



CLG ULADH AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL 2023

13Ú Eanáir 2023



05 TUARASCÁIL AN RÚNAÍ

One of the defining strengths of the GAA is its community basis, with in many parishes across the country the GAA club literally being 'at the heart of the community.'

Over and above the playing of our games and the promotion of our associated cultural and language objectives, the GAA club is often the driving force behind wider societal, environmental, health and community initiatives. Games involving clubs from neighbouring parishes, or indeed from within the same parish, often have an added intensity and local rivalry is very much part and parcel of the fabric of the organisation.

But transcending all of this is how the GAA as a unit reacts in times of need. Time and time again we see how the local GAA club is often to the forefront when there is a death in the community. During Covid we witnessed the GAA seamlessly adapting to a role in which it provided much needed assistance, in many forms, to the most vulnerable in our communities.

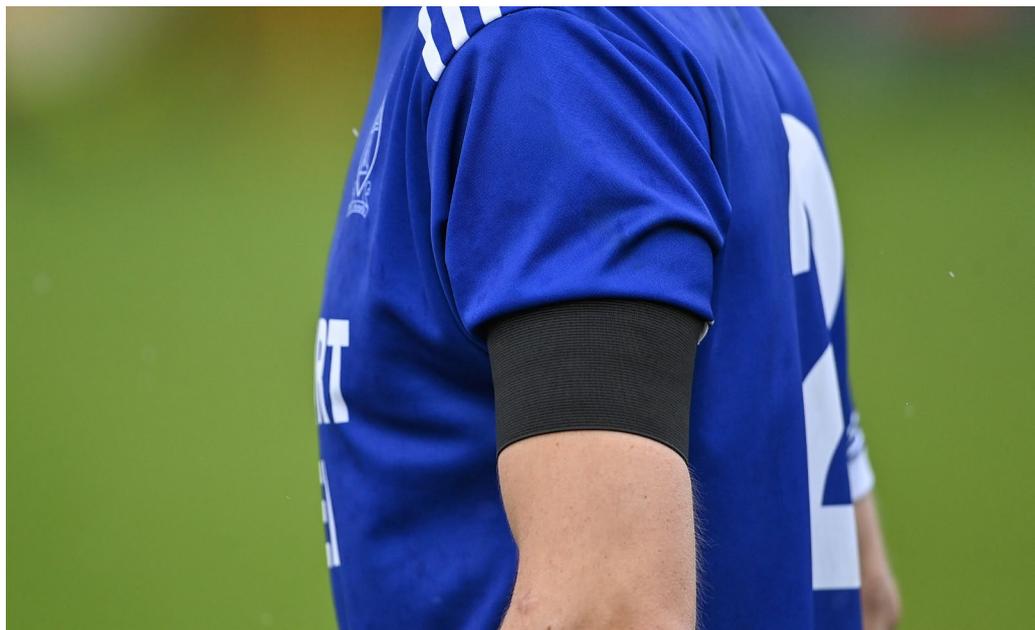
We are a resilient organisation that has endured good times and bad. Flexibility and adaptability are in our DNA and we pride ourselves in the part we play in enriching the lives of the people who live in the communities we serve. At the centre of this is volunteerism – it is the voluntary efforts of our membership that makes us what we are. However, no matter how well prepared we are, there are events which stretch us to the very limits of our capability – and beyond. The events that happened in Creeslough on 7th October is something that none of us could ever have imagined.

Catastrophic events on this scale surely only take place in cities and areas of dense population across the globe – or so we thought! None of us ever imagined them happening in rural Ireland or in the quiet village of Creeslough, which stares up at the beautiful Muckish Mountain.

On that afternoon I was present at a Gaelic Football match in Belfast between the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) and the Fire Department of New York (FDNY). A news alert on my phone advised of an explosion at a filling station in Donegal. I was sitting beside the NIFRS Chief Fire Officer and I commented to him that hopefully there were no fatalities or injuries. It was a forlorn hope and when not long later he was being briefed on the need for emergency services from the north to assist in the aftermath, it became clear that this was a serious incident. We just hoped for the best

but feared the worst.

By bedtime there were three confirmed fatalities, by morning there were five and as the day progressed that figure rose to seven, nine and finally ten. The scale of the tragedy was unimaginable. In the days and weeks that followed the local St. Michael's GAA Club became a focal point for people to meet, talk, comfort, console and grieve. Although the heart was torn out of the local community, the GAA again was at the centre of a massive effort in helping the people deal with tragedy on such a scale. No words of mine could adequately pay tribute to the efforts of the club, the wider GAA community in Donegal led admirably by County Chairperson Mick McGrath or the wider Creeslough people. While the world will move on, the people of Creeslough will live with the events of that Friday afternoon for the rest of their lives – they will





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cope in their own way and the local St. Michael's Club, helped by the wider GAA family, will continue to play a pivotal role. But things will never be the same again.

To the ten 'beautiful souls' (as they were so aptly described by Irish international footballer and former Donegal GAA player Amber Barrett) who lost their lives that day, you will never be forgotten, nor will the efforts of the rescue services and the local people who put community first as they strove to rescue survivors and locate the deceased. To all those who lost loved ones, you remain in our thoughts and for the injured, one can only but hope that through time your pain will be eased.

To the deceased; Robert Garwe and his daughter Shauna Flanagan Garwe, Catherine O'Donnell and her son James Monaghan, Leona Harper, Hugh Kelly, Jessica Gallagher, Martin McGill, James O'Flaherty and Martina Martin, may you all Rest in Peace!

COVID-19

On the evening of 21st January 2022 in a televised address from Government Buildings in Dublin the Taoiseach announced that the majority of public health restrictions, that had been imposed due to Covid-19, would disappear from the following day. After 681 days of restrictions life could finally return to something akin to 'normality', as we knew it two years earlier. A key element of the lifting of these restrictions is that sporting events could now proceed, indoor and outdoor, in front of capacity audiences and with no requirement for digital Covid certificates. On 15th February the north's Health Minister Robin Swann announced similar easements. We had clearly turned a corner in the fight against Covid. While it hasn't gone away, things have

largely returned to what is referred to as the 'pre-covid normal.' We can but only hope that it will be many years into the future before a pandemic of such scale and trauma visits this earth again.

GAMES ACTIVITY 2022

For the third consecutive year, the Ulster Senior Football Championship occupied a different time slot in the calendar- in 2020 the final was played at the end of November, in 2021 it was played at the end of July and in 2022 it was played at the end of May. An April commencement of the championship was a new departure for the Association. In Ulster it commenced with All-Ireland champions Tyrone travelling to Brewster Park for the Preliminary Round and ended six weeks later with a new resting place in Derry for the Anglo Celt Cup - the first time in 24 years that it resided in the Oak Leaf County. Well done to everyone who played their part in this momentous achievement.

The Ulster Under 20 Football Championship returned to its traditional spring slot in the calendar and again we were treated to some fantastic games. Tyrone defeated Cavan by the bare minimum in the final at Brewster Park and that was after their semi-final win over Donegal came after extra time and penalties. The Red Hand County went on to collect the ultimate honour and win the All-Ireland title. Congratulations to Tyrone on such a wonderful success.

The 2022 Ulster Minor Football Championship was organised in the same window as the Senior Championship and again featured a back door format. Neither finalist required this safety net and Tyrone

and Derry served up a cracking encounter, in what was the curtain raiser to the Senior Final in Clones. Tyrone's goal touch proved to be the difference in the end, as they won by four points.

The Allianz Football League again had contrasting fortunes for the Ulster counties. Armagh, Donegal, Monaghan and Tyrone all competed in the top tier. Interestingly, the four Ulster counties occupied the middle four positions at the end of the league. All counties would have been satisfied to retain their Division One status for 2023. In Division Two, Derry narrowly missed out on promotion due to dropping points to the top two sides, while Down failed to win a game and were relegated. Division Three included Antrim and Fermanagh and while neither made the top two they will be content to remain in this competitive tier for 2023. Cavan were our sole representatives in Division Four and they performed admirably to gain promotion to Division Three by topping the division and they went on to win the title by defeating Tipperary in the final at Croke Park. It was Cavan's first national title won at headquarters since their Sam Maguire Cup success of 1952.

In the Allianz Hurling League, Antrim, despite losing their five games in Division 1B, defeated Offaly in the Relegation Play Off and retained their topflight status. Down had a great campaign in Division 2A, winning four out of five games. However, they lost out to Westmeath in the League Final. Derry topped Division 2B and went on to win the final by defeating Sligo. Donegal finished in the second slot but lost out to Sligo in the semi-finals. Tyrone took the honours in

Division 3A, defeating Armagh in the final. Armagh finished third and beat Roscommon in the semi-final, while Monaghan finished in fourth place. Finally, in Division 3B, Fermanagh topped the group and defeated Longford in the final, while Cavan had a tough league campaign, losing all four games.

The Dr McKenna Cup is a competition that returned in 2022 to great aplomb and in the new split season it serves an important purpose in helping counties prepare for their Allianz League campaigns. To conclude a highly entertaining competition, Monaghan defeated Donegal in the final at O'Neill's Healy Park in Omagh. The Conor McGurk Cup, organised in conjunction with Queen's University, continues to grow in stature and once again served up some very exciting games. In the final, played at The Dub, Donegal looked to be on course for a surprise victory but a late Down comeback saw the Mourne men collect the trophy right at the death.

SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2022 Ulster Senior Football Championship commenced at Brewster Park, Enniskillen, on Saturday 16th April, where Fermanagh competed well for long spells but Tyrone eventually won out by 2-17 to 2-10 to progress to the quarter-final. The following weekend, we had two quarter-finals, which illustrates the condensed nature of the championship now. Antrim hosted Cavan in Corrigan Park and progressed via a 1-20 to 0-10 scoreline, while Donegal produced a strong team performance to defeat Armagh by 1-16 to 0-12 in Páirc MacCumhaill.

In the other two quarter-finals, Monaghan comprehensively defeated Down by 0-23 to 2-7 at Clones, while Derry travelled to O'Neills Healy Park and dethroned the Ulster champions in a well-deserved 1-18 to 0-10 victory. The first semi-final saw Cavan and Donegal meet in Clones on Sunday 8th May. A strong finish from the

Donegal men, including goals from Conor O'Donnell and Patrick McBrearty, saw them emerge as six-point winners and in the second semi-final the Derry crusade continued as they accounted for Monaghan by 3-12 to 0-17 in the Athletic Grounds.

The Ulster Final took place on Sunday 29th May in front of a full house in St Tiernach's Park, Clones. The colour and noise on show was a joy to behold and with the Ulster Minor Football Final played as a curtain raiser, we were almost back to pre-Covid 19 normality. The presence of the Mayobridge Band, Cumann na mBunscol games and honouring our Jubilee team (Cavan 1997) contributed to a truly remarkable occasion which was added to by an intriguing spectacle, even if it wasn't a game for the football purist. Derry and Donegal could not be separated after 70 minutes and extra-time was required (it previous times there would have been a replay). In those additional 20 minutes vital scores from Brendan Rogers and Conor Glass proved pivotal as so Derry reclaimed the Anglo Celt Cup for the first time since 1998, in a titanic tussle. Chrissy McKaigue was the proudest Derry man alive as he accepted the cup on behalf of his county, in what was a great day for Ulster and an even better one for Derry.

ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

With the introduction of the Tailteann Cup, the All-Ireland Qualifiers stage was reduced significantly. In Round One Monaghan travelled to Mayo, while Armagh and Tyrone faced off in the Athletic Grounds. In a tight affair throughout, the Westerners' goal proved to be pivotal as they won by 1-13 to 0-12 at McHale Park, Castlebar. The





all-Ulster tie at the Athletic Grounds was another great event in front of an almost full-house. The home side played some great football to the joy of the large home support and deservedly won by 1-16 to 1-10 and so ended the reign of Tyrone as All-Ireland champions.

The following weekend, on Sunday 12th June, Armagh and beaten Ulster finalists Donegal met for the second time in the 2022 Championship and despite a slow start the Orchard County gained revenge for their Ballybofey defeat, with a surprisingly comfortable 3-17 to 0-16 victory at St Tiernach's Park, Clones.

Ulster had, therefore, just two representatives left by the All-Ireland Quarter Final stage. Armagh and Galway played out a cliffhanger in Croke Park, with a late Armagh surge, including a point from a monstrous Rian O'Neill free, took the game to extra-time and when the additional 20 minutes ended the sides could still not be separated. Roll on the first ever penalty shoot-out in Croke Park and it resulted in a win for the Westerners, who were unerring with their spot-kicks, and it was they who progressed to the last four of the competition.

Derry produced a strong attacking display to defeat Clare by 5-13 to 2-08 at Croke Park in the All-Ireland quarter-final. They then faced Armagh's conquerors, Galway, in the semi-final and, despite a solid start to the game, failed to match the intensity of the Tribesmen in the second period and by the final whistle they found themselves five points adrift, losing out on a 2-8 to 1-6 final scoreline. It was a disappointing end to an otherwise brilliant year for the

Derry senior football team.

MINOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2022 Electric Ireland Ulster Minor Football Championship commenced on 16th April with Fermanagh playing Down in Brewster Park, as a curtain raiser to the senior game there on that day. Fermanagh won this Preliminary Round clash by three points, sending Down into the 'back door' route. In Round One, the following weekend, there were wins for Antrim, Donegal, Derry and Tyrone. The following Friday night, Monaghan eliminated Armagh in Qualifier Round One tie in the Athletic Grounds and on Saturday 7th May there were wins in the 'front door' for Derry over Donegal and Tyrone over Antrim. Meanwhile in the qualifier route Cavan and Monaghan eliminated Fermanagh and Down respectively. In the final qualifying round Cavan defeated Antrim and Donegal defeated Monaghan to leave only four contenders remaining.

In the semi-finals, Derry staved off a late Cavan comeback to win out by 0-16 to 0-11, while Tyrone defeated Donegal on penalties, after they couldn't be separated after extra time.

The final was played as a curtain raiser to the Senior Final and the early arrivals in Clones were treated to an absolutely pulsating spectacle. It was fitting that team captain and Player of the Match, Eoin McElholm, had the final say as his late goal secured the win for the Red Hand County on a 4-08 to 0-16 scoreline. Congratulations Tír Eoghain.

In the All-Ireland Quarter Finals, on Saturday 11th June, both

Ulster counties were involved in a double header in MV Hire O'Moore Park, Portlaoise against Munster opposition. Tyrone lost out to Kerry by a point, while Derry beat the Munster champions, Cork by 0-12 to 0-6 to move into the semi-finals. A fortnight later in Parnell Park, Derry lost out by the bare minimum to eventual winners, Galway on a 2-9 to 1-11 scoreline to end Ulster's involvement in the Tom Markham Cup competition.

UNDER 20 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Ulster Under 20 Football Championship was played on Friday nights throughout the months of March and April. Organising three football championships simultaneously has its challenges and it left weekends' particularly congested. Things were further complicated by some counties having commenced their club league programmes prior to the conclusion of this competition and, moving forward, moving the U-20



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championship to its former midweek slot is something that needs to be seriously considered.

The Preliminary Round saw the holders Down take on Fermanagh in Páirc Esler and they had a comfortable 2-13 to 0-7 victory. The following weekend, there were wins for Derry, Donegal, Cavan and Tyrone in the quarter finals over Antrim, Armagh, Monaghan and defending champions Down respectively. In the semi-finals' Cavan edged out Derry by two points at the Athletic Grounds, while Tyrone required extra-time to defeat Donegal in Celtic Park in a thrilling 3-16 to 2-16 encounter. In the final at Brewster Park, Ruairi Canavan's accuracy from placed balls proved to be the difference between the sides as Tyrone edged out a gallant Cavan side by a single point on a 0-11 to 0-10 score line.

In the All Ireland Semi Final, a late Ciaran Bogue goal proved to be the key score as Tyrone overcame Munster champions, Kerry by 1-14 to 1-12 at Portlaoise. A sublime team performance was then delivered on All-Ireland Final day as Tyrone overcame Kildare by -20 to 1-14 in Carrick on Shannon to claim the sixth title at this level for the Red Hand County. Congratulations to the entire team and management on a tremendous achievement.

CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS

With Covid-19 delaying the start of the Club championship season, the 2021 AIB Provincial Club Championships ran into January 2022 and once again Ulster was to the fore in serving up some memorable encounters. In football the holders Kilcoo retained their title, easily overcoming Derrygonnelly Harps in the final.



Steelstown became the first Derry side to win the Intermediate title after defeating Moortown in a low-scoring encounter, while Denn of Cavan collected the Junior silverware after overcoming Downings in the decider. Slaughtneil retained the Four Seasons Cup by overcoming Ballycran, while Banagher defeated Lisbellaw to make it an Intermediate double for the Oak Leaf County. Craobh Rua became the first Armagh Club to win the Ulster Junior Hurling title, with a well-earned victory over Carrickmacross in Newry.

After collecting their second Ulster title, Kilcoo required extra-time to see off the challenge of Munster champions St. Finbarr's (Cork) in the All-Ireland semi-final and extra-time was again the order of the day when, on 13 February, 'The Magpies' reached the promised land with a magnificent 2-8 to 0-13 victory over Kilmacud Crokes (Dublin), thanks to a late goal from Jerome Johnston.

A week prior to Kilcoo's success, Steelstown (Derry) lifted the All-Ireland Intermediate title with a

convincing victory over Trim (Meath). It was however their All-Ireland semi-final victory over Na Gaeil (Kerry) which paved the way for this glorious success. Congratulations to both clubs on such memorable achievements. You have created a very special place in GAA history for your respective clubs.

After an All-Ireland quarter-final victory over British champions St. Brendan's (Lancashire), Denn felt the full force of Gneeveguilla (Kerry) in the All-Ireland semi-final and were comprehensively defeated but the Breffni men can still look back with pride on a great year.

Slaughtneil lost out to eventual champions Ballygunner (Waterford) in the senior semi-final, while Kilmoyley (Kerry) ended the hopes of Banagher. Craobh Rua travelled to Birmingham for their All-Ireland quarter-final encounter with British champions Fullen Gaels (Lancashire) and what a game it turned out to be, with the British side winning out on penalties after the teams couldn't be separated



after extra-time.

HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

The restructuring of the national competitions aims to provide a high number of games for Ulster counties at their own level and it was another successful year for Ulster teams across the various grades at which they compete.

In the Tier Two competition, the Joe McDonagh Cup, Down, despite winning two of their four games (including a great away win in Kerry) failed to progress and it was left to the Glensmen to pick up the honours for the province. Antrim topped the group and subsequently faced Kerry in the final. In a brilliant game played at Croke Park, where Antrim led by 12 points after 25 minutes, they just held on to win in a 5-22 to 4-24 classic. Well done to the players and management.

In the Liam McCarthy Cup, the following weekend, Antrim were

drawn at home to Cork in the Preliminary Quarter Final in Corrigan Park on 11th June. Antrim played some great hurling particularly in the first half, but Cork's class and power saw them run out 3-27 to 2-19 winners. However, by virtue of their Joe McDonagh success they qualified to play in the 2023 Leinster Senior Hurling Championship and no doubt they'll be looking forward to welcoming Kilkenny and Dublin to Belfast.

In the Christy Ring Cup, Derry were the sole Ulster representatives. In the six-team group they finished third and despite missing out on a final place, they retain their status for the 2023 season.

In the Nickey Rackard Cup, Ulster were represented by Armagh, Donegal, Fermanagh and Tyrone. In the six-team group, Tyrone finished second and qualified for the final, Donegal came third, Armagh fourth and Fermanagh fifth. In the final, played

at Croke Park on 27th May, Tyrone produced a great display of finishing to beat Roscommon by 1-27 to 0-19 and collect the Nickey Rackard Cup. Congratulations to all concerned. Ulster were represented by Cavan and Monaghan in the Lory Meagher Cup. Cavan had a difficult campaign where they lost all five games while Monaghan's involvement was much more complex. They won four out of their five games but were deducted four points for fielding an ineligible player and subsequently finished in fourth position.

Comhairle Laighean agreed to accommodate one Ulster County in the 2022 Leinster Under 21 Hurling Championship. Antrim and Down indicated that they wished to compete for this place and played a qualifier on Friday 18th March. Antrim proved too strong, winning out on a 0-23 to 2-09 score line at Dunsilly. They progressed to the Leinster Championship where they were defeated by a strong Laois side at Parnell Park on a 3-21 to 0-12 score line. Down subsequently entered the All-Ireland B Competition and went on to win the Richie McElligott Cup by defeating Roscommon in an exciting final in Kingspan Breffni Park.

Antrim, Derry and Down participated in the Leinster Minor Hurling Championship in 2022. They were all in the Tier Three section where they each played five games. Antrim topped the group, while Down finished fifth and Derry finished in sixth position. Antrim then defeated Kildare in the Preliminary Quarter Final before losing out to eventual winners Offaly in the quarter finals. Down progressed to the Peadar Ó Liathain Cup (Leinster Minor 'B' Hurling Competition), while the remaining Ulster counties competed



in the Celtic Challenge.

OTHER HURLING COMPETITIONS

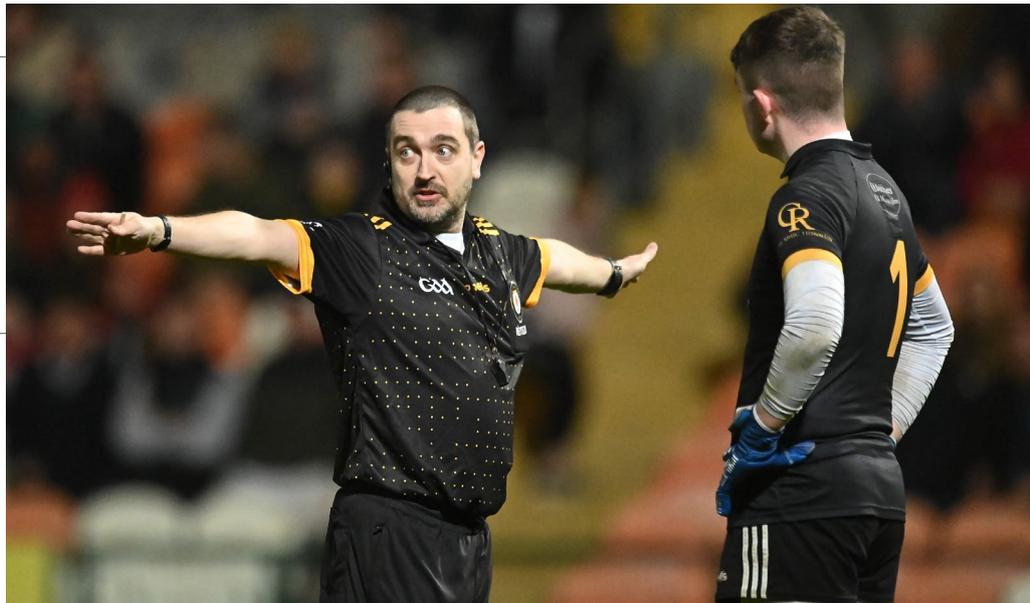
Some 104 teams from 15 counties participated in the Cúchulainn League and the Tain Og League in 2022 and this is testament to the great work being done at this level and it gives young hurlers a chance to compete at their own level against teams of similar standard from other counties.

2022 also saw a welcome return of the Poc Fada after a two-year absence due to the pandemic. Pearse Smyth (Down) took the provincial title and along with runner-up Cormac Gough (Derry) he competed in the All-Ireland competition which was held on Annaverna Mountain, in the Cooley Range, on Monday 1st August. The other Ulster winners, who also competed that day, were Ulster Senior Ladies winner Catherine Muldoon (Tyrone), Roisin McCormack (Antrim), Sean Óg McLaren of Antrim (U-16 Boys winner) and Tiarna Kelly of Derry (U-16 Girl's winner).

SCHOOLS COMPETITIONS

The GAA in the province is very fortunate to have many dedicated people working with teams at primary, post-primary and third-level and I thank each and every one of them for their ongoing efforts. At a time when budgets in the education sector face increasing challenges, it is more important than ever for all units to offer what support we can to our educational institutions. For many of our players, their first introduction to Gaelic Games is in the schools and it is important that the contribution of the education sector to the GAA family is never taken for granted.

At second level there was an



important breakthrough victory for St. Patrick's High School, Downpatrick who collected their first Mageean Cup title, while the MacRory Cup returned to St. Mary's, Magherafelt. With the support of Danske Bank, Ulster GAA/ Ulster Schools have been able to employ a communications student on their gap year to promote schools' competitions and I thank Michelle Campbell and Sarah Geoghegan, both of whom have been ably mentored by Niall Muldoon, for their work in this sphere.

Why we all like to win, there are times when there is a greater good and Ulster Schools are to be commended on their initiative adopted for the D'Alton Cup (U-13.5 level) which stipulated that teams would have to make five substitutions each after 20 minutes of play, so guaranteeing at least 20 minutes of game time for 50 players during the course of the game. While this was incorporated in the competition regulations, the necessary permissions for deviation from rule were not sought but, that said, the Ulster Schools Committee were entitled to believe that this regulation would be embraced universally, given what it had set out to achieve. Unfortunately, that proved not to be case, and the matter finally ended up at the table of the GAA's Central Appeals Committee. While the appellent school won their case at being removed from the competition (the

penalty imposed by Ulster Schools for breach of the regulation), the net effect of the successful appeal was that every game in the competition was nullified. As a consequence, everyone lost and the D'Alton Cup, unfortunately, has no winners for 2022.

REFEREES

In concluding my summary of games activity in 2022, I wish to thank our match officials. I thank all our referees for their time, commitment and involvement in the delivery of our much-reduced games programme. I must make special mention of Sean Hurson, the Ulster Referee of the Year. Sean took charge of the All-Ireland Club Final, the Ulster Senior Football Final and the All-Ireland Senior Football Final, sealing a magnificent year for the Galbally Peareses clubman. I also congratulate Niall Cullen on being appointed to referee the All-Ireland Minor Football Final, Barry Cassidy on being appointed to referee the inaugural Tailteann Cup Final and Colm McDonald on refereeing the Nickey Rackard Cup final.

The fact that three referees from the province refereed provincial senior football finals – as well as Sean Hurson in Ulster, Martin McNally refereed the Munster Final and Joe McQuillan the Connacht Final – shows the great depth of refereeing talent in the province and I thank everyone involved in providing the necessary support to our referees. In particular,



I thank Ryan Mellon, Eoin McNicholl and Gary Mallon for their support to referees on the National Panel and on the Referees Academy and to committee Chair Sean Rooney and Secretary Jim O'Rourke for their ongoing support to all our officials. Ulster GAA are in the process of finalising our Referees Pathway document, which we hope to launch in early 2023. Without referees, there are simply no games. Referees make themselves available, sometimes at very short notice, and on behalf of Ulster GAA I say thank you all for your continued dedication and service. It is therefore a matter of growing concern at the level of physical, verbal and online abuse that a number of referees have been subjected to in recent times. In support of referees, the Association

held a 'respect day' in October but every day should be a 'respect day' for the referee. How a person treats a referee says more about them than the referee. As All-Ireland Final referee Sean Hurson recently said; "Respect for all decisions – and you're not going to get them all right – and I think everybody could take a reset." Let's hope we can all heed these wise words and take a reset and that 2023 will not see a repeat of some of the horrific actions we witnessed during the past year.

NEW FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP STRUCTURES

After the robust debate prior to the Special Congress in October 2021, which failed to gain any consensus in relation to a revised structure for the Senior Football Championship,

the so-called 'green' proposal was adopted to universal approval at the GAA Congress in February, receiving almost 95% of the vote. With the groundwork having been done in advance, delegates arriving in Began for the Congress knew in advance that the passing of the first motion on the clár was almost a formality. Following the Special Congress it was clear that there were a number of factors that needed to be incorporated in any revised Championship structure.

These included;

- The link between the provincial championships and the All-Ireland series needed to be maintained;
- League performance needed to be recognised as a factor in determining Sam Maguire Cup/Tailteann Cup status;

- There needed to be 'reward' for the Tailteann Cup winners

As promised following the Special Congress, the Uachtarán put in place a workgroup with the task of bringing forward a motion that was likely to receive consensus at the 2022 Congress. The group went about its task methodically and efficiently, with all submissions evaluated and two potential motions were put forward to the January Ard Comhairle meeting – these became known as the 'green' and 'red' options.

The 'red' option was in essence a tweaked form of Proposal B motion which failed to get across the line at the October 2021 Special Congress. It varied in two respects from Proposal B in that it envisaged the leagues being re-structured from the existing Divisions 1,2,3 and 4 to 1A, IB, 2A and 2B and it attempted to create a link between the provincial championships (which



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would have still been played in the winter/early spring) and the League/Championship, in that it guaranteed provincial winners four home games and, significantly, awarded two and one league/championship points respectively to provincial championship winners and runners-up. For those who had touted the successive provincial successes of Dublin and Kerry as reason to 'divorce' the provincial championship from the All-Ireland series, it did seem somewhat bizarre to 'reward' provincial championship winners with a two points 'head-start' in the League/Championship.

While it did find favour with some exponents of Proposal B, it soon became obvious that the tweaked version of the proposal was failing to capture the imagination of the GAA public. With the alternative 'green' proposal being more attractive to the GAA membership, the 'red' proposal ran out of road and when put to delegates at the January Central Council meeting it failed to find one supporting voice. Even the GPA, such strong advocates of Proposal B, conceded that the 'green' proposal was, without question, the better fare on offer. Its adoption at Congress was never in question.

This is not to say that the 'green' proposal is perfect –there's probably no such thing in GAA world! Crucially, however, it incorporated much of the fundamental arguments from both sides of the Special Congress debate and tied them together in a manner which gained widespread consensus. This year we'll find out how it will work in practice – an exciting season awaits!

NEIL MCGEE AND MICHAEL MURPHY

Just weeks after Gaoth Dobhair's Neil McGee announced his retirement from inter-county football, came the announcement that, perhaps, the county's greatest and most influential footballer Michael Murphy had also departed the inter-county scene. As 'Irish Times' journalist Malachy Clerkin wrote after his retirement: "for a decade and a half Donegal had various players who could do various things. They had one player who could do all of the things."

In many ways the paths of Neil McGee and Michael Murphy mirrored each other. Both have one All-Ireland Senior Football medal, five Ulster Senior Football Championship medals and three All-Star Awards. Michael captained Donegal in each of his five winning Ulster Championship campaigns and no person has raised the Anglo-Celt Cup more than he has. Famously too, he lifted the Sam Maguire Cup in that memorable year of 2012 and also captained Donegal as they narrowly lost out to Kerry in the All-Ireland Final two years later. The Glenswilly man also captained the Donegal side that narrowly failed to Dublin in the 2010 U-20 final.

Michael Murphy also won three Donegal Senior Football Championship medals and while Neil had to settle for two Senior Championship medals, in 2018 he went on to add an Ulster Club Championship medal to his collection, before bowing out to Connacht and All-Ireland champions Corofin in the All-Ireland semi-final. Both men have graced the famous green and gold jersey with distinction and have left a legacy second to none for the people of the north-west

and beyond. Two great servants of Donegal and Ireland – enjoy your retirement and may you continue to grace the club field of Donegal for many years to come.

KEVIN MCKERNAN

We tend to laud those great hurlers and footballers who retire laden with All-Ireland medals but for every one of such heroes there are many more who take their own journey but at the end of their careers have little to show other than a lifetime of memories and an inner contentment of the part they have played in the great GAA journey – not to mention the odd regret! The accolade of being an All-Ireland medalist eluded Kevin McKernan but what an inter-county career he had.

After being first called into the Down senior panel by Ross Carr, Kevin called time on his inter-county career after Down's Tailteann Cup exit in 2022. After 16 seasons of outstanding leadership and total commitment to the 'red and black', he didn't owe Down football a bead of sweat! He played under six different Down management set-ups.

While the Celtic Cross eluded him – his only inter-county honour came in the form of a Dr McKenna Cup medal – the Burren man made an indelible mark on the game and in 2010 had the honour of playing in the All-Ireland final but a harrowing one-point defeat by Cork ensured there would be no happy ending to what was a remarkable season for the Mourne County.

Kevin played four International Rules tests for Ireland and captained Abbey CBS to MacRory and Hogan Cup success in 2006. He won a Sigerson



Cup medal 11 years later and helped Down to an All-Ireland Minor title in 2005. He also is the proud holder of an Ulster U-21 Championship medal. His great journey will continue with his beloved Burren and he is never happier than when coaching the next generation of young GAA players. Indeed, he has thrown his hat in with the Down Ladies Football team for the coming season, where he will work alongside manager Peter Lynch. Thanks for some great memories Kevin... and we look forward to many more.

At the end of the year two further stalwarts of the GAA in the province announced their retirement from inter-county football. Clonmore's Brendan Donaghy wore the orange jersey of Armagh with distinction for 17 years, collecting an Ulster medal in 2008, while Trillick's Rory Brennan bowed out having won three Ulster Championship medals, as well as an All-Ireland medal in 2021. While he didn't play in that final, he had lined out for The O'Neill County in the 2018 All-Ireland Final against Dublin. I wish them both well and trust that they will continue to grace the playing fields of Armagh and Tyrone respectively, at club level.

ULSTER HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

In 2018 the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship was put 'on-hold' for a three-year period to mirror the trial period for the new Championship Hurling competition structures. Although impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, these changes have now been adopted and indeed, thanks to their victory in the 2022 Joe McDonagh Cup, Antrim will compete in the Leinster Hurling Championship round-robin for the first time in 2023.

So where do we currently sit in relation to the potential return of the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship? Since the hurling championship trial began in 2018, things have been compounded further by the advent of the split-season and this has resulted in less dates being available to the Ulster Council for the playing of an Ulster Hurling Championship. With that in mind Ulster Hurling Development Committee members consulted with their counties and from the feedback it was clear that no county wanted the Ulster Hurling Championship to return as either a pre-season competition (a slot currently filled by the Conor McGurk Cup) or as an end of season competition. There are not enough available dates either during the league or between the end of the league and the commencement of the tiered championships to facilitate the running of a Senior Hurling Championship. So, unless there is flexibility on the duration of the inter-county season, the return of the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship seems unrealistic.

Additionally, there is widespread agreement within the province that there needs to be a link between any Ulster Senior Hurling Championship and the All-Ireland series. To me, this is crucial for a meaningful competition and I'm on record of saying previously that the day the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship was decoupled from the All-Ireland series, was effectively the day that it lost its status. Given the success of both the round-robin Leinster and Munster Hurling Championships and the Joe McDonagh Cup, since its inception in 2018, it is however unlikely that there will be any further

changes to hurling championship structures any time soon.

Championships are also clearly defined in the Official Guide with regard to their status, so even if it was possible to organise an Ulster Senior Championship, it would require deviation from rule by Central Council to be accommodated, even as a standalone competition. Therefore, unless there is a re-alignment of the inter-county season any return of the Ulster Senior Hurling Championship is unrealistic.

I referred earlier in my report to the Leinster Championship qualifying games that take place annually in the province at U-17 and U-20 levels. It has been agreed that from 2023 that these games may also be referred to as the Ulster Cup and a suitable trophy presented to the respective winners at both levels. This added incentive to teams should enhance the status of these games even further, even though they have largely been competitive affairs to date.

DAMIAN CASEY

On the evening of Friday 17th June word began to filter through of the death by drowning of Tyrone hurler. He was in Spain for a wedding due to take place the following day, at which he was due to be groomsman. The entire country was numbed by this tragic development.

Damian Casey was no ordinary hurler – he was up there with the best. He was a household name throughout the hurling community, not only in his native Tyrone or in Ulster but throughout the entire island. It is no exaggeration to state that the likeable Eoghan Ruadh, Dungannon clubman was undoubtedly Tyrone's

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greatest ever hurler.

Wearing his trademark number 14 jersey Damian wreaked havoc with opposing defences up and down the country. He first played for Tyrone senior hurlers in 2012 and amazingly played in every subsequent league and championship match until the time of his death a decade later. In the 2022 Nickey Rackard Cup semi-final against Donegal he surpassed 1,000 points in league and championship and he added a further 0-14 in Tyrone's final victory over Roscommon to bring his inter-county league and championship tally to 39-909. Surely there has never been a more prolific scorer in the history of Gaelic games?

We all miss Damian but nobody more so than his parents Sean and Susan, sisters Louise and Catherine and his close family circle. His clubmates in Eoghan Ruadh, his county colleagues in Tyrone and indeed the many opponents he faced and had still to face will miss him - he was such a gifted hurler than it was a privilege to share a field with him. Damien was posthumously honoured with a number of awards in 2022, including the Ulster GAA Hurler of the year, the Nickey Rackard Player of the Year and 'The Irish News' Ulster Hurler of the Year. Rest in Peace Damian - if there's a hurling team in heaven, it's just got a lot stronger.

HANDBALL

Ulster GAA have nurtured our relationship further with Ulster GAA Handball in 2022 and on their behalf, secured funding for the appointment of a Development Officer for three years through the RANK Foundation. The appointment of former World Champion Fiona Shannon to this post



has brought much needed full-time support to the volunteers and some additional financial support for programme and facility development. The post holder has a remit for development in schools and clubs and to enhance coach education and female participation, working closely with ad taking advantage of all that the Ulster GAA team has to offer.

There is a large programme of work to further develop the game and we are working with the Coaching & Games section in Croke Park with a view to creating a further post to assist in this process.

ROUNDERS

Thanks to the great efforts of a group of dedicated people Rounders in Ulster is undergoing something of a mini revival. Central Council delegate Anna Bradley (St. Trea's, Ballymacguigan) has been at the

forefront of increased efforts to promote the game with a number of 'taster' events held throughout the past year.

There are presently ten affiliated teams in the province with interest being shown by a number of others, so hopefully this recent success can be built upon.

The Mens' Senior All-Ireland Final was an all-Ulster affair with Erne Eagles (Cavan) retaining their titles by getting the better of Carrick Emmett's (Monaghan), while St. Clare's (Cavan) brought further silverware to the province by winning the Junior Ladies title. Six players from these three clubs were honoured with All-Star Awards.

GAA DISCIPLINARY SYSTEM

The GAA's disciplinary system was tested like never before in 2022.



Seeking a hearing following a penalty proposal by the Competitions Control Committee became the norm, rather than the exception. In many cases the basis of the hearing (or a subsequent appeal) had much more to do with process and procedure as opposed to whether the defendant had or had not committed an offence. There is a growing body of opinion that the GAA disciplinary system is overly bureaucratic and too adversarial in nature. This is not surprising given that there were numerous legal minds involved in the drafting of the current rules. While undoubtedly well intentioned, this has led to undue problems and given the legalistic wording of some of the rules, it is not at all surprising that lawyers (under the guise of being members of the unit involved) regularly represent the defendant an appeal or a hearing. The GAA rulebook sets a standard akin to what is expected in a court of law. This should not be the case for an amateur sport.

Compared to some other sports the GAA's disciplinary system is multi-layered. It has four stages and effectively it provides the 'member' with three opportunities to have a proposed penalty overturned. If there is video or other compelling evidence which proves that the offence for which a member has been offered a proposed penalty is more likely not to have occurred than occurred, then it may be successfully overturned at a hearing. However, if the proposed penalty is enforced at a Hearing, then the member has two further opportunities, at Appeal and, finally, at the Disputes Resolution Authority (DRA), to have the sanction revoked. At Appeal and DRA it is effectively all about process

and procedure and, frankly, at that stage it becomes virtually irrelevant as to whether or not an offence was committed at all. As someone remarked, this is akin to decisions of the District, Circuit, High and Appeal Courts' having to be justified before the Supreme Court.

There is clearly a fundamental flaw in a process which can absolve a 'guilty' party because of an error in procedure, even where there is clear evidence that an offence has been committed. The GAA rulebook sets a standard akin to what is expected in a court of law. This should not be the case for an amateur sport.

Surely there is a case, that where a process has been deemed to be incorrect or flawed in some way, the matter should be sent back for re-processing, rather than having the charge dismissed out of hand.

AGE GRADES

One of the hottest topics of debate within GAA circles over the past year has centred on 'Age-Grades.' With effect from January 1st 2018 the inter-county minor age-grade moved from U-18 to U-17 (this followed a decision taken at the 2016 GAA Congress) and subsequently GAA policy was adopted so that club games must be operated at U-13, U-15 and U-17 levels and at least one underage grade above U-17.

A number of GAA Reports which had been commissioned over the previous decade helped inform this decision - these included the Report of the Taskforce on Player Burnout (2012), 'Keeping Them in the Game' (2013) and The Report of the Minor Review Workgroup' (2015). The overwhelming evidence was that the demands on our most talented

players was both damaging and unsustainable and complimentary to the move from U-18 to U-17 at minor level, was that decoupling would remain at U-17, meaning that all minor players were no longer eligible to participate in adult competitions.

The rationale for moving minor to U-17 (and decoupling at 17) was based on solid rationale but for a variety of reasons counties have struggled to provide meaningful competition(s) at an underage grade above U-17. This has resulted in some players, who would previously have had an extra year at minor level, struggling to compete at adult level and therefore choosing to forego their GAA playing career. There has therefore been a cry from many people voicing the opinion that the minor grade needs to return to U-18 at club level, even though there is strong evidence pointing out that fewer clubs' games have been conceded at U-17 level than what was previously the case at U-18 level.

However, if there is a return to U-18 at club level and decoupling remains at 17, we are largely back to where we were before the change was made, with too many players facing the demands of being part of multiple teams across minor and adult levels (the only significant difference being that if inter-county minor remains at U-17, as seems likely, the elite minor player in his final year at inter-county would not be playing adult). There is no easy solution to the conundrum and if there is a solution that addresses all the concerns which have been raised, then I haven't found it yet. It will require flexibility on all sides and, hopefully, we can arrive at a place where workable accommodation can be found.

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COACHING AND GAMES DEVELOPMENT

2022 was a welcome year for coaching and games as activity within the province made its way back to some sort of normality. Although ever conscious of Covid, staff and volunteers made a welcome return to face-to-face engagements. The legacy and learning from the Covid experience were that a blended mix of online meetings and face to face workshops has become the norm, helping to reduce the number of journeys and time away from family for staff and volunteers.

Our work within primary and post primary schools, further and higher education and our grassroots club coaching programmes has continued throughout 2022. Coaches have been welcomed back into schools. Activity has picked up in clubs, further and higher education and in our counties. I acknowledge the excellent work that is being done in sustaining and promoting our games in this environment by our teachers, development officers, the schools and college staff, as well as our club and county-based volunteers through their administration, coaching and refereeing roles.

DELIVERING ON THE PATHWAY THROUGH OUR PROGRAMMES

Ulster GAA has been working to address all stages of the new player pathway. Initiatives and programmes have targeted all stages from fundamentals (F1) through to high Performance (E1). Staff delivery has been professional and has engaged work areas from Sport Science through to Performance and Lifestyle, Athletic Development, Disability and Special Needs to Handball, Coach Education, Club Coaching

Development, Performance Coach development, and a comprehensive Games programme to suit schools, clubs and academies. In addition, we have mapped our referee's development and coach education onto the pathway..

FUNDING

Development work could not happen without the support of our funding partners. With a base of some 160,000 playing members across our codes, we have a huge participation base. Funding to sustain Coaching and Games Development continues to come from four sources: Sport NI, The Department for Education, National GAA and Ulster GAA.

Sport NI is a significant funder for our work. In 2022 they extended their support for funding for one year, under their transition programme. This has allowed us to continue our direct support to key areas such as handball, disability, club coaching support, football, ladies football and hurling. As we move towards 2023, we recognise that there are gaps in our provision, and we will work with Sport NI to see if we can retain funding and fill these gaps.

Department for Education NI continues to support our Curriculum Sports programme. This programme has been embedded for over 18 years but funding challenges has resulted in this being reduced to 10 core staff on delivery. Recent failures by the Executive to agree a budget for a period in excess of one year has led to continued uncertainty surrounding this Programme and this uncertainty allows little opportunity for forward planning and a lack of job security for staff. Ulster GAA continues to encourage the Department to look

at this programme long term, but we fully understand and appreciate the challenges they face in the absence of an Executive and an agreed budget. The Sports Institute doesn't provide direct funding for development, but it does assign hours to GAA so that we can access their services. This has been used in the past year to support one to one engagement with players, deliver workshops to groups of service providers and to support hurling teams to look at their team, their environment, their culture and relate this to performance. We continue this relationship and hope that we can develop it further to be inclusive and involve our Ladies' codes.

National GAA also continue to support our County and Provincial staffing structures, though the ongoing National HR Review has caused uncertainty in some quarters. A Project Team is now working through the findings of the independently commissioned report and early decisions on the way forward should emerge shortly. It is clear at this early stage, however, that whatever the final outcomes may be, they will have an impact on roles and responsibilities and on who employs, manages staff throughout the Association.

GAMES DEVELOPMENT

Hurling Development continues to be run centrally by Ulster GAA, with development officers assigned to regions. Some of the initiatives are closely linked with National initiatives. The regional competitions involving teams from North Leinster and Connacht continue to be challenging and successful, though they provide the right level of competition. Counties need to be



fully aware of when these fixtures are happening and draw up their own fixtures' plans in a way which will avoid clashes.

Over the winter we have been running indoor games opportunities, targeting our smaller clubs with 9-a-side blitzes. Cross community initiatives continue in the integrated sector and through our Cuchulainn's Coaching Programme. O'g Sport was again successful and the work in the Prisons has continued.

Across all codes, coaching in schools, the development of new referees, coach education and academy support provides a focus for the development officers. In addition, we must all continue to strive to change coaching behaviour and the behaviour of players and spectators. We must the player at the centre of our focus, encourage development, instil respect for our referees and ensure that our games are not just about winning.

COACH EDUCATION AND CONFERENCE

Our Coach Education programme continues to provide challenging opportunities for coaches at all levels. High performance workshops have been held for inter-county and academy coaches, while Foundation, Level 1 and Level 2 courses continue to be organised for coaches at club and schools' levels. To supplement this, online and face to face workshops have taken place and Ulster GAA's annual Coaching Conference was held in November.

It was back face to face and was hosted at Ulster University Jordanstown. Eleven practical workshops and two keynote



addresses were well received in this excellent facility, which is linked to the Sports Institute. Liam Sheedy and Martin Kennedy delivered the keynote addresses, while practical sessions were delivered by former World Handball Champion Paul Brady, former Westmeath Manager Jack Cooney and former Irish International Rugby Union player Gary Longwell. Presentations were made to four of our Master Tutors who, when combined, have given over 120 years to Coach and Tutor development in our Province. I wish to formally pay tribute to Anthony Harkin (Donegal), Terence McWilliams (Derry), Brendan Harpur (Tyrone) and Frank Dawson (Antrim) for their many years of service and continued dedication to our games. I also thank all contributors to the conference and pay a special thanks to O'Neill's International Sportswear for their continued sponsorship of this event.

PROGRAMMES IMPACTING OUR

SYSTEM

Our interventions continue to have an impact on the physical and mental wellness of our members. They continue to help our sports develop and be sustained. While the outcome of the ongoing HR Review will no doubt inform the future direction of programme investment, we will continue to be creative in our delivery and we welcome the introduction of the online Athletic Development Programme for 2023 which will support inclusion, diversity, in our playing games and coaching practice.

SAFEGUARDING & CHILD PROTECTION

At the end of September, a former Treasurer of Crossmaglen Rangers GAA Club pleaded guilty to 139 charges of abuse against vulnerable young men ranging over a period of almost 30 years, having earlier pleaded guilty to 23 other charges. In a statement issued at the time the GAA apologised to the victims

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and their families and he praised the victims for their courage in coming forward and for their co-operation with both GAA and statutory authorities. This is a highly traumatic experience for all involved and for many of the victims the scars may last a lifetime.

It has also been and remains a difficult experience for those GAA officials who have been dealing with the victims and I place on record my thanks and gratitude to these individuals for their sterling efforts in the most difficult of circumstances. In particular, I commend the efforts of our Safeguarding Manager Bernie Fox who has put endless hours of effort into this case and has been a valuable source of comfort to both victims and the club.

As we have moved to living with Covid, we have continued to adapt and deliver on our Key Safeguarding Priorities throughout 2022. It is vital that we continue to ensure that this important area of our Governance continues to operate to the highest possible standards. We continue to utilise our online platforms, and we welcomed a move to online course registrations for all Safeguarding Courses. 2023 will see us join Garda Vetting on Foireann for the online verification of ID Documents. Our ongoing advice, guidance and assistance to our members and constituent units reaffirms the need to ensure clubs are compliant with GAA Code of Behaviour (underage) in our work with children and young people as we assist them in navigating very complex and sensitive Safeguarding matters. Our Safeguarding Policies are comprehensive in content and robust when applied as required in our work

with children and young people wherever they partake in Gaelic Games and associated activities. We can never allow ourselves to become complacent in their application and we welcome and encourage that all members continue to respectfully challenge any behaviour that they know not to be appropriate or not in keeping with the GAA Code of Behaviour (underage) through the channels that exist within the structures of the Associations, and are never afraid to raise issues, particularly in relation to matters of a Safeguarding nature.

Our 'Give Respect, Get Respect' campaign is an area of our work in which all clubs must try to implement to the best of their ability, leading by example and ensuring that the culture that exists within our clubs is one based on mutual respect and is inclusive of all. Any breach of our Association Rules or GAA Code of Behaviour (underage) must be dealt with in a fair, timely and appropriate manner. There is no place in our games for unacceptable behaviour and it is a responsibility we all bear to uphold the highest possible standards in how we conduct ourselves.

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 a legal requirement and Association Rule 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 Children's Officers and Designated Liaison

Persons must continue to lead on Safeguarding matters and ensure that they are compliant with legal and best practice requirements. 2022 saw the first Sport Ireland Self-Assessment Compliance Audit across the Associations in all units on the island. This was a mammoth task to ensure that all clubs completed as required on the Sport Ireland online portal. I thank all of those who worked to ensure this was achieved and to our units for their assistance in ensuring their timely completion. To assist with this, our annual club audit lists were provided to all clubs at the end of the year and it is evident that clubs are keen to ensure compliance with Legal requirements and Association Rules across the board, as we experienced record numbers of members vetted and trained in our suite of Safeguarding courses.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the members of an Choiste Slánchumhdaithe Uladh, chaired by Anne Fortune, whose passion and drive to lead our Ulster Safeguarding Team ensures that our work across Ulster continues to be at the fore. To our County Chairpersons, Designated Liaison Persons and Children's Officers and all of those who support them in this area of work. To outgoing Children's Officer in Donegal, Daireen McMenamin, we are forever grateful for your tireless work, for the professionalism you brought to the role and the manner in which you carried out your role at all times. I wish to acknowledge our key partners across Statutory Agencies, Government Departments and in other Sporting Organisations, it is truly through working together that we will continue to raise Safeguarding standards across the board and indeed learn from one another as we



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do so.

The work and dedication of Ulster GAA's Safeguarding Manager Bernie Fox is of the highest standard and she is a recognised leader in this field. Much of her work goes unnoticed but the support and value she brings to the table is truly exceptional. On many occasions she goes beyond the call of duty and her compassion, skills, knowledge and empathy are recognised across both statutory and voluntary sectors.

I also wish to thank Conn Stevenson for his exceptional work as part of the Ulster GAA Safeguarding team, and to Rory Lamb who joined us for four months to assist us. I also wish to thank Michelle Harte and Kayleen Iwasaki from Croke Park for their assistance throughout the year and to Ulster GAA Independent Board member Marcella Leonard for her guidance, advice and invaluable help. Finally, I wish to pay a special tribute to Gearóid Ó Maoilmhícheil, who recently retired from the role of national safeguarding manager. I am indebted to him for his guidance and support and hope that he is now able to enjoy some hard-earned retirement with his family.

FINANCE

The financial statements presented emphasise that Ulster GAA has had a reasonably strong year from a financial perspective. This performance can be attributed to three main areas; the retention of the significant public funding that Ulster GAA receives, distributions from Central GAA and a return to full spectator numbers resulting in gate receipts and streaming income of £1.7m. In addition, the Covid Recovery Programme for Sporting

Organisations was a welcome intervention by the Department for Communities/Sport NI, with over £2m awarded to GAA clubs, including £170,642 to Ulster GAA, and this has undoubtedly assisted clubs in maintaining provisions for their members.

The reintroduction of the Club Development Grants for 2022 is very welcome, with €1m committed to assist clubs in the improvement and development of their physical infrastructure. Given that over 40% of clubs in Ulster have made application to the fund, it is clearly evident that clubs are continuing to upgrade their facilities despite the difficulties posed by Covid-19 and the global economy

I want to pay tribute to Ulster GAA Cisteoir Declan Woods in his first year in the role who, along with the Finance Committee, has played a very active role in moving Ulster GAA to a cashless entity, with the introduction of scanning access to all of our fixtures. I would also like to thank our County Treasurers' and relevant county personnel for their much-valued assistance in the co-ordination and hosting of our games. I wish to acknowledge the contribution and efforts of the Ulster GAA Finance team led by Brian Mallon, Ruairi Cunningham and Paul Sanders. With the welcome return of full spectators for our 2022 competitions, I also thank Ashelene Groogan and our new staff member Laura Woods for their commitment and dedication to ticketing arrangements throughout the hectic fixtures schedule. I thank also Kathy Kelly for her assistance with ticketing arrangements during the course of the year.

TWINNING & WORLD GAMES

Ulster GAA continued its strong twinning arrangements with Britain and Canada over the past year. Ulster GAA coaches provided a series of sessions throughout Britain over the autumn and on 12th June Ulster GAA President Ciaran McLaughlin and I had the honour of attending the unveiling of a memorial plaque in Frongoch, commemorating the Gaelic football and athletic events played there - in a field they called 'Croke Park' - by Irish internees in the aftermath of the 1916 Rising, including the famous match between Kerry and Louth, which has been dubbed as the mini All-Ireland Final.

Ulster GAA referees were to the fore at the first Canadian National Championships which took place in Toronto in August. These were hugely successful and it showed the strength of the game in this vast country and the number of Canadian natives that play our games. The strong bonds that Ulster GAA holds with its twinning partners are highly valued by all parties and we will continue to work with them in the coming years to ensure maximum benefit for all.

I offer my congratulations to Derry on being selected to host the 2023 GAA World Games and commend Cavan on their bid application. It is a great honour for Derry, and indeed the entire province to have secured this prestigious event, and I've no doubt that there will be a memorable week of action and that Derry will be welcome hosts to the many visitors who will attend from across the globe.

SPORTS CAPITAL FUNDING

Sixty GAA clubs counties Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal benefitted

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from Sports Capital Programme allocations to the value of €4,643,300, with a further allocation to regional projects at the Donegal GAA Centre of Excellence, Kingspan Breffni Park and St. Tiarnach's Park, Clones bringing the total value of the award in Ulster to €5,221,747. A tremendous award for the individual clubs and counties involved and testament to the efforts of so many people in these counties. The Sports Capital Programme allows sports clubs to plan strategically on the understanding that there are regular opportunities to apply for significant funding to develop their facilities.

Eight Ulster counties benefitted from the Association's County Capital Infrastructure Grant Scheme – which made a welcome return following an absence during the pandemic – with combined funding allocation of €1,065,000. I wish the successful counties well with their proposed development schemes.

CASEMENT PARK

In last year's Convention Report, I expressed my optimism that the late judicial review challenge brought by residents to the July 2021 planning approval (our second planning consent) for Casement Park would not derail the project and that hope became reality on 31st May 2022 in the High Court in Belfast when Mr. Justice Michael Humphries dismissed all the planning matters raised in the legal challenge as being "without merit". This was a judgment that vindicated the work of the entire Ulster GAA project team. No appeal was lodged against the judgment within the statutory period and therefore some five and half years after the submission of our second planning application, no



legal impediments existed in relation to planning issues surrounding the redevelopment.

Prior to the Judicial Review being heard, the Ulster Council and the Project Board were successful in a Court Injunction, on a conflict of issue matter, pertaining to the legal team initially engaged by the objectors. I wish to acknowledge the very significant and skilled work of our Stadium Executive Team, led by Stephen McGeehan (Project Sponsor) who worked diligently with our technical and legal professionals to successfully defend the Casement Park planning approval, alongside officials in the Departments of Infrastructure and Communities. Over recent times our team has re-engaged with the local community and is finalising plans for a new Casement Park Engagement and Benefits Forum, which will play a critical role in ensuring the delivery of significant socio-economic opportunities that a new stadium will deliver for the GAA and for Belfast. Our design team, led by Populous (world renowned stadium architects)

are currently working on the detailed and technical design for the stadium. This will be completed by the spring of 2023 and will bring the design one stage further than what was required to obtain planning approval. As a result of the lengthy delays to the project and the worldwide volatility in the construction sector in recent times, the cost to build the stadium has increased exponentially. Whilst the official cost exercises cannot be completed until the design is finalised, there is no doubt that the budget required will clearly exceed our current funding package. We are working closely with the Department for Communities in progressing the business case and agreeing a funding package to ensure that prior to work starting on site, that the project is fully funded with contingency allowances for any further cost escalation in the period ahead.

Ulster GAA have engaged recently with the Irish Football Association on the FA/FAI bid to host the UEFA European Football Championship in 2028. Both Croke Park and Casement



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Park have been included in the preliminary bid dossier (14 venues) that was submitted in mid-November 2022. The full technical bid will be submitted in April 2023 with anticipated decisions in the autumn of 2023.

The potential for major international tournament games being played so early in the new era for a re-developed Casement Park would be truly transformational and true to the ideals and courage of the Association's firm commitment to the Maze/Long Kesh multi-sport stadium prior to government's invitation to submit plans for investment in GAA owned and controlled venues in 2010. After a year of successfully defending our planning application and bringing our stadium design to a new advanced level of detail, our priority in the coming months is to secure the funding and bring the project to site as soon as practically possible. I place on record my thanks to our enthusiastic and exceptionally committed Project Board Chairman, Tom Daly who continues to lead our Board and team through complex project delivery work and the other members of the Project Board and associated committees for their ongoing support and service to the project.

Our small Ulster GAA Executive team on the project continue to work diligently bringing all matters forward and I want to acknowledge Rory Miskelly, Tim Harkin, Geraldine McKavanagh, Brian Mallon, Paul McGurk and Stephen McGeehan. The ongoing support and co-operation with our Provincial Council from Central level and Antrim GAA is key to the success of managing all the daily pressure such a large-scale

project brings. I am grateful to Ciaran McCavana, Frankie Quinn, Tom Ryan and Uachtaran CLG Larry McCarthy for their contributions.

As Casement Park is a public sector project, ongoing liaison and co-operation with NI Executive and Departments is a vital function. We have been supported tremendously by the Department for Communities and outgoing Minister Deirdre Hargey was a champion for our project in difficult times. I thank Deirdre, the Permanent Secretary of the Communities Colum Boyle and the wider DfC Stadia team for their ongoing commitment to see this long-standing commitment delivered. Finally, I express my gratitude to our Integrated Consultancy Team Mott Mac Donald and our supply contractors Heron Buckingham Joint Venture for their work during 2022. There is no doubt that the continued absence of a functioning Executive will impact some of the key decisions that may need to be taken in the coming period, but we will continue our work with and lobby those in authority to ensure that we do not suffer any further delays to this long overdue project.

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. It also plays a role in public affairs and contributes to relevant engagements with public representatives and external agencies and organisations. There are numerous organisations that request to meet Ulster GAA and likewise there are partnerships we

have established, to 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.

CLUB AND VOLUNTEER CONFERENCE

A highlight for the Club and Community Department was the delivery of a successful Club & Volunteer Conference, in association with Bank of Ireland, delivered online, on Saturday 19th February 2022. The overarching theme of the conference was 'Club Together – Evolve, Deliver and Progress' and this included video case studies from clubs across the province highlighting best practice and experiences in a variety of different areas of club business. These included presentations from four clubs, namely, St Peter's GAA Warrenpoint (Down), Kildress Wolfe Tones (Tyrone), Bunrana GAA (Donegal) and Clan na Gael, Lurgan (Armagh). Guest speakers included Feargal Logan (Tyrone), Aogán Ó Fearghail (former GAA Uachtarán), Stephen Ferris (former Ulster and Ireland Rugby Player) and Fiona Teague (Public Health Agency).

145 Club Officers attended this highly successful club and volunteer conference.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND ENGAGEMENTS WITH EXTERNAL AGENCIES

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Ulster GAA, as lead partner, in conjunction with Ulster Rugby we



and Irish FA have been successful in obtaining funding to deliver a 12-month cross community programme entitled 'Sport Uniting Communities'. This will deliver a range of multisport activities and initiatives that will bring clubs, coaches and young people together from all sides of the community.

PEACE IV/PEACE PLUS

The Peace IV programme is now complete, and the multisport partnership of Ulster GAA, Irish FA and Ulster Rugby are in the process of applying to the new PeacePlus EU funding programme. It is hoped a successful application will result in funding of three Community Sports Development Officers for each sport for a four-year period. It is anticipated that a decision will be made in late 2023.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

Following a close association with CRC over the last few years Ulster GAA made a successful application for funding to deliver GAA activities

to non-traditional GAA groups and schools. This will enable two development officers to deliver set targets in identified areas of need over a two-year period. Ulster GAA also contributed to Good relations Week and attended CRC's Good relations conference on Sustainability.

FORAS NA GAEILGE

Ulster GAA continue to work closely with Foras na Gaeilge to support promotion of the Irish language. Following a four-year programme Foras na Gaeilge provided funding for a further six months to deliver key objectives around Foghlaim sa Chlub (Irish Language Teaching Plan for clubs).

LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND SOLACE

In recent times Ulster GAA have been able to highlight key areas of work to local councils and have submitted a paper to SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives). Local authorities are particularly keen to learn about our Health Initiatives

and Green club programme and see if there are areas of mutual interest. This is a relationship we hope to develop over the next period.

PSNI / AN GARDA SIOCHANA

Ulster GAA continue to engage with the PSNI on areas such as the "One Punch Can Kill" campaign, Road safety and raising awareness of scams through our involvement in the Scamwise partnership. In August 2022 an engagement forum was held in Armagh City Hotel for GAA county and provincial representatives and key representatives from PSNI. This was hugely successful event that enabled counties to make local PSNI connections and both organisations were able to explain about what they do at community level. We also work closely with An Garda Siochana across a range of issues

FORWARD SOUTH PARTNERSHIP

Ulster GAA in conjunction with South Belfast group "Forward South partnership", worked alongside the Third level Institutions (St Mary's, QUB, UU, Belfast Metropolitan College and Stranmillis College) to encourage responsible behaviour on St Patrick's day. A social media campaign was shared with the GAA members in each of these colleges.

NI HUMAN RIGHTS FORUM

Ulster GAA sits on the Sport and Human Rights forum and in October Diarmaid Marsden delivered a podcast outlining how the GAA adheres to good practices around the whole area of Human Rights.

BELFAST PRIDE

To further highlight the emphasis for Equality, Inclusivity and Diversity, on July 31st Ulster GAA participated in Belfast Pride and were joined



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by representatives from National GAA, Ulster LGFA, Ulster Camogie and Ulster Handball. Among the GAA representation in the parade were Aeracha Uladh (newly formed GAA team for those from LGBTQI+ community) Antrim GAA and clubs from Antrim and Down.

INTEGRATED EDUCATION FUND

Ulster GAA has met regularly with the IEF to explore new ways of encouraging GAA activity within the Integrated school sector. Numerous schools have availed themselves of the Integrated Education Sports Equipment Grants to acquire GAA equipment. In conjunction with Ulster Schools, we are trying to attract more post primary schools to take part in blitzes and ability appropriate competitions to encourage more participation. Integrated schools avail of coaching through the CRC funding as well as a significant number participating in the Cuchulainn initiative.

GREEN CLUBS

The Green Club Programme continues to develop across the island with GAA clubs involved in raising awareness of environmental issues and addressing sustainable development goals. The Phase 1 pilot programme concluded with input from 45 GAA Green Clubs, including 10 from Ulster. These clubs were able to avail of advice from partners such as Action renewables, NI Water, Keep NI Beautiful, RSPB and Sustainable NI, alongside direction and guidance from DAERA representatives. The efforts of these clubs have helped to form the GAA Green Clubs Toolkit which was launched in Croke Park on 3rd December as part of the Phase 2 stage of the programme. The Green Clubs Programme is a hugely

important one, and I am enthused by the fact that any GAA club can get involved in this valuable work. The Toolkit will serve to support many clubs and helps to keep the GAA to the fore on matters of sustainability. Ulster GAA are represented on the Green Club steering board by Diarmaid Marsden and Maura McMenamin.

I look forward to continuing to work with our expert partners, local councils and Government Departments North and South, as well as the Green Clubs and other governing bodies of sport who are keen to learn from the GAA Green Club Programme. My thanks to the effort of volunteers within our Green Clubs – you have certainly been the trailblazers for the programme, and I look forward to seeing your legacy grow and expand across the GAA.

CLUB DEVELOPMENT

CLUB MAITH

Club Maith continues to be the recognised brand for club excellence among GAA clubs in Ulster. In the past 12 months four clubs across the Province have achieved Club Maith status; Clan na Gael Lurgan, Kinawley Brian Boru's, Tempo Maguire's and St Joseph's Ballycran. Since its inception in 2007, 87 clubs have now achieved Club Maith Status. Currently there are 70 clubs engaged in the process online and receiving support and guidance with the aim of achieving accreditation in 2023.

CLUB PLANNING

Planning within the Association has long been recognised as a vital component of our continued growth

and development. This is particularly true at club level where a plan provides direction and enables a club to look beyond the day-to-day operations that can, at times, blur a more long-term vision a club may have. Through the National GAA Club Planning Programme, assistance and guidance is available to clubs through trained club planners within their county. Following a call out for expressions of interest, 22 clubs from within Ulster are engaged in the process.

The delivery of this programme would not be possible without the assistance of the Club Planning Facilitators, 15 volunteers from across all nine counties attended training in October equipping them with the skills and tools to guide clubs through the process.

NATIONAL OFFICER DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Ulster GAA continues to have a strong working relationship with the National Officer Development Committee (NODC), chaired by Paddy Flood (Monaghan). 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

VACCINATION VOLUNTEER TEAM

In January 2022, the partnership of Ulster GAA, the British Red Cross and Volunteer Now were called on again to assist with volunteering at the mass vaccination centres for the Covid vaccine boosters. This brought an end to this project for the partnership and Ulster GAA hosted a celebratory dinner ahead

of the Preliminary Round of Ulster Football Championship in Enniskillen, with match tickets included. This was a wonderful occasion which brought volunteers from the three organisations together to thank them for their monumental volunteering efforts during the Covid crisis.

I take this opportunity to put on record our thanks to all those who volunteered; this 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 our Ulster GAA team who led this initiative giving many hours of service to ensuring its success, in particular Diarmaid Marsden and Sharon Haughey-Grimley.

UKRAINE REFUGEE ASSISTANCE CENTRES

The partnership of the British Red Cross, Ulster GAA and Volunteer Now continued in 2022 with the Department of Communities seeking out our help with the volunteering efforts at the Ukraine Refugee Assistance Centres across the north. Responding to the influx of Ukraine refugees to the north of Ireland, DfC set up Assistance Centres in Belfast, Ballymena, Newry and Craigavon and later pop-up centres in Dungannon and Foyle. GAA volunteers assisted as 'Meet & Greeters' guiding the refugees and their sponsors through the advice centres ensuring those in need received all relevant help and advice.

This project continues to operate and we are very grateful for our small team of volunteers who continue to do an excellent job helping people who have come here to seek safety. I also take this opportunity to thank

Diarmaid Marsden and Sharon Haughey-Grimley of Ulster GAA for overseeing this project.

VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

Training for club officers has continued in 2022 as part of Ulster GAA's Volunteer Development Pathway.

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 2022, Ulster GAA ran this induction programme in association with National GAA to complement the National Club Leadership Development Programme. 462 Club officers participated in this induction across 190 Clubs. Clubs from our partners in Britain and Canada also were in attendance, as well as representatives from Camogie and Ladies Gaelic clubs.

SPORTS INSPIRE AWARD

The Sports Inspire Award operates in partnership between Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and the Irish FA, recognising 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 are recognised with the Sports Inspire Award when the milestones of 50, 100 and 200 hours are reached.

A joint awards ceremony was hosted in March 2022 which showcased the young volunteers and the impact they are making on their communities through their sports club.





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138 young people signed up for the Sports Inspire Awards Programme from Jan-Oct 2022, while 193 young Gaels achieved awards in the same period.

Young participants also achieve Volunteer Now's Youth Impact by completing the Sports Inspire Awards Programme.

ULSTER GAA YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAMME

Ulster GAA hosted its annual Young Leaders Programme 2022 with 37 young GAA members across the province aged 16-24 years old participating.

The Programme offers young Gaels an opportunity to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of issues relating to Gaelic Games and sport.

In 2022, the Programme extended across six months and included a Three-Day Young Leaders Academy, a Two-Day Canoeing Expedition, four Online Workshops, a 12-week Volunteering programme and six months of high intensity physical activity.

THE JOINT AWARD: GAISCE – THE PRESIDENT'S AWARD & THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH AWARD

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.

47 young participants have worked towards completion of each of

the sections in volunteering, skills development, physical activity and a co-ordinated expedition in 2022.

62 young people achieved Bronze Award or Gaisce – the President's Award since our last report. Ulster GAA President Ciaran McLaughlin and representatives from Gaisce and Duke of Edinburgh attended a celebratory event in Clan na Gael GAA Club, Armagh, in March. The club had over 30 successful award recipients.

DFC PROGRAMME AND KEY OBJECTIVES

"Sport - A Home for Lifelong Volunteering" continues to be the primary programme through which club and volunteer development is delivered through Ulster GAA. This programme is jointly delivered with the Irish FA and Ulster Rugby and is funded by the Department for Communities. There are a number of Ulster GAA specific initiatives, as well as Joint initiatives for the 2022/23 Programme.

TRANSLINK YOUNG VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH AWARD

In 2022, Translink sponsored the Translink Young GAA Volunteer of the Month from April – November 2022.

Oisin Coleman, 17, from Patrick Sarsfield GAC, Belfast, was the winner of the Translink Ulster GAA Young Volunteer of the Year award 2021. The selection panel said that Oisin stood out as a team player, who balances his own playing commitments for his club and county alongside volunteering through his coaching of underage teams, fundraising for local organisations and charities, as well being a Young Whistler referee. Chloe Callaghan, from the Termon

club in Co. Donegal was the highly commended winner in the Translink Ulster GAA Young Volunteer of the Year Award 2021.

BANK OF IRELAND COMMUNITY SUPPORT AWARD

In October 2022, the Bank of Ireland Ulster GAA Community Support Award was launched. The Award has been created to recognise the outstanding contribution of GAA Clubs in their communities and a winner is expected to be announced at the 2022 Ulster Club Championship Final.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

The Ulster Health & Wellbeing Committee, chaired by Fermanagh's Damien McHugh, met online three times during the year. It is pleasing that each county has a fully operational Health & Wellbeing Committee, which have been energised by the additional resources and strategic direction provided nationally. The development of the County HWC training module which was delivered at the national County HWC Forum in Croke Park in November and was well received.

HEALTHY CLUB PROGRAMME

Phase Five of the Healthy Club Programme began in January 2022, with 121 clubs in Ulster now active in the programme. The introduction of Foundation, Silver and Gold levels is adding greater motivation and recognition for Healthy Clubs to keep progressing in the programme. The Healthy Club portal has been re-launched which has meant some additional work on the part of clubs, so I thank them for their efforts.

CHARITY PARTNER

For the fourth consecutive year Ulster GAA has supported Prostate



Cancer Research through Queens University Belfast and the Patrick G Johnston Centre for Cancer Research. The partnership and subsequent 'Justgiving' page have been promoted at intervals throughout the year and in particular during the Ulster Championship 2022.

This year seen the launch of Ulster GAA's official partnership with Anthony Nolan - the charity that makes lifesaving connections between patients in need and incredible strangers ready to donate their stem cells. Although the link has been in place for some years, this year we were able to host Anthony Nolan representatives and volunteers at our Staff Health Day in September. The GAA membership can play a hugely significant role in donor recruitment, so I would encourage clubs to consider how they can get involved. My thanks are extended to Niall Colton from the Dromore St Dymphna's GAA Club for speaking at our staff health day to promote the lifesaving work of Anthony Nolan.

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH

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 their support and guidance. Work has begun in earnest around how we can best support our players by establishing a joined-up approach from health & wellbeing, safeguarding, and coaching. A Working Group has been established, and I look forward to seeing the full outworking of this programme in 2023. My thanks to all the members of the group who give of their time and expertise so generously.

HEALTH INITIATIVES DELIVERED IN CLUBS

I was very pleased that with easing of Covid restrictions we were able to resume of delivery of health and wellbeing initiatives in clubs. Part of this delivery included the provision of basic CPR training through the Call Push Rescue training which we are supported in by the British Heart

Foundation. We were also able to deliver 'One Punch' and 'Use Your Brain, Not Your Fists' workshops. Our 'Live To Play' Programme was facilitated by the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service 'Your Choice' Programme. My thanks to all our expert partners for their support in relaying important messages to our members.

It was very pleasing that Ulster GAA's Never Cross the Line #getconsent Programme was launched by the Minister for Justice Naomi Long in Stormont in June. This campaign highlights the need for consent each and every time and aims to increase awareness on what does and doesn't constitute consent. My thanks to White Ribbon NI for their support during campaign development, and for delivering "Consent" workshops to clubs and to our Young Leaders group.

NEW CAMPAIGNS

The area of health and wellbeing is an ever expanding one, and it is testament to the value placed on the GAA in our communities, that more and more good causes are brought to the attention of Ulster GAA. This year we launched two new initiatives.

'Breastfeeding Welcome Here' and 'We Are Breastfeeding Friendly' are campaigns promoted by the Public Health Agency, and Healthy Ireland, respectively. The campaigns aim to encourage more facilities to become more welcoming of breastfeeding mothers and their babies. I was delighted to see the adoption of the campaign by our County Grounds during the Ulster Club Championships. My thanks to the Public Health Agency, Healthy Ireland, and our County Officers for their dedication to this very worthwhile



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campaign which holds true to our ethos of "Where We All Belong."

Ulster GAA works closely with Translink on a number of initiatives and were happy to support their "Play It Safe" campaign, which aims to promote greater safety and less anti-social behaviour on public transport. My thanks go to our young players from Antrim GAA, Antrim LGFA and Antrim Camogie for giving of their time to be involved in the promotional video and for the respective Associations for their efforts in making this campaign possible.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT ULSTER CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES

Thankfully 2022 witnessed the return of full stadiums at our games. I was grateful to see our Ulster Championship being used to promote not only our games but also to showcase the wide reach our work has in other aspects of the GAA. My thanks to the RNLI for assisting Ulster GAA volunteers to promote water safety through the 'Respect the Water' campaign at the Fermanagh v Tyrone Ulster Championship Preliminary round in Brewster Park. Our semi-final involving Monaghan and Derry in the Athletic Grounds in May provided an opportunity to promote 'Care in the Sun' for which we are supported by Cancer Focus NI. This game also allowed us the opportunity to promote the 'Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing' message as part of our mental health promotion work. My thanks once again to our expert partners who support and guide our work.

CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PLANS (CIRP)

2022 has seen the review of the Critical Incident Response Plan,

and I thank all those involved in this work. There is no doubt that the support offered to our units through this programme is invaluable. Unfortunately, there have been many critical incidents over the past 12 months and, as ever, the GAA community has been a huge support to those most affected, none more so the St. Michael's Club in Dunfanaghy/Creelough as highlighted earlier in my report. My deepest thanks are expressed to all who have supported clubs, counties, and families through the most difficult of times and my condolences are offered to those affected.

I wish to pay an immense debt of gratitude to Ulster GAA's Health and Wellbeing Manager Maura McMenamin for her tireless efforts in this field. Ulster GAA's work in this area is well recognised and none of it would happen without Maura. I also express my thanks to Sean Quigley who assisted Maura on several of the above campaigns during his time as a placement student over the summer months.

IRISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

COISTE NA GAELIGE AGUS NA HOIDHREACHTA

This provincial committee is headed by Cathaoirleach Fergus Mac Aoidh with support from Rúnaí Ailís Nic an tSaoi and Cultural Officers from each county. The Coiste supports and promotes the initiatives of Oifigeach Gaeilge na Comhairle, the provincial Irish Language Officer, and is a vital link in the communicational structure of promoting Gaeilge agus cultúr throughout the GAA in Ulster.

CÚRSA DE FAOITE SNA DÚNAIBH

Ulster GAA's annual Cúrsa de Faoite in Downings returned in 2022 for the first time since the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic. With a full house of classes of all abilities, and successful evening events including a concert, it was a fantastic return to form for CLG Uladh's flagship Gaeltacht course.

GAELIGE SA CHLUB

The continued success of this Ulster GAA and Ulster University collaboration provides financial support for GAA members and continues to be a fantastic pathway to a high level of proficiency in Irish. This partnership not only opens the door to third-level education for many but also allows GAA clubs to benefit from increased awareness and promotion of Gaeilge. In 2022, we welcomed 20 more students from across Ulster clubs to join our successful cohort of 'Gaeilge sa Chlub' recipients throughout the years. We look forward to seeing how they promote Gaeilge within their own clubs as they acquire the language.

FOGHLAIM SA CHLUB AGUS OLLSCOIL ULADH / ULSTER UNIVERSITY RESOURCE PARTNERSHIP

CLG Uladh, supported as a special project by Foras na Gaeilge, and in partnership with Ulster University, created and launched the 'Foghlaim sa Chlub' teaching resource in 2022. 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 Chlub' scheme, that the decision was taken to expand upon the brand and create the 'Foghlaim sa Club' resource. This resource is designed to ease pressure on our volunteers and provide a high

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standard of Gaeilge to all clubs. Clubs are welcome and able to register onto the scheme at any stage of the year.

FEICEÁLACHT NA GAEILGE / VISIBILITY OF IRISH

Irish has been visible in all CLG Uladh programmes throughout the year, with particular effort to ensure the Ulster Final programme 2022 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 the Irish language media, with regular interviews and pieces covered by BBC Gaeilge, TG4, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta and various other Irish language media outlets.

Bothántaíocht, The Gaeilge Podcast for Ulster GAA continues to produce Gaeilge content for our members. CLG members, media personalities and those working within the Irish language sector are interviewed, and these interviews are available to watch and listen to on the Gaeilge microsite and on our YouTube channel.

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 to achieve a high standard of Irish within their club. We also support those promoting the language throughout the community and in the education sector, such as An Dream Dearg and An Gréasán.

TRÁTH NA GCEIST BORD

2022 saw the return of Tráth na gCeist Bord at county, provincial and national level, with the final being held in Croke Park this month. This event had been affected by the pandemic as so many other GAA events were, and we are delighted to have had Ulster representation at the event, after a successful Ulster Final in Armagh in November. Good luck to the MayoBridge, Aodh Ruadh and Bredagh Clubs.

SEACHTAIN NA GAEILGE 2022: CLUB GAEILGE NA BLIANA

Ulster GAA chose to take part in Seachtain na Gaeilge 2022 by spotlighting the events and campaigns of various clubs, media outlets and Irish language organisations. To close the celebrations, Ulster GAA launched the inaugural 'Club Gaeilge na Bliana' and many congratulations to Laochra Loch Lao, who were the inaugural winners. This award affords clubs with a chance to be recognised for their efforts to promote and use Gaeilge within their communities. There is a space for all clubs of all levels in this process and Ulster GAA welcomes all clubs to nominate themselves for the award in future years.

Ulster GAA are fortunate to have Tricia Ni Chearra as their Irish Language Officer and under her stewardship there has been a marked increase in the number of GAA Clubs offering classes. She has rolled-out several initiatives and continues to champion the Irish language and wider cultural affairs on behalf of the GAA in the province. I thank her for her great work.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

CÚCHULAINN INITIATIVE

The Cúchulainn Initiative aims to afford young people from different backgrounds the opportunity to engage with one another and to educate people not traditionally involved with the GAA. Taking part in the Boys' section in 2022 were Bangor, Cavan, Limavady and Lisburn. In the girls' competition Limavady and Lisburn were also represented alongside Antrim and Ballymoney.

In preparation for the Cúchulainn Blitz, schools were given six "GAA Taster Sessions" in which pupils who had never played Gaelic Games, or had very little interaction with the Games, were taught the basic skills of Gaelic Football and Hurling. Taster Sessions were provided in 15 schools with over 500 Year 11 boys and girls getting an opportunity to sample what the GAA has to offer. In addition, 'Getting to Know the GAA' presentations were delivered to participating schools which helped to promote greater understanding and respect for other cultures; a key aim of the Cúchulainn Initiative. The Cúchulainn Cup Blitz took place on Tuesday 29th March in Meadowbank Arena, Magherafelt. After a very enjoyable day of games the Cavan Cuchulainns emerged as winners of



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the boys blitz, whilst the Limavady Cúchulainns collected the honours in the girls section.

Following receipt of funding from The Executive Office through their Good Relations Fund further engagement in the initiative was possible during the Limavady and Lisburn groups. The groups engaged in coaching sessions, teambuilding days and good relations workshops throughout the Summer before travelling to London in September to represent Ulster in the All-Britain Competition (ABC Games). The Lisburn Cúchulainns were made up of girls from Forthill Integrated College and St Patrick's Academy whilst the boys' team from Limavady involved Limavady Grammar School, Limavady High School and St Mary's High School.

Despite being a team made-up of players who had little or no experience playing Gaelic games, the Lisburn and Limavady Cúchulainns represented themselves with distinction showing some incredible skills, passion, and team-work as they came up against club teams who have had several years of experience playing together.

The girls' team grew throughout the tournament before bowing out at the quarter final stage; meanwhile the boys' team created history becoming the first side from Ulster to lift an ABC trophy.

Since their return the group have been hosted by their local councils in acknowledgement for their engagement in the programme and efforts in building good relations in their local communities.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS



COUNCIL FUNDED PROGRAMME

The Community Relations Council supports staff through their Core Funding programme for delivery of specific activities and initiatives that address good relations under the strategic areas of Shared Communities and Safe Communities.

Some examples of these activities include:

SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

This is an outreach programme which sees teachers in non-traditional GAA secondary schools assist Ulster GAA's Community Sport Development Officers deliver a 6-week coaching programme in Gaelic Games. The aim is to upskill teachers in order that they may continue coaching once the programme ends. To date, five schools, 10 teachers and over 200 pupils have participated in the school

engagement programme.

CLUB ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMME

The Club Engagement Programme brings young people from the GAA community together for a four-week coaching programme including engagement through workshops with statutory bodies and external organisations, each promoting community safety.

Silverbridge Harps hosted the first event in October 2022, with over 37 young people involved over a 4-week period. They engaged in CPR, #Consent, One Punch and Road Safety workshops. Further programmes are planned across the province.

GAA - GAME OF THREE HALVES

'The Game of Three Halves' programme provides the opportunity for young people to try out Gaelic

Games, many of whom have no previous history with the association. It provides an opportunity to see their local GAA club as a 'shared space.' Participants from local primary schools, from all sections of the community, come together to participate in coaching in Gaelic Football, Hurling and Rounders. To date there have been two events hosted by Dromara GAC and St Michaels GAC, Magheralin with almost 100 participants.

GETTING TO KNOW THE GAA

This programme allows staff to meet people who are not traditionally from a GAA background and lead a workshop based on getting to know the GAA as both a sporting and community organisation. These talks help people understand how the GAA is active in every community and is an open and welcoming organisation. To date there have been four workshops delivered with 190 participants.

FRESH START THROUGH SPORT

This initiative is funded by Department for Communities in association with the Department 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 have delivered modules to participants from Derry City, North Belfast, Newtownards, East Belfast, Dungannon and Lurgan. Over a 16-week period the participants had opportunities 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.

ADDITIONAL OUTREACH

Ulster GAA's Community Sports Development Officers have engaged with Knock Presbyterian Church and Causeway Coast and Glens council to provide GAA coaching to non-traditional GAA groups. The aim being to bring GAA to a wider audience. Ulster GAA also worked alongside Ulster Hockey to deliver Hurling and Hockey coaching in post-primary schools in Banbridge, Newtownabbey and Glengormley. There were almost 150 young people involved in the project.

I pay special tribute to Diarmaid Marsden and his team for their delivery of such a comprehensive outreach programme. In particular I thank Proinsias O'Kane, Pierce Caherty and Ryan McShane for their efforts, while Fionntán O'Dowd plays a central role in the co-ordination of the Cúchulainn Programme. I also thank the staff members from our Coaching and Games Department who play such a vital role in the preparation of the Cúchulainn teams for the ABC Games.

CONGRATULATIONS

I wish to congratulate all our clubs and counties who collected honours during the past year and extend congratulations to those who received individual accolades for their performances on and off the field of play. The annual GAA President's Awards were held in early February and there were two highly deserving winners from the province. The Ulster winner was Malcolm McFarlane from the Bredagh Club, which is situated in South Belfast. Malcolm was particularly lauded for his efforts and those of the club in support of

some of the most vulnerable in their community.

The Gradaim Gaeilge was won by Sean MacCanna from the Wolfe Tones Club in Armagh. Sean's voice will be familiar to anyone who has ever attended a game in The Athletic Grounds, where for many years he has been the Public Address announcer. Sean won a Hogan Cup medal with St. Colman's College, Newry in 1967 and has served as Cultural Officer for his county.

There was also an Ulster connection with the International Award winner which was won by Brendie Brien of the St. Gabriel's Club in London. The Killimor (Galway) native has been a great friend of the GAA in Ulster due to our 'twinning' arrangements with Britain and indeed he was the recipient of an Ulster GAA President's Award just two months earlier. It was a great day for Ulster at the All-Ireland Scor Na nÓg Finals in Killarney on 1st May with three national titles coming to the province. The successful acts were Naomh Columba (Donegal) in Question Time, Omagh St. Enda's (Tyrone) in Instrumental Music and Glenullin (Derry) in Ballad Group. A big well done to them all. There were also three titles for Ulster at the Scor Sinsir Finals in Castlebar in November, with Carrickcruppen's Donal Morgan taking the Recitation title, near neighbours in South Armagh, Mullaghbawn, taking the silverware in Instrumental music, while Glasdrumman (Down) completed the Ulster 'treble' with victory in the Ballad Group section. Dynamic Kilcoo player Eugene Branagan was named as AIB Club Player of the Year following the tremendous achievement of 'The Magpies' in winning the All-Ireland Club Football title and he was joined



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by six of his colleagues on the AIB Club Football Team of the year. The winners were Niall Kane, Ryan McEvoy, Miceal Rooney, Darryl Branagan, Ceilum Doherty and Jerone Johnston, whose injury time goal ensured the Andy Merrigan Cup returned to The Mourne County for the first time since 1988.

Slaughtneil had two award winners on the AIB Club Hurling Team of the Year with Cormac O'Doherty and Brendan Rogers being the worthy recipients. It was the third such award for Brendan Rogers, while Darryl Branagan picked up his second Club Football Award. Eirgrid U-20 Footballer of the Year Ruairi Canavan (Errigal Ciaran) was joined by four of his All-Ireland winning colleagues on the EirGrid U-20 Football Championship Top 20, namely Niall Devlin, Brian Conway, Eoin Corry and Sean O'Donnell, while defeated Ulster Finalists Cavan were honoured with two recipients, namely Cian Reilly and Darragh Lovett. There were three representatives from the province on the 2022 Electric Ireland Minor Stars Football Team of the Year, with Ben Hughes (Donaghmore) collecting a well merited accolade, as did Ruairi Forbes (Ballinderry Shamrocks) and Johnny McGuckin (Watty Graham's, Glen) from beaten All-Ireland semi-finalists Derry.

Ulster champions and All-Ireland semi-finalists Derry secured two GAA/GPA All-Stars, with Chrissy McKaigue and Conor Glass becoming the latest in a distinguished list of recipients from the Oak Leaf County. Dunloy stalwart Conal Cuning won the prestigious Joe McDonagh Cup Player of the Year and he was joined on the Team of the Year by his Antrim colleagues Ryan Elliott, Joe Maskey,

Gerard Walsh, Keelan Molloy, Ciaran Clarke and team captain Eoghan Campbell, while Down forward Daithi Sands also won a deserved place on the team.

The late Damian Casey was posthumously selected as the Nickey Rackard Cup Player of the Year and he was named alongside his Tyrone colleagues Dermot Begley and Chris Kearns on the Ring/Rackard/Meagher Team of the Year, where Derry's Mark Craig was also honoured. While the honour of being the inaugural winners of the Tailteann Cup ultimately eluded them, there was some consolation for Cavan when they had four representatives on the Tailteann Cup Team of the Year, with Jason McLoughlin, Killian Clarke, Gearoid McKiernan and Gerard Smith being the worthy recipients. In Ladies Football Donegal's Niamh McLaughlin won the prestigious Players' Player of The Year Award and, together with Aimee Mackin (Armagh), collected a TG4 All-Star Award, while the Junior Players' Player of the Year Award went to Fermanagh's Bláithin Bogue. Meanwhile Antrim's Dervla Cosgrove, who scored an 84-second hat-trick in the All-Ireland Final against Armagh, won the Camogie Premier Junior Player of the Year Award.

The re-branded Ulster GAA Awards in association with O'Neill's, took place at the Manor House Hotel in Killadeas on 26th November. Special presentations were made to Ulster's All-Ireland winning teams of 2022, while Special Recognition Awards were presented to Eileen Jones (Ladies Football), Deirdre Fitzgerald (camogie), Paula Clarke (handball), Anna Bradley (Rounders), Sean Harte (Canada GAA), Liam McCabe (Cavan),

Dominic McCaughey (Tyrone) and Conor McDonnell, the incoming President of GAA Handball. Fermanagh GAA stalwart and Devenish St. Mary's Clubman Peter Carty was a popular winner of the Ulster GAA President/O'Neill's Lifetime Service to the GAA Award, while the other award winners were;

- Club Recognition Awards - Sarsfields Ballerin GAA (Derry) and Roslea Shamrocks GAA (Fermanagh)
- Coaching Awards Michael Gerard Doherty (Antrim), Gerard Cunningham (Armagh) and Aghadrumsee St. Macartan's GAC (Fermanagh)
- Club Gaeilge na Bliana - CLG Laochra Loch Lao (Aontroim)
- Inclusion, Equality & Diversity Award Con Magees GAC Glenravel (Antrim)
- Ulster Independent Clinic Healthy Club Award - Latton O'Rahilly GAA (Monaghan)
- Communications Award Tyrone GAA
- Community Engagement Award - CLG Naomh Micheál (Dún na nGall)
- Translink Young person of the Year Award - Hannah Shiel's (Donegal)
- Service to the GAA through Education - Sinéad McCourt (Armagh)
- Referee of the Year - Sean Hurson (Tyrone)
- Footballer of the Year Chrissy McKaigue (Derry)
- Hurler of the Year - Damien Casey (Tyrone) RIP

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

The easing of restrictions early in the year allowed for a welcome sight across the province as our press boxes once again returned to full capacities and media personnel were able to come in from the cold of the socially distanced, temporary facilities in stands that had become the norm of the last few seasons. A



lot of dedicated work happens away from the biggest games and the biggest days, however, and I would like to acknowledge the enduring work of local newspaper titles and their journalists for the commitment to coverage of all levels of our games and keeping them in focus with column inches every week. During the year, most of the news reporting on our association was balanced, though there do remain occasions when it is clear that the use of 'GAA' in a headline is being used needlessly to sensationalise an otherwise ordinary story. Unfortunately, this is not something that we can control and it is therefore imperative that we promote all of the good news stories coming from our clubs and counties to ensure our proud organisation is fully represented.

Digital media continues to propel communications for all aspects of our lives, with sport and the GAA certainly being no different. There is a requirement to be constantly moving forward in this area and improving and to this end we have engaged

with Digital Marketing agencies, as a key element of the Strategic Plan. Being better 'in digital' is vital for us to promote our games and activities at a provincial level as we do not play heavily in 'above the line' marketing, though we did partner with Bauer Radio (Cool FM & Downtown) for the Ulster Senior Football Championship again this year. It is also reflected in the continued growth of our social media follower numbers, which have seen impressive increases in the last twelve months - over 93k (+10%), on Twitter, 63k Facebook followers (+12%) and over 27k followers (+17%) on Instagram.

Whilst social media platforms are a great means to promote all of the great work going on in the association, unfortunately the instances of online abuse towards our amateur players, referees, and officials are becoming more and more frequent and I would echo the sentiments of Larry McCarthy that as a sporting organisation, we need to look at increased support from other bodies to help protect our members

from this blight on wider society. The GAA's social media guidelines are quite clear: "If a member is found to have breached this Social Media Policy in any way, disciplinary action may be taken in line with the GAA's Disciplinary Process."

The high demand for coverage of our games has continued after the pandemic and there is now almost an expectation that every major game played should either be shown on terrestrial TV, or via a live streamed platform. This of course, is not a sustainable approach long term, but live streaming of games is certainly here to stay and a welcome inclusion in our communications function.

We now have to take an aggregated approach to the number of supporters that 'view' our games, adding the number of stream purchases to the number of supporters coming through the turnstiles. Most of our counties have continued to provide a comprehensive offering of streamed games this season and I would like to highlight the commitment of Tyrone GAA to coverage of all their adult championship games over the last three seasons, which saw them pick up the Communications Award at the Ulster GAA Awards night recently. Our own Ulster GAA TV platform continued to provide a strong offering to supporters across our competitions and delivered notable income to us, whilst priced at affordable levels. Ulster GAA has worked with Nemeton for coverage of the Ulster Minor and Under 20 Football Championships and have recently moved to partner with live streaming specialists InPlayer and MacAV for exclusive coverage of the Ulster Club Championships. My thanks to everyone involved in making our broadcasts happen. The GAA Media Broadcast Rights



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Agreement for the period 2023-27 sees RTÉ retain its right to broadcast 31 championship games, with Sky departing the scene after eight years of broadcasting GAA games. Taking their place is the GAAGO streaming service (a joint initiative involving the GAA and RTE), with BBC now playing a much greater part in the broadcast of games.

While some have expressed concern at the increased RTÉ 'influence,' the significance of the increased BBC role should not be lost on people. Under the deal the BBC may broadcast Ulster SFC games (six in year one), as well as simulcast All-Ireland semi-finals and finals. These will be broadcast online, though the BBC may show both All-Ireland finals on their national television network and they have already stated that they will exercise this option in at least one of these finals. As well as a British television audience, the digital audience for these games is immense and this can only be a major fillip for worldwide promotion of our games. Additionally, the BBC will broadcast up to 10 Allianz League games involving Ulster counties on the BBC iPlayer. The league is a new market for the BBC and their presence in this space is to be welcomed. One irritant, however, will mean that due to geo-blocking, these games will not be accessible on this platform to patrons in counties Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan, though Ulster GAA will liaise with the GAA at national level and with the BBC to ensure that these particular games are also available on GAAGO.

The return to 'in person' in so many aspects of our lives facilitated getting back to hosting launch events for our major competitions. Whilst the

MS Teams media calls served us and the media well in the last two years, there just seems so much more to be gained from an event with trophies present, photography, video work and some food before heading for home. We were able to hold events for our Minor, U-20 and Club Championships, but it was very disappointing that the GPA action led to the cancellation of our flagship Ulster Senior Football event in April. After the enforced absences in the previous two years, there was a great deal of positivity around gathering our highest profile players and managers to promote our games. I look forward to 2023 and hopefully there will be no further unforeseen issues complicating things.

In the fast-paced environment of Communications it is important to have a strong team effort to help keep our games and initiatives in front of our stakeholders and I thank all those, both internal and external to Ulster GAA, who assist in delivering our messaging. Ulster GAA has a small but effective communications team and their efforts ensure that our brand continues to be at the forefront of sporting affairs in the province. Ulster GAA continues to work with our design agency, Kaizen Brand Evolution, across our major competitions and initiatives and have also embarked on a major brand development project with them that will guide how the Ulster GAA identity will be represented in all outward facing touchpoints for the next decade. I would also like to recognise the ongoing work and important services provided by John Merry (photography), LD2 (website) Mobile Media (videography) and Graeme Campbell (telecoms).

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

Again, I pay tribute to the trojan work undertaken by GAA volunteers throughout the province for the fostering and furtherance of Gaelic Games. The debt of gratitude owed to you all is immeasurable, not that you ever seek platitudes.

Iar-Uachtarán Oliver Galligan leaves the Ulster Council at Convention, having served 22 years as a member of this august body. He has had a remarkable tenure, with the honour of presenting the Anglo-Celt Cup to his fellow Cavan man Raymond Galligan (no relation) in November 2020 being one of the undoubted highlights of his distinguished service to the Council. During his time on the Council, he earned a reputation for being a man of the highest integrity, with a sharp mind. He led from the front during the Covid-19 pandemic and ensured that the GAA in the province continued to flourish during what was, perhaps, its most challenging period ever. While he may be no longer serving on the Ulster Council, I've no doubt Oliver will continue to make a valuable contribution to the GAA in both his native Cavan and in Ulster. As well as being a GAA colleague, Oliver is also a personal friend and I wish him and his wife Frances many more years of continued happiness together. Ciaran McLaughlin has completed his first year as chair and he has adopted a pragmatic and 'hands-on' approach to the role. Energetic and enthusiastic, Ciaran has shown great leadership over the past twelve months and his previous experience of chairing committees at county, provincial and national levels have been of undoubted benefit as he is able to bring a wealth of experience to his current role. Ulster GAA is fortunate to have someone of his calibre at the helm.

Our Vice-Chair Michael Geoghegan somehow manages to find time to combine his provincial duties with his role as Chairperson of the National Development Competitions Control Committee. His diligence and knowledge are supplemented with a strong business acumen and he is a tremendous asset to the Ulster Council.

In his first year as Treasurer of the Ulster Council Declan Woods led our Finance Committee and ensured that, despite the challenging economic times, we remain strong financially and he has overseen the implementation of new financial controls, particularly around 'cashless' match day deliverables. Michael McArdle has hit the ground running in his first year as Public Relations Officer and has established a solid working relationship with the media, while our digital output continues to grow. 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.

I thank all the Council members for their commitment, forbearance and understanding over the past year. Your views and wise counsel have been invaluable, and I thank you all for your great work on behalf of all GAA followers in the province. We say a farewell to the Council members who are stepping down and Convention and wish every success to those who are now joining us - I trust your tenure will be a joyful one. In the past year we appointed some new faces to Ulster GAA sub-committees, while some familiar faces remained in post (or moved

to other posts). We are fortunate to have so much talent amongst our dedicated volunteers and I sincerely thank all our sub-committee members and those who had served previously on sub-committees during the presidential term of our *Iar Cathaoirleach* Oliver Galligan. Particular mention goes to our Committee Chairs' and Secretaries' who oversee what at times is an exhaustive workload, while continuing to keep things moving forward between meetings.' I thank also the volunteers from the province who serve on National and other committees and commend also the staff members from Ulster GAA who serve on national GAA committees and other ad hoc committees, ensuring that the GAA voice is heard on the corridors of power.

Ulster GAA is fortunate to have such a dedicated workforce who make such a meaningful and lasting contribution to community life across the province. I am indebted to each and every one of you - you genuinely are a fantastic team to work with. Our senior staff team of Eugene Young, Stephen McGeehan, Diarmaid Marsden and Brian Mallon are invaluable to the work of the Council and they lead each of their respective teams with distinction, through a combination of regular communication and engagement and high-quality delivery. Many people I speak to are amazed at the range of work areas covered by Ulster GAA and that is all down to these individuals and their loyal teams.

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. I make special mention of the non-senior staff members with whom I have regular personal contact. Kathy Kelly is the Servicing Officer for both *Coiste Bainistíochta* and Senior Staff and she also has the vital role of co-ordinating and implementing Human Resources issues pertaining to Ulster GAA. Kathy's expertise and knowledge is also proving invaluable to the ongoing work relating to the national GAA HR Review.

The 'split-season' has, if anything, added greater complexity to the workload of our Games Administration Manager Stephen Donnelly, ably assisted by Niall Muldoon. We are, after all, essentially about playing games and without Stephen our games would not be played. Few people really appreciate the logistics surrounding the playing



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of games and with the 'split season' many of our games are now played at times of the year where the weather is prone to be inclement. This brings with it many challenges and endless hours of unseen work to secure the availability of both pitches and match officials. Stephen is a tremendous asset to both Ulster GAA and, indeed, the wider GAA public in the province, and beyond.

Paul McGurk heads up our PR & Marketing team and is supported by Michael Devlin. In an era of ever evolving technology, a clear understanding of digital media and its many platforms is vital to remaining relevant and our small communications team ensure that the Ulster GAA brand remains at the forefront of the sporting affairs in the province. Paul also leads on much of Ulster GAA's corporate partner and sponsorship arrangements and plays a significant role in our ongoing engagement with the wider public.

Laura Woods and Ashelene Groogan have the onerous task – many may say thankless task – of looking after Ulster GAA's ticketing arrangements, while Paul Sanders plays a vital role in ensuring that the documentation required by clubs making funding applications is legally compliant. Both Ashelene and Kathy got married in December and I wish them both (and their respective husbands, Paddy and Mark) every joy and happiness for the future. Ruairi Cunningham also plays an invaluable role in managing our finances on a day-to-day basis.

We don't need any reminding of the importance of having the correct safeguarding protocols in place, and as referenced earlier in my report, in Bernie Fox we are so fortunate to

have a person with such an in-depth knowledge and understanding of her subject area. While most club volunteers would prefer to spend their time on other duties, it should never be forgotten that safeguarding is the responsibility of all of us and it is only when issues arise that the true value of Bernie and her dedicated colleagues at county level can be fully appreciated

I've said it before and will repeat it again, the value of Geraldine McKavanagh to Ulster GAA is truly immeasurable. Her knowledge of the GAA in Ulster knows no bounds and her dedication, commitment and, above all, guidance to me is of the utmost quality. The greatest tribute I can pay her is how she gets through a mammoth workload almost unnoticed and with the minimum of fuss. As a confidant and loyal colleague, I could not ask for more – her contribution to Ulster GAA over many years has been remarkable and we all owe her one enormous debt of gratitude.

OBITUARIES

At the end of another year, I wish to offer my condolences and those of the Ulster Council to all of the GAA membership who lost loved ones over the past year. I trust that the GAA family was a source of comfort to you as you mourned your great loss.

Our President Ciaran McLaughlin last his mother Margaret on 16th December, just over eight months after he said goodbye to his beloved father Jimmy. Losing both parents in such a short space of time was undoubtedly a difficult and traumatic experience for the entire McLaughlin family.

On 2nd February our Armagh Council delegate Jarlath Burns said goodbye to his father Colman. Heading a family steeped in the GAA tradition, Colman was an avid Armagh supporter and just days before his death he proudly watched on television two of his nephews helping Armagh to a memorable victory over Dublin in Croke Park in their opening Allianz Football League game of the 2022 campaign.

On the last day of February our esteemed colleague Gerry Brady lost his brother Brian after a short illness and on 18th March our Deputy Chief Stewart Terence McShea said goodbye to his beloved mother Anne. The following day Eamonn Garvey passed away after a period of illness – an avid Armagh supporter, he was the brother of our Audit & Risk Committee Chair and former member of our Management Committee, Anne.

Our Head of Community Development lost his brother-in-law Brendan McCartan on 9th May and it was with great sadness that we learned of the sudden passing of Katrina Farmer, sister of our loyal volunteer and steward Kieran, on 26th May.

We were dumbfounded and deeply saddened on the afternoon of 3rd June as we learned of the death of Jack Henry, grandson of Ulster GAA's Director of Coaching & Games, Eugene Young. Just five days earlier wee Jack was in great form as he was pictured alongside Chrissy McKaigue in Clones, just minutes after he had lifted the Anglo-Celt Cup. But how things can change so quickly and the sudden passing of Jack, at the age of just five, has created a great void in the hearts of the Henry and Young families and in particular those of

his parents Enya and Brendan, and brother Paddy.

On 3rd November Margaret (Peggy) Kerr passed away peacefully. A great Carrickmore stalwart, Peggy was the mother of Tyrone County Chairperson Michael and Ulster GAA Scor Committee Secretary Clíodhna. Just two days later our esteemed Vice-President Michael Geoghegan said farewell to a close family relative in Genevieve McKernan and, poignantly, her son Kieran lined out for the Middletown hurlers in the Ulster Club Intermediate Championship just hours after her passing.

We were all shocked and saddened to learn of the tragic death of young Conor McCaughey on 8th November – Conor was the son of of former Ulster Council colleague Dermot. Conor had

won numerous underage titles with the Trillick Club and also helped them win a Scór na nOg County title in Tráth na gCeist.

On 28th November we mourned the death of Francis (John) McAlinden, the father of our esteemed colleague Sean, the Secretary of the Armagh County Committee.

On the morning of 18th December our esteemed colleague Jimmy Darragh said farewell to his beloved mother Eileen, who has a dedicated and loyal member of the St. John's Club in Belfast throughout her life.

On 21st December we awoke to the shocking news that our dear friend and colleague, Marion Donnelly, had died suddenly the previous night. Marion, was a proud member of the Emyvale GAA Club and was a

volunteer of the highest distinction, who was held in the highest esteem by all who had the privilege to come into contact with her. She served as a member of the Ulster GAA Finance Committee before, in December 2020, being elected to serve on the Ulster Council. At the time of her passing she was Secretary of the Ulster GAA Club Planning & Physical Development Committee and a member of both the Ulster GAA Hearings Committee and the Ulster GAA Scór Committee. A selfless and tireless individual, Marion was an outstanding GAA administrator who always put others before her. Working behind the scenes and away from the limelight, she was a person who got things done – and never sought credit.

She served for over a decade as Treasurer of the Monaghan County Committee (2005-15) and prior to that served as both Assistant Treasurer and Assistant Secretary. She was a key player in the development of the Monaghan GAA Training Centre in Cloghan and was also the Treasurer of her beloved Emyvale GAA Club.

On 16th December 2021 the GAA in Ulster said farewell to a Westmeath native who gave so much to the GAA in his 'adopted' province. Brother Larry Ennis is particularly remembered for his long and valued association with Schools' football, both as a coach and as an administrator, and he was a leader and motivator both inside and outside of the classroom. He taught in St. Mary's CBS in Belfast, St. Patrick's in Armagh and in Omagh CBS, winning three MacRory Cup titles with the latter institution. He managed the Armagh minor football team which heartbreakingly lost out to a last gasp





Meath goal in the 1992 All-Ireland final, though he took comfort in the fact that many of his protégées went on to win All-Ireland senior football medals a decade later. He also managed the Antrim senior football team to their last success in the Dr McKenna Cup, in 1981.

The Dunloy Cúchullain's Club lost their club member and former player Niall Quinn in a road accident just two days before Christmas and there was further tragedy for the Saffron County when young Portglenone player Connor Marron died after being struck by a train in the early hours of 2nd January, during a visit to London. Connor, whose father Feargal is a former Chairperson of the Casement's Club, was also a highly talented snooker player.

A tragic accident in the early hours of 27th December 2021 will live long in the memories of the GAA fraternity and wider Tyrone community. Three young friends, 'Petey' McNamee, Nathan Corrigan and Peter Finnegan died tragically as a result of a road accident on the A5 close to the Tyrone GAA Centre of excellence. Petey and Nathan were former players with the Beragh Red Knight's Club, where Nathan's father Damien is Assistant Secretary and the club delegate to the Tyrone County Committee. Peter was a former player with Clogher Éire Óg's and remained a strong supporter of the club. In the aftermath of the tragedy the Tyrone County Committee, amongst others, highlighted the need for the much-delayed upgrade of the A5 to be progressed as expediently as possible.

There was great sadness in the St. Mary's, Burren Club when one of

their youngest footballers, Aidan Carragher, left this world on New Year's Day 2022 after a period of illness. He dreamed of playing senior football for Burren but, unfortunately, we were all denied this prospect. John Killen was known to many of us in his capacity of Chief Librarian at the Linen Hall Library in Belfast and for some of his scholarly writings, but he was also very much a GAA person at heart. The former Loughinisland and Down player, who also served as Club Secretary, passed away peacefully on 2nd January.

Derry GAA lost one of its great stalwarts on 4th January, with the passing of Seamus Mullan. Although a native of Dungiven, playing for the St. Canice's club, Seamus lived in Derry City for many years and was a stalwart of the Doire Colmcille Club. He was a founder member of Club Derry and played a very prominent role in the re-development of Celtic Park. He was also pivotal in the organisation of the 2013 GAA Congress in Derry and was a regular reporter on Derry games for BBC Radio at a time when the GAA was fighting for more airtime.

The murder of young schoolteacher Ashling Murphy while jogging along the Grand Canal near Tullamore on 12th January sent shockwaves across the county and resulted in a wave of emotion on both a national and international scale. Ashling, who was very well known in traditional music circles, was a camogie player with the Kilcormac/Killoughey Club in Offaly. There was sadness in Monaghan and in Donaghmoynne in particular when the death of Eugene (Gene) McArdle was announced on 17th January. Gene was a great stalwart of the Fontenoy's Club but is best

remembered in The Farney County for the part he played in helping them to their only All-Ireland Junior Football success, in 1956. Gene played at right-corner-back in every match throughout that Ulster and All-Ireland campaign and had the reputation of being a resolute and uncompromising defender.

On the morning of 20th January we were shocked to learn of the devastating news of the death of young St. Brigid's, Belfast and Queen's fresher player Fionntán McGarvey. A talented footballer, his loss was deeply felt by all those who had the privilege of knowing him.

On 24th January Ulster GAA was saddened and shocked to learn of the sudden death of Kieran Gleeson, former Treasurer of the GAA in Britain and of the Lancashire County Committee. Just eight days earlier he was in Crossmaglen where his beloved St. Brendan's, Manchester were playing against Denn (Cavan) in the Junior Football Club Championship 'twinning final' on what was a very proud day for the club and for Kieran personally.

Also, on 24th January we were all deeply saddened to learn of the untimely death of young Kill Shamrocks footballer Cillian Boyle. Another young life taken from this world much too soon and there was further tragedy in the Breffni County on 1st February when young Denn player Oran Donohoe tragically departed this world.

On 30th January we learned of another tragic death with the passing of young Aughlisnafin footballer Marc Quinn, following an accident. The talented teenager had been part of

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the Mourne Academy and had broken into his club senior team. His mother Jenny is secretary of the club. Within the space of five days in early February the Gaels of Down said goodbye to two great stalwarts of the county, when Noel O'Hare (Balllyholland) and Brian Cunningham (Dundrum/Warrenpoint) died on 2nd and 7th February respectively and on 11th February we said farewell to Fr. Seamus McGinley, parish priest of Lissan and member of the St. Michael's Club. Throughout his priesthood Fr. Seamus served parishioners across counties Armagh and Tyrone and also served on the Executive Committee of Galbally Pearses GAC.

A great sense of shock engulfed the Liatroim Fontenoy's Club and wider community when on 12th February news emerged of the sudden death in Kiev of their former member Kevin Gregory. A young teacher, Kevin had previously worked in China and was a founder member of the Shunde Gaels Club in the city of Foshan.

On 18th February we learned of the death of Hugh Niblock, the Derry stalwart who had strong links with Antrim. Hugh won Ulster Senior Football Championship medals with Derry in 1970 and 1975 and a Derry Senior Football Championship medal with O'Donovan Rossa, Magherfelt in 1978. When he moved to Belfast he engrossed himself in the affairs of the St. Gall's Club, with whom his son Kevin won an All-Ireland Club medal in 2010.

There was great sadness when news reached Cavan on 20th February of the death of Fergus McCauley. The Drumlane man, who also played for Drumalee, won an Ulster Senior

Football Championship medal in 1969 and later served as a selector with the Cavan senior footballers under Fr. Bennie Maguire, after a serious injury cut short his playing career. He was residing in Dublin at the time of his death.

Just over a week after the passing of Fergus McCauley there was further sorrow in Cavan with the passing of Jimmy O'Donnell. He won a MacRory Cup medal with St. Pat's in 1955 and when living in Leitrim, played in three losing Connacht Finals and also was on the defeated team in the 1956 All-Ireland Minor Final, when he also lined out for the Ridge County. He first played for his native county in 1963 and won Ulster Senior Football Championship medals in 1964 and 1967. He later won two Longford Championship medals with St. Mary's, Granard.

On St. Patrick's Day we were saddened to learn of the sudden passing of Jim Kelly, former Ambassador to Canada, twinning partner of Ulster GAA. While a proud 'Dub' Jim was a great friend of Ulster GAA and he was Irish Ambassador to the United Nations at the time of his passing. The following day we learned of the passing of Hugh Pat Clerkin from Roslea. Hugh Pat was a loyal gateman over many years at Ulster GAA fixtures and was well known to regular attendees of provincial championship games within the province.

On the night of 26 March former Down GAA County Treasurer Hugh John Harper passed away peacefully after a short illness. As Down County Secretary I had the privilege of serving alongside Hugh John after he was elected County Treasurer and within nine months of his



appointment in 1994, Down were All-Ireland Senior Football Champions. Hugh John was one of life's gentlemen and he served both the Down County Committee and his club Conduff with distinction. His door was always open and many match tickets were distributed from there in the days before e-tickets became the norm. As County Treasurer he oversaw the development of Páirc Esler and was a member of the Down GAA Finance Committee for many years.

We had the worst possible start to the month of April when news began to break of the tragic death of young Sligo footballer Red Óg Murphy. The Dublin City University student, who played Sigerson Cup football in 2022, was a member of the Curry Club and had achieved so much in his 21 short years. He did things on the football field that most couldn't even dream of doing and his death has left an irreplaceable void in the lives of all those who were privileged to know him.



There was profound grief and sadness when news filtered through on Easter Tuesday that young Galway camog Kate Moran had passed away after suffering an accidental head injury while playing for her club Athenry against Ardahan the previous evening. The NUIG student was described as 'a shining light' and just a week short of her 21st birthday she was taken from us all too soon. We were shocked and deeply saddened to learn on the evening of 23rd April of the death of respected referee Mattie Maher. The Tipperary native was well known in London GAA circles and sadly passed away en route to hospital after taking ill while refereeing a game at the Glen Rovers Ground in Watford.

Another young person was taken from us all too soon when teenage Magheracloone footballer Aoibhe Byrne died following a tragic accident on the family farm. Her death plunged her family and the local community into indescribable grief and her loss will be felt by all who knew her. Also on 27th April, Fr Pat McHugh passed away after a long illness. A regular attendee at our games, Fr Pat was a former Vice-Chairperson of the Monaghan County Committee and served as Dean of St. MacCartan's College in Monaghan. The Fermanagh native was President of the St. Joseph's, Ederney Club at the time of his passing.

Charlie O'Donnell from Creggan in Derry City won an All-Ireland U-21 medal with the Oak Leaf County in 1969, before emigrating to New York where he had a successful career with the Donegal Club. In 1979 he captained the New York Select side which toured Ireland and he was laid

to rest on 30th April, the day before his beloved Derry defeated Tyrone in the Ulster Championship in Omagh. Former Donegal and Ulster player Frankie Brennan departed this world on 8th May just hours before his beloved Tír Conaill County defeated Cavan in the Ulster Championship semi-final. The Ardara Clubman played for Donegal at all levels and was a highly respected administrator. He was Club President at the time of his death.

On 9th May Ulster GAA said farewell to one of its trusted stewards when Noel Devlin passed away in Daisy Hill Hospital after a short illness. The jovial Dungannon man, who was President of the Eoghan Ruadh Hurling Club in the town, was well known to patrons who attended Ulster Championship games and his familiar face and friendly demeanor will be sadly missed. There was heartbreak in Gowna on 13th May, when young U-13 footballer



Colin Madden died peacefully after a hard-fought battle with illness. A talented footballer, Gowna captain Ryan McGahern dedicated Gowna's Cavan Senior Football Championship win to the memory of Colin.

Between 1963 and 1968 inclusive Seamus Hoare won five Railway Cup medals for Ulster (the first one as a sub). The St. Eunan's, Letterkenny goalkeeper was undoubtedly among the best netminders of his generation and he was named on the Donegal Team of The Millennium on three Dr McKenna Cup medals and three Lagan Cup medals with his native Donegal and won four Donegal Senior Football Championship medals over a 14-year period with St. Eunan's. He sadly passed away on 16th May. Magilligan stalwart George McGee passed away on 23rd May. In the 1950's and 1960's he represented Derry footballers at both Junior and Senior levels' and he later became a highly respected referee at both club and inter-county levels. He took charge of two Derry Senior Football Championship finals.

The hurling fraternity in Donegal and further afield were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Eamon Campbell on 7th June. The Setanta clubman, who was a native of Loughguile, gave great devotion to Donegal hurling and managed the Tír Conaill men from 2006 to 2009, leading them to their first Nicky Rackard Cup Final in 2006 where they lost out to Derry. A devoted family man, Eamon's spirit was perhaps best summed up when, despite his failing health, he insisted on attending the wedding of his daughter just three days prior to his death.

Bryansford GAA Club and the Co.

Down GAA community in general were shocked to learn of the sudden passing of Raymond Harbinson on 15th June. Raymond represented the club at all levels and later served as part of the club senior management team.

Also on 15th June, we learned of the passing of that great Cavan footballer Enda McGowan. The attacking half-back was born in Co. Leitrim but later settled in Ballyhaise and represented both club and county with distinction over many years. He won Ulster Senior Football Championship medals in 1967 and 1969 and followed these up with Railway Cup medals in 1970 and 1971. He also toured San Francisco as an All-Star replacement. The sudden passing of Michael Shields, father of Tyrone footballer Conor, on 17th June sent shockwaves through the local community and later that day the entire GAA community throughout the country and beyond was numbed as news began to spread of the tragic death of Tyrone hurler Damian Casey, while in Spain for a friend's wedding. I have penned a separate citation in Damian's memory elsewhere in this report.

It was with deep sadness that we learned of the death of Jim Fitzpatrick on 25th June. Just a couple of weeks short of his 93rd birthday Jim, who was Chair of The Irish News, helped improve the lives of so many people during his long life. A champion of peace, he worked earnestly behind the scenes in his unstinting efforts to create better community relations. He worked fervently to bring increased business to Belfast and was a former President of Belfast Chamber of Commerce. He was also a strong GAA supporter and had a

special place in his heart for the Down All-Ireland winning teams of 1960 and 1961, where his cousin James Sexton Fitzpatrick was a panel member.

On 27th June Termon said goodbye to their great club stalwart Anthony McGrenra and followers of camogie in Antrim were saddened to learn of the death of Mary Martin (nee Keenan) on 3rd July. The Ahoghill club member was one of the last surviving members of Antrim's 1947 All-Ireland winning team and she played a pivotal role in helping her club secure their first Antrim Senior Camogie title in 1948.

Some four weeks later, on 1st August, Antrim lost another camogie 'great' with the passing of Lily Spence. Lily was a substitute on the aforementioned 1947 All-Ireland winning team but her mark on the camogie world was to reach far beyond her native Antrim and in

1956 she was elected President of the Camogie Association. She later held the position of Treasurer of the Camogie Association for two decades and was a driving force behind the promotion of camogie in schools; being a founder member of the Ulster Camogie Colleges Council and went on to serve as its secretary for half a century. The St Teresa's stalwart also refereed four All-Ireland Camogie Finals and was one of the few living people to have a national trophy named after her, such was the high esteem in which she was held. One of the great camogie administrators, Lily left a lasting impression on all those who met her and must personally take much credit for the growth of the game in Ulster and beyond.

On 4th July Jimmy Burns who had a lifelong association with Scór in Carrickcruppen and Warrenpoint passed away and it was with great sadness that we learned on the death of Collie McGurk on 12th July, after a short illness. The Lavey and Derry clubman - a member of, perhaps, the most famous of all Derry GAA families - was steeped in the GAA and through his hurling, football and professional careers has left a strong and lasting impact throughout the GAA community. The holder of 16 Derry Senior Championship medals - 12 in hurling and four in football - he won an All-Ireland Club Football medal in 1991 and two years later he was part of the Oak Leaf panel of players which created history in bringing 'Sam' to Derry for the first time. He won an Ulster Senior Hurling Championship medal in 2000 - Derry's first since 1908 - and he later managed the Derry hurlers to Nickey Rackard Cup success in 2017. Colm founded the award-winning company McGurk Architects in 1993 and they





have been leading architects on many GAA projects, including Owenbeg and Ballykinlar (which unfortunately Collie didn't see to fruition). An enterprising, intelligent and articulate man, Collie's legacy will undoubtedly live on.

Redmond O'Hanlon's in Poyntzpass, Armagh and Ulster lost a great servant on 2nd August when Raymond McSherry passed away after a short illness. We often hear of GAA 'greats' but the people who, in good times and bad, go that extra mile to keep clubs' afloat – often in the most difficult of circumstances – can rightly be classified as the real GAA 'greats.' Raymond McSheery was one such 'great.' He held virtually every position, including that of Secretary for over 30 years, in his beloved club and also served as Secretary/ Treasurer of the South Armagh GAA Board. He was team manager, kitman and referee amongst many other things and when the club was struggling to field at underage level, Raymond traversed every road in the parish to ensure the O'Hanlon's took the field. He was a match day steward at national, provincial and Armagh games for many years and we'll all miss his welcoming smile on our future visits to the Athletic Grounds. Raymond, known as 'Raymie' to those who knew him, was honoured by GAA President Liam O'Neill with a Gradam an Uachtarain in 2013 – there could hardly have been a more worthy recipient.

On the evening of 4th August Brendan McAnallen passed from this world. A quiet man, Brendan never sought plaudits or praise, and with his family he was instrumental in setting up The Cormac Trust Charity, following the sudden death of his son Cormac in 2004. Thanks to Brendan and The



Cormac Trust defibrillators are now commonplace at sports grounds and other public places throughout the country and many lives' have been saved due to his pioneering work in the field of sudden cardiac arrest awareness.

A long shadow fell over the GAA world when late on the evening of 5th August news began to seep out of the untimely death of young Tipperary hurling star Dillon Quirke. The talented player collapsed while playing for his club Clonoulty/Rossmore in a Tipperary Senior Hurling Championships game in Semple Stadium against Kilruane McDonagh's and was later pronounced dead in hospital. The death numbed the GAA world and has taken from us a great person and a hurler with so much promise. The holder of both All-Ireland minor and

U-21 medals, Dillon made his inter-county senior debut and played in all four of The Premier County's Munster Senior Hurling Championship games in 2022.

Another link in that historic 1960 All-Ireland winning chain was broken with the death of Kieran Denvir on 8th August. A son of Down's first ever County Chairman, Kieran made his inter-county debut in 1953 and six years later starred as Down defeated Cavan to land their first Anglo-Celt Cup. On 25th September 1960 he came on as a second half substitute as Down defeated Kerry to bring the Sam Maguire Cup across the border for the first time. A modest man, who enjoyed a successful career in veterinary, Kieran also captained UCD to Sigerson Cup success in 1956.

On 26th August we sadly learned of



the passing of another Ulster 'great' when word reached us of the death of Patsy Gormley. The Claudy native was a custodian of Derry teams at senior, junior and minor levels and he had the honour of being the man between the posts when Derry reached the All-Ireland Final in 1958, having captured their inaugural Ulster Senior Football title a couple of months beforehand.

There was great sadness in the Mourne County when the death of Martin Bailie was announced on 3rd September. Affectionately known as 'Spike', the affable Ballygalget man made history in 1988 when he was selected as an All-Star replacement and so became the first Down hurler to tour with the All-Stars. He won three Ulster Senior Hurling Championship medals in the 1990's, to add to the U-21 medal he won in 1983. He donned the 'red and black' jersey for 15 years and also had a successful club career, winning five Down senior Hurling Championship medals. Following his playing days, he became a leading administrator within his club and served for a period as Club Chairman.

There was devastation in Donegal

with the death of Patrick Devenney and his daughter Margaret (Sullivan) on consecutive days. Patrick - father of former Donegal footballer Brendan - was a dedicated servant of the St. Eunan's Club in Letterkenny and he passed away following a period of illness. However, nothing could have prepared the family and wider Letterkenny community for what happened on 22nd September, the day after his death, when his daughter Margaret died suddenly. Both father and daughter were buried following a poignant joint service on 24th September.

The GAA world learned with great sadness on 30th September of the death of former Dublin GAA legend Brian Mullins. As a 19-year-old Brian lit up the GAA world in 1974 and was pivotal to their All-Ireland victory that year and he would go on to win three further All-Ireland medals with 'the Dubs' (as well as nine Leinster Championship medals) and an All-Ireland Club medal with his club St. Vincent's. He also later managed both Dublin and Derry and famously led the Oak Leaf men to an Ulster title in 1998, their last time to capture the Anglo-Celt Cup prior to 2022.

Aaron O'Neill was an avid Armagh supporter and the community in Portadown was shocked by his sudden passing on 12th October. His daughter Caitlin, who plays her club football with Ballyhegan Davitts, was captain of the Armagh Minor Ladies Football team in 2022.

We were saddened to learn of the passing of Frank Toman in England, where he had resided for some years, on 16th October. The Clann Eireann man, who holds a unique record in the annals of GAA history as the only

person to win a Hogan Cup medal with two different schools (St. Colman's, Newry and St. Mary's, Belfast) passed away after a short illness. He won Ulster Minor and senior medals with Armagh, coming on as a substitute in the 1977 All-Ireland final against Dublin. His daughter Anna is a hockey international and won a Commonwealth Games gold medal with Great Britain just a few months before the death of her father. Well known folk musician and former Aghaloo footballer Barry Mohan tragically lost his life in a road accident on the morning of 17th October and ten days later there was further tragedy when young Killyclogher footballer John Rafferty also tragically died in a road accident. Just four days before his untimely death, John played for his beloved club in the Tyrone League Football Final and in 2019 he led the club to a County Minor title. The talented footballer also represented Tyrone at U-20 level.

Loughmacrory stalwart Ignatius (Nishey) Harte passed away on 26 October after a short illness - he is the brother of Canadian GAA Secretary and former Chairperson, Sean Harte - and just two days later Lamh Dearg and Antrim stalwart Frankie Wilson also lost his battle with cancer. He delighted us with his sterling performances on the playing field and he did much promotion of Gaelic Games in Our Lady and St. Patrick's College, Knock, where he worked as a PE teacher. He was also a successful Irish League footballer and coach.

Another link of that breakthrough Down All-Ireland winning team of 1960-61 was broken with the death of P.J. McElroy on 28th October. P.J.



represented the Mourne County from 1953 to 1962, winning three Ulster Championship and two All-Ireland senior medals. While he didn't feature in the 1960 final he played an integral part during the campaign and he lined out at full-forward in the 1961 final. He also represented Ulster in the mid-1950's and partnered Sean Blaney at midfield on the first St. Colman's College, Newry MacRory Cup winning team. He also won Down Senior Football Championship medals in 1962 and 1963.

Former St. Paul's and Armagh footballer -and Hogan Cup medal winner with St. Colman's College, Newry - Mickey McDonald passed away on 17th November, having taken ill while abroad the previous week. A talented sportsman, he also played Irish League Football for Glenavon and Cliftonville. On the day of Mickey's funeral, his nephew Rory McLlroy became DP World Tour Golf

champion for a fourth time.

We awoke to the news, on 24th November, that former GAA President Sean McCague had passed away during the night. Sean was a proud Scotstown man, a proud Monaghan man, a proud Ulster man, a proud Irishman - and he was also a proud GAA man. He served many roles in the Association and was Chairman of the Games Administration Committee (now CCCC) during the presidency of Peter Quinn, before himself becoming President of the GAA in 2000. Over the next three years he served the Association with distinction and on 17th November 2001 presided over the removal of Rule 21 from the GAA Rulebook. A former member of the Ulster Council, he enjoyed success as a manager with his native Scotstown, before being a highly successful manager of the Monaghan team, leading them to Ulster title successes in 1979, 1985 and 1988

and he also led them to a National League title in 1985. When appointed Monaghan manager in 1978, Farney County hadn't contested an Ulster Final since 1952 but Sean built great belief with his teams and brought Monaghan football to a new level. Monaghan people of a certain vintage will especially remember the drawn All-Ireland semi-final of 1985, when Sean's Farneymen came so close to dethroning a great Kerry team as All-Ireland champions. He also assisted Eugene McGee on two International Rules teams.

On 28th November news broke of another tragedy in the Eoghan Ruadh Hurling Club in Dungannon, with the death of former Club Secretary Ciaran Coyle. Ciaran had also played football with his native Stewartstown Harps and there was further heartbreak in Tyrone and Dungannon just days later when, on 6th December, the death was announced of teenager Matthew McCallan, a pupil at St. Patrick's College in Dungannon and playing member of the Dungannon Clarkes Club.

In a further tragedy young Kinawley GAA player Caitlin Hogg died on 8th December after a road accident, which occurred on her way home from school two days earlier. The talented pupil was described as one of Kinawley GAA's 'brightest lights' and as well as playing for numerous underage teams, she was also part of the club's young volunteer programme.

There was a sense of shock when news of the death of Ann Herron was announced on 11th December. Ann was the Treasurer of the Sean Dolan's Club in The Creggan and played a pivotal role in the development of

their new indoor complex. It is so sad that she was not around for its completion, though her legacy will remain through it.

On 12th December we learned of the death of Liam McGreevy, after a short illness. A member of the Glasdrumman GAA Club, Liam was a former Down GAA Youth Officer and Coaching Officer and as Head of PE at St. Colman's High School in Ballynahinch, he played an important role in the development of many a young player's sporting career.

On 13th December news filtered through of that great Scotstown gael Tommy Moyna, less than three weeks after the death of his great friend and clubmate Sean McCague. A regular attendee at our games, Tommy was a delegate to the Monaghan County Board for over 20 years and was part of the county Ulster Minor Championship winning team of 1945.

We remember the above and all our members who have passed away over the past year. May you 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 to further the ideals of this great organisation. I thank also the many stewards and ticket scanning personnel who assist on match days and in so doing, provide a valuable service to the many patrons who attend our matches.

I thank the officers of all nine Ulster counties and extend particular thanks to our County Secretaries and County

Chairpersons, with whom I have most dealings. Your ongoing help and support is greatly appreciated. If I may be forgiven, I pay tribute to Liam McCabe and Dominic McCaughey who have recently retired as County Secretaries in Cavan and Tyrone respectively. I've known both men for many years – indeed they were in post when I was Down County Secretary in the 1990's (Liam as Assistant Secretary, before he assumed the role of County Secretary in 2005, while Dominic served a remarkable 36 years as County Secretary) – and I have nothing but the greatest of admiration for them. Hopefully they will now be able to get a well-earned rest! I also say a special thanks to Michael Savage (Armagh), Mick McGrath (Donegal) and Michael Kerr (Tyrone) whose tenure as County Chairperson has ended and thank them for their generosity and support throughout their time in office.

I thank also the GAA President Larry McCarthy, Ard Stiurthoir Tom Ryan and the staff of Croke Park who are always so generous with their time. I also pay tribute to my fellow Provincial Secretaries for their friendship and support – our regular Monday morning meetings' can be interesting affairs at times.

I thank also our colleagues in Ulster Camogie, Ulster Ladies GAA and Ulster Handball for their co-operation and understanding and I also give thanks to the numerous statutory organisations' and other sporting bodies with whom Ulster GAA has a close working relationship.

The involvement of partners at all levels of our association is vital and I thank our Corporate Partners for their commitment to supporting

the GAA at provincial level during what are still very challenging economic times. They are: The Ulster Independent Clinic, Translink, MCS Group, Cathedral Eye Clinic, McKeever Sports, UTV, Bank of Ireland and O'Neill's International Sports. At this time last year, we were in negotiations with our two biggest partners, The Bank of Ireland and O'Neill's, and I am delighted to report that we have since agreed new long-term agreements with both of them. It was also pleasing to be able to host our partners in Croke Park on the occasion of the Derry v Galway All Ireland Football semi-final/Tailteann Cup Final this year. I thank also the Association's commercial sponsors for their ongoing support.

Finally, I pay the biggest thanks of all to the team at home for their continued loyalty and support. My wife Deirdre, a rock at my side, and to my children Étain, Ardán and Malacháí, I say a huge thank you. Without the help of you all, I would not be doing this wonderful job.



BRIAN MAC FHÍOBHÚÍ
RÚNAÍ CHOMHAIRLE ULADH CLG