



CLG ULADH

AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL

2024

12Ú EANÁIR 2024



05 TUARASCÁIL AN RÚNAÍ

It has been both an exciting and a challenging year for the Association in the province. On the field of play the new championship football structures had their first airing, while the second instalment of the split season since coronavirus restrictions were eased has enabled us to make a more complete evaluation of the pros and cons behind it.

There was success, failure, joy, near misses and heartbreak in equal measure and new technology, with more and more counties embracing streaming options, meaning that access to our games has never been easier.

With BBC television now one of the main players in the GAA media rights field and the All-Ireland Football Final shown on the BBC network, 2023 witnessed the largest ever television audience for an All-Ireland Football Final with over 1.8 million people tuning into the BBC and RTÉ to watch Dublin regain the title by overcoming Kerry in a pulsating final. For Ulster counties, and Derry in particular, it was a case of what might have been!

We rightly take great pride in our status as a community organisation and in so doing there is a particular onus on us to adhere to our values and principles. Our mantra is 'Where We All Belong.' A number of high-profile safeguarding cases in the past year have challenged us like never before and this will require a re-assessment and re-evaluation of how we do things in this difficult and complex field. The Association rightly prides itself on its track record in child safeguarding but our responsibilities go beyond that – a person does not suddenly become 'safe' on their 18th birthday! Our

policies and procedures will have to reflect new realities and new expectations. We will ultimately be judged on how well we respond to this new environment.

ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP FORMAT

The new format of the All-Ireland Championship generated large amounts of debate, with the reality of playing 24 games to eliminate just four teams in the round-robin series generating most of the discussion. The logic of eliminating just one of the four teams from the round-robin pool was to minimise the risk of 'dead-rubbers' in the final game. To that extend the format worked in that there was only one such game where neither team had anything 'to play for' - the Tailteann Cup game between Limerick and Wicklow - while only Clare were eliminated from the All-Ireland series prior to their final game.

A second argument was that there was a clear difference between wanting to win and needing to win. While this line of thought has some merit, the statistics clearly indicate that the most straightforward route is also the best route. In the All-Ireland series, three of the four group winners won their All-Ireland quarter-finals, with the other group winner (Armagh) only losing

following a penalty shoot-out. Another group winner won the Tailteann Cup (Meath), with the beaten finalists (Down) having been in the same group. It is undoubtedly arguable that the best route to a semi-final is to have a guaranteed quarter-final tie through winning your group and the statistics show this to be the case. Across both the All-Ireland series and the Tailteann

Cup only one county (Limerick) went into the final series of round-robin games having already won their group, a statistic that vindicates the chosen format. While ongoing review is important, this is not a format that I would be re-visiting in the near future.

GAMES ACTIVITY 2023

The championship commenced with Armagh hosting Antrim at the Box-It Athletic Grounds on Saturday 8th April and a mere five weeks later, Derry were leaving St. Tiernach's Park with the Anglo Celt Cup at the front of the bus for the second successive year. Congratulations to the Oak Leaf County on a historic back-to-back. The Ulster Under 20 Football Championship continued in its traditional spring slot in the calendar and again we were treated to some fantastic games. After a very entertaining competition, Down defeated Derry in a great final at the Box-It Athletic Grounds.

The 2023 Ulster Minor Football Championship was organised in the same timeframe and included a round robin format followed by quarter finals. This format was introduced on a one-year trial basis but it wasn't the success we would have hoped for with too many uncompetitive fixtures. Following new proposals adopted at the GAA Special Congress on 30th September, a tiered competition will follow the provincial championships in 2024.

Derry arrived at the final stage unbeaten, while Monaghan recovered from a defeat in the group stages to reach the decider. Both teams served up a cracking encounter and could not be separated in normal time or even extra time. Derry won the Fr. Murray Cup on penalties.



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The Allianz Football League again had contrasting fortunes for the Ulster counties. Armagh, Donegal, Monaghan and Tyrone all competed in the top tier. Tyrone, after losing their first three games, and Monaghan, again, performed miraculous recoveries, as both counties retained their Division 1 status. Donegal and Armagh occupied the bottom two positions after the seven games and were subsequently relegated. In Division 2, Derry topped the group after going unbeaten and despite losing out to Dublin in the Division 2 Final, are promoted back to Division 1 for 2024. Division 3 included Cavan, Down, Antrim and Fermanagh in an ultra-competitive section. Fermanagh topped the table after a final day win at Cavan with both teams being promoted, with Cavan going onto win the Divisional Final. Down finished in third, while Antrim occupied the sixth slot to retain their status and ensure that all nine Ulster counties will remain in the top three divisions in 2024.

In the Allianz Hurling League, Antrim defeated Laois in Division 1B to retain their top tier status. Down and Derry occupied the bottom two places in Division 2A, with Derry being relegated.

In Division 2B Donegal and Tyrone finished in third and fourth spots respectively, with Meath beating Donegal in the 2B Final. In Division 3A, Armagh finished second and Monaghan third, with Armagh beating the Farney County in the Semi-Final, only to fall to a strong Roscommon team in the final. Fermanagh finished bottom in the six-team group and were subsequently relegated. Finally, in Division 3B, Cavan topped the group and defeated Leitrim to secure promotion.

Once again an exciting and competitive Bank of Ireland Dr. McKenna Cup whetted the appetite for the season ahead with Derry defeating Tyrone in the final, which was played at the Box-It Athletic Grounds one week prior to the commencement of the Allianz Football League campaign. The Conor McGurk Cup, which is organised in conjunction with Queen's University Hurling club, again proved very competitive and history was made when Donegal took the honours for the first time, defeating Ulster University in the final.

SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2023 Ulster Senior Football Championship commenced with Armagh defeating Antrim by 0-20 to 1-08 in the First Round. The following weekend there were two quarter finals, highlighting the condensed nature of this year's championship. Fermanagh hosted Derry in Brewster Park and the reigning champions progressed on a 3-17 to 2-08

scoreline, while Monaghan finished strongly with a last-gasp Ryan O'Toole goal to emerge 2-17 to 1-18 winners over Tyrone in O'Neill's Healy Park. In the other two quarter finals, Armagh travelled to Cavan on 22nd April and emerged as 1-14 to 0-12 winners, while Down defeated Donegal by 2-13 to 1-11 at Pairc Esler the following day, the first time since 2010 that Donegal failed to win their opening championship game. The first semi-final saw Derry and Monaghan lock horns in O'Neill's Healy Park on Saturday 29th April. A strong attacking performance from Derry saw them win out by 1-21 to 2-10. In the other semi-final, an Armagh goal blitz was enough to see off Down on a 4-10 to 0-12 scoreline at St. Tiernach's Park, Clones.

The Ulster Final took place on Sunday 14th 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 the Ulster Ladies Senior Football clash between Armagh and Cavan gave us a fitting curtain raiser. The



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presence of the Mayobridge Band, Cumann na mBunscol games and honouring our Jubilee team (Derry 1998) contributed to a marvellous event. Derry and Armagh could not be separated in normal and extra time as the teams were tied at Derry 1-15 Armagh 0-18. Derry held their nerve to despatch their penalties and claim the Anglo Celt Cup for their second successive year. It was the first time in the history of our great association that a senior provincial final was decided on a penalty shoot-out. Conor Glass accepted the cup on behalf of his beloved county on a memorable day for the GAA in the province.

The fact that the game was decided on penalties generated much debate on the airwaves and occupied many column inches in the days and weeks that followed. Given the condensed nature of the championship that currently exists due to the split season, it is accepted that replays cannot be accommodated in all knock-out games. Although, perhaps, not the best preparation for the All-Ireland qualifier games that follow, there is however an argument that, as a final, the deciding game in the provincial championships should, like an All-Ireland Final, go to a replay if the teams are still level after extra-time, with a penalty shoot-out only being used if a replay was to finish level after-extra-time.

ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

With the introduction of the Tailteann Cup, the All-Ireland qualifiers stage was reduced significantly from previous years. In the All-Ireland Senior Football Championship, Ulster had five counties involved in the group stages. There were four



groups of four teams with Armagh and Tyrone pitted in Group 2, along with Westmeath and Galway. With only one team being eliminated, it kept interest alive until the last series of games and there was none more exciting than this group, with it literally going down to the last two kicks of the ball on the final day. Two missed frees by Galway against Armagh and Westmeath coming back to secure a draw against Tyrone (and indeed almost winning the game at the death) ensured that Armagh topped the group and progressed straight into the quarter final. Galway finished second, while Tyrone finished third to secure the Preliminary Quarter Final places.

In Group 4, Derry, Donegal, Monaghan and Clare were drawn together. Derry went through the group unbeaten by winning two games and drawing with

Monaghan in the other to progress to the Quarter Finals. Donegal edged out Monaghan in the final round of games and subsequently claimed the second spot in the group to ensure a home Preliminary Quarter Final, meaning that Monaghan finished in third. In those Preliminary Quarter Finals, Tyrone travelled to Donegal and played their best football of the year to win out by 1-18 to 0-13, while Monaghan edged past Kildare by the bare minimum in an exciting contest at Tullamore.

Subsequently, Ulster had four representatives left at the All-Ireland Quarter Final stage with three of them playing in Croke Park on Saturday 1st July. Kerry displayed their attacking ruthlessness as they defeated Tyrone on a 2-18 to 0-12 scoreline. In an all-Ulster affair, Monaghan and Armagh could not be separated after

extra time, so penalties ensued. In an all too familiar ending for the Orchard faithful, Monaghan emerged victorious after the shoot-out and progressed to the All-Ireland Semi-Final meeting with Dublin. The following day, Derry produced another highly professional display to defeat Cork by 1-12 to 1-08.

The semi-finals took place a fortnight later. Monaghan produced a brilliant display before a final quarter onslaught from Dublin saw them emerge as 1-17 to 0-12 winners. The Ulster disappointment continued the following day as Kerry and Derry went toe to toe. Derry played some brilliant football and despite missing a number of great chances were still in pole position in the final quarter. However, Kerry finished strongly and grabbed the vital scores at the death to win out by 1-17 to 1-15. It was a heartbreak for Derry who had given

so much and can count themselves most unfortunate to have lost out on the day.

TAILTEANN CUP

There were 17 teams in the 2023 Tailteann Cup, including four from Ulster, all of which qualified from their groups to the knockout stages. After finishing second in their group, Fermanagh were disappointingly defeated at home to Laois in the Preliminary Quarter-Finals by 1-11 to 1-09. Down navigated their way past Longford with a 1-20 to 1-12 win at Páirc Esler.

In the Quarter Finals, Down edged out Cavan in an enthralling all Ulster clash at Kingspan Breffni Park by 1-17 to 0-15 and Antrim also displayed their attacking poise at they defeated Carlow by 1-19 to 1-15 at Corrigan Park. The semi-finals were played as a double header in Croke Park on

Sunday 25th June and they were two very different games. Meath just managed to stave off a late Antrim onslaught to emerge winners by 2-16 to 2-14. In the second game, a close contest was expected but Down went goal crazy, with the game over as a contest long before half-time. In the end it finished 8-16 to 2-12, with two late Laois goals proving to be of little comfort to the Midlands side. In the final Down started well but a fortuitous Meath goal gave the Royals' renewed impetus and Down were never able to open up the Meath defence like they had done in the semi-final and in the end the powerful Royals were fully deserving winners on a 2-13 to 0-14 final scoreline.

MINOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2023 Electric Ireland Ulster Minor Football Championship was played on a round robin basis with a group of five and a group of four. The top four teams then progressed to the quarter final stage. While this move was well intentioned and designed to give our counties more games, the range in quality from the top teams to the bottom teams was too vast for this format and, consequently, there were numerous mismatches.

After the group games were concluded, the quarter-finals took place on Saturday 13th May. Cavan edged out Donegal by a single point, Monaghan defeated Armagh, while Derry and Tyrone had facile victories over Antrim and Fermanagh respectively.

In the semi-finals, we were treated to very different contests. Derry defeated Donegal by 0-9 to 0-4 at Killyclogher, while Monaghan defeated Tyrone on penalties in



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Roslea after they were tied 2-19 to 4-13. The final was another cracking affair and was featured live on TG4. Derry and Monaghan finished 1-15 to 3-09 after extra time and Derry, just like their senior counterparts, claimed the Ulster title on penalties.

In the All-Ireland Quarter Finals, played on Saturday 10th June, both Ulster counties were involved in a double header in Carrick-On-Shannon against Connacht opposition. Derry defeated Galway by 1-13 to 0-4, while Monaghan overcame Mayo on a 1-16 to 1-08 scoreline to cap a great day for the Ulster teams. In the semi-finals, Monaghan saw off Kerry by 1-11 to 0-11 at Tullamore in a curtain-raiser to the All-Ireland Preliminary Quarter-Final clash with Kildare and this win was the first instalment of a great day of double delight for the Farney side. The following day, a very controlled performance from the Ulster champions, saw Derry defeat Dublin by 3-11 to 1-08 at the Box-It Athletic Grounds. On Sunday 9th July, a massive crowd turned up to the Box-It Athletic Grounds for the All-Ireland Minor Final between Derry and Monaghan, a repeat of the Ulster Final. Derry seized control from the early stages and deservedly claimed the Tom Markham Cup on a 1-13 to 0-9 scoreline. Congratulations to the players and management and to Monaghan who gave so much to this year's minor championship, they can be very proud of reaching their first All-Ireland Final at this grade since 1939.

UNDER 20 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The Ulster Under 20 Football Championship returned to its traditional Wednesday night slot in the springtime. However, it must



be added that the competition was played at the same time as the Ulster Senior Football Championship and this resulted in some counties having to make tough decisions in relation to which team a player played for, as if a player played Senior Championship he was excluded from playing at U20 level. Thankfully, this matter has now been addressed ahead of the 2024 season but there is an onus on all counties to first and foremost bear in mind the welfare of the player and ensure that he is not put in an impossible situation. This will require dialogue and understanding on all sides.

The Preliminary Round clash between Monaghan and Armagh was postponed by three days due to a monsoon just before throw-in. In the re-fixtures at Clones, Monaghan just edged out the visitors by 0-9 to 0-7. In the quarter-finals, there were wins for Derry, Down, Monaghan and Donegal over Fermanagh, Tyrone, Cavan and Antrim respectively. In the semi-finals, Derry defeated Donegal by 0-11 to 0-5 at Owenbeg, while Down overcame Monaghan by 1-17 to 1-9 at Páirc Esler. In a really competitive final, Down's thirst for goals proved to be the difference as they claimed the Corn Dónall Ó Murchú on a 2-11 to 0-9 scoreline. Congratulations An Dún. In the All-Ireland Semi Final, played on 6th May in Parnell Park, Down lost out to the eventual winners, Kildare by 1-11 to 2-07 in a thrilling encounter.

CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS

The 2022 season finished with the concluding stages of the All-Ireland Club Championships. Pre-Christmas, the Ulster Junior Hurling champions Setanta from Donegal lost out in the Twinning Final (All Ireland Quarter-Final) to Kilburn Gaels at Carrickmore. On the 18th December, the Intermediate champions, Liatroim (Down) were defeated by Toreen from Mayo on a 1-18 to 1-14 scoreline at Kingspan Breffni Park.

In the Senior Hurling Championship semi-final, Dunloy produced a scintillating display in Croke Park to defeat the Galway and Connacht champions St. Thomas' by 1-14 to 0-13. In the final, on 22nd January 2023, despite Dunloy's strong resilience, the formidable Ballyhale Shamrocks from Kilkenny emerged victorious and collected their ninth All-Ireland title success with a 1-22 to 1-15 win. In the football competition, all three Ulster sides reached the Final but disappointingly all three fell at the final hurdle. In the Junior Championship, Stewartstown travelled to Glasgow pre-Christmas and defeated Glasgow Gaels in the Twinning Final. In the All-Ireland semi-final, they defeated Clifden by 1-14 to 1-9. In the All-Ireland Final at Croke Park, they faced a David Clifford inspired Fossa side. Stewartstown played some great football in the first half but some ill-discipline cost them dearly, yet they battled gallantly to the very end before losing out on a 0-19 to 1-13 scoreline.

At intermediate level, Galbally had a great semi-final victory over Dunmore McHales on a 4-4 to 1-09 scoreline. In the All-Ireland Final, they also faced Kerry opposition in the form of Rathmore. The Kerry side held the ascendancy for long spells and despite a strong final quarter by the Tyrone champions, Rathmore held on to win by 1-11 to 0-11.

In the Senior grade, Ulster champions Glen (Watty Graham's defeated Moycullen at Croke Park in the semi-final to set up a final meeting with Kilmacud Crokes, who had lost out to Kilcoo in the previous year's final. In a great game, the Dublin champions just held on to win by 1-11 to 1-09. However, in the aftermath of the game, it was highlighted that

Kilmacud Crokes had more than the allocated number of players on the pitch for the last play of the game, as they defended a '45' and their two-point lead. Glen objected to the result of the game and the Central Competitions Control Committee ordered a replay, as it was deemed that Kilmacud Crokes had breached Rule 6.44 of the Official Guide. However, the Dublin Club subsequently appealed this decision and on 3rd February the Glen Club advised Croke Park that they were withdrawing from the appeal process as they felt the conditions no longer existed for a replay to take place. Kilmacud Crokes were subsequently declared All-Ireland Club Football champions.

There are clear learnings from what was a sad episode that overshadowed what was a close and well contested match. The same rules apply to an underage league game, where a referee is the only neutral official as they do in an All-Ireland Final, where there is a full team of neutral officials. However, the reality is very different in both cases. Where there are no neutral sideline officials (which is the case in the vast majority of games) it is a direct matter between the referee and the team making the substitution. Where there is a full complement of neutral officials, a team official gives a substitution slip to a sideline official, who in turn deals directly with the referee in relation to the substitution taking place. I think we can learn from other codes and adopt a position that a substitute cannot enter the field of play until the player he is replacing has left the field of play.

The 2023 Ulster Club Championship began on the weekend of 28th October with 43 games taking place over seven weekends. At the time of writing most competitions have reached either final or semi-final stage.

INTER-COUNTY HURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

The format of the national competitions aims to provide a high number of games for Ulster counties at their own level, with five levels of competition.

In the Leinster Hurling Championship, Antrim were guaranteed five games in the group stages. A draw at home to Dublin augured well for the remainder of the campaign but three defeats on the bounce followed at the hands of Wexford, Kilkenny and Galway, which



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saw them travelling to Westmeath in the final round in a relegation battle. A fine performance in Mullingar saw Antrim emerge victorious and secure their Leinster Championship/ Liam McCarthy Cup status with a 4-24 to 1-19 victory. Westmeath were consequently relegated to the Joe McDonagh Cup for the coming season.

In the Tier 2 competition, the Joe McDonagh Cup, Down were the only Ulster representatives. In a tough group they played five games, with their only victory coming in the final round, away to Kildare. This win secured their status in the competition as Kildare were relegated to the Christy Ring Cup for 2024. In the Christy Ring Cup, Derry and Tyrone were the two Ulster representatives. In the six-team group, Tyrone finished with three points, including a draw with Derry, and subsequently occupied the fifth slot at the end of the group stage, securing their Christy Ring Cup status. Derry finished in second place, which qualified them for the final. In that Christy Ring Cup Final, a great second half comeback by the Oak Leafers just came up short as Meath edged the contest on a scoreline of 1-23 to 1-21 in Croke Park.

In the Nicky Rackard Cup, Ulster was represented by Armagh, Donegal and Fermanagh. In the six-team group stage, the counties experienced very different campaigns. Fermanagh finished bottom of the group with only one point and were subsequently relegated to the Lory Meagher Cup. Armagh had two wins and three defeats to finish third in the group and secure their status while Donegal finished in second position and qualified for the final. In the final,

played at Croke Park, Wicklow edged out Donegal by 1-20 to 3-12 to claim the Nicky Rackard Cup.

In the Lory Meagher Cup, Monaghan and Cavan both competed in the six-team group. Cavan finished third after a solid campaign, while Monaghan topped the group with three wins and a draw. Subsequently, they faced Lancashire in the decider at Croke Park. In a great game of hurling, Monaghan won out by 3-22 to 3-20 to collect a first ever Lory Meagher Cup for the Farney County. Congratulations to all involved.

In 2023, with the approval of the CCCC, Ulster re-introduced the U20 Hurling Competition, on a round-robin basis. Antrim, Derry, Donegal and Down entered the competition and following the group stage it was Antrim and Derry that advanced to the final. In the final, played at Owenbeg on 11th March, The Saffrons ran out 2-13 to 0-11 winners to secure the trophy and progress to the Leinster Championship, where they defeated Meath but lost out to Westmeath and Offaly to end their interest in the competition. Ulster also organised an U20 Hurling Development League and this provided competitive games at their own level for Armagh, Cavan, Fermanagh and Tyrone. This competition was played in February and March, with Cavan collecting the silverware, ahead of Tyrone. Five Ulster counties participated in the All-Ireland Under 20B Hurling Championship (Richie McElligott Cup). In the quarter-finals, Armagh and Tyrone lost out to Mayo and Roscommon respectively, while Derry defeated Donegal and Down had a comprehensive win over Wicklow. In the semi-finals, Derry beat Mayo while Roscommon defeated Down. In the final, which was played at Croke Park,

Derry claimed the Richie McElligott Cup by defeating Roscommon on a 3-17 to 2-14 score. Well done to the players and management.

In 2023, Ulster re-introduced the Minor Hurling Competition (Danny McNaughton Cup) on a round robin basis involving Antrim, Derry, Donegal and Down with each team guaranteed three games. After the group stages, Antrim and Down occupied the top two places and faced each other in the final. In that final, played at Dunsilly on 11th March, Antrim ran out comfortable 6-13 to 1-13 winners to secure the Ulster Minor Hurling Championship and progressed to





the Leinster Championship (Tier 1). In a tough group, Antrim lost their three games against Galway, Laois and Kilkenny and thus ended their involvement in the championship. As Ulster runners up, Down entered the Leinster Tier 2 competition and they also found the going tough where they lost both games against Meath and Westmeath respectively.

The five counties which didn't compete in the Danny McNaughton Cup took part in a newly created Ulster Minor Hurling Development League, along with an U16 team from Antrim and it proved to be a competitive competition with the Antrim lads taking the honours. In the Celtic Challenge, Antrim, Derry, Donegal and Tyrone all qualified for the quarter-finals of the Division 3 competition (Corn William Scott) and indeed the former two counties progressed to an all-Ulster Final where the Antrim team emerged triumphant. In Division 4 Armagh reached the semi-finals but went under to Roscommon, while in the Division 5 competition Monaghan, having defeated Fermanagh in the semi-final, lost out to Wicklow Blue in the final. Cavan was eliminated at the quarter-final stage.

SOUTH ULSTER ADULT CLUB LEAGUE

This league competition is organised across three grades and gives an opportunity to clubs to compete against teams of a similar standard from different counties. The winners in 2023 were Erne Gaels (Fermanagh), Bunrana (Donegal) and Traugh Gaels (Monaghan). My sincere thanks go out to Kieran Farmer for the sterling work he does in organising the games programme for this competition.

HURLING/SHINTY INTERNATIONAL

Saturday 23rd October saw the Shinty International take place between Ireland and Scotland and it was played at Páirc Esler, Newry, where the Down County Committee proved to be marvellous hosts. The hybrid game returned for the first time since 2019 - the series had been put on hold due to COVID-19 - and Ireland ran out well deserving winners. Ulster were well represented on the squad with Neil McManus (Antrim) captaining the team to victory and he was joined by Caolan Taggart (Down), Niall Arthur (Monaghan) and Luca McCusker (Fermanagh). Terence 'Sambo' McNaughton was also part of the management team. Well done to all involved.

CÚCHULAINN AND TÁIN ÓG LEAGUE COMPETITIONS

These leagues have proved to be very popular and my thanks goes out to Ulster Hurling Manager Kevin Kelly and his team for their efforts in organising so many games across a range of counties in order to promote the game in areas where Gaelic Football is largely the dominant code. This year saw 429 games played across U-17, U-15 and U-13 grades

POC FADA

The Ulster Poc Fada was once again excellently hosted by the Shane O'Neill's club in Glenarm, with four categories of competition, namely, Senior and U16 Hurling and Senior and U16 Camogie. Conor Woods (Ballycran & Down) emerged as the winner in the Senior Hurling, finishing just ahead of Liam Watson (Loughgiel & Antrim). Sean Óg McLaren (St. Paul's & Antrim) retained the Under 16 Hurling title and he came second in the All-

Ireland competition which is held on Annaverna in the Cooley Mountains.

Emma Mulvaney from Castletara in Cavan won the Senior Ladies Camogie Competition, with Tiarná Kelly from Ballinascreen in Derry winning the U16 Camogie title and she went on to win the All-Ireland title. Well done to Tiarná and all those who won provincial honours.

ULSTER HURLING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The focus of the Ulster Hurling Development Programme is to engage players and coaches at 'grassroots' level in a constructive games programme and provision of coach and referee educational opportunities. The hurling staff who organise and develop the Programme concentrate on participation and performance levels through engagement with clubs, schools and counties. This is implemented through four key objectives:

1. Implementation of annual participation hurling games programme
 - Indoor Hurling
 - Regional Go Games
 - CúChulainn & Táin Óg Leagues
2. Plan and delivery of development hurling [U14 to U17] coaching & games programme
 - County Minor and Celtic Challenge
 - Academy Squads
 - Ulster U16 Players Camp
3. Provide coaching support within clubs and linking with feeder schools
 - Primary School coaching support
 - Secondary School coaching support
 - Club workshops

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4. Target and implement coach/referee education opportunities within each region.
- National Governing Body (NGB) Awards (Introduction to Coaching Gaelic Games, Award 1, Award 2)
 - Ulster Coach Academy
 - Referee Foundation courses
 - Regional Hurling Roadshows

I thank everyone involved in the delivery of this programme, much of which is done away from the public spotlight, but it does engender a love of hurling and camogie amongst young people and is undoubtedly helping to develop the game in 'weaker' areas.



REFEREES

In concluding my summary of games activity in 2023, I wish to thank our match officials. I thank all our referees for their time, commitment and involvement in the delivery of our much-increased games programme in a tighter timeframe.

The Referees Pathway document for Ulster is now in situ as we strive to develop and retain our match officials. Without referees, there are simply no games. All of our referees make themselves available and some at very short notice. On behalf of Ulster GAA, I say thank you to all of our referees and fellow match officials for their continued support. I thank the Referees Committee, under the stewardship of Sean Rooney and Jim O'Rourke and pay tribute to staff members Stephen Donnelly and Ryan Mellon for their continued work in this important area. I also welcome Gary Mallon on board as Ulster GAA

Referee Development Officer and he will play a leading role in helping to both develop existing referees and attract new people to the cause.

There is no doubt that instances of abuse of referees, be it physical, verbal or online, does make it more difficult to attract new recruits. Attacks on match officials must be stamped out. Committees need to be brave and don't be afraid to take tough decisions in dealing with such cases but there needs to be a message, loud and clear, that this will not be tolerated.

NEIL MCMANUS

Just a few weeks after he helped ensure that Antrim retained their Leinster Hurling Championship status, Neil McManus, arguably the greatest ever hurler to don the famous 'saffron jersey', announced his retirement from inter-county hurling. A victory over Westmeath in Mullingar on 28th May was to be his last hooray on the

inter-county stage, with the glorious sunshine lighting up the day, just as Neil had done on so many occasions during his glittering career. Since making his inter-county debut at minor level in 2005, Neil represented his beloved Antrim for 19 seasons. He won an Ulster Minor title that year and repeated the feat as captain the following year. An Ulster U21 medal followed in 2007 and he went on to collect 10 Ulster Senior Hurling championship medals. Joe McDonagh Cup success followed in both 2020 and 2022. A role model for any aspiring hurler, his clubmate Terence 'Sambo' McNaughton described Neil as "the full package." There can be no more apt description of a man who has left us with some indelible memories. He has given so much enjoyment to so many people over the years and I have no doubt that he will continue to entertain and enjoy as he continues his club career with his beloved Cushendall.



At the latter part of the season two great footballing stalwarts in Ronan McNamee (Tyrone) and Benny Heron (Derry) also announced their retirement from the inter-county scene. The Aghyaran man was a consistent and dependable full-back and in his illustrious career for the Red Hand County he won three Ulster Championship medals, an All-star award and, of course, that much coveted Celtic Cross, in 2021. Ballinascreen's Benny Heron also called time on a stellar inter-county career when he announced that he would not be returning for a twelfth year with the Oak Leaf County. An ace finisher, he won back-to-back Ulster Championship medals in 2022 and 2023 and played a key role in helping Derry rise through the divisions to take their place at the top table of league football in 2024.

THE MACRORY CUP

This year marks the centenary of the MacRory Cup, a competition with a rich tradition, great (or maybe not so great!) memories and, above all, a proud history. It is a competition that undoubtedly sits proudly at the top table of GAA affairs in the province. In 1923 Dr. Joseph MacRory, Bishop of Down and Connor (and later Cardinal), presented a trophy to be played for in Ulster Colleges' Football and it was indeed fitting that the first recipients of this magnificent silverware were St. Patrick's College, Armagh, the alma mater of the future Cardinal. The first game in the competition was played in Armagh on 21st November 1923 between St. Patrick's, Armagh and St. Macartan's, Monaghan and, appropriately, Ulster Schools marked the anniversary of this great occasion by playing a MacRory Cup game between the same two colleges exactly 100 years to the day after the historic first meeting.

In a fitting ceremony, presided over by the Archbishop of Armagh, Dr. Eamon Martin, on 13th October 2023, a plaque was laid on the grave of Cardinal MacRory in St. Patrick's Cemetery - fittingly on the anniversary of his death, which occurred 78 years earlier. Another plaque was also laid on the grave of Fr. Tom Rafferty, the first Honorary Secretary of Ulster Colleges', who did so much to promote the MacRory Cup in its formative years and who is buried close to Cardinal MacRory.

The first MacRory Cup involved just three schools and was organised on a league basis, St. Patrick's, Armagh being declared the winners after winning all four of their games, which were played on a home and away basis. It has certainly grown in stature in the intervening 100 years and the final has been televised live (or at least online) since 1990. Many players who have gone onto greater things in the GAA - and beyond - have graced this great competition and as we celebrate this important milestone, the hope is that it will continue to be celebrated just as keenly when the next centenary of this great competition comes around.

DISPUTES RESOLUTION AUTHORITY

In 2005 the Association approved the creation of the Disputes Resolution Authority (DRA) to avoid decisions made by internal bodies within the GAA being appealed to the High Court. This action followed a number of challenges made against GAA units, the most notable of which involved a Westmeath footballer who was granted an interim order by the High Court which allowed him to play in the 2004 All-Ireland quarter-

final. The ethos behind the creation of the DRA was that a court would be unlikely to hear such a case, when an independent arbitration mechanism was already in existence. To that extent the existence of the DRA has proved successful in that there has been no need for units or members to go to the High Court by means of remedy and it has undoubtedly resulted in financial savings for any unit who would have been party to any such High Court challenge.

However, like many things in the world GAA there have been unintended consequences. At the time of writing there have been over 40 appeals to the DRA this year..... and counting! Would there have been anywhere near this number of High Court challenges if the DRA didn't exist? The answer must surely be an emphatic 'no.'

While there should always be recourse open to a member or unit who believe that they have been the subject of a grave injustice, all too often the DRA is being used as just another strand of the GAA's disciplinary mechanism. This is not what it was ever intended to be. This is not what it should be. This needs to be remedied.

When the DRA was established in 2005, any application to the DRA must be accompanied by a deposit of €1,000 and all or part of this may be reimbursed at the discretion of the Tribunal. Over 18 years later that fee remains at €1,000 despite a requirement in rule for it to be reviewed on an annual basis. I very much doubt if the cost of an appeal or application for interim relief to the High Court today, remains the

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same as it was in 2005. It is long since past the time that the DRA deposit fee is amended to be more reflective of times and it should also be the case that where a claimant is unsuccessful in their challenge, that they should bear the costs of the other party/parties, unless the Tribunal decree that there are some mitigating circumstances. These, however, should only be by exception. It is surely an opportune time for a complete review of the DRA process.

COACHING AND GAMES DEVELOPMENT

2023 was a mixed year for Coaching and Games with a major positive being the renewal of a four-year funding programme with Sport NI, but this was countered with the termination of the Curriculum Sports Programme, funded through the Department for Education and the loss of 12 valued members of staff as a consequence.

Our work within primary and post primary schools, further and higher education and our grassroots club coaching programmes has continued throughout 2023. Activity has also increased with our clubs, further and higher education and in our counties and again I wish to acknowledge the excellent work that is being done in sustaining and promoting our games in these environments by teachers, development officers, the schools and college staff. We have additional support for handball and the Ulster Handball Committee have been active with National Handball in the development of new clubs and opportunities for coach and referee education. To play our games we need club and county-based volunteers who deliver on administration, coaching and refereeing roles.

We have been working to address all our coaching, refereeing and player pathways. 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. Additional support has been provided with the appointment of a Referees Development Officer and a Pathways Development Manager.

Funding for Development

Development work could not happen without the support of our funding partners. With a base of over 161,000 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 Northern Ireland, Department for Education, National GAA and Ulster GAA.

Sport NI is a significant funder for our work. Funding is now in place for 2023-2027 allowing us to continue to support handball, disability, club coaching support, football, ladies football and hurling. The extension of funding halfway through the year has allowed us to plug some gaps in our provision. The key funding pillars outlined by Sport NI align significantly with our Strategy, with significant focus on Retention and Growth, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Pathway Access and data generation and research.

Department for Education NI

programme continued to end of June 2023. During this period the staff continued to support our schools. Research with the schools has shown the value that they placed on the programme. It has been embedded in their delivery for over 18 years but had been reduced from 32 staff to 12 core staff during that period. Unfortunately, the lack of a functioning Executive and budget pressures has resulted in the cessation of the programme and the redundancy of experienced and motivated young people. Ulster GAA will continue to lobby the Department on the merits of the programme but in the absence of a Minister this will likely be more in hope than expectation.

The Sports Institute continues to assign 200 hours to Ulster GAA so that we can access their services. These hours are available to our counties. They have been used in the last twelve months to support one to one engagement with players, deliver workshops to groups of service providers, to support ladies football teams looking at their performance culture and environment, sports science, nutrition and strength and conditioning. Ulster GAA will continue this relationship into 2024 and hope that we can develop it further with our ladies' codes as well as offer support to our men's codes who express an interest.

National GAA also continue to support our County and Provincial staffing structures and increased funding for Games Development is warmly welcomed. In recent time the implementation of the Mazar's Report has been ongoing. It is a

laborious process which involves ongoing discussion with various stakeholders, including Provincial Councils and County Committees, on a range of topics including staff structures, roles, responsibilities, salary scales and on the number of employers within the Association. Hopefully, everything can be agreed within the coming months and we can fully concentrate on our 'raison d'être' of promoting Gaelic Games. The outcome of the HR Review will see a closer relationship with our counties and delivery on national programmes. This closer working relationship should enable both our counties and the provincial council to synergise their efforts to maximise potential and ensure better outcomes for coaches and players alike.

GAMES DEVELOPMENT

Hurling Development continues to be run centrally by Ulster GAA, with Development Officers assigned to regions. Recruitment of additional hurling staff is key to expansion of the games. Initiatives delivered closely link with National initiatives. The regional or cross provincial leagues and competitions involving teams from North Leinster and Connacht continue to be both challenging and successful. They provide the right level of competition for the competing clubs.

As the age grades debate continues, we focus our attention on the development of football in our club's and schools. Over the winter we have been running indoor games opportunities, targeting our smaller clubs with nine-a-side blitzes. Cross community initiatives continue in the integrated sector and through our Cúchullians coaching. GAA for ALL has gathered momentum with



the embedding of 8-12 club hubs targeted to develop opportunities. This enabled Ulster GAA to host their inaugural 'GAA For All day', which took place in Donaghmore on 7th October. Teams from across the province participated in what was a great day for the association in the province and sincere thanks go out to our wonderful hosts, the Ulster GAA staff and volunteers who made it happen. Special praise goes out to Ulster GAA President Ciaran McLaughlin for his leadership in driving forward this initiative and to Bronagh Lennon and Kieran McKeever for the pivotal role they played in making this great event happen.

The Wheelchair Hurling Programme continues, thanks in the main to the great efforts of Paul Callaghan, Shane McCann and Garreth Thornton, with our senior team winning the

National League in 2023 and losing out narrowly to Munster in the Championship.

In all Codes, coaching in schools, development of new referees, coach education and academy support, disability and inclusion provides the focus for the development officers. In addition, we must continue to strive to change coaching behaviour and the behaviour of players and spectators. We must keep focus player centred, encourage development, instil respect for our referees, make it fun and not just about the win. A huge challenge across the board.

COACH EDUCATION

Our Coach Education programme continues to provide new opportunities for coaches at all levels. Programmes and workshops

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for coaches and service providers continued through 2023. The Coach Academy targeted coaches in the talent space providing additional mentoring support for individuals and groups. ICGG Course delivery continued with work completed on integration of the safeguarding programme into its delivery. The level 1 and level 2 courses in the Club and schools' space also continued. To supplement this, we have the online and face-to-face workshops and in particular the athletic development programme. Our annual Coaching Conference is scheduled for January 2024.

ULSTER GAA HANDBALL

Ulster GAA's work with Ulster Handball has moved on exponentially in recent years. Fiona Shannon has been appointed as Handball Development Manager on a four-year contract and, with the assistance of funding from

the RANK Foundation, Eilise McCrory has been appointed as Development Officer for two years. Both staff are supported by National appointments also working within the province. This has allowed increasing handball coaches and referees to come on board and it has also resulted in the birth of a number of new clubs. The post holders are integral to the Ulster GAA Team and have a remit for development in schools and clubs, enhancement of coach and officials' education and increasing female participation.

The aforementioned Eilise and her Breacach colleague Conor McElduff had the honour of winning the All-Ireland Senior Singles Men and Ladies Wallball titles respectively, while Caitlin Conway, also from Tyrone, picked up a Junior title. Also, Ulster had its first GAA Handball President since Sean McEntee when

Donegal native Conor McDonald, a member of the Monaghan Harps Club, assumed this prestigious office at their Handball Congress in Monaghan and we wish him well during his tenure in office.

GAA ROUNDERS

One of the success stories in recent years has been the growth in the number of clubs taking up Rounders. In 2020 there were just three clubs in Ulster but a growth of 300% has seen that figure increased to 12 by the end of 2023. Hopefully, this growth will continue and with the support of County Committees' we can build on this foundation and increase participation levels across the country.

A promotional day in Garvaghey in the spring brought clubs together and demonstrated the work which was taking place to raise the profile of





the sport. Between the promotion of Rounders and the boost it gave to the teams, this proved to be a successful initiative to launch the year.

In June a very successful primary school tournament was held in conjunction with Doire Cumann na mBunscoil. Over six days, 25 schools took part, 57 teams played and around 800 children from South Derry participated. It is hoped to build on this and to expand the tournament to an annual, county-wide event, with the additional aim of expanding and replicating this across all counties in the province. Feedback from the tournaments showed that GAA Rounders offers a different playing experience for children who may or may not play the other GAA sports. Contact has been made with some secondary schools in Derry to bring the sport to older children. Again, once a solid foundation with second level schools' is in place, it may be easier to replicate this across the province.

The GAA World Games in July provided an opportunity to bring the game of Rounders to a global audience. A successful exhibition game, which involved players from the entire island, was held as part of the games programme.

On the national stage it was a great year for Carrickmacross Emmet's who won three All-Ireland titles. The Senior Mens' team defeated Erne Eagles in an all-Ulster Final, while there was also national honours for their Intermediate Mixed and Junior Ladies' teams.

An invitational tournament, aimed particularly at newer clubs, was held in Cloghan the hospitality and excellent facilities provided by the

Monaghan County Committee was a further boost to the promotion of the sport in the province.

The GAA Rounders Year concluded with the All-Stars celebrations in Athlone on October 14th. Ulster was heavily represented at the awards, seeing seven players receive honours. Carrick Emmett's added another trophy to their heavily laden cabinet when they were voted Club of the Year by their peers. Congratulations to them and indeed to all the clubs who are striving to increase the profile of this great game.

Overall, it was a very successful year and the aim is for GAA Rounders to continue to progress and with the support of Ulster GAA to get new clubs and underage teams to join. In particular, I wish to thank Anna Bradley and Ronan Kiernan for their sterling efforts in developing the game over the past number of years. While they may be playing more low-profile roles in 2024, I know that they will continue to give their support and commitment to developing the game as it grows from strength to strength. I also wish every success to Arleen Ramsey as she assumes the role on Ard Comhairle.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Our last strategic plan, which was published as we began to emerge from the throws of the COVID-19 pandemic, focused heavily on sustainability, with some of our more ambitious aspirations put on hold given the uncertain future that lay ahead. That future now looks a little more certain and under the leadership of Kieran McKeever and Bronagh Lennon a new strategic plan, which will have a five-year lifespan (the most recent strategic plans had

a three-year duration), is presently being compiled by a hard-working and diligent team and it will be published early in 2024.

The Leadership and Planning Committee will oversee its progress and the plan will shape the direction of travel for our members, players, volunteers and GAA units as we head towards what will be an exciting and, perhaps, historic period for our association and our sister organisations.

During the year counties Armagh, Tyrone and Down launched their new strategic plans. Both counties have ambitious plans on and off the field and they consulted widely before finalising their document and the vision articulated by both counties will no doubt sustain and, indeed, further develop the promotion of Gaelic Games in the respective counties. Other counties are also in the process of developing their new plans.

SAFEGUARDING

2023 saw the legal conclusion to what has become known as 'The Crossmaglen case'. A former Club Treasurer pleaded guilty to 162 abuse charges against 23 victims over a period of close to 30 years. We are indebted to those victims who remained steadfast in their resolve to ensure that the perpetrator was brought to justice and we extend our sincere thanks to their families, the club and wider community for their ongoing support. We don't know how many victims there were, but we can be sure that the actions of those victims who broke their silence have saved future victims from having to endure the trauma and pain that they endured. Ulster

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GAA are deeply saddened and sorry that this abuse took place within one of our clubs, perpetrated by one of our own members and from the moment we became aware of what was happening, we were committed to helping and supporting those impacted in any way we could. This commitment remains and one can only but hope that happier times lie ahead.

The world of Safeguarding in Sport is changing apace. It is vital that we recognise that abuse happens in society and therefore it is only natural that concerns will be raised in an organisation of our magnitude which is totally embedded in the community. The Association has continually updated its Child Safeguarding policies and guidance over the past 20 years, and while it is never perfect, we can be rightly proud of the policies, procedures, practices and training in this vital area of our Governance.

But our duty of care isn't just for our youth. As an Association, we have a responsibility to Safeguard all members who participate in Gaelic Games and Activities, regardless of age or ability. A number of concerns in recent times required us to address gaps in our procedures and therefore, in late 2022, Ulster GAA began work on the development of an Adult Safeguarding Policy, the first in the GAA. To support this work, an Adult Safeguarding Panel of experts to whom cases of an Adult Safeguarding nature can be referred for review, has been appointed.

At this juncture may I pay tribute to the immense work carried out by Marcella Leonard during her time as an independent member of

our Management Board. She was a driving force behind the need for such a policy and she has played a pivotal role in helping to develop it. Her expertise and knowledge in this sensitive and challenging area is second to none. While no longer on our Board, I know she will continue to assist Ulster GAA where possible and guide us in our efforts to make our sport safer for all.

The first referral to the Adult Safeguarding Panel was made this year, when they were tasked with considering our response towards concerns of a domestic abuse and violence nature that had been raised. The Association is considering the findings of this review and there is little doubt that increased safeguards will be required in the future.

Ulster GAA has committed to the White Ribbon Pledge to never commit, excuse or stay silent about sexual harassment, sexual assault or domestic violence against others and I use this forum to reaffirm our commitment to this pledge. In so doing I encourage any member who has concerns about these serious and sensitive matters to raise these either with their County Designated Liaison Person (DLP) or the Safeguarding Managers at Ulster or National levels. One of our core values is Inclusiveness. I wonder if our members stop to think about what this actually means? For me, it means we are welcoming for all and everyone who wishes to participate should be given the opportunity to do so. This means at Go Games level that everyone should get a chance, where the focus is on participation for all rather than just on the better players, at the expense of the rest.

The Respect Initiative was developed

to help foster and encourage a positive culture at all levels between opposing players, team officials and match day officials, in addition to supporters and it is incumbent upon all of us who work within the Association, particularly with players and coaches, to continue to encourage respectful attitudes towards others. When our actions fall far short of what is required, they need to be challenged. A win at all costs mentality, that unfortunately has permeated throughout some of our games and teams, is likely to be detrimental to the long-term player development and is in danger of creating a culture and attitudes among those players that is not conducive to the values of the GAA. Maybe it is time for us all to press the re-set button!

A worrying trend in recent times surrounds the apparent increase in 'off the ball' incidents on the field of play, resulting in serious injury for some players, both at juvenile and adult levels. The trauma experienced by those impacted cannot be underestimated, and I appeal to all clubs, managers, coaches, players and parents to ensure that this type of behaviour is actively discouraged and that there are serious consequences for those who engage in same. This will require rule change. While gravity can be applied in cases where it is deemed that more than the minimum suspension is warranted, history tells that committees are reluctant to go beyond double the minimum, for fear of having their decision over-turned by a higher body on appeal. Our rules, while well-defined, are quite prescriptive and absolute - they were drafted with 'legal' standards and procedures in mind, but I often wonder how much different they



may look had they been written by medics? I remind clubs that this type of behaviour cannot be tolerated and rather than adopt a cloak of silence, be brave and do the right thing, difficult as it may be at the time. Only through such actions will we see a reduction in such serious incidents. Ulster GAA have in our toolkit a 'One Punch can Kill' course which is particularly aimed at educating young people on the potential impact of such actions. Our door is always open!

Our Safeguarding tutors continue to deliver our suite of courses to our members in the most diligent and attentive manner and this is to be warmly applauded. They are the voice of Ulster GAA in communicating to our members the importance and content of our Safeguarding Policies and Procedures, in turn assisting in the delivery of a high standard of practice in their implementation.

I wish to recognise the work of our Safeguarding Team of Bernie Fox and Conn Stevenson – I will reference the work of Bernie later in my report – and also to the Ulster Safeguarding Committee, under the stewardship of Cavan's Anne Fortune, who has done a sterling job in assisting County and Club Children's Officers as they navigate the most complex and sensitive of safeguarding cases. Anne Fortune, Stephen Sherry (Tyrone), Mary McEnaney (Monaghan) and Mick McGrath (Donegal) won't be returning to their county roles and I commend and pay tribute to the work they have undertaken on behalf of the Association during their tenure. I thank also Barney Herron, Gary Farrell, Michelle Friel, Fergus Cooper and Anita Kehoe for their ongoing and valuable work in their respective

counties, and also our colleagues in the LGFA and Camogie Associations for their contributions to the committee over the past year.

A5

On the night of 27th October 2022, I attended a wake near Loughmacrory, Co. Tyrone. It was a night when driving conditions were difficult and I considered travelling home via Omagh, rather than the more direct route via Carrickmore. I chose the latter and joined the A5 not far from the Ballygawley Roundabout. Had I gone home by Omagh, I would have come across a fatal accident on the road, close to the turn-off for Beragh. The deceased was John Rafferty, a young footballer with Killyclogher.

Back in July 2007 the NI Assembly approved the A5 Western transport Corridor, an upgrade of the 93km route from Aughnacloy to Newbuildings from single to dual carriageway. Over 16 ½ years later not one shovelful of tarmac has been laid.

Just over three months after John's death, I was privileged to attend the launch of the 'A5 Enough Is Enough' campaign at the Tyrone GAA Centre of Excellence in Garvaghey. Niall McKenna, The Chair of the Campaign Group, was a club colleague of John and it was his death that prompted Niall and others to establish the group.

Since the Assembly made the decision to upgrade the A5, close to 50 people have lost their lives on this stretch of road and many more have been injured. It is a perilous road and one must ask the question how many more lives must be lost before the correct action is taken. The delay has led to spiraling costs but this cannot

be used as an excuse for not doing what's right. A Public Inquiry has now taken place with its findings expected shortly. One can only but hope that the proposed upgrade will be given the green light to proceed.

SEAN BROWN

On the night of 12th May 1997 Sean Brown, Chairperson of Bellaghy GAC, was abducted as he locked the gates of the club and driven some 10 miles to a layby close to the M2 when he was taken from the car and shot. No one has ever been charged with the murder. An inquest into the death commenced in March 2023 and immediately adjourned. To show solidarity with and support for the Brown family in their quest for the truth, in June of this year I attended one of the numerous pre-inquest hearings which have taken place prior to the commencement of the full hearing, which is presently scheduled for January 2024. Other leading GAA figures have also attended. In September 2023 the Northern Ireland Troubles Legacy Bill was passed into law and this effectively means that any conflict related inquest which has not reached consideration stage (i.e. evidence sessions have concluded) by 1 May 2024 will be halted and the case will transfer to the newly established Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR). Opposition to the Bill received cross party support from the political parties in the North and from the Irish Government, but the Conservative Government proceeded with its passage through Parliament and it is now law. In October, one of the pre-inquest hearings heard that 18 new files containing 'sensitive information' had just been located and the

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following month it was revealed that the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) had issued a Public Immunity Interest (PII) Certificate following an application from The Security Service (MI5) to withhold certain information pertaining to the murder. This has only added to the speculation that there may have been collusion attached to the murder. There is now a real fear that any further delay will cast grave doubt on the 1st May 2024 deadline being achieved. Sean Brown's murder was clearly sectarian – his only 'crime' was being a member of the GAA. As an Association we must continue to use whatever influence we have to ensure that this case is concluded as expeditiously as possible and the Brown family can at least take some solace from a completed inquest.

CLUB & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Club and Community Development Department is responsible for Club and Volunteer support, Irish Language and Culture, Health and Wellbeing of our members, and Community Outreach. The Department plays a role in public affairs and contributes to relevant engagements with public representatives and external agencies and organisations. There are numerous 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.

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Public Affairs and engagements with external agencies

Dept of Foreign Affairs – Ulster GAA, as lead partner, in conjunction with Ulster Rugby and Irish FA have delivered a successful cross community programme entitled "Sport Uniting Communities" over the last 12 months.

PeacePlus – The Peace IV programme ceased in late 2022, but the multisport partnership of Ulster GAA, Irish FA and Ulster Rugby are still 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. If

successful, Ulster GAA will be the lead partner in this funding programme.

Community Relations Council – Ulster GAA are coming to the end of our two-year funding award from CRC. This has been very successful, and we are in process of making a fresh application for continued funding for the next period. The programme (as outlined in detail below) helps to deliver GAA activities to non-traditional GAA groups and schools.

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. Ulster GAA also met with CLOA (Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Association) to outline our work in community outreach, our impact within communities and the need for improved playing facilities.

PSNI – We 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 2023 Ulster GAA attended a Reference Engagement and Listening event (REaL), hosted by the PSNI for representatives of the CNR community to discuss issues around policing. We have also introduced Community Police Officers, and their role in the community, to young GAA members at some of our club engagement events.



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. Phase 2 of the programme began with 46 clubs from Ulster involved. Since Phase 2 of the Green Club Programme launched in March this year, clubs have received training webinars in the use of the Toolkit, club and community consultation and sustainability action planning as well as thematic webinars in Water, Biodiversity and Waste, and an Energy Webinar. All Ulster Green clubs attended an in-person event in December in Tyrone.

NI Human Rights – Ulster GAA continue to sit on the Sport and Human Rights forum and during the year our Volunteer Development Officer delivered a presentation to the forum on the importance of volunteering in a sporting context.

Belfast Pride – To further highlight the emphasis for Equality, Inclusivity and Diversity, in July, Ulster GAA participated in Belfast Pride and were joined by representatives from Ulster LGFA, Ulster Camogie and Ulster Handball. Among the GAA representation in the parade were Aeracha Uladh, Antrim GAA and clubs from Antim and Down.

Integrated Education Fund – Ulster GAA has continued to meet with the IEF to explore new ways of encouraging GAA activity within the Integrated school sector. Numerous schools have availed of the Integrated Education Sports Equipment Grants to acquire GAA equipment and some schools have availed of GAA coaching sessions. Increasingly we are seeing more Integrated school participate in

Ulster Schools competitions and this is to be welcomed. Integrated schools avail of coaching through the CRC funding, while others participate in the Cuchulainn initiative.

Thinking Futures; Building Recognition – The Department of Foreign Affairs granted funding to the Institute of Irish Studies at Liverpool University to deliver presentations across Ireland to GAA members from a Unionist perspective. Professor Peter Shirlow (Head of the Institute) was accompanied by unionist representatives Professor Colin Coulter, Ian Marshall and Alison Grundle to outline their background and how they would see themselves in a united Ireland. Brian McAvoy, Geraldine McTavish and Diarmaid Marsden provided the GAA perspective at these events. They were held in each Province starting with the Leinster event, in Croke Park, The Ulster event in Silverbridge GAA, The Connacht event in Connacht Centre of Excellence, Bekan and the Munster event in Limerick.

Our partnerships continue to develop, and we now have more structured engagement with partners and councils through our links with Sustainable NI and have ongoing collaborations with RSPB, NI Water and Keep NI Beautiful. All of these partners are also engaging with clubs on the ground as well.

An application has been submitted, in partnership with RSPB NI and NI Water, for the National Lottery Community Nature and Climate Fund, and Ulster GAA are named as a key participant in a joint Sustainable NI Action Renewables application to the National Lottery Community Energy and Climate Fund. Sport NI opened a Renewable Energy Pilot Fund for sports clubs back in October and some of our clubs were successful in availing of the funding available. The project is growing from strength to strength and there are great examples of sustainable activities and practices that our clubs are involved in.

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CLUB DEVELOPMENT

Club Maith

Club Maith has been the recognised brand for club excellence among GAA clubs in Ulster since its inception in 2007. In the subsequent years 92 clubs have achieved Club Maith Status and the programme has now been adopted by National GAA and will be made available to clubs across the other three provinces for the first time in 2024.

In the past 12 months eleven clubs across the Province have achieved Club Maith status; St Brigid's Belfast, Clan na Gael, Lurgan, Loughinisland, Belnaleck Art MacMurrough's, Lisnaskea Emmetts, St. Patrick's Donagh, Dromore St. Dympna's, Errigal Ciaran, Greencastle St. Patrick's, Killyman St. Mary's, and Tattyreagh St. Patrick's,

Club and County 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 that 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.

National Officer Development Committee

Ulster GAA continue 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

Ukraine Refugee Assistance Centres

The partnership of the British Red Cross, Ulster GAA and Volunteer Now continued in 2023 with the Department of Communities seeking out our help with the volunteering efforts at the Ukraine Refugee Assistance Centres across the north. The joint volunteering effort came to an end in October 2023. For almost 20 months, the partnership supported the DfC Assistance Centres in Belfast, Ballymena, Newry and Craigavon and later pop-up centres in Dungannon and Derry. A small but dedicated team of 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. I thank our volunteer team who were professional, committed

and compassionate at all times. Their efforts have made a huge difference to those fleeing war in Ukraine. I also take this opportunity to thank Diarmaid Marsden and Sharon Haughey-Grimley of Ulster GAA for overseeing this project.

Volunteer Development Pathway

Ulster GAA completed its Club Officer Training Programme for 2023 with 649 NEW Club officers engaged through this programme, 450 club officers attending LIVE training. Ulster GAA, in partnership with Croke Park through the National Club Leadership and Development Programme, delivered training for the Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, PRO and Coaching Officer in clubs. In addition to this Ulster GAA ran Club Officer Induction Training for Development Officers, Children's Officers, Healthy Club Officers and Cultural Officers. The programme targeted all club volunteers new to their role in 2023 and the training was role specific. The training was open to officers in LGFA and Camogie Clubs also.





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 on achieving 50, 100 and 200 hours.

A joint awards ceremony was hosted in March 2023 in Belfast City Hall which showcased the young volunteers and the impact they are making to their community through their sports club.

175 young people signed up for the Sports Inspire Awards Programme from Oct 2022-Oct 2023 while 209 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 2023 with 47 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 2023, the Programme extended across six months and included: Three-Day Young Leaders Academy in July, Two Day Hiking Expedition in July, Four Online Workshops in July/August, 12-week volunteering July-September, Six months physical activity May-October.

As the Ulster GAA Young Leaders Programme 2023 comes to close, 47 young participants achieved the following awards across six different categories.

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.

60 young participants have worked towards completion of each of the sections in volunteering, skills development, physical activity and a coordinated expedition in 2023 and received their awards in December 2023.

In 2023 Ulster GAA decided to invest in expedition equipment and upskill its own staff to deliver hiking expeditions so that GAA participants can now complete the entire award within their GAA club/County. Sharon Haughey-Grimley, Ashelene Groogan, Pierce Caherty and Ryan McShane are now fully trained for delivering hiking expeditions, with both Sharon and Ashelene completing Expedition Assessor and Supervisor Training. In 2023, Ulster GAA delivered two

hiking expeditions in the Mourne which resulted in 48 young people completing their bronze expedition with Ulster GAA.

Youth Volunteering Success
Young GAA Volunteers participated in a number of key events over the past year including: Seanad na nÓg at Dáil Éireann, One World Summit in Belfast, NI State Dinner to mark 25 years of the Good Friday Agreement, GAA National Youth Forum and the GAA Congress.

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 2023/24 programme. These include: Volunteer Charter for clubs to adopt, Club Inclusion Charter, Annual Multisport Youth Forum, annual Multi-Sport Volunteer Forum, three Lifelong Learning Volunteer Workshops.

Through the partnership we have also secured funding from the David Cross Foundation and Sir George Quigley funding for the development and delivery of a volunteering initiative targeting young people, including: the development of videos to showcase the role of young volunteers in sport, Education related bursaries for those who have achieved Sports Inspire 200 hours and our Young Leaders, development of an Inclusion and Diversity webinar.

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Translink Awards: Young Volunteer of the Month

In 2023, Translink sponsored the Translink Young GAA Volunteer of the Month from June – November 2023. With the Ulster GAA Young Volunteer of the Year 2023 to be selected in December. Our monthly winners are:

- June - Aoife Quinn (Coalisland Na Fianna)
- July - Oisín Barr - (Doire Colmcille)
- August - Three members of the Oakleaf Lions GAA For All club: Aisling Kennedy, Aine Flynn Cara Murray
- September - Orla Warnock (Greencastle)
- October - Ronan Gildernew (Aghaloo)

Bank of Ireland: Community Support Award

In 2023, Antrim club, Ruairí Óg CLG Cushendall, collected the Bank of Ireland Ulster GAA Community Support Award in recognition of their work during the past year. They were

chosen from the nine county winners in the province. This Award was created to recognise the outstanding contribution of GAA clubs in their communities, where many go over and above their normal day-to-day activities to promote outreach, equality, diversity and inclusivity.

HEALTHY CLUB PROGRAMME

Phase five of the Healthy Club Programme concluded in August, while Phase 6 welcomed new clubs in November. 2023 was a milestone year for the Healthy Club Programme, 10 years since its inception, and the introduction of the continuous engagement model which awards clubs at either Foundation, Silver or Gold level. 109 clubs in Ulster achieved Irish Life GAA Healthy Club status and were formally recognised at an Ulster Awards event in October at Tyrone GAA Centre, Garvaghey.

CHARITY PARTNER

2023 welcomed the introduction of Air Ambulance NI as Ulster GAA's charity partner. This was formally

launched at the completion of the much-anticipated Ulster GAA Charity Skydive, which after being postponed due to inclement weather, very successfully took place on 14th April. My sincere thanks go out to the brave skydivers and their counties for their involvement and support and to our esteemed president Ciaran McLaughlin who was the driving force behind this great initiative. The skydivers were;

- Antrim – Jane Adams
- Armagh – Jarlath Burns
- Cavan – Larry O'Reilly
- Derry – Aoife Ni Chaiside
- Donegal – Maxi Curran
- Down – Benny Coulter
- Fermanagh – Marty McGrath
- Monaghan – Dessie Mone
- Tyrone – Gemma Begley

In total, a very impressive €37,000 was raised for both the Patrick G. Johnston Centre for Cancer Research at Queen's University Belfast and Air Ambulance NI.

IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH WITH PHA AND OTHER PARTNERS

I welcome the financial support from the Public Health Agency (PHA) which enables work in the area of health improvement and emotional wellbeing. Our attempts to develop better connections between the health and wellbeing, coaching, and safeguarding aspects of the GAA have been successful and require continued collaboration in where this area of work should progress to in the future.

The GAA's link with Movember on the 'Ahead of the Game' programme will be hugely beneficial for clubs in supporting their young (13 and 14 years of age) members' mental



health. 2023-2024 will see the roll-out of year one to Healthy Clubs who are interested in hosting the programme in their club. Year 2 and Year 3 will see the accessibility of Ahead of the Game to all clubs. Significant work has taken place in developing a Substance Use programme for the GAA through local and regional drug and alcohol task forces in the 26 counties. It is hoped that this offering can be replicated through links with the PHA and other services in the 6 counties, and I look forward to seeing the roll-out of the programme across the island in 2024 and beyond.

Listen, Learn, Lead

Ulster GAA have linked with White Ribbon NI since 2020. Since that time our relationship has strengthened with the development of the **Never Cross the Line #getconsent** campaign in 2022. This year we have rolled-out training for staff and full Council members on the three modules of Listen Learn and Lead, delivered by White Ribbon NI. This has enabled Ulster GAA to commence the development of an Action plan, which will be published in 2024. This is an area of work that has been to the fore for several years and one which will continue to be of great importance to Ulster GAA.

Our Consent workshop has continued to be rolled-out very successfully to young people through our clubs in various formats including the Club Engagement Programme, and Ulster GAA Young Leaders Programme.

One Punch

2023 has seen the launch of our newly revised One Punch programme. Having been available as a presentation to clubs for several years, it was appreciated that the

programme ought to be a lot more accessible so that every club can benefit. The revised programme is now available as a self-playing presentation which we are promoting to clubs via our health and wellbeing and coaching avenues.

The consequences of one punch can be serious and life-changing, for the victim, the perpetrator, and every one close to them. We are at a cusp whereby we seriously need to assess our attitude and behaviour around this very serious issue. I implore clubs to get onboard the one punch programme and embed the messages contained within it in our individual and collective behaviours. I sincerely thank those involved in the revised programme for giving so generously of their time, and testimony. There is no doubt your contribution has added greatly to the programme.

Live To Play – Share the road to Zero

Ulster GAA is one of numerous sporting organisations that have supported the 'Share the Road to Zero' Campaign. It fits nicely with our long established Live to Play road safety awareness programme. Unfortunately, death and serious injury on our roads is at the highest for some years. Tragically, pedestrians have moved into one of the high risk groups for the first time. Bearing in mind the excellent walking and running initiatives ongoing in GAA clubs we are reminded that road safety affects everyone, and unfortunately all of our clubs have been affected by road deaths. Thus, I am urging everyone to get involved with Ulster GAA's role in 'Share the Road to Zero' by signing the pledge and taking greater care on our roads.

HSCNI Foster Care

"Fostering Belonging" is the tag-line

for HSCNI Foster Care's most recent campaign to highlight the huge need there is for more foster carers. This phrase aligns closely with the GAA's core value of "Where we all Belong". Unfortunately, the need for foster carers has risen starkly during COVID-19, and has continued to remain unprecedentedly high. GAA volunteers and their families are exactly the people the campaign hopes to attract, as our caring nature as GAA volunteers, and our connectedness to our community is what also makes good foster carers. It is something for us all to consider to and take action if it's something which we can assist with.

Gambling Awareness

2023 seen the establishment of a strong partnership with the charity Gambling with Lives. The charity delivered their workshop on gambling harms to clubs and received positive feedback. Unfortunately, problem gambling is a huge issue, and is on the increase, particularly among young people. Services are quite limited so it came as a huge set-back when Gambling with Lives informed Ulster GAA in October that it was having to scale back its operations. Ulster GAA will continue to liaise with GWL in the hope that operations can be fully restored.

CPR

Ulster GAA continue to partner with the British Heart Foundation on CPR and AED support. The Call Push Rescue programme continues to be rolled-out through the Club Engagement Programme and on request from clubs and schools. BHF have developed a new RevivR app which aims to equip anyone, whether trained or not, with the knowledge of the Chain of Survival, and CPR skills.

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A very successful demonstration of RevivR was organised by Armagh's Health and Wellbeing Committee for their county stewards. This programme can be easily replicated across other groups, and is something which we will see progress in 2024. My thanks to BHF and the IHF for their continued support.

Health & Wellbeing at Ulster Championship

The 2023 Ulster Championship, once again, provided suitable opportunities for the GAA to promote a taster of health and wellbeing activity. Blood donation, through NIBTS and IBTS was promoted at Tyrone v Monaghan in O'Neill's Healy Park, Omagh. The importance of stem cell and bone marrow donation was highlighted in Brewster Park when Fermanagh took on Derry through our partnership with Anthony Nolan. Finally, the meeting of Armagh and Cavan in Kingspan Breffni Park provided a wet but hugely enjoyable occasion for members of the GAA All Star Inclusive Clubs in Cavan and Armagh. My thanks are expressed to volunteers from all counties who made this possible, and to our partners who provide their expertise on important matters.

Critical Incident Response Plans (CIRP)

2023 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. 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.

IRISH LANGUAGE & CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Coiste na Gaeilge agus na hOidhreacht

This provincial committee is headed by Cathaoirleach Ailis Nic An tSaoi with support from the 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. Tá baill an choiste seo ag croilár na Gaeilge in Uladh agus iad mar ghuth na Gaeilge ina gcontaetha féin. Déantar gach iarracht tionscadail agus feachtais na Gaeilge a chur ar bun le tacaíocht ón choiste seo agus a chur chun cinn ó cheann ceann na bliana.

Cúrsa de Faoite sna Dúnaibh

Ulster GAA's annual Cúrsa de Faoite in Downings took place in July 2023. With a full house of classes of all abilities, an interesting day trip and successful evening events including a course lecture and concert, it was a fantastic week for CLG Uladh's flagship Gaeltacht course. Bhí cúrsa iontach againn sna Dúnaibh i mbliana. Bhí ceithre rang ar fáil agus iad uilig lán go béal le baill CLG agus le foghlaimoirí ó gach cearn den Chúige. Táimid go mór faoi chomaoín ag Emer Ní Ghallchóir agus Conor Ó Ghallchóir a tháinig chuig an chéad oíche le cúrsaí teanga a phlé leis an lucht féachana. Táimid ag dúil go mór le fás agus forbairt an chúrsa seo sna blianta atá amach romhainn.

Gaeilge sa Chlub scholarship scheme

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. We saw a wide range of Gaeilge sa chlub projects at club level, including exploration of Gaeilge logainmneacha in East Belfast and access to learning of Amhrán na bhFiann for children in Kildress, which will have a lasting impact on the promotion of the language in their area.

In 2023, we welcomed 23 more students from across Ulster clubs to join our successful cohort of Gaeilge sa Chlub recipients throughout the years. The challenge for them now is to promote Gaeilge within their own clubs as they acquire a better knowledge and understanding of the language.

Tá CLG Uladh ag obair i gcomhpháirt le hOllscoil Uladh chun scileanna Gaeilge bhaill an CLG a fheabhsú. Tugann an scoláireacht seo deis do bhaill an CLG in Uladh tabhairt faoin Dioplóma sa Ghaeilge in Ollscoil Uladh. I mbliana, tá 23 mac léinn againn ó chlubanna éagsúla fud fad an Chúige. Táimid ag dúil le tionscadail iontacha uathu le linn 2024.

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 Chlub resource. This resource is designed to ease pressure on our volunteers and provide a high standard of Gaeilge to all clubs. Clubs are welcome and able to register onto the scheme at any stage of the year. This year, we have also explored the possibility of adding to the material and new methods of making the material even more interactive. Seoladh an acmhainn seo ag tús 2022. Tá CLG Uladh agus Ollscoil Uladh ag obair le chéile le tamall de bhlianta anuas, agus beartíodh ar an bhranda 'Gaeilge sa Chlub' a fhorbairt agus a leathnú mar gheall ar rath na scéime. Is é an aidhm atá againn ná go gcuirfear acmhainn ar fáil a bheas ina chuidiú dár n-oibríthe deonacha a bhíonn ag teagasc na Gaeilge ag leibhéal an chlub, agus go mbeidh deis ag gach club sa Chúige ardchaighdeán teanga a chur ar fáil. Tá fáilte roimh chlubanna clárú ar an scéim seo am ar bith.

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 2023, in both our games and Scór competitions, 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, Raidió Rí-Rá, Raidió Fáilte and various other Irish language media outlets. There were opportunities this year for the provincial Irish language officer to speak as Gaeilge on podcasts and Radio about other Ulster GAA initiatives, outside of her Irish language and culture responsibilities, such as the wheelchair hurling competitions, to demonstrate that Gaeilge is 'fite fuaite' throughout other areas of Gaelic Games in Ulster, not just events which specifically relate to Gaeilge/cultúr amháin. Tá an Ghaeilge le feiceáil sna clárú le linn na mbliana, agus foirm dátheangach curtha i bhfeidhm don chraobhchomórtas in 2023. Tá Gaeilge le feiceáil ar na meáin shóisialta de chuid CLG Uladh, agus cloistear Gaeilge ó CLG Uladh sna meáin trí mheán na Gaeilge ar ábhair éagsúla. Bíonn CLG Uladh ag obair leis

na heagraíochtaí éagsúla san earnáil seo ó cheann ceann na bliana: BBC Gaeilge, TG4, RTÉ, Raidió Fáilte, Raidió Rí-Rá, Meon Eile agus go leor eile nach iad.

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. 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. This year the scheme saw record numbers of registration and is

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currently fully subscribed.

Tá sé iontach go deo tábhachtach go mbíonn eagraíochtaí na Gaeilge san earnáil ag obair le chéile. Tacaíonn CLG Uladh le Foras na Gaeilge, bímid ag obair le Glór na nGael go minic.

Feachtas 'Ar an Pháirc / The 'Ar an Pháirc' campaign

The importance of the visibility of the Irish language in its promotion on digital media is well recognised. Sometimes the simplest initiatives have the greatest impact. The 'On the Pitch' campaign encouraged counties to conduct pre-match and post-match interviews with players or spectators through the medium of Irish.

Aithnímid an tábhacht a bhaineann le hinfheictheacht na Gaeilge, go háirithe ar na meáin shóisialta, agus í á cur chun cinn. Uaireanta bíonn an tionchar is mó ag na tionscnaimh is simplí ar na meáin shóisialta. Spreag ár bhfeachtas ar an bpáirc contaetha chun agallaimh réamh-chluiche agus iar-chluiche a dhéanamh le himreoirí nó le lucht féachana trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Feachtas 'Céim chun tosaigh' / 'Céim chun tosaigh' (a step forward) campaign

This year, in an effort to remove obstacles to the promotion of the Irish language, we launched our Céim chun tosaigh campaign. Although the GAA is keen for clubs to get involved in the FSMD, it was acknowledged that a new initiative was necessary to bridge the gaps between clubs with little or no relationship with the language and registering for FSMD. The campaign highlights 10 of the best ways to promote the language at club level.

I mbliana, mar iarracht chun deireadh a chur le constaicí ar chur chun cinn

na Gaeilge, sheol muid ár bhfeachtas Céim chun tosaigh. Cé go bhfuil fonn ar an CLG go nglacfadh clubanna páirt san FSMD, admhaíodh go raibh gá le tionscnamh nua chun na bearnaí a líonadh idir clubanna ar bheagán nó gan aon ghaol leis an teanga agus clárú don FSMD. Aibhsíonn an feachtas 10 gcinn de na bealaí is fearr leis an teanga a chur chun cinn ag leibhéal na gclubanna.

Gaeilge sa Rang agus Gael Linn / Partnership with Gael Linn

This year we started a joint project with Gael Linn. Gael Linn and other Irish language organisations believe in the importance of children getting a background to the Irish language at primary level before they enter secondary school. Ulster GAA promote resources that were developed by Tyrone GAA to benefit schools that wish to access them. In doing so we were able to involve county players from across all codes to help with the creation of the resources and act as ambassadors of the scheme. This was launched in Garvaghy in November.

I mbliana chuir muid tús le comhthionscadal le Gael Linn. Creideann Gael Linn agus eagraíochtaí Gaeilge eile a thábhachtaí atá sé go bhfaigheann páistí cúlra don Ghaeilge ag an mbunleibhéal sula dtéann siad isteach sa mheánscoil. Bhí muid in ann acmhainní a chruthaigh CLG Tír Eoghain a chur chun cinn i gcruthú na scéime seo ar mhaithe le haon scoil ar mian leo teacht orthu; agus é sin á dhéanamh againn bhí muid in ann imreoirí contae ó gach cód a thabhairt isteach chun cuidiú le cruthú na n-acmhainní agus feidhmiú mar ambasadóirí na scéime. Seolfar é seo i dTír Eoghain i mí na Samhna.

Tráth na gCeist Bord

The Tráth na gCeist Bord finals happen at county, provincial and national level, with the final being held in Croke Park. Bhí Babhta Ceannais de Thráth na gCeist Bord ann ag deireadh 2023. Bhí ionadaithe ó gach Cúige i láthair, i ndiaidh do na cúigí trí fhoireann a chur chun tosaigh ar an oíche. Comhghairdeas leis na buaiteoirí!

Seachtain na Gaeilge 2023: Club Gaeilge na Bliana

Ulster GAA chose to take part in Seachtain na Gaeilge again in 2023 by spotlighting the events and campaigns of various clubs, media outlets and Irish language organisations. Clubs came together in parts of Armagh to create joint events and there was a large emphasis on the social aspects of learning the Irish language through initiatives like the 'Pop-up Gaeltacht' in parts of Donegal and Tyrone. The 'Club Gaeilge na bliana' award recognises the effort clubs are making in the promotion of Gaeilge and these awards will take place in Feabrauy 2024.

Bhí CLG Uladh rannpháirteach in Seachtain na Gaeilge 2023. Roghnaigh muid i mbliana arís deis a thabhairt d'eagraíochtaí agus do chlubanna eile imeachtaí agus feachtais na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn ar ár meáin shóisialta. Tá CLG Uladh go mór faoi chomaoin ag na clubanna iontacha fud fad an chúige seo a dhéanann obair iontach ar son na teanga. Eagraítear ranganna, clubanna óige, feachtais ar na meáin shóisialta, seisiúin traenála agus cóitseála agus go leor eile nach iad trí mheán na Gaeilge. Táimid eolach ar chuid mhaith den obair seo. Tá go leor oibre ag dul ar aghaidh nach bhfuil i mbéal an phobail, áfach, agus tá sé rí-thábhachtach go dtugtar aird ar na



hiarrachtaí sin. Is as an bhearna sin a d'éascair coincheap an ghradam seo. Ba mhaith linn deis a thabhairt do chlub amháin gach bliain aird a tharraingt orthu féin, agus a gcuid oibre ar son na Gaeilge a chur ar ár súile dúinn.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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 2023 were Ballymena, Cavan, Cavehill and Downpatrick. In the Girls' competition Belfast, Coleraine, Lurgan and Strabane were represented. 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 20 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 Thursday 30th March in Meadowbank Arena, Magherafelt. After a very enjoyable day of games the Cavan Cúchulainns emerged as winners of the Boys' blitz whilst the Lurgan Cúchulainns collected the honours in the Girls' section.

As a result of funding being awarded from the Department of Foreign Affairs through their Reconciliation

Fund, the Cavan Cúchulainns were offered the opportunity to represent Ulster at the Northern Games in Manchester at the end of May. The group consisting of players from Breifne College and Royal School Cavan enjoyed a three-day trip which ended in defeat by a single point of the U17 section.

Further funding for the programme from The Executive Office through their Good Relations Fund allowed extended engagement in the initiative with the Lurgan group. The girls engaged in coaching sessions throughout June before travelling to London in early July to represent Ulster in the All-Britain Competition.

The Lurgan Cúchulainns were made up of girls from Brownlow Integrated College, Lurgan Junior High School and St. Ronan's College, Lurgan.

Despite being a team made-up of players who had little or no experience playing Gaelic Games, the Lurgan Cúchulainns represented themselves with distinction showing some incredible skills, passion, and teamwork as they came up against club teams who have had several years of experience playing together. Reaching the semi-final and losing out to the eventual winners was however a magnificent achievement.

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:



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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 so that they may continue coaching once the programme ends. So far, this programme has been delivered in 5 different schools from the controlled and integrated sectors. In total 240 young people have participated across 60 coaching sessions with 10 teachers mentored.

Club Engagement Programme

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

This year Buncrana CLG, Newry Shamrocks GFC and Clan na Gael GFC, Lurgan have hosted this programme. Across the three hubs, 96 young people were engaged in 12 workshops including CPR Training, #Consent, One Punch, Road Safety and Gambling with Lives.

GAA - Game of Three Halves

The GAAme 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. On occasion, it provides an opportunity for participants 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 four GAAme of Three Halves events delivered with 300 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 9 workshops delivered with almost 190 participants.

Department of Foreign Affairs – Sport Uniting Communities

The DFA provides a 12-month funding award to the multisport partnership and this employed a member of staff from each of Ulster GAA, IFA and Ulster Rugby. The programme had certain targets to meet and these were all achieved comfortably. It is the intention to seek an extension of this programme until such time as Peaceplus funding is available

Inclusive Clubs workshop - These online workshops are developed under the theme of inclusivity, diversity and equality. It was delivered to club representatives, parents and coaches around how to make their club and their activities more inclusive. The workshop focused on the topic of 'Autism in Sport: Creating Inclusive Coaching Sessions for All'. Over 100 people registered for more information and 68 logged in live on the night.

Club Educational visits - Each sports partner hosted a stadium tour to showcase their venue to club representatives from all three sports. This was an opportunity for networking and engagement

between club reps from the three sports while at the same time enabling them to gain new experiences of sports environments that they may not usually be involved in. The Irish FA facilitated a tour of The National Football Stadium at Windsor Park, Ulster Rugby at Kingspan Stadium and Ulster GAA in the museum and stadium at Croke Park. The tours allowed around 140 club representatives to experience the 3 stadiums.

Game of Three Halves - The Game of

Three Halves events are joint events involving coaching sessions from each of the three sporting bodies. This event allows participants to try sports they may not have tried before whilst also working and learning with people from different communities and backgrounds. The events promote the learning of skills as well as games-based scenarios whilst promoting teamwork and other attributes that are important for all three sports. There were 12 'Game of Three Halves' events delivered in 2023 as part of the 'Sport Uniting Communities' programme involving almost 700 participants.

Club Sport for Peace Days - Club

Sport for Peace days are activity-based events that are ran as joint projects between the three organisations. These allow children and young adults from various backgrounds to come together through sports participation. Participating clubs host the event and in turn promote their commitment to becoming an open and welcoming organisation to all. Through the course of 2023, 12 of these events successfully took place across the province and engaged over 400 young people.



Have a Go Days - CSDO's from Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and The Irish Football association worked together to deliver 'values based' coaching and fun skill stations using inflatables targets at our 'Have a Go' events. These events are based in areas where opportunities to take part in certain sports are minimal, and it also provides an opportunity for participants to engage with others from a different community or religious background. In 2023, 340 people took part in six "Have a Go" days.

Good Relations Conference - This seminar on Good Relations was delivered on 22nd November 2023 at the new Ulster University campus in Belfast City Centre. Delegates from various sporting organisations and Sport studies students heard about the ongoing work delivered by the multisport partnership. They were able to watch highlight videos of activities such as the Game of Three Halves and how local clubs at grassroots level have built up partnerships for mutual benefit. Delegates heard personal stories of sports stars who had played various codes and the impact that sport has in bringing communities together.

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. In the last year Ulster GAA have delivered modules to participants from Lurgan, Downpatrick, Derry City and West

Belfast. 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. The NI Affairs committee travelled over from London in the early part of the year to hear about the project and visit some of the activities being delivered. Ulster University once again produced a great piece of research and evaluation on the programme which confirmed the positive impact sport has for the young people in areas of high social deprivation.

Other Outreach Work

Ulster GAA's Community Sports Development Officers have engaged with Knock Presbyterian Church, Lisburn Feile, and Causeway Coast and Glens council to provide GAA coaching to non-traditional GAA groups. They have also coordinated and delivered GAA activities at shared education events in Lurgan and Lisburn, bringing GAA to a wider audience. Coaches from the three sports delivered a Game of Three Halves event to international students at Ulster University in September.

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

Comhairle Uladh is proud of the commitment and dedication of its volunteers who are drawn from right across the province. Be it on our Council or it's sub-committees and workgroups, match-day stewards or support personnel, we are very fortunate to have so many capable people willing to make a telling contribution to promote and foster the aims of our great Association. Ciaran McLaughlin has now completed two years as Uachtarán

Comhairle Uladh and his energy and enthusiasm never ceases to amaze me. In leading from the front, he has steered the Council through some challenging times, and we owe him an immense debt of gratitude for his unstinting efforts.

Michael Geoghegan combines his Vice-Chair of the Provincial Council role with that of Chair of the National Development Competitions Control Committee. Michael is a tireless and visionary worker, a strong voice of reason and a tremendous asset to the Council.

Our Treasurer Declan Woods is charged with the onerous task of overseeing the financial affairs of the Council. He has rightly set governance at the front and centre of our business transactions and he works closely with the Finance Committee in ensuring that we both operate to the best possible standards and he also assists our counties as they strive to achieve high levels of governance.

Our PRO Michel McArdle has built up a trusting and workmanlike relationship with the media during his two years in the post. He has overseen Ulster GAA's brand re-design and has an excellent working relationship with both our counties and with Ulster GAA staff alike, particularly those in the PR & Marketing team. I thank him for his strenuous efforts in promoting our affairs.

I thank also the Chairs', Secretaries' and members of all our sub-committees for their ongoing efforts. Much of your work goes unseen but without you we would not be able to deliver the broad spectrum of initiatives which we undertake as part

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of our broad community-focussed ethos.

A number of members today say farewell to the Council after varying years of service and I thank you all for your outstanding contribution to the furtherance of our affairs. I've no doubt that you will all continue to play active roles within the GAA and I wish you well in your future endeavours. I thank you for all your efforts.

No praise is too high for the trojan efforts of our thousands of volunteers who make the GAA the great organisation that it is. However, we cannot also forget the immense contribution made by the employees of the Association, who are always at hand and who play such a significant role in improving the lives of others. We are fortunate to have a dedicated and loyal staff at Ulster GAA and I thank each and every one of them for their ongoing commitment and dedication.

I obviously work closely with my senior staff team, whose work covers a myriad of activities across many fields. To Eugene Young (Director Coaching and Games), Brian Mallon (Head of Finance, HR and Business), Diarmaid Marsden (Head of Community, Strategy and Public Affairs) and Stephen McGeehan (Head of Operations, Compliance and Infrastructure) and their respective teams I say a big 'thank you.'

As highlighted earlier in my report, the greatest responsibility we have as an organisation is to ensure that we operate in a safe and welcoming environment and that our commitment to safeguarding is paramount. It has been a challenging

year in this respect but be in no doubt were it not for the herculean efforts of our Safeguarding Manager Bernie Fox, her professional advice, standards and expertise, we may have been in a very different space. No words of praise for her are too high.

Our very reason d'être is the promotion and playing of games and we are fortunate to have on our team someone of the calibre of Stephen Donnelly, ably assisted by Carly McClean, who week after week give endless hours in ensuring the proper organisation of our games at provincial level. I thank them sincerely for the immense contribution they make to the furtherance of our GAA activity.

Our Public Relations and Communications team led by Paul McGurk continues to perform heroically in promoting the work and vision of Ulster GAA. Paul led on a branding refresh this year and the new imagery has all the feel of a modern and vibrant organisation. In dealing with the media or publicising our activities on digital or conventional media Paul, Michael Devlin and the team play a key role in keeping Ulster GAA at the forefront of sporting affairs in the province and I thank them for their continued efforts.

No words of praise from me can adequately pay tribute to the work of Geraldine McKavanagh who time after time goes way and beyond the call of duty in her tireless and unstinting efforts on behalf of the association in Ulster. She has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the GAA in Ulster and her portfolio of contacts is truly immense. Her dedication, loyalty and commitment are beyond compare

and we just don't know how grateful we are in having her in our midst.

CASEMENT PARK & UEFA EURO 2028

In my convention report last year I concluded the Casement Park section referring to the absence of the NI Executive and the impact that this might have on progressing the project during 2023. This came after successfully closing out all planning and legal challenges to the project during the year.

During 2023 a significant amount of work was undertaken with our colleagues in the Department for Communities (DfC) to conclude the contract strategy for the construction of the stadium.

Following senior counsel legal advice a decision was made to retain and modify the existing contract with the joint venture (appointed in 2013) and the required public procurement (VEAT) notice was published in mid-July.

As this work concluded one of the JV partners filed for administration. The existing entity of the joint venture, Heron Bros Limited then participated fully in a recent due diligence exercise which clearly demonstrated their capacity and capability to bring this project forward. However, it subsequently became clear that our preferred option of retaining and modifying the existing contract for the project could not be achieved within the financial limits of the Public Contract Regulations and this, regrettably, brought the existing contract to an end for both Ulster GAA and Heron Brothers, who for over a decade were wholeheartedly committed to the delivery of the



project and I sincerely thank them for their unstinting efforts over that period, often in the most challenging of circumstances.

Meanwhile, Casement Park was named as one of the ten stadia put forward to stage games as part of the joint bid by the five Football Associations on these islands to host the Euro 2028 Tournament. By the time the successful bid was confirmed on 10th October Ulster GAA had secured strong commitments from both the Secretary of State Chris Heaton-Harris and An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar that their governments' fully support the re-development of Casement Park for the GAA and as a venue to host the Euro 2028 Tournament. Confirmation of funding contributions will follow in due course.

I wish to thank my counterpart Patrick Nelson and the Executive of The Irish Football Association for placing their confidence in us to stage games at Euro 2028 and I also place on record the appreciation of us all for the huge amount of work undertaken by

our own Ulster GAA Project leader Stephen McGeehan and the wider project team, in working with a large group of government and sports stakeholders in concluding the stadium agreements and technical work that cemented Casement Park's inclusion in the tournament.

The delays to the Casement Park project have been lengthy and frustrating with the cost of building our Provincial Stadium considerably higher than the £77.5m earmarked when we were within days of starting on site prior to the first judicial review challenge in 2014.

The promise made to Ulster GAA in 2011 by the NI Executive and repeated in every Programme for Government published since and in 'New Decade New Approach' (2020) is undeniable and remains as valid today as it was over 12 years ago. The GAA were asked by the Executive to submit plans for a stadium to meet their strategic need. That remains as valid today as it was 12 years ago if, indeed, not more so. In this context a broader question arises for those people who suggest that we

should accept some lesser offering, or nothing at all.

Ulster and Antrim GAA have played a long game on this troubled project but now is the time to go and win the game by delivering this project once and for all.

Tom Daly, our Board Chair from the inception of this project has stuck to the task throughout and has led our board and team through some very challenging periods and deserves special praise. I also wish to commend all members of the Project Board and associated committees for their ongoing support and service to the project.

The Ulster GAA Stadium Executive team of Rory Miskelly, Tim Harkin, Geraldine McKavanagh, Brian Mallon, Paul McGurk, and Stephen McGeehan have all worked exceptionally hard during 2023 to bring the project to this point and I thank them on behalf of the Council for all they have done and continue to do.

Ulster GAA is supported by Central GAA and Antrim GAA is every aspect of the project and I want to acknowledge the full support of Ciarán McCavana, Frankie Quinn and Ard Stiúrthóir Tom Ryan for their support and forbearance. Department for Communities (DfC) work with Ulster GAA in a collaborative way on the project. I want to especially thank the Permanent Secretary of DfC Colum Boyle and his wider Programme Board and DfC Stadia Team for their partnership with us to bring the project to this stage. I thank recent Senior Responsible Owner Moira Doherty for her efforts in driving forward the project. Moira has now

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moved to a different government department and I wish her well and welcome on board her successor Emer Morelli, who brings a wealth of public sector experience to the role. I also welcome the more recent involvement of the Department for Economy and Tourism NI locally for their support in the context of the Euro 2028 bid.

Lastly, sincere thanks to our Integrated Consultancy Team Mott Mac Donald and all our support networks for their efforts in 2023. I hope that we'll be even busier in 2024 and beyond.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

A major achievement delivered during the year was our brand refresh project to ensure Ulster GAA's visual identity, that stakeholders see at

every engagement with us, is modern and future-proof. The concept of the refresh is to be evolutionary, an upgrade of the existing image, rather than a clean slate approach. For us it involved a new look for both the combination mark logo and our crest, revised typography and colour palettes and a detailed set of brand guidelines to ensure consistency. The development process involved contributions from Officers, Full Council, Management and staff over an extended period to ensure the end result was a team effort. I believe that this was a very valuable exercise for the Ulster GAA brand to stand out in a competitive environment, and I look forward to its continued roll out over the next twelve months.

Digital technology plays an ever increasing and important role in the promotion of our activities and

facilitates effective communication and engagement with our stakeholders and communities. During the year, we joined up with Belfast-based agency Digital 24, to sharpen our capabilities in this area of work and the outputs will be fully implemented throughout the coming year. The need for us to be accomplished digitally is supported by the continued and impressive growth in our own social media follower numbers again this year – X/Twitter breaking the 100k mark (+10%), Facebook rising to 69k (+10%) and Instagram continuing to thrive at 31k (+15%). Furthermore, we have secured an official Ulster GAA Tik Tok handle to be launched early in 2024 – it is a platform with over two million users in Ireland and it is important that we stay relevant to the 18-24 market by being able to communicate with them. We also intend to put an added focus on LinkedIn going forward to highlight the full breadth of our work and achievements to a more corporate minded audience. Content is crucial for engaging all our audiences and I am delighted to welcome Michael Canavan to the Communications team in the new position of Digital Content Creator. His role will focus on videography and photography which will allow us to improve how we tell the Ulster GAA story going forward. A great example of digital marketing driving GAA initiatives was our charity skydive in February, which I reference earlier in this report. A strong and appealing graphic and video content schedule across all our channels, over a nine-week period, ensured high profile awareness and ultimately drove up the final total to the amazing £37k figure.





The Ulster GAA TV platform continues to hold a key role in our communications operations, providing opportunities to showcase games that would otherwise not be broadcast. Whilst our results demonstrate there is good revenue to be generated from the biggest games, the platform allows us to shine a light on lower-level grades that may not come close to covering their costs. Ulster GAA endeavours to provide real value to supporters with discounted competition tickets available for the Ulster Club and McKenna Cup series of games. It is good to see that all of our counties are now in the streaming game and providing excellent services to their members and Gaels further afield. This year however, the increase in illegal streaming via firesticks and other devices has had a significant impact on the viewer numbers for some county TV platforms. It is an area that we are monitoring closely with other sports rights holders and relevant bodies, as there is a real risk of our units being forced to reduce their levels of coverage, if they began to incur sizeable losses for broadcasting their games.

The past year saw the first rendition of the current GAA media rights package, where GAAGO were assigned, for the first time, the opportunity to show games played in Ireland. While their introduction to this market generated much debate, including in the chambers of the Oireachtas, two key factors appeared to get lost in the overall discussion. Firstly, many of the games shown on GAAGO would have either been shown previously by non-free-to-air providers or, indeed, not shown at all, and, secondly, even with GAAGO in the market, over 200 free-to-air games were broadcast on TV in 2023, more

than ever before. Our relationships with media in the province remain largely positive. During the season, we provided a number of events for sports journalists to have player and manager access opportunities, and these are always warmly welcomed. As with all major sports bodies and organisations, we will and do come under added scrutiny from news media at certain times, on specific topics. I am happy to engage and provide comment in response to any journalist who is balanced and fair in their reporting. Unfortunately, there are some occasions when the journalism appears less than objective, and taking the right to reply has little impact on the intended angle of the article. Thankfully though, these instances are exceptions to the rule, in my experience.

On a commercial level, I wish to thank our Corporate Partners who have supported Ulster GAA throughout another season. We were delighted to be able to host them again on All Ireland semi-final day in Croke Park in July and, hopefully, such events will be held in a new provincial stadium in the not-too-distant future. We have established a new workgroup to enhance our commercial focus ahead of the new season and I hope to be able to report on some notable achievements this time next year. Our current valued partners are: O'Neill's, Bank of Ireland, Ulster Independent Clinic, Translink, MCS Group, McKeever Sports, UTV & Cathedral Eye Clinic.

Marketing and Communications in a sporting world is an ever-evolving challenge and whilst our in-house team is small in number, we have

solid external support from trusted agencies and suppliers. Kaizen has again been completely essential in delivering so many aspects of our work, including the brand refresh project, our creative campaigns for all competitions and our match day programme productions. I also acknowledge the very important services of Mobile Media and River Flow Films (videography), John Merry (photography), LD2, (website) and CSD Omagh (telecoms)

CONGRATULATIONS

It was a great night for Ulster at the annual GAA President's Awards, which were held in Croke Park on 3rd February. The Dermot Earley Family Award was won by the Mallon Family from St. Paul's in Lurgan. Philip was a founder member of the club in 1972 and has held the posts of Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer (he was the first treasurer of the fledgling club), while his wife Pat was an underage team coach from the outset. Their children and grandchildren are also heavily involved in what is a very progressive club.

Margaret Keenan, the long-time secretary of the St. Patrick's, Gortin Club was a highly deserving winner of the Ulster Award. She has been involved in club administration for over 35 years and is also the Secretary of the Tyrone GAA Hearings Committee.

Bronagh Lennon from the St. Mary's, Aghagallon Club was the worthy winner of the Gradam na Gaeilge. A champion of language and culture, Bronagh is currently the Antrim Scór Secretary and sits on the national Scór Committee. A former All-Ireland Scór Sinsir winner, she is a strong

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advocate of all things cultural and is also the current Secretary of the Ulster GAA Leadership and Planning Committee.

There was further Ulster success with Deirdre Fitzgerald from the Derrytresk Club picking up the Camogie Award. Deirdre is the Tyrone Camogie Secretary and is also registrar of both her own club and of the Ulster Camogie Board. Just three months earlier, Deirdre also won an Ulster GAA Award for her services to camogie. All-Ireland Club football finalists Glen were honoured with six players selected on the AIB Club Football Team of the Year, while club hurling finalists Dunloy were somewhat unlucky to have received just three awards on the equivalent hurling team. The Dunloy trio were Ryan McGarry, Kevin Molly and Conal Cunning and the sextet from the Maghera based club were Michael Warnock, Ryan Dougan, Ethan Doherty, Emmett Bradley, Jack Doherty and Danny Tallon. Loughinisland ace Oisín Savage picked up the accolade of Provincial Player of the Year in the Eirgrid U20 Championship, while he was joined by the Burren duo of Odhrán Murdock and Paddy McCarthy on the Eirgrid Top 20 'Team' of the Year.

Derry and Monaghan contested the All-Ireland Minor football final in 2023 and it was no surprise that both counties dominated the Electric Ireland Minor Star Football Team of the Year, winning 11 awards between them. Derry's Johnny McGuckian won the coveted Player of the Year Award and he was joined on the Team of the year by his colleagues Fionn McElDowney, Cahir Spiers, James Sargent, Tommy Rogers and Conall Higgins. The five Monaghan

recipients were Jamie Mooney, Jack Lynch, Sean O'g McElwaine, Tommy Mallen and Matthew Finn.

Two years of MacNamee Award winners were honoured at a banquet in Croke Park on 13th August and there was a strong Ulster connection with three award category recipients. The 2021 'National Media Award' winner was 'Irish Times' journalist Malachy Clerkin, a Monaghan native, for his excellently scripted and gripping tribute to deceased Monaghan U20 Football captain Brendan 'Ogie' O Dufaigh and how his beloved Monaghan Harps Club became the epicentre of the GAA universe in the days following his death, as the whole country tried to comprehend the reality of his tragic launch.

Brendan again featured in the 2022 award recipients, as RTÉ Radio na Gaeltachta collected the 'Gradam na Gaeilge' for their documentary, which was simply entitled 'Ogie.' and there was also success for Paula Magee and the Down GAA Communications team as they collected the 'Best GAA Programme' accolade for their 2022 Down Senior Football Championship Final publication.

October is the month for the awards for the secondary hurling and football competitions and there was plenty of Ulster success across all the selected teams. Six Ulster hurlers received gongs in the Ring/Rackard/Meagher Champions 15 selection, with goalkeeper Luke White being joined by his Donegal colleague Danny Cullen, Derry duo Richie Mullan and Cormac O'Doherty and Monaghan's Niall Garland and Niall Arthur. Down hurler Pearse O'g McCrickard was the sole Ulster representative on The Joe

McDonagh Cup Team of The Year. There were six players from the province selected on The Tailteann Cup Team of The Year. Beaten finalists, Down, had four winners, namely team captain Pierce Lavery and the Burren trio of Danny Magill, Odhrán Murdock - adding to the Eirgrid top 20 Award he won earlier in the year - and Liam Kerr. Antrim's Ruairi McCann (St. Mary's, Aghagallon) and Cavan's Padraig Faulkner completed the Ulster sextet and it was a history making award for the Kingscourt man as he became the first player to collect both an All-Star Award and a Tailteann Cup Award. It was a great night for Ulster at the PwC All-Stars as Monaghan's Conor McCarthy joined the Derry quartet of Conor McCluskey, Gareth McKinless, Brendan Rogers and Shane McGuigan in picking up gongs, while there was further Derry success as Glen's Ethan Doherty picked up the Young Player of the year accolade. There was even success for Ulster GAA as they picked up an Aisling Award for the contribution they make to Tourism and Hospitality and while there was to be no Ulster success at the All-Ireland Scór Sinsir Finals in Killarney, Eamon McMahan (Antrim) was fittingly honoured with a Scór Long Service Award.

MARION

It was with a deep sense of shock and dismay that we learned late on the night of 20th December 2022 of the sudden passing of our Ulster Council colleague Marion Donnelly. A proud Emyvale woman, just 12 days earlier the clubs of her beloved Monaghan had re-elected her to represent them on the Provincial Council.

Marion was a volunteer of distinction and 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 the Ulster Council.

At the time of her passing, she was the Secretary of the Ulster GAA Club Planning & Physical Development Committee and was also a member of the Ulster GAA Hearings and Scór Committees. We are much poorer today without her!

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 asked for credit. Marion 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 the Emyvale GAA Club. Her many talents will be greatly missed – but never forgotten.

ART

It was with a sense of shock, dismay and disbelief that we learned of the death of Art McRory on the morning of 9th August. Few people in Ulster have made such an indelible mark on our great association, than Art. He was pre-deceased by his beloved wife Helen under six months earlier. Art played an active role in numerous sports including basketball and volleyball, not to mention his keen interest in greyhound racing, but it is through his lifelong involvement in Gaelic Games that he is best remembered.

For many years he represented his beloved Dungannon Clarke's both as a player and an administrator and was, right up until his death, active in the re-development of their

magnificent O'Neill Park Project. He was also a leading protagonist in the development of schools' football across the province. An instrumental figure in the development of Ulster Secondary Schools', he proposed their merger with the Ulster Vocational Schools in 1965 and when, in 2015, that body merged with Ulster Colleges' to form Ulster Schools', he became the first Honorary president of that new body.

His time as manager of the Tyrone Senior football team is legendary. Art had three spells at the helm, firstly from 1980-87, again from 1993-96 and finally from 2000-02 (the latter two spells as joint-manager with his former team captain Eugene McKenna). He brought the team to their first All-Ireland Final in 1986 where they came so close to dethroning the mighty Kerry and in 1995 they were denied the opportunity of a replay with Dublin when a Sean McLaughlin 'point' at the very death was incorrectly disallowed. In 2002 he led the O'Neill County to their first National Football league success – adding to the five Ulster Senior titles he won as manager. Prior to his roles as senior team manager, he led the Tyrone Vocational Schools to an All-Ireland title in 1967 and the following year, as player/coach, led Tyrone to their first All-Ireland junior football title win, when they defeated London. In 1973 he led an exciting Tyrone side to their first All-Ireland Minor Football success, with a victory over Kildare. At provincial level Art served as Assistant manager to Brian McEniff with the Ulster Inter-provincial football team, winning 13 Railway Cup titles during their term in charge from 1983 to 2007.



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Not one to stand on ceremony, everyone has a story to tell about Art. Sometimes the term 'great' can be exaggerated, but not with Art. He was truly one of Ulster's GAA 'greats' and he has left an indelible mark across the GAA in the province and nowhere more so than in his beloved Dungannon and Tyrone. He will always be missed and fondly remembered.

SEAN HARTE

On the 4th November the GAA community bade farewell to one of the great overseas servants of the Association with the passing of Sean Harte. Just three weeks earlier Sean took ill while attending the Annual Dinner of the Toronto Divisional Board and, unfortunately, he never recovered. His loss is a great one to not only his own beloved family but

to the GAA family. Sean left his native Loughmacrory in 1974 and for just shy of 50 years Canada became his home. In those subsequent years he devoted his life to his family, his profession in the taxi insurance business and to the GAA.

While a lover of all things Irish, it was with the GAA that he devoted much of his energy and in 2022 he was fittingly honoured with the Irish Person of the Year Award in Canada. Just months earlier he had been honoured by Ulster GAA at their annual President's Awards. Sean held numerous posts on the Canadian County Board, including that of Chairperson, and he was Secretary at the time of his untimely passing. Initially a player with the St. Vincent's Club in Toronto, he spent most of his life with the St. Mike's club and soon earned the

reputation as a fearless player. He was a high calibre referee and was still active until shortly before his death. His administrative talents have been rightly lauded and he was instrumental in bringing the Tyrone v Dublin game to the Skydome in 1990 and the Ladies' All-Star Tour to the city in 2012. A burning ambition of his was finally realised in 2022, having been delayed through COVID-19, by the staging of the first ever Canadian National Championships, a sign of the growth of the game in the country beyond its traditional Toronto and Vancouver strongholds.

Sean has left a legacy to the GAA in Canada and thousands of young Irish men and women who have made that journey across the Atlantic over many years have so many reasons to be thankful for what he has done. Toronto will never be the same again,





Canada will never be the same again. Sleep well, dear friend!

SEAN MCCASHIN

It was with a profound sense of shock that we learned on the morning of 19th November that our beloved colleague on the Ulster Council, Sean McCashin, had passed away suddenly late on the previous night. Sean was one of life's gentlemen, generous with his time and generous of spirit. He was a lifelong gael and at the time of his death he was an active referee – indeed he refereed a game just hours before his untimely passing – a Down delegate to the Ulster Council, PRO of the East Down Divisional Committee and Assistant Secretary of the Down LGFA.

Sean was active in many spheres and held many posts within his beloved Ballykinlar Club and served many years as secretary of the East Down Divisional committee before the five-year rule came into effect. He also served as Youth Officer on the Down County Committee. Sean also loved his refereeing and would travel anywhere to referee a match – he spoke to players and could often be heard encouraging players when officiating at underage level. He made a great contribution to Ulster GAA since he joined the Council two years ago. He adjudicated on a hearing the night before he died. A great husband and father, a great GAA man and, above all, a great person.

Sean will be sadly missed by those who knew him. My condolences go out to his wife Annette and family and to the wider GAA family, and particularly that in Ballykinlar, and County Down.



There was widespread sadness throughout Cavan and further afield with the passing of Kevin Smith, who died on 29 December 2022 after a period of illness. A native of and former Treasurer of Killygarry, Kevin immersed himself in the Crosserlough Club when he moved there, serving in numerous roles including that of Club Chairman. He was club Development Officer at the time of his death. He was, perhaps, best known for his role as Cavan GAA Development Officer where he played a key role in a number of infrastructural initiatives, including the Polo Grounds Centre of Excellence at Kingspan Breffni Park. He was highly respected by the clubs of Cavan to whom he gave much invaluable advice and also served as Vice-Chairperson of Cavan Ladies' Board.

OBITUARIES

On 18th December 2022 our esteemed colleague Jimmy Darragh lost his beloved mother Eileen after a short illness and on 28th May 2023 Ulster Ladies Gaelic Football Administrator Ronan McCarthy said farewell to his beloved mother Mary, again after a short period of illness.

Two great stalwarts of Cavan football died within days of each other in December 2022, with Oliver Brady passing away on 17th and Tony Morris five days later. Oliver, from the Lacken Club, won an Ulster Senior Football Championship medal in 1969, while Tony, from the Gowna Club, having shot onto the scene by being part of the Cavan team that reached the 1959 All-Ireland Minor Football Final, went on to win three Ulster Senior Football Championship medals, in 1962, 1964 and 1966 and he also won Railway Cup medals with Ulster in 1965 and 1966.

In the final hours of 2022, we said farewell to our former Ulster Council colleague Gerry Mullan. A member of the Ballycran Club, Gerry was a man passionate about all things Irish and he gave a lifetime of service to the GAA and wider Irish culture. Gerry had a particular passion for Hurling and first joined the Down Hurling Board in 1956 and he served as a selector with the Down Hurling team from 1962 to 1979 inclusive. Always willing to give of his time, he once travelled to Tyrone to attend a meeting to promote hurling – and left as manager of the senior hurling team. Gerry was also a distinguished referee and did much to recruit new referees. He served as a Down delegate to the Ulster Council from 1988 to 2001 on the Ulster Council and was highly respected throughout the province and beyond. He also served as Chairperson of the Down Camogie Board from 1964 to 1970

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and was a selector on the All-Ireland Junior winning team of 1968. 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.

The Ballyholland Harps Club said farewell to Mary Coulter on 2nd January. A great stalwart throughout her life, Mary worked tirelessly in the fostering and promotion of Camogie and was President of the Harps Camogie Club at the time of her death. Mary was aunt of our esteemed Ulster LGFA colleague Ciaran Murtagh.

On the morning of 3rd January we learned of the death of that great Antrim GAA stalwart Gilly McIlhatton. At the young age of 18 he became Secretary of his beloved John Mitchel's Club and he went on to hold various posts within the club, including Chairperson and Treasurer. An ever present at Casement Park, Gilly was a former manager of the Antrim Senior Hurling team and was a champion for the cause of hurling both in his native county and in Ulster. Gilly was also an avid follower of Scór.

Also on the 3rd January, former Donegal Ard Comhairle delegate and member of Coiste Bainistí Seamus O' Domhnaill said goodbye to his mother Kathleen. On that date also John Agnew, a founder member of the All Saints' Club in Ballymena passed to his eternal reward.

The sudden death on 22nd January of former Ballybay and Monaghan footballer Eamon McAleer was met

with great sadness in the Farney County. Eamon had represented his native county with distinction over many years and was held with great respect by colleagues and opponents alike.

On 8th February we bade farewell to one of the great characters of the GAA when Tommy Lynch was called to his eternal reward. At the young age of 16 he represented his club Correnshigo at a South Armagh Convention and when the club folded in 1951 he joined the neighbouring Carrickcruppen Club. By 1972 he had become Chairman of the Armagh County Committee and he gave a lifetime of service to the GAA and indeed all things cultural. An avid supporter of Scór, he also founded the Camlough Heritage Committee in 1998. Tommy was also a quiz master of note and where there was a disputed answer to a question Tommy showed who was in charge with his infamous quip; 'you may be right tomorrow but I'm right tonight.' Matter sorted.

Aidan Walsh worked closely with Ulster GAA's Community Development Department on the Cuchullainn initiative. He was the co-ordinator for St. Patrick's College in Antrim, where he taught. A former dual player with the All-Saints' Club in the town, his sudden death on 10th February sent shockwaves through the local community.

We were all saddened to learn of the death of Des O'Neill on 18th February. Des, the father of football manager Michael O'Neill. A member of the St. Gall's Club in Belfast, Des hurled for Antrim from 1951 from 1966 inclusive. He was goalkeeper on the team which lost to London in the 1959 All-Ireland Junior Hurling Final, having defeated

Cork in the 'Home' Final. Des also hurled for Ulster in the Railway Cup, making his debut at the young age of 18, and he also briefly hurled for Armagh, while he lived in Portadown. Des ended his club career with All Saints in Ballymena, after the family moved to the town.

There was both sadness and shock when we learned of the death of Marie McBride on 2nd March. A highly popular and respected teacher at De La Salle College in Belfast, Marie was sister of Antrim footballer Paddy McBride and sister-in-law of former Antrim player and team manager Gearoid Adams.

The tragic death of young Tiarnan Fullerton on 13th March was met with shock and sorrow in Keady and neighbouring clubs. Tiarnan's family are steeped in the workings of the Michael Dwyers and Lamh Dhearg Clubs, with whom Tiarnan had played.

On the morning of 25th March we learned of the death of Dr. Martin Walsh. A true gentleman, Martin was ahead of his time when it came to sports medicine and he will be fondly remembered in the annals of Down GAA. Dr. Walsh was in the 'dug-out' on all five of Down's All-Ireland senior title wins and in their U21 and four All-Ireland Minor title successes. He was also team doctor when the Down hurlers played Cork in the 1992 All-Ireland semi-final against Cork. A fine sportsman in his own right, the Banbridge native – though associated with Bryansford for most of his life – captained St. Colman's, Newry in their first MacRory Cup Final appearance in 1945. A man of great faith, with a beautiful voice, Martin gave a wonderful rendition of 'Panis Angelicus' at the 2010 GAA Congress



in Newcastle. He was also a talented athlete and had the distinction of beating the great Sir Roger Bannister in a mile race.

Also, on 25th March we learned of the passing of Peter Pritchard. The Bailieborough native won MacRory Cup medals with St. Patrick's, Cavan in 1961 and 1962 and by 1963 he had earned a call-up to the Cavan senior football team. In 1964 he famously came off the bench to score two second half goals in the Breffni men's victory over Down in the Ulster Senior Football Final and he added a second provincial medal in 1967. He also won a Railway Cup medal in 1968. Peter spent much of his life in London and was heavily involved with the Dulwich Harps Club, where he was Honorary life President. Peter unfortunately had his 1964 Ulster Championship medal stolen and Ulster GAA were delighted to secure an exact replica replacement and an emotional Peter was 're-united' with his medal at a function in London in 2017. It really meant a lot to him to get this medal.

The untimely death of Darren O'Neill on 1st April was met with great sadness in the St. James' Club in Aldergrove when he was senior ladies team manager. An excellent coach, Darren had formerly played with St. Malachy's in Belfast and was a member of the Antrim Masters Football team at the time of his passing.

Late in the evening of 5th April we were all saddened to learn of the passing of the great Jim McKeever. Amongst the greatest players never to win an All-Ireland medal, Jim won the inaugural Footballer of the year award in 1958, the year he led his beloved Derry to the All-Ireland final. The St. Trea's, Ballymaguigan Clubman made an immense contribution to the GAA in his native county, also becoming both senior team manager and County Chairman. However, the greatest gift to the GAA made by 'Gentleman Jim' was undoubtedly in the field of education and the number of students, who would later become household names in the coaching world, that he taught at St. Joseph's

Teacher Training College (now St. Mary's). It is a legacy that will forever live on. Jim also managed St. Mary's to their first Sigerson Cup success in 1989 and served as a member of the Sports Council.

Former Monaghan GAA County Secretary, PRO and Central Council delegate John Heaphey passed away on 1st May while on holiday in Lanzarote. A distinguished GAA official, the Kerry native moved to Monaghan to take up a teaching post in 1966 and soon immersed himself as a player and administrator with the local Monaghan Harps Club. He served as Club Secretary from 1969 to 1978 and later joined the Scotstown Club when he moved to the area. John's talents were soon recognised by a wider audience as he was to hold several administrative posts on the Monaghan County Committee, including the role of County Secretary from 1991-99 and Central Council delegate from 2000-06. He also served on the National Games Administration Committee (now CCCC).



The morning after the dramatic Ulster Senior Football Championship Final between Derry and Armagh in Clones, news broke of the death of Martin 'Marty' Lynch. Marty was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease early in 2022 and he approached his illness with the same dignity that he approached life. A talented sportsman, he captained the Down U21 team to an Ulster title in 1984 and later that year made his debut for the Down senior football team. After a successful underage career with Newry Mitchels, he moved across town to the St. John Bosco Club and when he 'hung up the boots' he managed the Shane O'Neill's Club in

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Camlough. He also played League of Ireland Football for Monaghan United and was a keen cyclist and runner. A range of personalities came together in Newry last year for a 'Legends for Lyncho' game and Marty attended his last GAA match just three weeks prior to his death, as he witnessed his beloved Down overcome Donegal in the Ulster Championship at Páirc Esler.

On 20th May former Tyrone GAA Treasurer and member of the National Finance Committee Raymond McKeown said a final farewell to his beloved wife Noeleen and on 26th May the death occurred of Donegal native Ben Geraghty, who for many years had acted as a steward at Ulster Championship games and at Cavan games in Breffni Park. A member of An Garda Síochána, Ben immersed himself in the GAA in Cavan when stationed in the county, serving for a period as Chair of the Cootehill Club and he was also a respected referee.

On the 4th June we said farewell to Sean Higgins (Glenravel) who had been a tireless advocate for secondary schools' football in both Antrim and Ulster and who spent endless hours championing the cause of Gaelic games in our schools.

On the morning of 9th July as the All-Britain Competiton Games (ABC's) in London were entering their final day, news broke of the death of John Gormley, after a period of illness. John was a 'giant' in every way and was both a founder member of this great competition and was Chair of the Organising Committee at the time of his passing. Indeed, it was both poignant and fitting that John would be called from this world on the day those hundreds of children, including

his own grand-daughter, would be participating in this great festival of Gaelic Games, of which he was such an integral part.

Ulster GAA have a proud association with the ABC's and with the GAA units in Britain, as our 'twinning partner.' Over the years we have had many dealings with John and, although a native of Cloone in Co Leitrim, he was a wonderful friend of Ulster. After leaving his native Leitrim almost half a century ago, John settled in Luton where he joined the local St. Dymphna's Club and where, with his wife Bernadette, he raised three children. He was a much revered full-back for Dymphna's and immersed himself in the affairs of both the club and the Hertfordshire County Committee, where he held numerous roles. Between 2006 and 2009 he served as President of the Provincial Council of Britain and in 2021 he was elected as the provincial delegate of Britain to Central Council, where he remained a member until his death. A true gentleman, the GAA in Britain has lost a great servant but his legacy will forever live on and especially through his beloved ABC Games.

On 21st July Coalisland Na Fianna stalwart died after fighting a courageous battle with illness. A great stalwart he was both Club Vice-Chairperson and delegate to the Tyrone County Committee at the time of his passing. The following evening Maria McLaughlin, wife of our esteemed Chairperson Ciaran, said farewell to her beloved father, John McGonagle, who died following a period of illness. On 22nd July, also, Ciara Ferry lost her battle with cancer after putting up a brave fight. A former employee of Antrim GAA, Ciara was a Donegal native and she

won an Ulster Club medal with St. Eunan's, Letterkenny in 1993. An all-round sportsperson, Ciara was also an accomplished triathlete and a talented basketball player.

As many of us gathered in Croke Park on All-Ireland Football Final day, the news broke of the death of John McKillop. Affectionately known as 'Wee John' the affable Cushendall man was a true stalwart of the association and a true champion of our values of integrity, volunteerism and inclusion. He was at home at Páirc Mhuire and rarely missed a hurling or camogie game at any level when his beloved Ruairí Óg's were playing. He is even depicted on a mural on the wall of Sambo McNaughton's 'Lurig Bar' in the village.

Ulster GAA were both delighted and honoured to present John with a President's Award in 2018 and there have been few more deserving winners. As a statement from the Ruairí Óg's following his death said, he was part of their DNA. That he certainly was, and much more. The club tribute added: "John would often wander onto the sideline and into the middle of huddles to give a last minute peptalk and anyone lucky enough to witness this would agree that these moments of pure passion and love for his team was truly an honour to experience." Enough said. No more words are needed.

On the same day as John died, 30th July, we lost another great GAA stalwart when Frank Rodgers died suddenly. Indeed, the day before his untimely passing, he watched one of his grandsons win a Down U13 league title with Bredagh. Frank was a great stalwart of Beragh and Tyrone GAA, both as a player and



as an administrator. In 1958 he represented Tyrone at minor, junior and senior levels' and after injury cut short his playing career, he gave his full attention to administrative affairs. From 1968 to 1992 he served as secretary of the Red Knights' Club but Frank's portfolio stretched far beyond club affairs, as he performed the demanding role as Secretary of the Tyrone Games Administration Committee for a quarter of a century, 1975 to 2000.

Frank also played a major role in the promotion of GAA affairs. His voice was recognisable in GAA circles as he was one of a number of trusted correspondents who, in the days before the BBC failed to give due recognition to Gaelic Games, provided match reports for the 'Sunday Sportsound' evening wrap-up broadcast on Radio Ulster.

His wider communication skills were recognised by the GAA at national level when he won McNamee Awards in 1979 and 1974 and the family tradition in the publicity field continues through his son Alan who is well known in local journalistic circles.

The sudden death of Art McRory on the morning of 9th August was met with a sense of shock and sadness across the GAA community in the province and I have penned a tribute to Art elsewhere in this report.

Dungannon suffered a further loss with the tragic death of young Naomh Treasa camogie player Nicole Gillick on 14th August – another young life gone from us all too soon. On the same day our esteemed colleague and former Tyrone County Treasurer

Eileen Connolly said farewell to her beloved mother, Mary.

We were saddened to learn of the death of Liam McDaid, the former Bishop of Clogher, while holidaying abroad on 15th August. Bishop McDaid, a native of Donegal, spent most of his pastoral live serving communities in Monaghan and Tyrone and was also a former President of St. Macartan's College in Monaghan. He was a great lover of Gaelic Games and along with his good friend Archbishop John McDowell, was a regular attendee at Ulster Finals in Clones.

There was sadness when the death of Tyrone historian Joseph Martin was announced on 20th August. He was best known for his writing of the official Tyrone GAA history "The GAA in Tyrone: Raising the Red Hand" which was first published in 1884 and updated on numerous occasions since, most recently to record Tyrone's All-Ireland Senior Football title win of 2021. A great servant of the GAA, Joseph was a lifelong member of the St. Colmcille's Club in Carrickmore, where he held numerous committee posts, including that of Chairperson and Treasurer.

There was a sense of shock and disbelief around Derry and Ballinascreen in particular with the death of Benny McPeake on 24th August. A winner of two Hogan Cup medals with St. Patrick's, Maghera, Benny won Ulster Championship medals at minor and U21 level and lined out at centre-half-back for the Derry team which went under to Cork in the 1981 All-Ireland Minor Football Final. He also represented Derry at senior level, playing his last Ulster Championship game in 1989 against Donegal.

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On 31st August we said farewell to Eddie Devlin, a stalwart of Tyrone and the Coalisland Na Fianna Club. In 1948 he made history by becoming the first (and only one of two) person to captain back-to-back All-Ireland Minor Football winning teams and in 1957 he lifted the Anglo-Celt Cup, having been part of the Tyrone panel that captured the county's first provincial title the previous year. A Sigerson Cup winner with UCD, Eddie also won three MacRory and one Hogan Cup medal with St. Patrick's, Armagh and he also represented Ulster in the Railway Cup.

It was with deep sadness that we learned of the death of Danny Morgan on the afternoon of 2nd September. For many years Danny was a loyal steward at Ulster GAA fixtures across the country. Teams playing in Clones will remember him fondly as he manned the gate at the tunnel area. A great servant of Ulster GAA, he will be fondly remembered by the many gaels who got to know him over the years.

Shock, anger and disbelief transcended the area around Castlederg with the death of Conor Browne on 4th September, having been the victim of a stabling in the town in the early hours of 2nd September. Conor was well known in the area and was a member of the local St. Eugene's GAA Club.

There was a sense of numbness and disbelief around Cavan and the Drumalee GAA Club, in particular, with the tragic death of young player Dayle Reilly on 4th September and there was further sorrow and sadness in nearby Ballyjamesduff, and indeed throughout the entire Breffni County, when word spread on the morning

of 10th September of the death of mother and son Kathleen and Michael Lynch in a house fire. The Lynch family were steeped in the GAA, with both Kathleen and Michael avid supporters of the local Castlerahan Club. Kathleen indeed had four grandsons on the Castlerahan side which won the Cavan Intermediate Football Championship in 2022, while a grand-daughter was part of the Castlerahan/Denn combination which won the equivalent Ladies Championship in the same year.

There was sadness and disbelief with the tragic death of Declan O'Hare on 9th September. The O'Hare family are steeped in the Dromara GAA Club and Declan's death is even more poignant given that his brother Kevin also died tragically just over a decade earlier.

On 13th September Peter Finn, Chair of the Ulster GAA Higher Education Committee, said farewell to his beloved mother Eileen.

A terrible tragedy transcended the country when nine-year-old Kildress boy Ronan Wilson died on the evening of 23rd September after being struck by a car in Bundoran while on a short break with his family. The fun-loving child had a passion for Gaelic Football and indeed his parents ensured that his funeral cortege came by the Wolfe Tones Gortaclady pitch as Ronan paid one last visit to the place that had brought him so much joy, happiness and friendship.

On the morning of 24th September the GAA in Derry lost a 'giant' in every way when Liam Hinphey, father of our esteemed colleague Kevin, passed away following a period of

illness. Liam was born in Coleraine and brought up in Kilkenny, where he developed his passion for hurling, but when he returned to Derry to take up a teaching post in Dungiven in 1963 his life, and that of hurling in Derry, and Dungiven in particular, changed forever. He both hurled for and managed Derry and was a founder member of the Kevin Lynch's Club and cut the first sod in the club's playing field. He had a passion for all things Irish and while hurling was his first love he was also well versed in Gaelic Football and was indeed a selector on the Derry Ulster Senior Football Championship winning sides of 1975 and 1976. Liam was a larger-than-life character and everyone has a story to tell about him – I can even remember, from my university days, him refereeing a hurling game without a whistle, when the official match referee failed to show. Knowing Liam, even if he had one, he may not have blown it too much in any event! A man ahead of his time, Liam was one of the true legends of the GAA in the province.

On the morning of 2nd October we





received the sad news that Ross Mealiff had passed away. The Clones native had a great affinity with GAA teams from all over the country. With his Hotel Kilmore in Cavan a favourite and most hospitable venue for many GAA functions and team stop-overs. Ross was generous in every way, sponsoring many GAA events and functions, and he always went beyond the call of duty to ensure your every need was catered for when you visited his premises. A larger-than-life figure in every way, visits to Cavan or Clones just won't seem the same with Ross unfortunately gone from us.

At the grand age of 90 Arthur Ruddy made his final breath. A former Councillor and twice Chair of Newry & Mourne District Council, Arthur was a public servant of note but he was also a great GAA man. Never afraid to champion the cause of GAA clubs in search of public funding, Arthur won four Down Senior Football Championship medals with Newry Mitchel's and he later became a distinguished referee and took charge of the 1977 Down County Football final between Bransford and Burren.

Hugh Russell, an Olympic and Commonwealth Games medalist, was an iconic sporting figure but the GAA's greatest acquaintance with him came in his professional role as a photographer with 'The Irish News.' His death on 13th October, after a short illness, was mourned throughout the entire community. Hugh was always a pleasure to work with and through his photography he captured many iconic moments and the GAA photographic library is much richer thanks to his efforts. 'The Irish News' suffered a further loss just four days later with the death of their respected journalist Dawn Egan. A

member of the Ballycran Club, where her husband Mark served as Club Chairperson, Dawn was immersed in the local community and just two days after her poignant funeral, one of her sons (Christopher) lined-out for Ballycran in their Down Senior Hurling Championship final meeting with Portaferry.

On 19th October Derry and Bellaghy said farewell to Tom Quinn, a man moulded out of the great tradition of Derry defenders. He won an All-Ireland minor medal with the Oak-Leaf County in 1965, an U21 All-Ireland medal in 1968 and Ulster Senior Football Championship medals in 1970, 1975 and 1976. He also won seven Derry Senior Football Championship medals, two Ulster Club Championship medals and an All-Ireland Club medal with his beloved club.



Liam Austin (senior) passed away on 20th October - the father of All-Ireland medalist, Liam Og. A great stalwart of the GAA in Down, he served as a selector with the Down Senior Football team in the late 1970's/early 1980's and, indeed, briefly served as interim manager during that time. He also managed the Rostrevor Club to their breakthrough Down senior Football Championship success in 1976.

On the morning of 22nd October there was deep shock across the GAA community when news broke of the untimely passing of Liam Peoples. A stalwart of the John Mitchel's Club in Claudy, Liam was immersed in the GAA at club, county and provincial level, as he willingly devoted his time and talent to assist the GAA in any way he could. Liam first came to prominence when he served as goalkeeper on the Derry Minor Football team that reached the 1981 All-Ireland final, where they lost out to a star-studded Cork side, but it was as a trusted administrator that Liam made his greatest mark on our great Association. Liam held numerous roles on the Derry County Committee, including Secretary, Treasurer, Vice-Chairperson and delegate to the Ulster Council. He continued to serve the Ulster Council after his time on the Council expired and could be seen volunteering at many of our high-profile games and he was a valued member of the Provincial Finance Committee at the time of his passing.

Saturday 4th November was a sad day for the GAA in Ulster. We awoke to the terrible news of the tragic death of Madden Raparees Club Secretary Patrick Grimley on his way home from his 40th birthday party and within seven days his beloved

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wife Ciera and their great friend Ciara McElvenna were also taken from as a result of the same accident. What started out a night of celebration, ended in despair. It is a tragedy of unbearable consequences for all the bereaved families and for the wider community and GAA club. A stalwart of the Madden Club, Patrick, like the rest of his family, was steeped in the GAA. A former player, he excelled as club secretary and also popped up as a commentator for Armagh GAA TV. The death of his wife Ciera on 11th November left three young children orphaned and inflicted more grief on a community that has been left reeling by these tragedies. In between both deaths came that death of Ciara McElvenna, on 8th November, the day of Patrick's funeral. She was the mother of four young children and wife of 2002 Armagh All-Ireland winning panelist Kevin. .

Later on 4th November came the news of the death in Toronto of Canadian GAA Secretary and Tyrone native Sean Harte, who I have profiled earlier in my report, while that evening came news of the death of former Down GAA Chairman Anthony Williamson. The genial Rostrevor man served two spells as Chairperson of the Down County Committee and during his first term he had the privilege of handing over the Frank O'Hare Cup to his clubman Mickey Cole as Rostrevor won the Down Senior Football Championship for the first time. Well, he would have had, but Anthony bestowed that honour to Down GAA President and fellow clubman George Tinnelly, and act of generosity that summed up the generosity of the man. In 1980, during his second term as County Chairperson, he had the honour of welcoming Congress delegates to

Newcastle, as Paddy McFlynn was inaugurated as President of the GAA. Perhaps his greatest legacy to the Association was as a founder member of Scór – or Scór Seachto as it was initially known as – with Cork man Derry Gowan. Anthony knew the importance of the cultural side of the Association and the importance of having this outlet, particularly during autumn and winter evenings, in an era long before floodlights at GAA venues became fashionable.

On 5th November our esteemed Casement Park Project Board member Mick McGuckin said farewell to his sister Maureen (O'Donnell) and in the early hours of the following morning two more teenagers lost their lives on our roads when Alana Harkin and Thomas Gallagher died following an accident near Gleneely.

On 13th November former Fermanagh and Lisnaskea Emmet's footballer Eimir Martin lost her battle with leukaemia, at the young age of 35. A talented person, she was a midwife at the South-West Acute Hospital in Enniskillen and was a daughter of former Ulster Council member Vincent Martin.

A bleak time for road deaths in Armagh got even worse when, on 14th November, news filtered through that 16-year-old Dylan Vallely had succumbed to injuries he received in a road accident 18 days earlier. The Newtownhamilton youngster was a senior prefect at St. Joseph's High School in Crossmaglen and was a gifted footballer for both club and school. Indeed, just the week prior to his accident he had been named as the St. Michael's Minor Player of the year.

On 17th November, just 13 days after the death of their Secretary, came the news that Matt Healey, Chairperson of the Canadian County Committee, had passed away after a period of illness. A Tralee native, Matt initially worked in Ballinskelligs where he joined the local St. Michael's Foilmore GAA Club, before emigrating to Toronto in 1987. He soon became Chair and Manager of the Clan na Gael Club and he later was a founding member of the Durham Emmet's Club. An expert on the rules of the Association, Matt held numerous administrative posts at club, divisional and county levels and his proudest day undoubtedly came when he was elected as Chairperson of the Canadian County Committee at their Convention in December 2021. He presided over the inaugural Canadian National Championships in August 2022 but, unfortunately, fell ill during 2023. A great stalwart of the GAA and indeed all things Irish, Matt was also on the organising committee which brought the Skydome games to Toronto in 1990.

On that same night (17th November) Bishop Emeritus Anthony Farquhar of Down and Connor passed away peacefully after a short illness. My memories of 'Fr. Tony' go back to my student days in Coleraine, where he was university chaplain, and we, thankfully, kept in touch over the intervening years. I'll miss that annual Christmas Card! Bishop Tony was equally passionate about his sporting duties, as he was about his pastoral duties, which he performed with care, diligence and compassion. A regular attender at our games, I have one particular fond memory of him and Bishop Patrick Walsh standing together at the side of the road in Ballymartin as the triumphant Down team made their way through



the village on an open top bus, on their tour of the county following their All-Ireland success. He also had a great love for soccer and was an avid follower of Dundee United and I recall him telling me that on the 25th anniversary of his ordination, his family sent him to Italia '90 and I know he also played a role in helping secure an audience with the pope for the Irish team during that tournament.

Another young life was tragically lost on our roads on 18th November with the death of former Ballela hurler Cathal McCrory and late on that night came the shock news of the untimely death of our Ulster Council member and Down delegate Sean McCashin. I have paid a separate tribute to Sean elsewhere in his report.

On 19th November Kathleen McDermott, who worked in the Ulster Council office in Clones for many years, passed away peacefully. The older personnel amongst us will have many fond memories of Kathleen from her time with us.

On 25th November Bryansford and Down lost a great gael with the death of Kenny Bailie. The holder of two Ulster and six Down Club football championship medals Kenny was a tireless volunteer and served on the County GAA Finance Committee for many years. He was also part of the management team for Down's All-Ireland minor triumph of 1999. Two days later Tyrone and Ardboe O'Donovan Rossa said farewell to a legend of the club when Mickey John Forbes was called from our midst.

There was further grief, heartbreak and despair in the Kildress Wolfe Tones club and indeed throughout Tyrone when word filtered through on 3rd December of the death of young club footballer Matthew McGuigan, just days after he had arrived in Sydney. Matthew, a Tyrone minor in 2017, had been captain of the Kildress senior team for the past two years, assuming that leadership role when he was just 22 years of age. A talented individual and a club volunteer of note, his untimely

passing was met with total disbelief and his loss will be greatly felt by this family and many friends.

On 8th December Moneyglass said goodbye to Kathleen Kelly, one of the finest camogie players ever to grace the club. Kathleen was a stalwart of club and county over many years and won All-Ireland Senior Camogie medals with Antrim in 1967 and 1979. She was the aunt of Derry GAA County Chairperson, John Keenan.

Just before going to print, I learned of the death, on 14th December, of Hugh McParland, one of our most loyal stewards. Hugh was on duty at the Ulster Club Football Final in Armagh, just four days before his passing.

May these and all our friends and colleagues who departed this world over the past year, may you rest in peace!

THANKS

I offer my deepest thanks and gratitude to the many people who continue to assist me in my role as Provincial Secretary. To the staff of Ulster GAA, our volunteers at club, county and national levels and to the many great people I meet in the course of my work, I say a big thank you. I pay a special tribute to our team of stewards and gatemen who answer the call when asked to 'turn out' for Ulster GAA. I thank in particular Chief Steward Michael McCarney, Deputy Chief Steward Terence McShea and our Event Controllers for their ongoing efforts. I thank also our colleagues at Ulster Ladies and Ulster Camogie, with whom we have a particularly strong relationship.

I thank our county officers and offer particular thanks to our County

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Secretaries' and County Chairpersons', with whom I would be mostly in communication. Through your efforts and assistance, my job is made that bit easier. In particular I pay tribute to Ciarán McCavana (Antrim), Sean McAlinden (Armagh) and Sean Keane (Derry) who have completed their respective terms of office and I thank them sincerely for the support during their respective tenures.

To this end the personal and very public attack on one of our most loyal and hard-working officials during the Down v Donegal Ulster Senior football Championship game in Páirc Esler on 23rd April was a vindictive act which was rightly and widely condemned across the GAA community and beyond. The fact that the person behind this deed operated behind the cloak of anonymity speaks louder than any words and one can only but hope that their stated love for the GAA in Down will in future be utilised in a productive manner, rather than for some personal kick or glorification.

I thank also the outgoing GAA President Larry McCarthy, Ard Stiúrthóir Tom Ryan and the staff of Croke Park who are so generous with their time and always make themselves available when assistance is required. A champion of the club game in particular, Larry finishes his term-of-office at Congress 2024 and as our first 'overseas president' he has been a strong voice for the GAA grassroots. In the past year the New York senior team won their first ever Connacht Championship game, while their Junior team collected All-Ireland honours for the first time. Larry certainly brought them good luck. I wish him well and extend similar best

wishes to our incoming President, Jarlath Burns. I thank also my fellow Provincial Secretaries for their ongoing counsel and support.

Ulster GAA is twinned with Britain, Canada and Argentina and I thank the many people across these and all overseas units who are doing so much to keep our games alive overseas, often in the most trying of circumstances. It has been a particularly trying period for our colleagues in Canada with the deaths of both their Chair and Secretary within ten days of each other in November. The loss of both Matt Healy and Sean Harte to the GAA in Canada cannot be truly evaluated and they can be assured that Ulster GAA will work with you to ease your burden, where possible. The Junior 'twinning finals' have added a new dynamic to the Britain-Ulster partnership in recent years and these annual games are looked forward with interest by the competing teams. The Hurling Club of Buenos Aires celebrated its centenary in 2023 and I congratulate them on achieving this great milestone and due to the great efforts of stalwarts promoting the game there, two Argentinian teams participated in World Games 2023.

On the subject of World Games, I thank Derry County Committee and World GAA on their excellent organisation of this year's event. Owenbeg was a perfect venue for hosting the games, with the finals' being played at Celtic Park, while there has never been a finer World Games parade than the one which took place along the Derry Walls. A big thank you to everyone who made this such a memorable event.

I thank the officers and staff of Sport NI and Sport Ireland for their ongoing support and I thank the many voluntary and statutory bodies who work with us an offer support.

I thank our corporate sponsors for their continued generosity and, above all, I thank the countless numbers of players and match officials, without whom there would be no GAA.

Finally, I give the biggest thanks of all to my wife and family for their ongoing loyalty, support and understanding. In particular, I thank my wife Deirdre for her patience and tolerance as without her full support my job would be so much more difficult.



BRIAN MAC FHÍOBHUÍ
RUNAÍ



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