan.

The tragic death of James Reel on 10th April caused shock waves through the community in South Armagh and especially within the Silverbridge Harps GAA Club in particular.

The Drumanness Club lost a great stalwart when Gerry McDermott passed away peacefully in hospital on 13th April. Gerry was the recipient of an 'Irish News' Ulster GAA Volunteer award in 2019 and was one of those great 'unsung heroes' that make the GAA the wonderful organisation that it is.

Donegal photographer Michael 'Jack' O'Donnell departed this world on the 1st May following a period of illness. For close on 40 years the popular Glenties native was a regular presence at GAA games in the Tir Conaill County and his jovial presence and good humour will be sorely missed by us all.

Down GAA lost two great stalwarts on the weekend of 8th and 9th May with the deaths of Arthur Downey and Michael Carr. Arthur was a player and former Chairperson of the Clanna Banna club and was part of the St. Colman's College panel when the famed Newry nursery captured the Hogan Cup for the first time in 1967. Michael was a lifelong member and player with the St. Peter's, Warrenpoint Club and for many years he represented the people of the area on Newry and Mourne District Council. As fate would have it their respective fathers', Dessie and Gerry, were both part of the Down Junior Football team which brought the



first all-Ireland title to the Mourne County in 1946, with Michael's father Gerry being the down captain on that historic occasion.

The tragic parting of Catherine McCann on 10th May was met with widespread grief not only in her native Lavey, for whom she had played camogie, but throughout South Derry and in the Creggan community in Antrim, where she had taught in the local primary school for 17 years, during which she instilled a love of Gaelic Games in many future players for the Kickham's Club.

Tyrone GAA stalwart Teddy Devlin passed away peacefully on 18th May. He was a founding member of the Eoghan Ruadh Hurling Club in Dungannon, where he was Club President. A lifelong Gael, he served the club as a player, referee and administrator and also served as a member of both the Tyrone and Ulster Hurling Boards.'

There was an abundance of grief in 'The Mournes' and further afield with the death of young Ballymartin footballer Callum Fitzpatrick on 1 June and five days later the sudden death of Fr. Tony Corr, the popular Parish Priest of Aghaderg and Donaghmore, caused shockwaves throughout the diocese of Dromore.

The tragic death of young Brackaville Owen Roes player Joshua Griggs on 8 June was met with deep sorrow and sadness across the entire community. The talented footballer was involved in numerous community enterprises, including the Tyrone Somme Memorial Association, and will be fondly remembered by all those privileged to have known him.

Ulster GAA is twinned with Canada GAA and we were saddened to hear of the death of Jarlath Connaughton on 11th June. For over twenty years Jarlath served as a dedicated coach, referee and committee member of the Ottawa Gaels Club and from 2008 to 2013 inclusive he was Vice-Chairperson of Canada GAA. Jarlath had a particular passion for developing youth GAA overseas and he was a founding member of the Continental Youth Championship (CYC), which has grown to become the biggest Gaelic games youth tournament held outside of Ireland. He was also a talented musician and armed with guitar and beautiful voice he brightened up many a social gathering over the years.

It was with great sadness that we learned on 12th June of the death of Sean Hughes in Philadelphia. The 27-year-old, who played for Pearse Og's in Armagh before emigrating to the USA, was seriously injured in a construction accident six months previously and eventually succumbed to his injuries. He was a member of the Young Ireland's Philly GAA Club



at the time of his death. We were honoured to have his widow Emily present at Armagh's Ulster Senior Football championship game against Antrim in The Athletic Grounds on American Independence Day.

On the morning of 14th June, we learned of the death of Columban Fitzsimons, the Vice-Chair of the East Down GAA Committee and the Chair of the St. Patrick's, Saul GAA Club. As a player, referee and administrator Columban gave a lifetime of service to the Association and no matter how big or how small the call, Columban was always first to raise a hand. A strong devotee of Scór, he, along with his brother Martin, could be seen as half-time draw sellers at Down's home Allianz League and Championship games up to the start of the commencement of the coronavirus pandemic. A true gael who will be sadly missed, his son Gareth is a former Chairperson of USGAA.

On the night of 15th June, the gaels of Armagh said farewell to a man who had given a lifetime of service to the association in the county. Sometimes the word 'gentleman' can be over-used but that was certainly not the case with Joe Canning. For anyone privileged to know him, he was always willing to help out where he could. His service to the GAA in the Orchard County was recognised in 2020 when he was made Honorary Life President of the County Committee, in succession to the late John O'Reilly. Joe had served two decades as Armagh GAA Treasurer and had previously served as Secretary of both the Armagh Minor Board and the South Armagh Board. He was also Honorary Life President of his beloved St. Cillian's Club in Whitecross, where he held numerous administrative

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roles and where he served as Secretary for 12 years.

Donegal defeated Down in the Preliminary Round of the Ulster Championship on 27 June but there was mourning in the Tír Conaill County when Joe Winson passed away after a period of illness. Affectionately known as 'Dodo', the St. Eunan's Clubman played 'top of the left' on the breakthrough Ulster Championship winning team of 1972 and he added a second provincial medal to his collection two years later.

On 3rd July came the passing of former Down GAA County Chairman Charlie Keown. The Liatroim Fontenoy's Clubman held the Cathaoirleach reins in Down from 1985 to 1988, having previously served as Chair of the Hurling Board in the county. A hard-working and enthusiastic Gael Charlie was at the helm when Down, in 1977, collected the Tom Markham Cup for the second time and there could be no hiding his pride when, the previous year, Burren became the first club from the county to win an All-Ireland Club title.

The following day we said goodbye to that great Omagh and Tyrone stalwart Thady Turbett who passed away aged 92. Some 73 years earlier, aged 18, he was 'between the posts' as his beloved St. Enda's captured their first ever Tyrone Senior Football Championship title (he went on to win five more Tyrone County Championship medals) and in 1956 he was also goalkeeper on the Tyrone team which won their breakthrough Ulster Senior Football Championship title. He repeated the feat the following year and he also won three Railway Cup medals for Ulster, lining

out in the 1960 and 1963 finals.

A great sense of grief overwhelmed the Drumgath and surrounding areas with the sudden death of young club player Daniel Bailie on 12th July. One of the finest underage players to wear the maroon jersey, Daniel always represented his club with pride and he will always be remembered with great fondness in his locality.

On 14th July Loughinisland and Down lost a great gael with the passing of Paddy Murray. As a player, referee and administrator Paddy served the Association well and was a former Chair of the East Down Board and he served as a member of the Down County Committee for many years.

The gaels of Tyrone lost a giant on the same day, with the passing of Patrick Harte. The Pomeroy Plunkett's clubman spent his working life in Belfast but never forgot his roots and he was a founder member of and key worker for 'club Tyrone' since its inception in the 1990's. How we would have loved to have been in Croke Park on 11th September - no doubt he was looking down on his beloved 'Red Hand's from above!

The death of Monaghan U-20 captain Brendan 'Ogie' Ó Dufaigh in a road accident on the night of 16th July, just hours after leading his team to victory over Donegal in the Ulster Minor football championship semi-final, led to an outpouring of grief across the GAA community and elsewhere in this have paid a tribute to Brendan Óg and the lasting legacy he has left to Gaelic games despite being called from this world before he reached his 20th birthday.

On 21st July we said farewell to

Jimmy McElhatton, a great stalwart of Carrickmore. Jimmy was a familiar figure around St. Colmcille's Park - where, as groundsman, he ensured that the pitch was always in pristine condition - and his legacy with the club and with the Éire Óg Hurling Club will live long in the memory. An experienced administrator, no job was too difficult for Jimmy and he was also a respected referee, being the man in the middle for games in Tyrone and at inter-county level for almost a quarter of a century. Jimmy lifelong involvement with the Association was honoured nationally when he was awarded a Gradam an Uachtaráin in 2020 and two years previously he was awarded the Credo Gold Pin for his services to the GAA in his native county. There were emotional scenes the day after his funeral as his son Conor helped Tyrone to victory over Donegal in their Nickey Rackard Cup semi-final, which fittingly was played at Jimmy's beloved Páirc Naomh Colmcille.

There was double tragedy due to drownings in Cavan on successive days during the July heatwave. On 21st July Natasha Core died in Lough Gowna after rescuing her son - an underage player with the Gowna Club - from the water, while the following day Killian Casey, a player with Crosserlough, died in hospital after getting into difficulties while swimming in Lough Sheelin two days earlier.

Also on 21st July the Derrygonnelly Harps Club and the local community around Boho were numbed by the tragic death of Peter Jones, following an incident in Lough Melvin. Peter was a great servant of the club and was at his happiest seeing young players develop - he was Coaching Officer



at the time of his passing. Two of his sons, Aaron and Leigh, later played on the Derrygonnelly Harps team which defeated Enniskillen Gaels as they regained the Fermanagh Senior Football Championship title.

The following day Brookeborough Heber MacMahon's lost their last surviving member from the inaugural club committee of 1955. Pat Wray was a trustee and Honorary President of the club, having performed countless roles in the intervening 66 years. He was instrumental figure in the club's first Junior Championship success in 1962 and intermediate Championship success three years later and in 1970 he had the honour of managing the club in their first Senior County Final appearance, where they lost to Teemore Shamrocks.

The sudden death of Colm McKinstry on 8th August was greeted with disbelief amongst all those who knew the quiet and unassuming Lurgan

man. Colm was an outstanding servant of the GAA in Armagh, with whom he won three Ulster Championship medals. Alongside his midfield partner Joe Kernan, he was instrumental in Armagh's journey to the 1977 All-Ireland Final. He was rewarded with an All-Star in 1980 and two years later he had the honour of lifting the Anglo-Celt Cup, as he captained the Orchard County to victory over Fermanagh in the Ulster Final.

He was a stalwart of the Clan na Gael Club, with which he won ten Armagh Senior Football Championship medals and he was a key part of the team of 1972-74, which became the first in the province to win three consecutive Ulster Club titles. A dedicated individual, Colm was a gentle giant of a man who has left us with many great memories from his time on the Gaelic fields of Ireland.

In the late morning of August 14th

news began to filter through of the death of James McCartan, one of the true legends of Gaelic Football. James was pivotal to the historic breakthrough of 1960 when Sam Maguire 'crossed the border' for the first time. The much-vaunted half-forward line of O'Neill, McCartan and Doherty are still revered in GAA circles over 70 years after this historic event and as Down retained the All-Ireland title in 1961.

The contribution of James to those breakthrough All-Ireland successes was immense and he was the recipient of the Caltex Footballer of the Year Awards in both 1960 and 1961. His thunderbolt goal against Offaly in the 1961 All-Ireland Final and his performance in the second half of the 1961 Ulster Final, when he came off the bench despite a serious arm injury and changed the course of the game, are still fondly remembered in The Mourne County.

James captained Ulster to victory in the 1966 Railway Cup final, as he secured his third interprovincial medal. At club level James won three Down Senior Football Championship medals with Glenn and as he reached the twilight of his playing days, he helped Tullylish reach the 1971 Down County Final, where they lost to a much-vaunted Bryansford side. He served two spells as Down senior manager, leading them to an Ulster title in 1978 and a National Football league title in 1983. He also managed Down to U-21 All-Ireland Finals in 1977 and 1979, securing success over Cork in the latter, having lost out to Kerry in the former.

Greyhound Racing was another great sporting passion of James where he was a successful trainer, with his



greatest moment coming in 1978 when Gullion Lad triumphed in The Irish Cesarewitch. A true legend, James will be forever remembered in the annals of GAA folklore.

Fr. Iggy McQuillan passed away on the 20th August, having reached the grand old age of 90. The Newtownbutler native had the honour and distinction of captaining Fermanagh to their first and, indeed, only All-Ireland Junior Football success, in 1959. A talented footballer who led the team from full-back, Fr. McQuillan later became president of St. Columb's College in Derry and he was instrumental in delivering the college's only Hogan Cup success, in 1965. Having been 'instructed' to give up Gaelic games on his ordination, Fr McQuillan regularly played under the most apt nom-de-plume 'Sam Maguire.'

On the morning of the August Bank Holiday Monday we were all saddened to learn of the death of former Ulster, Down and Antrim hurling manager Sean McGuinness. The jovial Patrick Sarsfield's clubman always had a chuckle in his voice and was a true giant of hurling in the province. As Antrim manager in the 1980's Sean raised the profile of hurling in the county and his charges put in numerous heroic performances against the traditional hurling counties, most notably in 1986 when they ran Cork to five points in the All-Ireland semi-final. In the golden era of Ulster hurling in the 1990's he led Down to two Ulster Hurling titles and he also managed Ulster to three Railway Cup finals in the early '90's, losing out by just a single point to Munster in 1995 in what was Ulster's last final appearance. He also had spells in charge of Lavey, Bredagh and



UUJ hurling teams in a stellar career.

The gaels of Derry and indeed throughout the province said goodbye to Brian Mullan on 3rd September. The Ballerin Sarsfields clubman was right-corner-forward on the first Derry team to contest an All-Ireland Final (in 1958). He played senior football with the oak leaf county for over a decade and was later involved with the Owenbeg project. A loyal club and family man, Brian was immersed in the Ballerin Club, where he was a trustee and former Chairman. His daughter Sinead was married to the late Eamonn Burns who won two All-Ireland medals with Down in the 1990's.

On 8th October Bellaghy mourned the death of Damien Brown, after a short illness. The former club player and team manager won a provincial club title in 1994 and played on the Wolfe Tones team defeated by Kilmacud Crokes in the 1995 All-Ireland Club final. He is best remembered, however, for his tireless campaign to secure the holding of an inquest

for his late father, Sean, who was murdered by the LVF in May 1997, after being abducted as he locked the gates of the club premises.

On 2nd November the gaels of Tyrone said farewell to John Joe O'Hagan, a great stalwart of the county. The Coalisland native who won five senior football championship medals with Clonoe O'Rahilly's won back-to-back All-Ireland Minor Football titles in 1947 and 1948 and he was part of the Tyrone Senior team which won breakthrough Ulster Senior Football Championship titles in 1956 and 1957. In all he represented his county 61 times at senior level and his son Damien would later represent the county with distinction. John Jee also managed Eglishe to their only Tyrone Senior Football Championship success, in 1970.

On the same day Bryansford said farewell to their esteemed Club President Oliver Burns. Oliver holds the distinction of being the first person to 'lift' the Seamus McFerran Cup as he led The 'Ford to back-to-back Ulster Club titles in 1969 and 1970 and had the distinction of leading his charges onto Croke park for the first ever All-Ireland Club final in 1971. His son Brian was full-back on the 1994 All-Ireland winning Down side.

Also, on 2nd November the GAA world said their last farewell to the great Dublin player Des 'Snitchy' Ferguson. I reference Des as he was actually a Down man by birth, having been born in Castlewelling in 1930 and he spent his early years there. Indeed, his father Liam won Down Senior Football Championship medals with 'The Town' in 1924 and 1934. Des won All-Ireland Senior Football medals with Dublin in 1958 and 1963 and,



in 1961, he played on the last Dublin team to contest an All-Ireland Senior Hurling final. He never forgot his roots and in 1964 he trained the Down team which won the All-Ireland Junior Hurling Championship. He lived much of his life in Meath and in an ironic twist of fate, his son Terry played for 'the Royals' against Down in the 1991 All-Ireland Senior Football final.

On November 6th we witnessed the passing of that great Sean MacCumhaill's and Donegal stalwart Martin Griffin. The towering full-back won Ulster Championship medals in 1974, 1983 and 1990 and was one of the most naturally gifted footballers to wear the green and gold of his native county. He also played inter-county hurling for his county.

Just six days after winning their first ever Ulster Club Championship fixture, the Watty Graham's Club in Maghera, on 26th November, were cast into a dark shadow of tragedy and grief with the death of their esteemed club member and local school principal Francis Lagan. Francis died when a tree branch fell on his car during



'Storm Arwen.' Miraculously his wife and two of his children, who were in the car with him, survived this horrific experience.

Just a few weeks before his untimely death Francis presided at the opening of a new 4G pitch at his St. Mary's, Glenview school, where the John McLaughlin Cup also paid a visit following the Watty Graham's historic first Derry Championship success. Highly respected as an educationalist, GAA and civic leader, Francis was described by the Education Minister as a "dedicated and passionate principal," while the Derry County Committee paid tribute to him by saying that "he helped improve the life of many young people in our schools and clubs." His sister Roisin is the Secretary of the Watty Graham's Club.

On 30th November, just six weeks shy of his 99th birthday, the gaels of Warrenpoint and Down said a fond farewell to Barney Carr, a giant of a man who had the distinction of managing the Down team to those famed All-Ireland triumphs of 1960 and 1961. Faith, family and football were Barney's three great life virtues and on his death he was described by the Down County Committee as "an outstanding son of Down."

Barney played on each of his beloved St. Peter's, Warrenpoint's three Down Senior Football Championship winning teams and, in 1944, along with his brother Hugh, he was part of the Down team which won the Dr McKenna Cup, the first provincial silverware won by the Mourne County at senior level. He was both President and a trustee of the St. Peter's Club and also served as an administrator on both the South

Down Divisional Board and the Down County Committee. In his latter years he published a memoir of his life entitled 'Summerhill' where he lived throughout his life.

Sean Donnelly was as well known in GAA circles as he was in political circles. A founder member of the Loughmacrory Club, Sean passed away on 2nd December, and was fondly remembered in his native Tyrone as an administrator and referee of note.

As we gathered in Breffni Park on the occasion of the Ramor United v Kilcoo Ulster Club Football Championship game on 4th December, word filtered through of the death of that great Cavan stalwart Andy McCabe. The tigerish corner-back won Ulster senior Football championship medals in 1967 and 1969 and was a cornerstone of the Ulster railway cup winning teams of 1970 and 1971. He was also a central figure in Crosserlough's magnificent seven-in-a-row of Cavan's Senior Football titles won from 1966-72 inclusive, with Andy captaining the team in the first rung of that record breaking run.

On the morning of 7th December, we awoke to the news that Darragh Cross clubman Colin Murray had passed away overnight after losing his battle with cancer. Colin was a well-respected referee on both the Down and Ulster hurling panels - he was also a distinguished football referee - and refereed the Ulster Minor Hurling Final in 2017 and the Intermediate Club Hurling finals' of 2016 and 2018 (when as standby referee he took charge when the match referee got injured during the course of the game).

Also, that morning the St. Mary's, Burren club said farewell to their former Chairperson, player, coach, youth leader and fund-raiser Joe Murphy. Joe had been in ill health for many years after suffering a stroke and was well known throughout the province as for many years he acted as a volunteer steward at Ulster GAA fixtures. A passionate GAA member, as Chairman of the Burren Club Joe was a key driver in ensuring the installation of floodlights at St. Mary's Park in 1975 - the first for any GAA club in Ireland.

Just as I 'sign-off' on this report I've learned of the death of Dermot Baxter, a former Chairperson and Secretary of the St. Bronagh's, Rostrevor Club. Dermot also served on the Down County Committee and on a number of sub-committees.

May they all rest in Peace!

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.

Although we haven't had to call upon them as frequently over the past couple of years, I pay a special tribute to our team of stewards and gatemens who answer the call when asked to 'turn out' 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' and County Chairpersons', with whom I would be mostly in communication. Your ongoing loyalty and support are most welcome and greatly appreciated. I thank also the GAA President Larry McCarthy, 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.

Ulster GAA works closely with a range of National Committees and I thank the membership of these bodies for their support. May I be forgiven for making special reference to the former National Hurling Director Martin Fogarty, who has stepped down from his post, for his guidance, wisdom and support during his five-year tenure.

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. This year we welcomed

Rosemary Hughes-Merry and Eileen Jones to our Management Board and their contribution has added to the meetings.

In the course of our work Ulster GAA deals with many statutory and voluntary bodies across all levels of society. I thank all of these bodies for their support. Tolerance and understanding and particular I thank those bodies and Government departments with whom we liaise closely on a range of issues.

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 Malachai for their ongoing help. To you all I say a big Thank You!



BRIAN MAC FHÍOBHÚÍ
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