



**CLG ULADH**

**AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL 2021**

29Ú Eanáir 2021

# 05 TUARASCÁIL AN RÚNAÍ

*"In the worst hour of the worst season  
Of the worst year of a whole people..."*

**The words of the poet Eavan Boland in her famine poem 'Quarantine' hold true for the year that has just passed. 2020 certainly was 'a year like no other!' It's a year we will never forget.**

Words like 'lockdown' (the close relative of 'quarantine'), 'social distancing', 'super spreader' and 'self-isolation' became part of our everyday vernacular and indeed how poignant it was that Eavan herself would die at the height of the pandemic (though not from COVID-19) at a time when we didn't really know the scale or depth of what we were facing.

Last January we were watching and listening to news reports of a new coronavirus strain that was sweeping through the Hubei Province of China, but when we held our Annual Convention in Silverbridge on the last day of the month little did we know what lay in store. Indeed, that was the very evening that Brexit took effect and this was much more of a side topic of conversation amongst the delegates than anything than was happening in far-off Asia.

27 days later came the first reported case of COVID-19 on the island of Ireland - the rest is history! Within a fortnight, restrictions were being placed on our everyday lives and before the end of March we were all in 'lockdown.' Initially we hoped that things would soon return to some sort of normality but how wrong we were as the 'new normal' became another addition to our lexicon in 2020.

It would be remiss not to pay the most glowing of tributes to the health staff and frontline services for their response to the pandemic. Despite the obvious risks to their own health - and some paid the ultimate price - they unstintingly gave of their time (and lots of it) and professionalism to do their utmost for the greater good. They are owed a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. We are proud of you all and can take pride also in the fact that many are members of our great Association.

At the outset of the pandemic no one knew what to expect and being told to 'stay at home' was alien to everything we were accustomed to. The elderly and the most vulnerable were most susceptible to COVID-19 we were

told and a sense of fear engulfed the community as the rising daily death tolls brought the harsh realities of this pandemic into sharp focus. But the GAA put its best foot forward and responded to the needs of society in a manner which vividly demonstrated the community values of our great Association.

All over the country GAA club volunteers were at the forefront of community relief efforts, delivering goods and pharmaceuticals to the most vulnerable, many of whom were confined to their houses. GAA units placed their facilities at the disposal of health authorities, north and south, and in our counties of Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan GAA facilities were used as COVID-19 test centres.





Ulster GAA established a COVID-19 Advisory Group under the Chair of Stephen McGeehan, who also sits on the National GAA Advisory Group. Each of our counties had their own working group which linked to the Ulster Group and strong relationships were established with the NI Executive and with local authorities on both sides of the border. As the numbers of cases and deaths increased the NI Executive asked Ulster GAA, the Irish Football Association and Ulster Rugby to have a cohort of volunteers on stand-by in the event of the civic authorities being so over-whelmed that they would need additional support. Thankfully we never reached that stage but once again the GAA was ready and able to assist had that need arisen.

The GAA can be rightly proud of its community response - but we did what we always do, albeit never before on this scale. I thank everyone who played their part - it was a real team effort and I know the depth of gratitude is appreciated by so many across the entire island. It was the GAA at its very best!

Additionally, GAA players and units across the country lent their support to coronavirus messaging initiatives being driven by the Health Service Executive and the Public Health Agency. This continues to happen as we move into the next phase of the pandemic.

Ulster GAA also established its own dedicated COVID-19 microsite which was a vital source of information for our members and units. Incorporated within this was a dedicated funding page which signposted clubs to the various support programmes



that were in place across both jurisdictions.

On Friday 13th March the GAA called a halt to its activities - it was one of the first sporting organisations to do so. Spring then rolled into summer and the GAA pitches lay idle - and at a time when they should have been at their busiest. June brought better news and by mid-July games were permitted, albeit in front of a couple of hundred spectators and under

strict conditions. Although a concept which was an anathema to the GAA membership it was excellently observed by our members throughout the country.

Having been devoid of games for over four months, the club championship games captured the imagination and interest of the nation like never before. With severely reduced attendances at games, 'live streaming' became



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increasingly popular and indeed presented counties with a welcome revenue stream when regular income channels were suffering severely.

County finals co-incided with the relaxation of some of the lockdown measures that had been in place and unfortunately there were a small number of cases where post-match gatherings led to the emergence of COVID-19 clusters. These essentially related to County Finals in both male and female codes. We all know the joy of having our club playing in a County Final and it was regrettable that some post-match activities led to a rise in COVID-19 cases but it should be stressed that many thousands of games took place without any issues – and all our clubs and their members should be commended for that.

There was also much media coverage surrounding events at two Senior football finals in the province. For the record it should be noted that there were no reported positive COVID-19 cases resulting from either of these games.

Following the incidence of social gatherings following County finals the GAA moved quickly and on 5 October the GAA paused its club programme until further notice. A fortnight later Ireland moved to level 5 restrictions which called a halt to all sporting activity except at 'elite' level. For the GAA this meant senior inter-county only with all such games having to be played with no spectators permitted.

On 2nd December the country moved out of Level 5 – further restrictions remained in the north until 11th December – and while the country briefly returned to Level 3, club games are not allowed to be played under this level of restriction. However, as the daily numbers of positive cases reached record highs across the island, measures akin to Level 5 restrictions took effect in the north on St. Stephen's Day and on 30th December the Irish Government announced a full return to Level 5. Both Governments announced further restrictions in the first week of January. While things can change rapidly, it is difficult to envisage any club games taking place prior to Easter 2021 and, indeed, any club activity during April will probably be a bonus.

While we hope for better times there is no doubt that we will endure more pain in 2021. There is renewed hope now that a vaccine for COVID-19 is in place but this is but one tool in

our armoury to fight this dreaded coronavirus. What is clear however is that we will continue to endure restrictions for some time to come and it is difficult to see the country moving to Level 2 or below any time soon, so the prospect of club games resuming in the near future appear to be remote.

## FIXTURES TASKFORCE REVIEW

At the end of November 2019 the Fixtures Calendar Review Task Force published their proposals in relation to the GAA fixtures schedule and, in line with their terms of reference, outlined a series of recommendations in relation to competition structures and dates.



Some of the 'less difficult' recommendations were adopted at the GAA Congress in February 2020, while it had been the intention to hold a Special Congress in September to consider the more far-reaching proposals put forward by the Task Force.

Three options were put forward in relation to the senior inter-county football championship, one of which was the retention of the status quo. The other two options provided for an eight-team provincial championship, divided into two groups of four teams each. One of these options has an All-Ireland Championship linked to Allianz League finishing positions, with the provincial championships being run as standalone competitions, divorced from the All-Ireland series.

The idea of a split season allocating the first six months of the year to inter-county activity and the latter

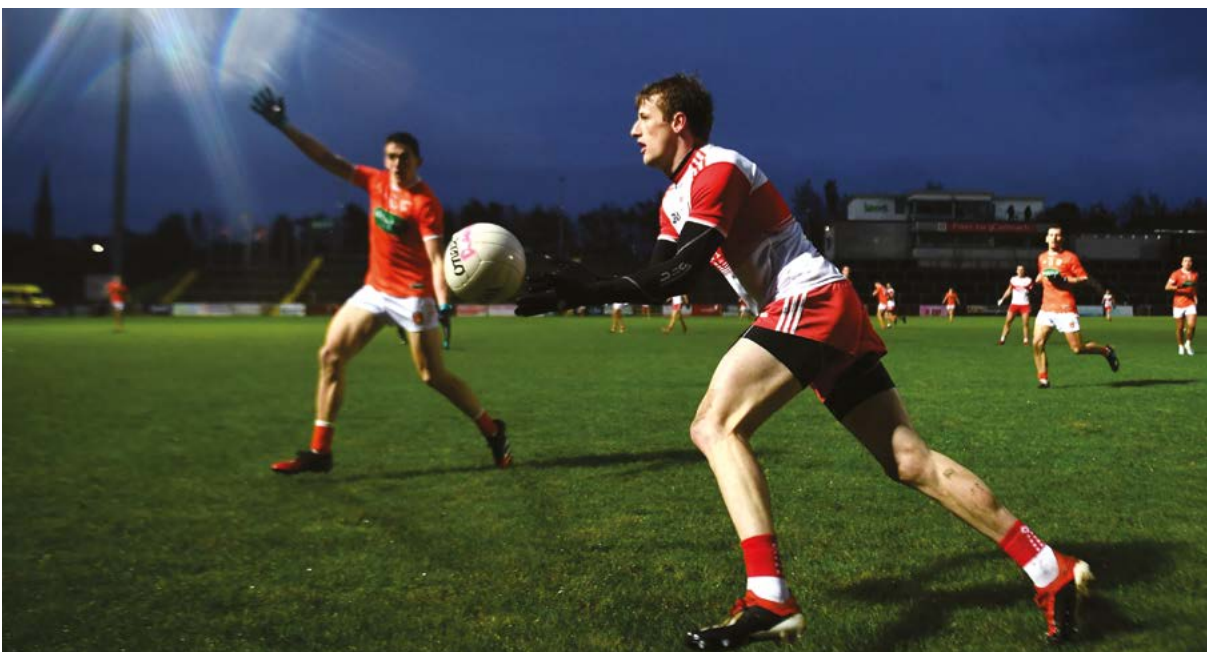
six months to club activity was explored by the Task Force but they concluded that it wasn't the best fix solution to the fixtures issues and no recommendations were brought forward in this issue.

Then COVID-19 came along – and the world changed! Given the small playing window open to the GAA in 2020 it had no option but to adopt a split season so both club and inter-county competitions could be catered for. While the resumption of GAA activity was welcomed by all, the success of the split season prompted the GAA President to ask Task Force Chair Eddie Sullivan to reconvene his committee and update their November 2019 Report accordingly.

This it has done and has recommended a split season. In 2020 it was important that the club season came first, given that it guaranteed that every player in the country would get a chance

to play. This happened and when the club season was complete the inter-county season took centre stage. Moving forward however it makes much greater sense to play the county season first. Non county panelists can play leagues and other non-championship games during the inter-county season and then clubs will have their full quota of players available to them for championship games. The absence of provincial and All Ireland Club championships in 2020 was crucial to the club season going first. Once these competitions are re-instated their timing would clash with the pre-season and early rounds of competition of the inter-county season. This will undoubtedly result in friction in some counties – an issue that won't arise if the inter-county season comes first.

Crucially, the Fixtures Calendar Review Task Force also re-visited their earlier options in relation to the Senior Football Championship, and





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have brought forward some minor modifications. The separation of the provincial championships from the All-Ireland series remains on the table, though an Ulster Championship to consist of 1 x Round Robin Group of 5 and 1 x Round Robin Group of 4 has replaced the initial proposal of two groups of four, which would mean one Ulster County being designated to Connacht on an annual basis.

I've previously stated my strong desire to ensure that all nine Ulster counties get to compete in their own provincial championship, so this amendment to the initial option is a welcome development. However, I have also previously expressed my opposition to the de-coupling of the provincial championships from the All-Ireland series. Doing this would devalue the provincial championships and counties would undoubtedly use them as preparation for the forthcoming League/Championship. As evidence you don't have to look any further than the now defunct Ulster Senior Hurling Championship – during the 1990's and 2000's it was a competitive competition with Antrim, Down and Derry all enjoying success. However, when it became de-coupled from the Liam McCarthy Cup series it effectively lost its prestige and was no longer treated with the same relevance by players and supporters alike. I fear the same would happen the Ulster Senior Football Championship if this proposal was to be adopted.

The option of eight teams' provincial championships with progression to the All-Ireland series also remains on the table – but with one significant development. As I alluded to earlier, I couldn't support any proposal which doesn't give all nine Ulster

counties the opportunity to compete for the Anglo-Celt Cup but unlike the November 2019 proposal this option is now catered for. There is a Preliminary Round in the Ulster Championship every year – Cavan even managed to win it from it in 2020 – and one option put forward in the updated Task Force Report is for the two lowest placed teams in the Allianz League to play off, with the winner playing in the eight team Ulster Championship and the loser playing in an eight team Connacht Championship, along with a team from Leinster. The fact that a similar process would happen in Leinster means that every county gets the opportunity to play in and indeed win their own provincial championship. Given the importance of the provincial structures this is an important fundamental.

There are many positives to this option. One is that every county will be guaranteed at least one 'home' championship game each year and another is that each county is also guaranteed a minimum of four championship games. This can only but improve standards and is preferable to the current 'super-eight' fixtures where only the stronger counties get additional games. I strongly favour this option. The option also remains for one team from Ulster (and three from Leinster) to play in a different provincial championship but without the opportunity to play a preliminary fixture to effect this opportunity. Under the revised proposal this would mean that the lowest place county in the Allianz league would automatically play in the Connacht championship – this is much less preferable to my favoured option for the reasons as outlined above.

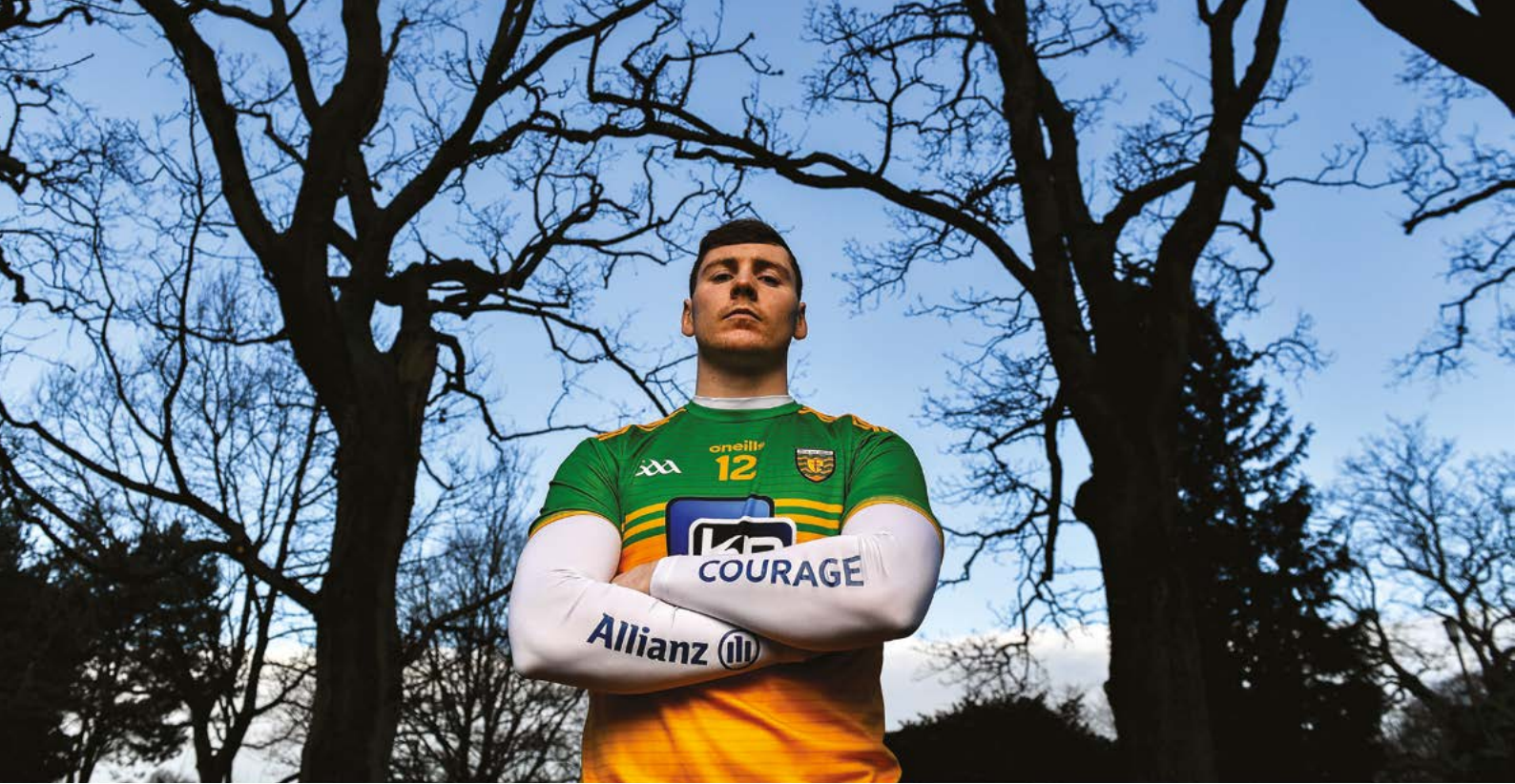
## GAMES ACTIVITY 2020

In 2020, the Ulster Senior Football Championship took place from the end of October to mid-November behind closed doors. The Anglo-Celt Cup returned to Cavan for the first time in 23 years as they saw off Donegal in a thrilling final at the Athletic Grounds in Armagh, played on Sunday 22nd November.

The Ulster U20 Football Championship was played in the early part of the year, with the final in which Tyrone defeated Donegal in Clones being one of the last games before lockdown, while the Ulster Minor Football Championship was severely affected by the pandemic and has been extremely disjointed. This has been very disappointing for all involved with county minor teams in 2020.

The Ulster Football Club League in 2020 saw a total of 54 clubs involved, with 14 teams in senior and 24 teams in intermediate and 16 in junior. We had reached the semi-final stage in all three grades by early March, at which stage the nation was placed into lockdown and the decision was taken, subsequently, to abandon the Ulster League. It should be noted that the entry numbers had increased by 17 on the previous year and this competition continues to provide clubs with competitive action at their appropriate level prior to the commencement of their internal county games programmes.

The Allianz Football League had contrasting fortunes for the Ulster counties. Armagh were promoted to Division 2 along with the divisional winners Roscommon; Cavan and Fermanagh were relegated to Division 3; Down secured promotion



to Division 2 along with divisional winners Cork, while Antrim narrowly missed out on promotion from Division 4.

On the hurling front it was a very encouraging year for our counties in the Allianz League. Antrim topped Division 2A and went on to win the league title by defeating Kerry in Tullamore by 2-23 to 2-20 on Sunday 18th October. On the same day Down defeated Derry in the 2B Final by 2-16 to 0-17 at the Athletic Grounds. Division 3A had been completed prior to lockdown and once again there was Ulster success with Donegal defeating Armagh in the decider, which was played in Carrickmore.

### CONOR MCGURK CUP

Longford and Louth were new additions to the Conor McGurk Cup which commenced in December 2019 with nine participating teams. It was however the traditional hurling foes of Antrim and Down which made it to the final which was played at The Dub (Queen's University Playing Fields) on 5th January 2020. Victory went to 'The Saffrons' on a winning scoreline of 2-19 to 0-13.

### BANK OF IRELAND DR. MCKENNA CUP

In our first competition of the year, the Dr McKenna Cup, which didn't include the University Colleges,

Tyrone retained their title by edging out Monaghan in the final, played on Saturday 18th January, by 0-11 to 1-05. A disappointing side note was the decision of Donegal not to field in their semi-final against Monaghan due to a significant number of players being unavailable. Tyrone had defeated Down in the other semi-final.

The BOI Dr McKenna Cup is a competition that will not take place in 2021 due to the late conclusion of the 2020 inter-county senior season but proposed changes to the fixtures calendar, if adopted, will signal the end of the pre-season inter-county competitions. It is a competition that has served this province well, having been first played for in 1927. Down

the years many counties used it as a springboard to further success and in more recent times it has played an integral part in helping the three Belfast-based universities prepare for the Sigerson Cup. The Dr McKenna Cup signalled the commencement of a new season and gave renewed hope to all participants and the Ulster GAA inter-county scene will be somewhat poorer without it should it be a casualty of a revised fixtures calendar.

### SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

Up until just a few years ago, it took nine weekends to play the Ulster Championship – this year it was played over just four. The 2020







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Ulster Senior Football Championship commenced at St Tiernach's Park, Clones on Saturday 31st October, where Cavan rallied late on to defeat Monaghan after extra time by 2-15 to 1-17. The winning score came from a monster 55m free converted by the Cavan goalkeeper and captain Raymond Galligan with the very last kick of the game. The following day two quarter-finals were scheduled, outlining the condensed nature of this year's championship. Armagh travelled to Celtic Park and edged past the home side by 0-17 to 0-15 while Donegal squeezed past Tyrone in a rain-soaked Ballybofey on a 1-13 to 1-11 scoreline after a titanic battle. While we didn't know this at the time, this game drew a curtain on the illustrious career of Mickey Harte as Tyrone manager and I will pay my own tribute to Mickey later in this report.

In the other two quarter-finals, played a week later, Down breezed past Fermanagh with ease on a 1-15 to 0-11 scoreline in Brewster Park, while Cavan eventually saw off a determined Antrim challenge, winning out by 0-13 to 0-09 at Kingspan Breffni Park. The semi-finals were complete contrasts. Donegal blitzed Armagh by 1-22 to 0-13 at Kingspan Breffni, while Cavan came from ten points in arrears to defeat Down 1-14 to 1-13 at the Athletic Grounds, Armagh in a thrilling contest.

The Ulster Final took place one week later where three-in-a-row chasing Donegal and Cavan met at the Athletic Grounds, in what was a repeat of the 2019 final. This was a unique final in many ways. Played behind closed doors, the first final in Armagh since 1941 and ultimately and fittingly, it had a thrilling conclusion. 2019 was a step too far for Cavan but 2020 proved to be the year that they

bridged a 23-year gap. They produced a steely display and when Conor Madden bagged a major in the 69th minute, they were four points up and heading for dreamland.

The history books will show a winning scoreline of 1-13 to 0-12 but that only tells part of the story. It was a remarkable end to a remarkable Ulster Championship and my congratulations go to Cavan for this success. Just five weeks after being relegated to Division 3, the Breffni men were Ulster Champions, and it was won after playing on six consecutive weekends (they played Allianz League games on both weekends prior to their first Ulster Championship fixture).

In the All Ireland Semi-Final, the newly crowned Ulster champions played the All-Ireland champions Dublin in Croke Park on 5th December and despite putting up a spirited performance, the all-conquering 'Dubs' emerged



convincing winners on a 1-24 to 0-12 scoreline.

### **ULSTER MINOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP**

The Ulster Minor Football Championship had been scheduled to commence in April with a 'back-door' element but when it became clear that Gaelic Games activity would resume the Ulster CCC agreed that this year's Electric Ireland Ulster Minor Football Championship would revert to a straight knockout format and that the draw would mirror that of the Ulster Senior Football Championship. In the Preliminary Round, Monaghan scored a late goal to defeat Cavan by 1-8 to 1-7 on 17th October. The following week,

restrictions came back into place which meant that the Minor Football Championship had to be paused.

It re-commenced on Sunday 20th December with Monaghan defeating Antrim at Corrigan Park, Derry narrowly getting the better of Armagh at Owenbeg, Tyrone securing a one-point victory over Donegal in Ballybofey and Fermanagh turning in a disciplined display to defeat a fancied Down team in Enniskillen. Unfortunately, on Christmas Eve came the news that Minor (and U20) Inter-County Championships had once again fallen victim to Coronavirus restrictions as the country entered the third and seemingly most virulent wave of the pandemic. This resulted

in a postponement of both minor semi-finals which were scheduled to be played on 3rd January 2021. It is not known when they can resume again but given the dramatic increase in the numbers of people contracting the virus there is no prospect of this happening in the immediate future.

### **U20 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP**

2020 saw the continuation of Regional Leagues for this age grade with the majority of Ulster counties taking part in the Leo Murphy Cup which was won by Mayo, who defeated Louth in the final. Monaghan won the Philly McGuinness Cup after beating Longford in the final, which was played on the last weekend in January.





The EirGrid Ulster Under 20 Football Championship commenced in February with Derry defeating Fermanagh after extra-time in the Preliminary Round game which was played at Celtic Park. There were quarter-final wins for Antrim, Tyrone (after extra time), Down and Donegal (after extra time and penalties) over Derry, Armagh, Cavan and Monaghan respectively. Atrocious weather conditions meant it proved very difficult to secure venues for the semi-finals which were played on 29th February but thanks to the generosity of the Lavey and Loup Clubs the games went ahead and all four teams, despite the weather conditions, served up some wonderful football. Tyrone edged out Antrim by 0-11 to 0-9 at the former venue, while a late Donegal goal helped them secure a 1-11 to 0-12 victory over Down.

A strong second-half showing helped Tyrone to secure the title with Darragh Canavan's goal proving decisive in their 1-11 to 0-9 victory over Donegal in the final at Clones. This game was played on 7th March but the back-to-back Ulster Champions, due to the onset of COVID-19, had to wait

over six months until 17th October to play their All-Ireland semi-final against Dublin. Tyrone led for most of the game but this time it was Dublin who finished strongly to win by two points and set up an All-Ireland final meeting with Galway.

### HURLING CHAMPIONSHIP

Pride of place on the hurling front from an Ulster perspective was the magnificent achievement of Antrim in winning the Joe McDonagh Cup, which means they will play in the Leinster Senior Hurling championship in 2021. Building on their league success Antrim played some outstanding hurling in the McDonagh Cup round-robin stage and this set up a final meeting with Kerry. The final, which was a repeat of the league final played two months earlier, was played as a curtain-raiser to the All-Ireland Senior Final. Trailing by a point at half-time Antrim turned in a strong third quarter and held on to deservingly win on a 0-22 to 1-17 scoreline. It was proud captain Conor McCann who lifted the cup under the Hogan Stand.

In the Nicky Rackard Final, Donegal beat Mayo by 3-18 to 0-21 at Croke Park on the memorable Bloody Sunday weekend, while Kildare defeated Down in the Christy Ring Final on the same double bill. Down however had the consolation of gaining promotion to the Joe McDonagh Cup for 2021 and their epic semi-final penalty shoot-out victory over red hot favourites Offaly was undoubtedly the greatest hurling shock of the season.

In the Lory Meagher Cup, Fermanagh and Cavan again competed strongly with the group stage meeting between these two sides ending in a draw. Fermanagh progressed to the final by virtue of their one-point win over Louth in the group stages but the Leinster men turned the tables in the final by producing a strong performance to defeat the Erne men by 2-19 to 2-8.

Comhairle Laighean agreed to accommodate one Ulster county in the 2020 Leinster U21 Hurling Championship. Antrim and Down indicated that they wished to compete for this place and played



a qualifier in October 2020. Antrim, with a late flurry of scores, proved too strong winning out on a 3-24 to 2-14 scoreline at Ballycran. They progressed to the Leinster Championship where they were defeated by a strong Dublin side at Darver.

There was success for the minor hurlers of Down who defeated Meath by 1-14 to 0-15 at Páirc Tailteann in Navan in the final of the Peadar O Liathain Cup (All-Ireland Minor 'B' Hurling) with Francis Caldwell being the Mourne hero, as his winning goal came deep in second-half stoppage time.

### **CLUB FOOTBALL & HURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS**

The year commenced with the playing of the concluding stages of the AIB All-Ireland Club Football and Hurling Championships.

At senior level Kilcoo (Down) put in a sterling performance to defeat favourites Ballyboden St. Enda's (Dublin) by 2-8 to 0-11 in the All-Ireland semi-final in Kingspan Breffni Park on 4th January and fifteen days later they faced the might of Corofin (Galway) in the All-Ireland Club Final in Croke Park. The Westerners were

hoping to become the first club to win three consecutive Club Football titles but Mickey Moran's charges made it clear from the outset that they weren't in town just to make up the numbers. The sides were deadlocked at 0-7 apiece at full-time after a tense tactical battle but Kilcoo's valiant effort fell short as Corofin pulled away in extra-time, winning on a 1-12 to 0-7 scoreline.

The day after Kilcoo had defeated Ballyboden St. Enda's, Slaughtneil (Derry) put in an equally stirring performance against reigning All Ireland Club Hurling champions Ballyhale Shamrocks (Kilkenny) in Newry. The Derry men matched the Kilkenny artisans puck-for-puck and score-for-score throughout the game and it was only a stoppage-time Colin Fennelly goal that sealed victory for the Noreside outfit.

The Monaghan duo of Magheracluone and Blackhill who were Ulster Intermediate and Junior Football Champions respectively played on 11th January, with Magheracluone comprehensively defeating Leinster champions Mattock Rangers (Louth) in Crossmaglen, while Blackhill were unlucky to go under to Wexford outfit Rathgarogue-Cushinstown, losing by

a single point. In the All Ireland final a fortnight later Magheracluone never reached their potential and lost out to Oughterard (Galway) by 2-16 to 0-12.

In hurling, Ulster Intermediate champions Naomh Eanna (Antrim) found the challenge of a Tommy Walsh inspired Tullaroan a step too far in the All-Ireland semi-final, while it was another Kilkenny Club, Conahy Shamrocks, that proved too strong for Eoghan Rua (Derry) in the Junior semi-final, which was played in Inniskeen. Throughout this pandemic, the GAA clubs have further enhanced its role in local communities throughout Ireland and when games were permitted to be played again the club scene flourished, giving some brightness at a time of great darkness in our lives. From mid-July the Club Championship was beamed onto our television screens in the comfort of our homes. This was provided on either free to air channels or 'streamed' behind a paywall devised by the various County Committees. We watched on as Ederney ended a 52-year wait to claim the Senior title in Fermanagh. Dungannon Clarks waited even longer - all of 64 years - as they won the O'Neill Cup in Tyrone and so ended a generational famine. Their victory was secured by means



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of a penalty shoot-out after they and Trillick St. Macartan's finished level after extra-time and so they became the first team ever to win a county title by this method.

Dunloy and Loughgiel went head-to-head in the Antrim Hurling Final for the first time since 2012 as the young guns from Cuchulainn's claimed back-to-back title. The Cavan SFC Final required a replay with Crosserlough finally seeing off a determined Kingscourt challenge. Slaughtneil, in both codes, Kilcoo and Scotstown continued to rubberstamp their dominance in their respective counties.

We could go on and on throughout the nine counties and the stories would keep flowing. In 2020, we have been denied the opportunity to view these winners on the provincial stage, but the memories that have been provided will live long in the memory. 2020 will forever be etched in our grey matter and thankfully for the gaels of Ulster there will be a small consolation that we were able to view some of the greatest successes of the modern era. The full list of County Championship winners are outlined below, with six adult championships perhaps hoping to be finished when the COVID-19 restrictions allow.

COUNTY	SENIOR FOOTBALL	INTERMEDIATE FOOTBALL	JUNIOR FOOTBALL	SENIOR HURLING	INTERMEDIATE HURLING	JUNIOR HURLING
Aontroim	Cargin	Moneyglass	Ardoyne	Dunloy	Tír na nÓg	St Paul's
Ard Mhacha	Maghery	Clan na Gael	Forkhill	Middletown	N/A	Sean Treacy's
An Cabhán	Crosserlough	Ballinagh	TBC	Mullahoran St Joseph's	N/A	N/A
Doire	Slaughtneil	Greenlough	TBC	Slaughtneil	Swatragh	Lavey
An Dún	Kilcoo	Saul	St Paul's	Portaferry	TBC	TBC
Dún na nGall	TBC	Aodh Ruadh	Convoy	Setanta	N/A	Carndonagh
Fear Manach	Ederney	Enniskillen Gaels	TBC	N/A	N/A	N/A
Muineachán	Scotstown	Monaghan Harps	Aughnamullen	Castleblayney	N/A	Clontibret
Tír Eoghain	Dungannon	Edendork	Kildress	Eire Og	N/A	Naomh Colum Cille

### OTHER HURLING INITIATIVES

Unfortunately, much of the hurling activity scheduled for 2020 was decimated due to the pandemic with the following events and competitions among those having to be cancelled; the Annual Ulster Subway Player Academy Programme, County Summer Development Camps, Academy Squad competitions, Provincial and National Poc Fada, Tain Og Leagues, Cúchulainn Adult Club Hurling League, Ulster Hurling Og Sport, Feile na nGael, Ulster Féile, Ulster Club championships and the Provincial Coaching Workshops. Our Regional Hurling Staff are continuing to engage with their Counties, clubs and schools in the form of club development workshops, support coaching

and the organisation of regional, provincial and cross provincial games programmes, across all age grades and levels.

The necessity to furlough many staff, including all of the Regional Hurling Development Officers from 1st April to 31st October obviously severely dented our delivery capacity but since these staff have returned on a part-time basis they have run out a very successful and engaging Vodcast series, which can be viewed on the Ulster GAA YouTube channel.

In 2021 The National Hurling Development Committee (HDC) is hoping to progress with a Cross-County Hurling Competition for Adult Hurling Clubs. The new CúCulainn League will be a regional cross-

county-border league for developing Hurling Counties. This will provide clubs in the developing Tier 3, 4, 5 hurling counties with increased opportunities to participate in a series of meaningful games against teams of a similar standard from a county other than their own.

### ULSTER SCHOOLS

It has been a particularly difficult year for the Ulster Schools Committee with most of their competitions halted by the pandemic. The premier Ulster Schools Hurling Competition, The Mageean Cup, had been concluded in November 2019 with Cross & Passion College, Ballycastle defeating St. Mary's CBS, Belfast to take the honours but for the first time since the MacRory Cup became a knock-out competition in 1935, there was no



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final. Those two great heavyweights of Ulster Colleges Football St. Colman's College, Newry and St. Patrick's College, Maghera made it through to the final but days before it was due to be played all GAA activity ceased.

Efforts to re-schedule the game for later in the year proved unsuccessful and it was agreed that the title should be shared. It was a similar case in the MacLarnon Cup where Our Lady & St. Patrick's, Knock and St. Pius X, Magherafelt shared the spoils. This was a bitter-sweet ending for both schools but particularly for the East Belfast college who were denied the opportunity to play in their first ever MacLarnon final.

Not being able to stage these finals' was one of many sporting casualties of 2020 and given the

current high levels of Coronavirus it is almost certain that many Schools' Competitions won't again be played in 2021. Competitive sport is very much part of school life and it is sad that many young people have and will continue to miss out. Hopefully however brighter times won't be too far away and that in the not-too-distant future we can see a return to action on this front.

## HANDBALL

Unfortunately, the Handball season in the province was decimated by the COVID-19 pandemic with none of the major championships in the province able to take place. Hopefully it will be a more positive picture for the coming season.

## REFEREES

In concluding my summary of games activity in 2020, I wish to thank

our match officials. I thank all our referees for their time, commitment and involvement in the delivery of our much-reduced games programme. On behalf of Ulster GAA I say thank you to all of our referees for your continued support. We are in the process of developing a Referees Pathway document for the province, which we hope to launch in 2021. The quality of our football referees was recognised at national level with six of the 14 inter-county senior championship referees in 2020 coming from the province. This is a testament not only to the referees themselves but also to the individuals who have done so much to promote refereeing in the province. In his first year on the inter-county championship list Paul Faloon's performances didn't go un-noticed and he was rewarded by being appointed to referee the All-Ireland

U-20 Final. Congratulations Paul! I also congratulate Barry Cassidy and Sean Hurson on being appointed to referee the Ulster and Connacht Senior Football Finals' respectively.

### **MICKEY HARTE**

On the evening of Friday 13th November news quickly spread that Mickey Harte had stepped down as manager of the Tyrone Senior Football team. Mickey had spent an incredible 30 consecutive years in charge of Tyrone teams at Minor, U21 and Senior levels, the last 18 of which were with the latter.

When Mickey took charge of the Tyrone Minor team in 1991 few would have dared to think what an incredible journey he and Tyrone football would embark upon. It was a journey laced with both triumph and tragedy.

Success cannot be measured in trophies alone but the record of Mickey Harte's tenure has ensured a place for him at the top table of great Gaelic Football managers. 'O'Dwyer, Heffernan, Boylan, Gavin, Harte...!', they almost roll off the tongue. With Mickey at the helm Tyrone won three All-Ireland Senior titles, one National League title, six Ulster Senior titles, 12 Dr. McKenna Cup titles, two All-Ireland U21 titles and one All-Ireland Minor title.

After Mickey started out his inter-county managerial career in 1991 success didn't come instantly but the Tyrone County Committee of the time had the vision to realise that he was developing a group of players, both in terms of their football ability and their character. The first All-Ireland success didn't come until 1998 (the young minor team of the previous year reached the All-Ireland Final and had to endure the tragic loss of their colleague Paul McGirr who died



tragically from injuries sustained in their opening Ulster Championship game that season) but it was the catalyst for an avalanche of success, spearheaded by those three Sam Maguire Cup winning victories in the space of six seasons.

Mickey's enduring faith undoubtedly helped him through the bad times with the sudden death of Cormac McAnallen in 2004 and the brutal murder of his daughter Michaela on her honeymoon in 2011. His character shone through during those dark times and has continued to shine through.

We thank Mickey for the contribution he has made to the GAA not only in Tyrone but throughout the province. He has always been very supportive of Ulster GAA and it is only fitting that I thank him for the many occasions that he selflessly gave of his time when we sought his attendance at Ulster GAA organised events and launches. When he stepped down as the Tyrone supremo he said he wouldn't be buying the slippers just yet. Needless to say, we didn't have to wait long before we heard of his next footballing adventure. We wish him well and no doubt there will be an increased focus on the Louth football





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fortunes in the coming years. Thanks for everything Mickey and best wishes for the future.

## COLM CAVANAGH

As we got some respite from the pandemic and county training recommenced in anticipation of an October 17th resumption to the season, news came on 23rd September that Colm Cavanagh would not be re-joining the Tyrone set-up. His career with the Tyrone seniors under the tutelage of Mickey Harte had spanned 14 years and the two-time All-Star from The Moy club man was the last All-Ireland medal winner on the O'Neill County panel. Like his brother Sean he gave many of his best years to Tyrone football and we are deeply indebted to him and wish him well in his future endeavours.

## CONOR MAGINN

Following the conclusion of the 2020 Championship Down stalwart Conor Maginn announced his retirement from inter-county football. The Bryansford club man had represented his county for 11 seasons and was a loyal servant to the Mourne cause. While he didn't have any silverware for his efforts he has many great memories from his inter-county career including playing in an All-Ireland Final, having come on as a substitute for John Clarke in the 2010 decider against Cork.

## EAST BELFAST GAA

At a time when Coronavirus brought many of us to our knees, there arose a shining light from the east - East Belfast. The formation of East Belfast GAA, the first GAA club in that part of the city since the demise of the St. Colmcille's, Ballyhackamore club in 1972, was the brainchild of David McGreevy (a Teconnaught native who played for London in the 2013

Connacht Football Final) and Richard Maguire. What started with a tweet in the hope of getting an U12 team established within weeks led to the club fielding adult teams across all four team codes - a remarkable achievement.

Inclusivity is at the heart of East Belfast - their club crest is unique in that it features the word 'together' in English, Irish and Ulster Scots, as well as the Red Hand, the Shamrock, the Thistle and the famous Harland and Wolff cranes Samson and Goliath, which dominate the East Belfast skyline. Their Club President is the inspirational Linda Irvine and their membership is undoubtedly the most diverse of any club in Ireland.

To form a GAA club at any team in East Belfast was no mean feat - to do it in the midst of a pandemic is mind-boggling. I extend my congratulations to the club and trust that it will continue to go from strength to strength.

## FÉILE

The underage festivals of hurling and football that are Féile na nGael and Féile Peile na nÓg have been one of the great success stories of the GAA. Unfortunately, the 2020 competitions had to be cancelled and there was particular disappointment in counties Donegal, Derry and Tyrone who had been scheduled to host Féile Peile na nÓg.

This year we will celebrate 50 years of Féile na nGael - Féile Peile na nÓg didn't come into being until 1982 - and this is an opportunity to celebrate the success of these underage festivals of Gaelic Games which have given many days of enjoyment to players, families and clubs.



The concept and raison d'être of these great competitions is as valid now as it was half a century ago but they have grown way beyond what the founders could have imagined. Logistically Féile has become highly challenging with over 250 teams competing and over 600 games being played over three days.

In my Annual Report to the Ulster Convention in January 2018, while reviewing the Féile Peile na nÓg that had been held in counties Cavan, Fermanagh and Monaghan the previous summer, I wrote;

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

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were hosting visiting children had to be 'cleared' by either the Garda Vetting Bureau or Access NI. The amount of work that this placed on host clubs and Ulster Council staff, who had to process each application, was staggering....

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

Well, the Association did think seriously about the issue and late last year published revised Féile proposals. In a post COVID-19 era the overnight stays with host clubs seems much less attractive but, as I pointed out above, even prior to COVID-19 the risks associated with the host club concept of Féile were a cause for concern. Under the new proposals the concept of a host county or host counties has been removed, with games following the respective county competitions being organised on a regional basis. This removes the need for overnight stays in the homes of host families. The new concept will also provide greater opportunities for clubs to play teams from outside their county. The age grade has been raised from U14 to U15, while it is also anticipated that in future there will be greater cross county opportunities for club teams at U13 level. The raising of the age grade to U15 aligns with the GAA's new age-grade policy and will hopefully address some of the early teenage fall-out rates experienced by

some GAA units, particularly in larger urban settings.

## **BLOODY SUNDAY REMEMBERED**

On November 21st 2020, one hundred years to the day since the atrocity, the GAA marked Bloody Sunday with a poignant, dignified and befitting ceremony in Croke Park. 14 torches were lit on Hill 16, along with corresponding pillars of light, in memory of the 14 people who went to a football match that infamous day in 1920 and never returned. They were remembered in an oration narrated by Brendan Gleeson which concluded with words most fitting;

*"They are our family, Our friends, Our people. Cuimhnimis orthu uilig. We Remember them all."*

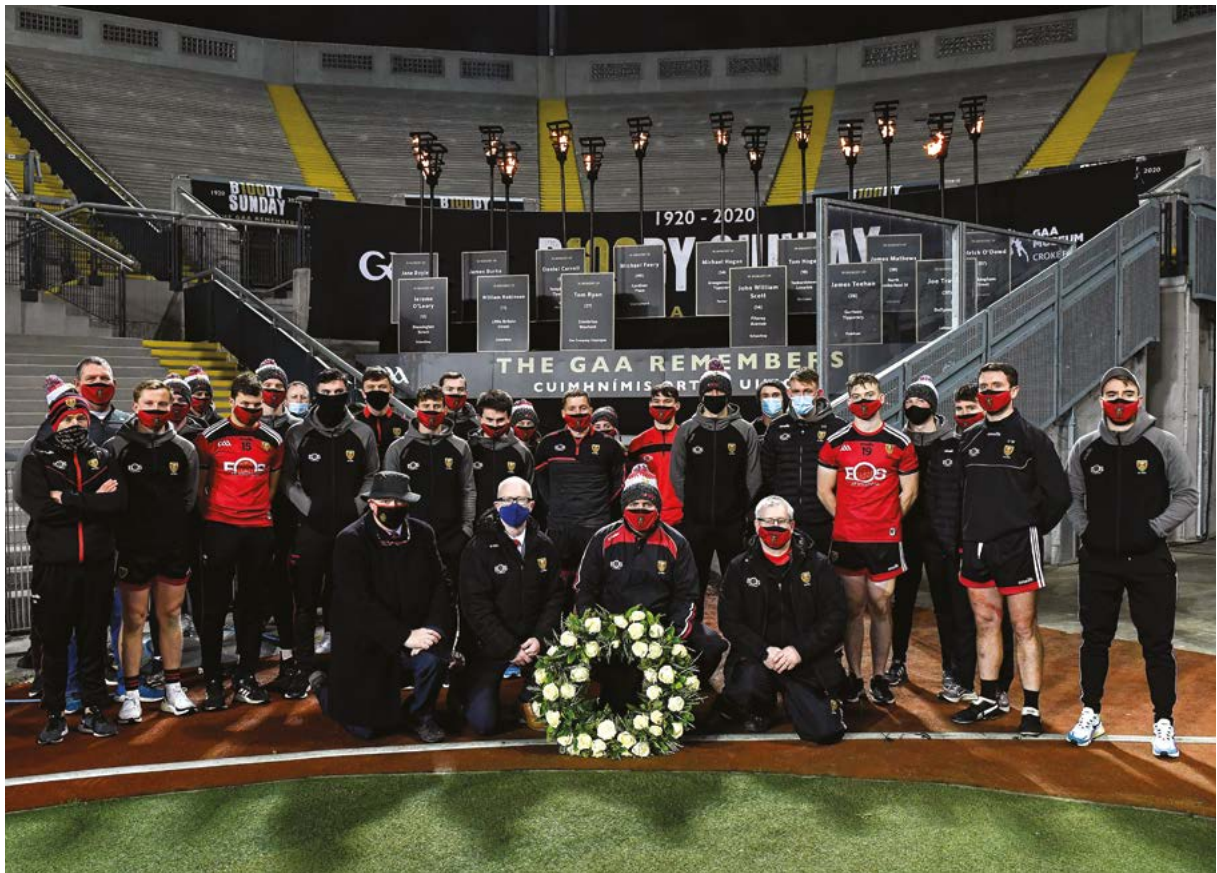
In a ceremony attended by by Uachtarán na hÉireann Michael D Higgins, An Taoiseach Micheál Martin and Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Catherine Martin, the Ard Stiúrthóir Tom Ryan and Uachtarán CLG John Horan laid wreaths on the spot close to Hill 16 where Tipperary corner back Michael Hogan was fatally shot that day. Poignantly, Dublin captain Stephen Cluxton, accompanied by his team colleagues, also laid a wreath after the Leinster Football Final which followed the ceremony – Dublin had of course been Tipperary's opponents on that fateful November day in 1920. Great praise is due to the GAA Commemorations Committee for their efforts to mark this centenary, with particular thanks to Croke Park staff member Cian Murphy. The contribution of journalist Michael Foley should also be recognised – his book 'The Bloodied Field', published in 2014, has been the source of many of the initiatives marking this solemn

day in our history. Indeed Michael "brought to life" the story of Bloody Sunday and now the other victims have been given their rightful place alongside Michael Hogan in the history of the GAA.

That Croke Park ceremony will live long in our memory – but so too will those of the following day. As someone wrote it was the day that Gaelic football allowed itself to dream again. Only once before, in 1920, had the four provincial championships been won by Dublin, Mayo, Cavan and Tipperary and while Mayo and Dublin had the 2020 versions neatly ticked away, few would imagined the scenes which would unfold in Páirc Uí Chaoimh and the Athletic Grounds on 22 November 2020.

But Tipperary, wearing the white and green jerseys of Grangemockler – just as they had in Croke Park 100 years and one day earlier – surprised Cork to land their first Munster title since 1935, while a few hours later Cavan ensured that the All-Ireland semi-finals of 2020 would mirror those of 1920 with perhaps the greatest shock of the 2020 campaign when they dethroned reigning champions Donegal in the Ulster Final.

In another twist to an already remarkable story, the 1920 Ulster final, was refereed by none other than Tom Hogan, brother than Michael Hogan. Had it not been for COVID-19, the Ulster final would have been played five months earlier but fate decreed that it would be played on the same weekend as the anniversary of Bloody Sunday. A truly incredible weekend was best summed up by 'Irish Examiner' journalist John Fogarty when he wrote;



*"We've been told time and time again that sport doesn't do sentiment, but maybe in a year like this, it made an exception."*

Incidentally, and movingly, two weeks later after their All-Ireland semi-final defeat to Mayo in Croke Park, Tipperary football captain Conor Sweeney and his colleagues laid their own wreath near to the spot where Michael Hogan was killed.

## FINANCE

It has been a most challenging year for Ulster GAA financially with zero gate receipts from our biggest revenue earners, the Ulster Senior Football Championship and the Ulster Club Championships (which were cancelled). Inclement weather also impacted on attendances at the Bank of Ireland Dr. McKenna Cup games and at the EirGrid Ulster U-20 Championship, which moved to an earlier calendar slot in February/March.

Worryingly, there is little prospect of turnstiles opening any time soon so 2021 will be as equally challenging, if not more so, than 2020. This will

continue to place significant pressure on the organisation and it will impact on our operational capability for some considerable time.

I thank our Treasurer Michael Geoghegan and our Finance Team headed up by Brian Mallon, who with the support of the Ulster GAA Finance Committee, have worked steadfastly to steer us through these uncharted waters. Brian, Ruairi Cunningham and Paul Sanders have also been an invaluable support resource to our clubs and counties during these unprecedented times and I know that their efforts are greatly appreciated.

Unfortunately, our loyal band of gatemens and stewards were not as busy as we would have hoped over the past year but hopefully we'll see more of those familiar faces at our games in 2021. I thank all those for whose services that we did need to call upon in the past year.

## COACHING AND GAMES

It was a year in coaching and games that we will not forget for many reasons both good and bad. On the

negative side we have had to cancel so many of our education activities and participation events. We have had to change the format of our Championships and our Clubs and Counties have had to squeeze an adjusted programme into a short time frame. Administrators, coaches and players have to be commended for their resilience and the planning they have undertaken, to keep players safe and injury free.

In the year that our Provincial Club Audit generated a 95 per cent response rate, it highlighted clearly the need to support small and medium sized clubs. Despite the pandemic we have started this process. On the positive side we have found new ways of doing our work. We have graduated to the Microsoft Teams platform very quickly. This has facilitated webinars and club meetings online. We have generated videos and vodcasts that have populated our YouTube channel. We have run in-service opportunities for teachers. Our wheelchair hurling programme continued with the Friday night quizzes and challenges. What a group this is, motivating and

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supporting each other through very difficult times.

Ulster GAA has challenged coaching staff to come up with new ideas and new delivery mechanisms. We have built a stronger relationship with our primary schools. Schools coaches have spent quality time in the schools with less travelling between schools. The independent research currently being completed has clearly indicated that this has helped to meet the physical and mental wellness needs of the pupils and teachers alike. As a back-up plan, Ulster GAA piloted virtual sessions into the schools, but the Principals and teachers were keen to have coaches in, adhering to good practice and hygiene around the COVID-19 threat. In 2020 there was the unusual situation where coaching staff in the Six Counties were furloughed and not working from April through to the gradual return to work (three days per week) in October. Albeit a reduced number of hours, this was welcomed as a step forward, given that no activity had taken place in the north during this six-month period. Cúl Camps were not delivered in five of our nine counties as coaching had ceased due to many staff being furloughed. Derry were able to offer a small number of camps and in Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan the Cúl Camps proceeded but on a much-reduced basis. Having any camps at all was, however, an achievement in itself given the difficulties we all faced in 2020. In the 'Three Counties' there were also challenges arising from the Irish Government's Wage Subsidy Scheme which supported working staff, though with reduced salaries, and this resulted in a number of employees leaving their posts to seek alternative work.

I thank the entire Coaching & Games Team at Ulster GAA for your patience and tolerance over the past year. With no on-field activity for much of the year most of you had to be furloughed and the immediate future is far from encouraging. These are difficult times for all. As an Association, it was necessary to avail of government support schemes to ensure long term sustainability of the GAA in our Counties and Province. This situation will continue into 2021 and retention of existing structures will be a challenge. One positive has been a significantly greater use of technology to conduct our business and we look forward to the time when we have full activity and engagement with clubs, schools, further and higher education establishments and our counties.

## STRATEGIC PLAN

The preparations for the forthcoming Ulster GAA Strategic Plan – one which has lasted some 18 months – edged towards a conclusion last month when the draft final document was presented to the full Ulster Council. The plan is currently being finalised and it is hoped to launch it in the coming weeks.

I wish to thank Professor David Hassan for Chairing the Strategic Planning Committee, the members of this committee and the members and Chairs' of the support workgroups for their persistence and hard work. This document is designed for delivery over three years and was informed through a wide consultative process. 'Sustaining Clubs and Building Capacity' is appropriate strapline, given the times that we have experienced and are likely to continue to experience in the foreseeable future. The four key themes that have

emerged, based on feedback both from members and from the Club Audit carried out in 2020, are:

1. Improving Opportunities for Participation and Performance;
2. Supporting and Developing our Volunteers and Administrators;
3. Governance and Operational Excellence;
4. Communication and Wider Civic Engagement.

To deliver on any strategy, the engagement and the help by stakeholders both internally and externally is essential. As we move into delivery on the strategy, we will target the small and medium sized clubs to provide specific support – some of this has already commenced during the COVID-19 period.

The Strategy has received wide support from a range of external agencies and is reflective of not only the administration and governance of our Association, but the wider aspects of coaching and games, language and culture, health and wellness and our civic engagement. Through the work that we do, Ulster GAA will continue to impact on communities, schools and wider society and this strategic document will provide key direction for our on-going journey over the next three years.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Ulster GAA, like in many other areas of our activity for 2020 was adversely affected in working with our County Committees and Clubs in bringing forward development projects during the year. For a period at the start of the pandemic physical works actually ceased at sites but thankfully that turned out to be a temporary measure. Unfortunately, the financial



impact from COVID-19 has not been so temporary and as a result the ability of Central Council and ourselves to support projects has meant that we have not been in a position to make awards via our Parks and Safety Committee in 2020. We hope that we will be able to re-instate such support measures in due course but on current projections we are likely to have further significant restrictions on our financial capabilities in 2021, 2022 and possibly beyond.

Stephen McGeehan, our Provincial representative on the National Infrastructure and Health & Safety Committee has continued to work with those units that had secured finance prior to the pandemic and it has been very encouraging to progress most especially on the Corrigan Park Project and St. Tiernach's Park, Clones which both have proceeded during the year on the stadia front. I sincerely hope that before long, we will see spectators return to these venues and others as crowds return to sporting events as the mass distribution of vaccine proceeds on the Island. Progress also continues to be made to made at Centre for Excellence projects at various stages including Armagh, Cavan, Down and Fermanagh.

We were also able to proceed with the Sport NI funded minor health and safety improvements delivering CCTV and PA improvements at a number of designated venues in the North as referenced in last year's report and I want to thank Liam Nelis, our Project Officer who assisted Counties and Clubs to maximise this opportunity. At the time of writing, new opportunities for project funding in the region of £15,000 have emerged for 2020/21 and 2021/22 which

will assist our ongoing compliance in health and safety and we will continue to ensure the Association benefits now and in to the future from this grant support.

### **CASEMENT PARK PROJECT**

In last year's report detailing progress (or a lack of it as some might say), I set out the critical importance, as I saw it, for the return of the NI Executive for the prospects for the project going forward. Within days of the restoration of devolution in the North and the appointment of Departmental Ministers', the Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey and Finance Minister Conor Murphy visited the site in a demonstration of their unequivocal support for the project. This was a much-needed boost and it got us off to a great start for the year.

Without planning, however, as our Project Board Chairman Tom Daly has said for many years', there is no project. That remained the case until mid-October when Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon announced to our delight that she would be recommending a notice of approval for the project. On 18th November that Notice was issued, all of 1,359 days after the planning application had been submitted.

This was a result that lifted the spirits of all Ulster Gaels as for the second time we have secured the support of Government Ministers' and planning officials for our new fit for purpose provincial stadium in Ireland's second city, Belfast. I thank them for the time they devoted to the application. For over a decade Ulster GAA has been striving to develop a Provincial Stadium for the Association in Ulster, which will be recognised as a symbol of the GAA's contribution to

communities in the North and provide a catalyst for the further promotion of Gaelic Games in Belfast. Casement Park, which first opened in 1953, is the home of Antrim GAA and Ulster GAA and we are determined to see the venue transformed to become the iconic stadium for the GAA in Ulster for future generations.

Tom Daly has been involved as Chairman of this stadium development project from the very beginning and his commitment has been absolute during the past ten years. I now look forward to 2021 being the year when Tom and fellow Board members may have the opportunity to see real progress on site.

I thank our Stadium Project Team members. Rory Miskelly, Stephen McGeehan and Tim Harkin have worked intensively on getting the planning decision across the line in 2020 and Brian Mallon and Geraldine McKavanagh have left no stone unturned in continuing to ensure the highest standards in finance and administration, which is critical to the governance of the operation of both the Project Board and the Steering Group. The pace has stepped up on critical project workstreams that will develop the project to a state of readiness in the early part of 2021. Thanks to Paul McGurk, the Ulster GAA Communications Team and the support provided by Aiken PR for the Casement Park Project.

Antrim GAA Ciarán McCavana (Chairperson) and Frankie Quinn (Secretary) continue to represent the County at all levels of the project on our Board and Steering Group and they carry the hopes and support of the entire county, its clubs and members that we will see Antrim

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teams back in Casement Park in the not-too-distant future.

Thanks to all our Project Board and Project Steering Group members who contribute to our work and thanks to Ard Stiurthoir Tom Ryan and Uachtarán John Horan for their ongoing support for the project.

We record our appreciation to the Department for Communities (DfC) and their colleagues in Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) for their ongoing support and funding for the Casement Park Project.

As I write this report, I am delighted to receive the news that Deirdre Hargey has returned to her Ministerial role after a period of illness. I trust she will return to full health and I wish her well for 2021. I also wish to

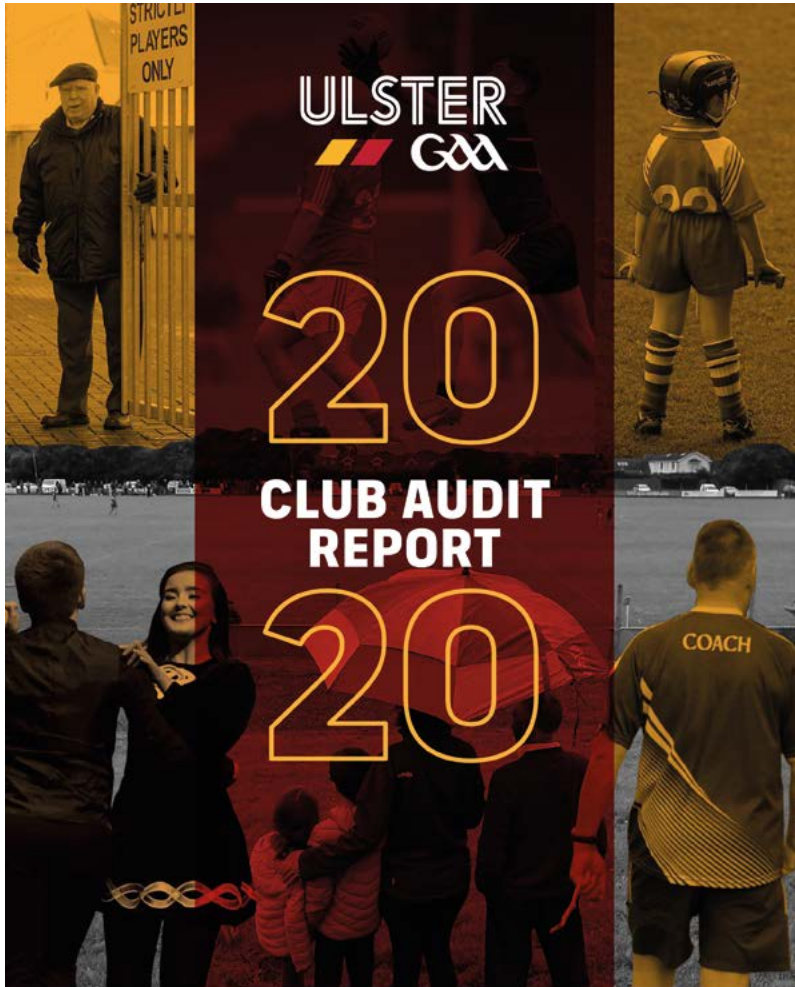
thank Carál Ní Chuilín for her period as Interim Minister and in Gaelic Games terms she was certainly an 'impact sub' providing energy, encouragement and support for us in the past few months. Thank you Carál.

Let's hope that 2021 is going to be the year we see real progress being made and we look forward to reporting further progress during the year!

## CLUB AUDIT

In the early part of the year Ulster GAA, with the support of Gaelfast and Sheffield Hallam University, conducted the most comprehensive audit of our clubs in our 117-year history. The audit not only questioned clubs on key aspects of club life including participation, games, volunteering, facilities and finances

but also looked deeper at social issues such as culture and disability. It has provided us with a source of information which has not only helped to inform our forthcoming Strategic Plan but some of the middle to long-term issues that we need to address as an Association. It showed the GAA in the province on a firm footing but also identified key areas which need more attention, particularly with regard to the overall support base and volunteer capacity in some of our smaller units. What was particularly encouraging was that we had some 95 per cent of our clubs engaging with the process and 345 clubs (93 per cent) making a full online submission. This would not have been possible without the support of both Ulster GAA staff and the staff in counties for the technical and practical support



which they gave to clubs during the process. As well as providing a wealth of key data to Ulster GAA, the survey has also provided counties with key information specific to their own clubs and this will undoubtedly prove to be a valuable portal of information when it comes to their own forward planning. All told, it is an exercise that we can be proud of and one which provides us with concrete evidence to support us in

our on-going dealings with both the voluntary and public sectors, as well as with our own units.

I wish to place on record my sincere gratitude to the clubs and counties of Ulster for their 'buy-in' to this process and the aforementioned staff without whose help we would not have achieved such high-level returns. I thank also Dr Dave Barrett for his interrogation of the data,

which he translated into a very 'easy to understand' report, and Dr Paul Donnelly for his help in the design and roll-out of the audit. I thank also Dr Eugene Young and Diarmaid Marsden for the 'hands-on' roll they played at provincial level in driving forward the process.

In the latter part of 2019 and the early part of 2020 Ulster GAA, at the behest of Sport NI, subjected ourselves to an external audit of our Elite Development System under the auspices of the model known as SPLISS (Sport Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success). Given that GAA teams don't compete on the international stage some of the nine assessment pillars were not totally relevant to our situation but the thorough overview and analysis of our affairs found many strengths, particularly in relation to participation, governance, talent identification and player support. The areas identified as needing specific development were largely in the context of the GAA not being on the Olympic pathway and not having a meaningful international outlet. It was a thorough exercise and one which will benefit Ulster GAA, particularly when it benchmarks itself against other sporting organisations.

**SAFEGUARDING**

2020 has challenged everyone in many ways and this was no different to the area of Safeguarding. The global pandemic caused upheaval in all aspects of our daily lives including our roles as volunteers in our clubs. With our usual GAA games and activities temporarily suspended during 'lockdown' it was inevitable that greater emphasis would be placed on the use of online platforms to ensure the safety of our members.

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Safeguarding courses were moved to a secure online interactive platform to allow our volunteers to be trained as required and ready for when club activity resumed. The Safeguarding Team at Ulster GAA work tirelessly to ensure all vetting applications are processed in a timely manner as these two components are essential for anyone working with children in the Association. I thank Bernie Fox, Shane McCann and Conn Stevenson for their commitment and dedication to this vital area of work and I also thank Ulster Safeguarding Committee Chair Anne Fortune and her committee members for their efforts. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work, dedication and time committed by our Club and County Chairpersons/ Designated Liaison Persons' (DLP), Secretaries and Children's Officers in relation to all safeguarding matters. I thank them for their continued commitment.

It is imperative that Club and County Chairpersons' and Children's Officers continue to implement best practice procedures to ensure we create and maintain a safe environment for all activities and indeed remain fully compliant with legal requirements. The role of the DLP is vital within all of our clubs and Counties and we encourage all those appointed to complete the Safeguarding Three workshop tailored to support those fulfilling the DLP role and overseeing safeguarding measures.

Remote coaching, virtual class rooms, protective bubbles, shielding, isolating, sanitising, face coverings to name but a few, have been to the forefront of daily discussions. It is clear from the collective effort within our communities that safeguarding

our youth, elderly and vulnerable is important to us and we must strive to continue this in everything we do.

## GREEN CLUB PROGRAMME

The Green Club Programme is a partnership between the GAA, LGFA, Camogie Association and the local government sector. It is an all-island based project with additional involvement in the north from DAREA, Sustainable NI, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Derry City & Strabane District Council.

There are five thematic areas namely; Energy, Water, Waste, Biodiversity and Travel & Transport and an expert partner has been identified for each theme. Some 45 clubs throughout Ireland are participating in the first phase of the Green Club Programme, and within the province there is a specific North West Cross Border Hub incorporating five clubs from two jurisdictions - Derry City and Strabane and Donegal County Council areas. In addition, there are a further five Ulster clubs from different council areas participating in the pilot.

The aims of the Programme are as follows;

- Provide guidance and resources to clubs to support sustainable development
- Reduce costs associated with energy, water, waste and transport management
- Improve opportunities for increasing biodiversity in GAA grounds
- Support access to relevant grants and funding sources

Sustainability and a cleaner operating environment will become increasingly familiar in GAA parlance in the coming years. We are a community based organisation and protection of our environment needs to play a greater role in our thinking as an Association. This is a positive start and I trust that it will be an initiative that all our clubs will be able to embrace and champion in due course. In the meantime we can all do our bit - COVID-19 has effectively banished the use of single use plastic bottles from our sidelines. The next step is for us to work to a position where







every member of every team panel has their own personal water bottle. Surely, it can't be too difficult!

### **CLUB AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

The Club and Community Development Department is responsible for Club and Volunteer support, Irish Language and Culture, Health and Wellbeing of our members, and Community Outreach. The Department plays a role in public affairs and contributes to relevant engagements with public representatives and external agencies and organisations. The Club and Community Development Department is a point of contact for all clubs to receive guidance on club matters and volunteer development. The Department deals with queries directly or can signpost to professional bodies as necessary. The impact of COVID-19 has affected the normal delivery of work across all areas but in conjunction with the funders, staff have been able to adapt and find alternative methods of delivery. I thank all the staff in the Department, led by Diarmaid Marsden, for their diligence and hard work in particularly difficult circumstances.

### **WOMEN'S AID WHITE RIBBON CAMPAIGN**

Ulster GAA are one of the latest organisations to lend support to the White Ribbon Campaign. This campaign is a global movement to end male violence against women. The White Ribbon campaign aims to create a society where all women can live in safety, free from violence and abuse.

Ulster GAA has teamed-up with Women's Aid ABCLN to sign the White Ribbon Charter which makes a personal pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women.

The partnership was formally launched during Women's Aid '16 days of Action' which is an international campaign of activism against gender-based violence and ran from 25th November until 10th December

### **FRESH START THROUGH SPORT**

This initiative is funded by Department for Communities in association with the Department of Justice. It is a diversionary programme where Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby, Irish FA and Belfast Giants work in partnership to deliver workshops and practical sporting and volunteer experiences to young people from areas of high social deprivation. Ulster GAA are currently

delivering modules to participants from Belfast and Carrickfergus.

### **CLUB MAITH**

Club Maith continues to be the recognised brand for club excellence among GAA clubs in Ulster. With no activity on the field during the initial lockdown, a number of clubs were able to achieve success off the field with Club Maith accreditation. 11 clubs in total have been awarded in 2020; Thomas Davis Corrinshogo, Peadar O'Doornin's Forkhill (Armagh), Killygarry (Cavan), Henry Joy McCracken's, Moneymore (Derry), Milford, Burt (Donegal), Loughinisland (Down), Devenish St Mary's (Fermanagh), Clonoe O'Rahilly's, Dungannon Clarke's and Stewartstown Harps (Tyrone). A Club Maith Twinning Award was introduced in May for clubs in Britain; to date Glasgow Gaels, Cean Creige (Scotland) and St Jude's (Gloucestershire) have registered and are completing the process. An online webinar 'The Club Maith Pathway' was held in June to highlight the accreditation process as well as providing support and guidance to those already engaged.

### **CLUB AND COUNTY PLANNING**

With club efforts focused on supporting their communities and returning to play, The Club Planning

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Programme was paused during lockdown. The process was restarted again in October with clubs utilising online meetings and online surveys to consult with their members to help inform their future plans. The National Club and County Committee have produced a County Planning Guide and Toolkit to help support counties develop their own strategy. A number of Ulster counties' strategic plans have now expired and it is hoped that they engage with the committee in 2021 for guidance in the process. Ulster GAA also continues to work closely 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.

## **GOLDMARK**

Ulster GAA is a delivery partner for the Millennium Volunteers GoldMark Programme, which promotes and encourages young people aged 14-24 years old to volunteer in sport. Ulster GAA works with clubs to manage this programme through club co-ordinators. In 2020, a further 111 young people registered for the GoldMark Programme. This means over 2000 young people are currently volunteering in their club and working towards GoldMark accreditation for their efforts.

Despite the difficulties that this year brought, 100 young people achieved awards in 2020 for their volunteering efforts, 46 achieved 50 hours, 32 achieved 100 hours and 22 young club members were awarded the

Award of Excellence for 200 hours volunteering.

## **GAISCE /JOINT AWARD / DUKE OF EDINBURGH**

Ulster GAA have had their license extended to deliver the Joint Award; offering our young volunteers the opportunity to achieve Bronze, Silver, Gold in either Gaisce – the President's Award, Duke of Edinburgh or Duke of Edinburgh International Award; through the Joint Award Initiative. Young volunteers from our pilot programme continue to work towards their award. To date 11 young people have completed each of the volunteering, skills development and physical fitness sections. Plans are being put in place to open this award out to our clubs and a number of clubs have already confirmed interest for 2021.

## **VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY**

Ulster GAA has an established Volunteer Development Pathway which includes three key steps: Club Officer Induction, Club Officer Development Programme and the Elevate Club Leadership Award. The Club Officer Induction is role specific training for all new club officers across Ulster for Chairpersons, Secretaries, Treasurers, PROs, Development Officers, Children's Officers, Coaching Officers, Cultural Officers. In 2020, Ulster GAA ran this induction programme in association with National GAA to complement the National Club Leadership Development Programme. 327 Club officers participated in this induction across 147 Clubs. The Club Officer Development Programme delivered training for club officers across priority issues facing clubs. In total 217 club officers

attended the Level 1: Club Officer Development Programme, with 102 clubs represented from across the province's nine counties.

## **DFC PROGRAMME**

"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.

- Volunteer Charter: Ulster GAA clubs continue to sign up to the multi-sport volunteer charter
- Inclusion Charter: Ulster GAA clubs continue to sign up to the multi-sport inclusion charter

A Multisport Youth Forum took place prior to the Tyrone vs Dublin NFL match at Healy Park in February. An online Multisport Youth Forum took place in July 2020. Young volunteers from the three sports explored key issues facing volunteer in sport. Multi-Sport Volunteer Forum: A forum took place in Kingspan Stadium focusing on funding, marketing and volunteering. An online forum took place in April discussing the various funding supports available to clubs. Lifelong Learning Volunteer Workshops: Club Planning, Club Fundraising and Club Funding Webinars took place in October, November and December

## **HEALTH & WELLBEING**

2020 has been a difficult year for everyone given the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of lockdown and cessation of GAA activities for



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long periods of the year some staff were put on Furlough leave, including the Community & Health Manager, from 1st May, returning to working part-time from August onwards. Many of the usual health and wellbeing activities were overtaken by COVID-19 activities and many of the health and wellbeing activities planned for 2020 could not take place.

Ulster GAA's Health & Wellbeing Committee which normally meets quarterly, met twice via Microsoft Teams in 2020. The Committee continues to provide an essential function in enabling counties to report back on activities ongoing, and any issues encountered. Ulster and National Health & Wellbeing updates are provided. Although only having met twice in 2020 the meetings served as a valuable platform to take stock of COVID-19 related issues, while also providing a support network for County Health & Wellbeing Committee Chairpersons in a difficult year.

## HEALTHY CLUB PROGRAMME

2020 witnessed the beginning of the Phase 4 of the HCP with Ulster having

77 clubs involved, including one overseas unit, Montreal Shamrocks. The Ulster Orientation Forum for new and existing clubs was held online in November 2020. Despite COVID-19 restrictions many clubs are making great strides with their HCP activities.

## CHARITY PARTNER

Ulster GAA has supported Prostate Cancer Research through Queens University Belfast, and the Patrick G Johnston Centre for Cancer Research. Many of the plans that had been worked on prior to COVID-19 were scuppered with the lockdown. However, a Just Giving page has been set-up for 2020, and the partnership promoted through-out the Ulster Championship. The "Show Your Colours" fundraising initiative from the Ulster SFC Final was set-up to support the partnership and certainly added a bit of 'colour' to an Ulster Final that was played with no spectators present.

## 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. The programme continues to be built around the 'Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing' campaign. Thankfully, the PHA were appreciative of the need to be flexible this year, while acknowledging the growing role the GAA played in supporting people's wellbeing throughout the pandemic.

A portion of the budget went towards development of the Ulster GAA COVID-19 Microsite, which was extremely effective in supporting clubs and members throughout the 'lockdown', particularly in relation to relaying important public health messages. This funding also enabled Ulster GAA to work with 'Inspire' to create an online mental health awareness campaign throughout the winter of 2020-2021. The campaign was aimed specifically at volunteers who have been engaged in the COVID-19 Community Response, and safe return to GAA activity throughout the summer. The programme took cognisance of the fact that many of our volunteers had worked extremely hard in what has been a difficult and stressful year.

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A series of short online awareness workshops were also made available to staff for three weeks in the lead-up to World Mental Health Day which took place on 10th October. They included information on looking after our own mental health during COVID-19, active listening skills, and suicide awareness. Action Mental Health delivered a free Mindset workshop to staff on 23rd October 2020.

## LIVE TO PLAY

A 'Live To Play' social media campaign was promoted in November 2020. Important road safety messages were relayed by our nine county Ambassadors in the week leading up to the Ulster SFC Final which corresponded with Road Safety Week 2020. I appreciate the involvement of our 'Live To Play' Ambassadors; Neil McManus (Antrim), Niall Grimley (Armagh), Killian Clarke (Cavan), Chrissy McKaigue (Derry), Jamie Brennan (Donegal), Darren O'Hagan (Down), James McMahan (Fermanagh), Conor McManus (Monaghan) and Niamh Woods (Tyrone).

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

'Use Your Brain Not Your Fists' was delivered to members of CLG An Tearmainn in October 2020 via Microsoft Teams, with help from An Garda Síochána and Leitrim County Council. Although completed, it has raised reservations about the suitability of delivering hard-hitting messages through an online medium.

There has been progress made in evaluation the 'One Punch' presentation to include more focus on pitch violence and facial and head

injuries. 2021 will see more milestones being reached in this regard.

Ulster GAA has also been engaging with Omagh GP Dr. Eugene Haigney in relation to a 'Hands Down' initiative which he has developed after his son Daniel sustained a serious facial injury as the result of an 'off-the-ball' incident in a club game in July. His presentation, which easily sits alongside the 'One Punch Campaign' - and could potentially be incorporated as part of it - illustrates the physical, emotional and financial cost of such injuries. In particular it emphasises the impact of strikes which happen 'off-the-ball' which can have devastating consequences, given that the victim is unprepared for such an action.

Daniel's case is one of a small number which have prompted a potential rule change which will come before the GAA Congress.

## CRITICAL INCIDENT RESPONSE PLANS (CIRP)

This programme continues to be promoted to clubs and counties. Unfortunately, 2020 has seen significant number of critical incidents which have affected our clubs and counties. Thankfully many of our units affected had their CIRP in place and were best placed to deal with the serious and extraordinary position in which they found themselves. A special word of mention must go to our County HWC members who played a vital supporting role to our members who experienced extremely difficult situations. It cannot be emphasised enough the importance of clubs, counties and Ulster GAA in having their CIRP in place. My sympathy goes out to all those affected by critical incidents this year, and my heartfelt

thanks to all those who continue to provide support.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Ulster GAA has been involved in numerous outreach events and activities over the last 12 months. These have included a lecture on Sport Uniting Communities as part of the Croke Park Museum summer programme. This coincided with the launch of the Bloody Sunday commemorations. A presentation was also delivered at the T-BUC engagement forum in February as well as representation at T-BUC's online conference as part of Good Relations Week in September. Community outreach work is primarily delivered as part of our 'Sport Uniting Communities', Peace IV programme. This is a joint project between Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby & the IFA and is funded through European Regional Development Funding from SEUPB. The programme is designed to support peace and reconciliation within the nine counties of Ulster, with a clear cross community and cross border focus. This year many activities have had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions but staff have discovered alternative methods of delivering some of the targets as set out.

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 more about the Association.

The programme had commenced in February with Getting to Know the GAA presentations delivered to participating schools which helped to promote greater understanding and



respect for other cultures, a key aim of the Cúchulainn Initiative. A number of taster sessions had been provided in Football and Hurling before the programme was halted in March with the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking part in the boys' section for the first time were Bangor along with Cavan, Limavady and Lisburn. In the girls' section Cave Hill, Antrim and Limavady were involved for the first time, alongside the returning Ballymoney.

### JOINT INITIATIVES

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. Due to the imposed restrictions many Sport for Peace days had to be cancelled in 2020. However, there were four events that successfully went ahead throughout the province within the project and engaged around 166 young people.

The Game of Three Halves events are joint events involving coaching sessions from each of the three sporting bodies. This allows participants to try sports they may not have tried before whilst also working and learning with people from different communities and backgrounds. The events promote the learning of skills as well as games-based scenarios whilst promoting team work and other attributes that are important for all three sports. There were seven Game of Three

Halves events delivered in 2020 as part of the 'Peace IV Sport Uniting Communities' programme involving almost 413 participants.

CSDO's from Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and The Irish Football Association work together to deliver 'values-based' coaching at our 'Have a Go' events. These events are based in areas where opportunities to take part in certain sports are minimal, and it also provides an opportunity for participants to engage with others from a different community or religious background. In 2020, 195 people took part in 'Have a Go' days. The Volunteer Development Programme involves a series of five workshops, which are attended by volunteers from each sport to discuss important aspects of their clubs including the definition of different roles and responsibilities within clubs, volunteer recruitment and retention, succession planning and becoming an inclusive club. Due to the pandemic, only one workshop was completed in person however workshops were then completed online with 65 participants from 39 clubs taking part.

The Youth Leadership Programme

involved the creation of youth forums where participants engaged in training in volunteering and personal development, gaining a Level 1 Qualification in Sports Leadership.

### GETTING TO KNOW THE GAA

'Getting to Know the GAA' is a single led activity ran by Ulster GAA's three Community Sport Development Officers. Groups from various communities and backgrounds receive a presentation and are involved in discussion about the history of Ulster GAA, its methods and its work within the community. Feedback from these events has been very positive, with many highlighting that they were unaware of the work done by the GAA outside of sport within the local community. 220 Participants took part in this deliverable during 2020.

### IRISH LANGUAGE & CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

This provincial committee is headed by Cathaoirleach Jarlath Burns and is compiled of Oifigigh Cultúrtha from each county. The coiste supports and promotes the initiatives of Oifigeach Gaeilge na Comhairle, the provincial Irish Language Officer, and is a vital link in the communication process



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of promoting Gaeilge agus cultúr throughout the GAA in Ulster.

Tá baill an choiste seo ag croílár na Gaeilge in Uladh agus iad mar ghuth na Gaeilge ina gcontaetha féin. Déantar gach iarracht tionscadail agus feachtais na Gaeilge a chumadh sa choiste seo agus a chur chun cinn ó cheann ceann na bliana.

## ACMHAINN TEAGAISC / TEACHING RESOURCE

Rinneadh iniúchadh ar chlubanna Uladh in 2019, agus as sin a d'eascair an Plean Teagaisc. Tá CLG Uladh agus Foras na Gaeilge ag obair le hOllscoil Uladh ar an tionscadal seo, agus 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.

As a need for assistance with the teaching of Gaeilge at club level was identified by our clubs in 2019, in April 2020, Ulster GAA and Foras na Gaeilge partnered with Ulster University to develop a teaching plan with resources for Ulster clubs to both alleviate pressure on club volunteers teaching Irish classes, and to ensure a high standard of Irish is available to clubs across the province.

The teaching resource is compiled of modules, each module has 12 weeks' worth of lessons with informative notes for both student and teacher, as well as support audio material. Module one has been developed by a team from Ulster University, Ulster GAA and contributing clubs, and module two, a GAA focused lesson plan, created by Ulster University students as part of their studies.

I ndiaidh dúinn scéim phíolótach a bheith againn in Uladh, beidh fáilte roimh iomlán na gclubanna sa tír úsáid a bhaint as an acmhainn.

## AN GHAELGE LE FEICEÁIL / VISIBILITY OF IRISH

Irish is visible in all programmes throughout the year, with particular effort to ensure the Ulster Final programme 2020 employed a bilingual format. Tá an Ghaeilge le feiceáil sna cláir le linn na mbliana, agus foirm dátheangach curtha i bhfeidhm don chraobhchomórtas in 2020.

Ulster GAA has a 'Gaeilge agus Cultúr' microsite, and this is available bilingually, as well as the Irish that is seen across the Ulster GAA website. Tá suíomh CLG Uladh dátheangach ar shuíomh na Gaeilge ar líne, agus tá Gaeilge chruinn le léamh áiteanna eile ar shuíomh na Comhairle. Ulster GAA ensures that Gaeilge is used on all our social media platforms, as well as the voice of Ulster GAA to be heard through the medium of Irish on all topics on Irish media and radio. 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.

## FEACHTAIS AGUS OIDEACHAS AR LÍNE / CAMPAIGNS AND EDUCATION ONLINE

During the COVID-19 outbreak, CLG Uladh made every effort to provide learning opportunities online, and to remain creative in the promotion and use of Gaeilge at a time when it was not possible to gather our members. Rinneadh gach iarracht le linn na paindéime an Ghaeilge a chur ar fáil ar líne agus deiseanna foghlama a chruthú dár mball.

An early campaign in 2020 saw a 'Foghlaim Gaeilge' / 'Learn Irish' playlist, with young CLG members from across the province reciting useful phrases each week, uploaded to CLG Uladh social media platforms. CLG Uladh staff also seized the opportunity to learn Gaeilge online during the summer of 2020, and over 70 students across the province availed of an online classroom directed at both GCSE/Junior Cert and A Level / Leaving Cert student in the autumn. The winter of 2020 saw a school profile campaign focused on the link between Gaeilge and GAA games in our Ulster schools, particularly those of the Irish-medium.

## LÍONRÚ POBAIL / COMMUNITY NETWORKING

An important part of promoting Irish is ensuring that we, as an organisation, interact with and support community-based Irish language groups. Ulster GAA has created links with Glór na nGael as they continue to provide their outstanding Joe McDonagh Foundation service, a project that successfully guides GAA clubs through a process of language acquisition and promotion in order to achieve a high standard of Irish within their club. Ulster GAA's Oifigeach Gaeilge works closely with Glór na nGael as an assessor for clubs going through the Foundation process, and assessed a high standard of clubs in 2020 across all four provinces. We have also forged links with Irish Language media outlets, such as BBC Gaeilge and Raidió na Gaeltachta. Ulster GAA has formed a strong partnership with funders Foras na Gaeilge and all their umbrella organisations. Ulster GAA



will continue to connect and work with the Irish language community both in and out of the GAA family and encourage such organisations to contact us to strengthen these links.

### SEACHTAIN NA GAEILGE 2020

Bhí CLG Uladh rannpháirteach in Seachtain na Gaeilge 2020. This year saw the 'Club Spotlight' campaign, focused on the efforts of Ulster clubs to promote Gaeilge between 1-17ú Márta. Each day saw a new club video uploaded to our social media sites, showing clubs training sessions and youth clubs being held through the medium of Irish, as well as our Gaeilge sa Chlub recipients at their Ulster GAA workshop.

CLG Uladh encouraged all clubs to promote Gaeilge throughout Seachtain na Gaeilge, and provided recommendations on our website with the hashtag #SnaG20 agus #GAAGaeilge, in order to follow the efforts of Ulster clubs in the 2020 campaign.

### COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

Whilst we always strive for more and improved media coverage, I would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of those broadcast, print and digital media personnel who have continued to attend and promote our games and events during the challenging times of 2020. We have had to adapt to the changing requirements ourselves via online media launch events and effectively moving press facilities into the stand at games but we believe that this has worked highly effectively and safely for all. I thank Michael McGoldrick in particular for his work in providing excellent temporary media facilities at venues across the province for the Ulster Senior Football Championship.

Digital media played an even greater role in delivering communications and news sources during the pandemic and it is appropriate that enhancing our capabilities in this field is a key focus area for our new Strategic Plan for the next three years. The various online platforms allowed our communities to keep connected at the height of the 'lockdown' and it also allowed the great work of our clubs on the ground to be showcased around the province and beyond. The past year has again witnessed an increase in our digital media output and the number of followers continues to grow - Ulster GAA now has over 81k followers on Twitter, over 52k followers on Facebook and over 21k followers on Instagram. With the power of digital media literally at our fingertips, it is essential that all our members take responsibility when using these platforms to not do anything online that might tarnish the GAA's image and reputation or bring the GAA into disrepute.

Live streaming of games by our units reached unparalleled levels as a result of so many fixtures being 'behind closed doors' during the year and indeed the opportunity to see their teams back in action was widely welcomed by many Gaels across the country. The temporary relaxing of central GAA broadcast agreements to allow for the increase in this coverage must be applauded, despite another two years left to run, until 2022. Some clubs and counties unfortunately found that delivery of live coverage can be a difficult to achieve with many stumbling blocks along the path but, to their credit, their knowledge base and internal abilities have now been well enhanced for future endeavours. Ulster GAA also made a commitment

to provide live streamed coverage of the delayed Electric Ireland Ulster Minor Football Championship games and we were very pleased that our partnership with Páirc TV allowed us to deliver this successfully for all of the selected games.

In the modern communications environment, it is imperative to have a strong team of suppliers to help deliver the objectives of Ulster GAA and I thank all those who have supported us during the year. Kaizen Brand Evolution, our new design agency have been very easy to work with since their appointment at the end of 2019 and will be of great benefit as we move through communications aspects of the new Strategic Plan. I also acknowledge the important services of Celebration Events (Videography), John Merry (Photography) and Graeme Campbell (Telecoms).

Our Corporate Partners span a wide range of industries and they too have felt the impact on the pandemic on their business and normal ways of working so I thank them all for their continued commitment and understanding through the last twelve months, when a lot of plans could not be realised for various reasons. 2020 saw our current agreement with Bank of Ireland reach its conclusion and whilst the Dr. McKenna Cup could unfortunately not form part of a new proposal, I look forward to retaining a long-standing relationship with them in other ways.

I wish to place on record a special thanks to O'Neill's International Sportswear with whom we've had a long a special relationship. When GAA and other sports activity came to an abrupt halt in the spring they

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turned their attention immediately to the manufacture of PPE equipment for healthcare workers. They did a great service to the wider community. I thank them for their sterling service and for their continued backing to Ulster GAA.

With the support of PRO Declan Woods, the PR & Marketing team led by Paul McGurk have risen to the challenge. New methods of working have been explored and new partnerships have been developed. These are exciting times digitally and I thank the entire team for their efforts.

## BREXIT

In recent Reports to the Ulster Convention I highlighted my concerns about the Brexit decision and particular the potential ramifications of a 'No-Deal' Brexit. While it is a positive development that this has been averted we still don't know the full ramifications of Brexit and what it will mean for all on the island of Ireland. We can only but hope that the impact will be minimal but only time will tell.

## CONGRATULATIONS

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic there was no All-Ireland (or indeed) provincial Scór Sinsir Finals held in 2020 but the Scór na nÓg All-Ireland finals were able to go ahead on 1 February in Killarney. There was double success for Donegal and the town of Letterkenny with Siofra Ní Airmhí from the St. Eunan's Club winning the Recitation and Letterkenny Gaels taking the honours in the Novelty Act. The great tradition of quizzing in the Cornafean (Cavan) Club was maintained with success in Tráth na gCeist.

There was recognition for Ulster at the annual GAA Presidents' Awards in February with the renowned McGovern family from Burren being honoured with the Dermot Earley Family Award. Three generations of the family have represented Burren, Down and Ulster on the playing fields and there was widespread acclaim for such worthy recipients. James McElhatton has given over half a century of service to the St. Colmcille's, Carrickmore club as a player, coach, referee and administrator, although he is probably best known as the groundman at St. Colmcille's Park. A number of years ago James was honoured by being elected Club President and this award is due recognition on a national level. There was further success for Ulster with Maggie Skelton from Aghyaran collecting the Ladies Award while Con Ó Dónall from Bun an Phobail in Moville was a popular recipient of the Gradaim Gaeilge Award. Congratulations to all.

The annual McNamee Awards recognise excellence in communication and the 2019 winners were announced in April 2020. There was success for Ulster with the St.

Joseph's, Ballycran (Down) winning the 'Best Club Website' Category with the judging panel in their citation stating that it was "informative and engaging, clearly laid out and simple to navigate." Eglis Clubman and former Ulster GAA employee Donal McAnallen secured the 'Best GAA Publication Award' for his fascinating book "Forgotten Gaelic Volunteers." The publication, which was a true labour of love for Donal, tells the previously untold story of GAA members from Ulster who fought in World War One and, as the winning citation states, is 'a worthy addition to the history of the Association.' For those members with an interest in history it is well worth reading. There was a third success for Ulster when Ballyshannon native and 'Irish Times' journalist Keith Duggan picked up the 'National Media Award' for his brilliantly crafted feature on the winning Antrim All-Ireland U-21 Football campaign of 1969 and the subsequent life journey of those who featured in that famous success. All-Ireland Club Football finalists Kilcoo were rewarded with four AIB GAA Club Player Awards with the Branagan brothers Darryl and Aaron, Paul Devlin and Conor Laverty being







the successful recipients and the Slaughtneil duo of Chrissy McKaigue and Brendan Rogers being honoured with the hurling equivalent. Indeed, Chrissy made history by becoming the first player to receive Club Player Awards in both hurling and football, having won a football award in 2018.

In our sister codes there was tremendous success for Ulster counties with Down winning the All-Ireland Intermediate Camogie title, Armagh winning the All-Ireland Premier Junior Camogie title and the Cavan camogs winning the Nancy Murray Cup. In Ladies Football Fermanagh were crowned All-Ireland Junior champions.

## OBITUARIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has swept across the globe with devastating consequences and at the time of writing over 3,800 people confirmed with the disease have died on the island of Ireland since the first COVID-19 death here was reported on 11th March. The true figure is undoubtedly higher. To everyone who has lost a loved one due to this dreaded virus I send my deepest sympathies. Unfortunately, it is a figure that will continue to rise in the time ahead.

I wish to express my condolences and those of the Ulster Council to all our GAA members who lost loved ones in what was a year that we'll always remember.

Our much loved and valued colleague Maura McMenamin said farewell to her father Brian in February following a tragic accident at work, Paul Sanders lost his mother Mary at the end of January and Proinsias O'Kane lost his father Michael in April. At the

end of October our Ulster Camogie colleague Julie O'Neill said farewell to her father Joe. As I conclude my report, we also learn of the sad news on the morning of 4th January 2021 of the death of Amy Mallon, beloved mother of our Head of Finance Brian, after a short illness.

In January Ulster Scór Chairperson Paula Magee said farewell to her father Pat Pyers. Former Council member Ed Byrne sadly lost his daughter Karen, while Brendan Casey, also a recent Council member, said farewell to his mother. Tyrone County Secretary Dominic McCaughey and County Chair Michael Kerr lost their fathers' on consecutive days in mid-May. Tyrone delegate Benny Hurl said farewell to his sister Mary in early May, while at the end of June Sean McCashin (Down delegate) said his last goodbye to his beloved mother Betty. Damian McHugh, the Chair of the Ulster Health & Wellbeing Committee, lost his brother Sean, while the Chair of our Integration Committee and lifelong friend of Ulster GAA Eamonn McMahon lost his son Conor in October. Also in October, we were saddened to learn of the death in London of Pat Duggan,

brother of Armagh Central Council delegate and GAA Management Committee member Paul Duggan. Two of our regular gatemens Sean McCullough and Sean Devlin lost their wives Eilish and Colette in April and September respectively.

The year began with the death of former Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon. Seamus was a political heavyweight who constantly championed the cause of peace and he did so much to promote a shared society, famously calling the Good Friday Agreement "Sunningdale for slow learners." A lifelong GAA supporter Seamus won a MacRory Cup medal with the Abbey CBS, Newry in 1954 and was President of his local Mullabrack GAA Club in Co. Armagh. On 1st December 2019 Sonia Kinsella from the St. Patrick's GAA Club in Saul was presented with her Translink Ulster GAA Coach of The Year Accolade. Less than two months later Sonia was taken from us and all too soon. She battled her illness with great courage and was an inspiration to all who knew her.

January also witnessed the death of former Down goalkeeper John Harte



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and the month ended with the death of young Donegal footballer Callum Friel who was a member of the St. Michael's Club. Callum played in the 2018 Buncrana Cup (U-16) and had a promising career before him but was tragically taken from us after a short illness.

Former Bryansford and Down manager Sean Smith passed away in early February. A coach before his time Sean had two spells as manager of the Mourne County, bringing them to three Ulster final appearances, though the Anglo-Celt eluded him on each occasion. A native of Maghera, Sean won an All-Ireland minor medal with Armagh in 1949. That great Derry and Dungiven stalwart Francie Brolly also died in February. While better known for his involvement in the folk and traditional music scene he and his entire family are steeped in the GAA tradition and he was an avid follower of the games.

Also in February lifelong gael Barney Treanor was called to his eternal reward following a period of illness. For many years Barney served as an Ulster Council steward and the genial Burren man made a massive contribution to the Association as a player, referee, administrator and coach. A strong advocate for the cause of refereeing, he refereed the 1971 Down Senior Football Championship Final and later served as both Vice-Chairman of the County Committee and Chairman of the South Down Board. Known the length and breadth of the country, Barney was a selector of both the Down All-Ireland Senior winning team of 1991 and the Minor winning team of 1987.

Ulster GAA lost a great friend with the death of Tadhg Meehan on Valentine's

Day. The proud native of Caltra in Co. Galway spent a lifetime in Britain and served as both Secretary and Treasurer of the Provincial Council of Britain, a twinning partner of Ulster.

In mid-March our colleague in Croke Park Teresa Rehill lost her father Joe following a tragic accident. Joe was a regular attendee at our games. On 25th March we said farewell to Toni Carragher from the Silverbridge Club. Toni was a great friend of Ulster GAA and regularly assisted at our games over the years.

Former Ulster GAA President Phil Smyth was called to his eternal reward on 2nd April. The Cavan native served for many years on the Ulster Council and was President from 1983-85 inclusive, having previously held the roles of both Vice-President and Treasurer. Quiet spoken, Phil always acted with the greatest integrity and his word was his bond.

Tragedy struck two clubs in Cavan within a matter of days in the latter part of April. Teenager Shane Halton from the Cornafean Club was a promising and talented player with a bright future and Lewis Fay-Cooper, who played for Cavan against Derry in the 2015 Ulster Minor Football Final, captained his beloved Killinkere to a Cavan Junior Football title in 2019.

There was further tragedy in early May with the death of teenager Carl Mooney, a promising footballer with Ardoyne Kickhams and a student at St. Malachy's College. Weeks later there was further tragedy for St. Malachy's with the tragic death of young Noah Donohoe.

The Edendork Club suffered a series of deaths over a short period including



their Club President Pat McAtasney and groundsman Julian Arthurs.

The great St. Gall's gael Gerry Higgins, who had the honour of captaining the West Belfast side to their first Ulster Club title in 1982, passed away on 17th May. Gerry also represented 'The Saffrons' with distinction and was part of P.J. O'Hare's management team with the Antrim senior footballers. On the same date the GAA world said goodbye to Tom Maguire, a great GAA gael from the Derrylin O'Connell's Club. Tom served as groundsman for the club years but was best known for his stewarding role both at Croke Park and at Ulster GAA Championship games over many years.

There was great sadness throughout Co. Down and much further beyond on the morning of 21st May when news broke of the passing of John Murphy after a short illness. John was a talented footballer who first came to prominence with the Down minor team which reached the All-Ireland Final in 1966 and two years later, helped in no small measure by his first half goal, he was part of the famed Red 'n' Black team that brought Sam Maguire to the Mourne county for a third time. Although his playing career ended prematurely



after a car crash John continued to be a great servant of Down football and he played an integral part in Down's All-Ireland winning teams of 1991 and 1994, when he worked as a selector alongside Peter McGrath.

The GAA community, and in particular the hurling community, in Armagh and further afield were saddened to learn of the death of Jimmy Carlisle on Sunday 31st May 2020. Jimmy was unquestionably Armagh's "Mr Hurling." On the playing field he represented his club, county and province with distinction and captained Armagh to an Ulster Junior Hurling title in 1965. Two years earlier he had the unenviable task of marking the legendry Eddie Keher in a Railway Cup semi-final. He also managed the Armagh hurlers to All-Ireland Junior success in 1978 – a title they retained the following year. Jimmy was Chair of the Armagh Hurling Board for many years and also served as Chair of Ulster Hurling Committee. He was a former member of the GAA's National Hurling Committee and while he served as Chairman of his beloved Cuchulainn's for a long period, he was always the first in the queue to lend a helping hand to any club in the county wishing to develop hurling. A great gael, he is fondly remembered and has made a fitting and lasting contribution to the 'small ball' game in the province.

On June 6th we heard of the tragic death of former Leinster GAA Coaching Officer and Kilkenny hurler Lester Ryan in a road accident close to his home in Gowran. A popular figure Lester was liked by all and his death was all the more poignant given that his older brother Johnny had tragically died in a farming accident five years earlier.

Shock, sadness and sorrow greeted the sudden and untimely death in July of young Eoghan Rua, Coleraine dual player Michael McQuillan. Affectionately known as 'Smicko' to his friends, the talented Coleraine player, who also hurled with the Ulster University at Magee, was an integral part of the Eoghan Rua side which won the Derry and Ulster Junior Hurling Championship titles in 2019. He will be sorely missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

Last year I had the honour of attending a very special 60th anniversary of Queen's University Belfast's breakthrough Sigerson Cup win of 1959. The victory over the mighty UCD in Ballybay is regarded by many as a breakthrough moment for gaelic games in the north and the man who led Queen's to victory that day was the Eire Og, Derriaghy Clubman Hugh O'Kane, who had previously won a MacRory Cup medal with St. Patrick's, Armagh. Hugh, who became a distinguished cardiac surgeon, was in tremendous form that evening as he and his team-mates of 60 years earlier recalled that famous win but, unfortunately, after a short illness Hugh was called to his eternal reward in July. Incidentally, among the UCD players who opposed Queen's on that historic February day was none other than former Ulster GAA President John Vesey.

On the morning of 3rd August 2020 we learned of the death of the Nobel Laureate John Hume. The visionary Derry man was a champion of the peace process and it can be said that unquestionably were it not for John Hume there are many people alive today that would have been long since gone were it not for John Hume.

While Gaelic Games may not have been his first love as a sport, John was a frequent attendee at our games and any time you were in his company you knew that you were in the presence of a very special person. John gave hope to many when hope was in short supply and we are all so thankful to him - he was a firm believer in the art of the possible! He has been referred to as 'Ireland's Martin Luther King' - and not without good reason. For many years he was seen alongside his party colleague and friend Seamus Mallon, when they served as leader and deputy leader of the SDLP. It is almost fitting that these two great Irish statesmen, who were born within five months of each other in the mid 1930's, should also die within months of each other in 2020. United in life and united in death. In many respects these two great men of Irish politics led parallel lives.

There was a widespread sense of shock when news of the death of Hugh McWilliams, another great Derry man, filtered through on the evening of 14th August. A lifelong GAA fan, Hugh, the Managing Director of the highly successful H & A Mechanical Services, was a proud sponsor of Derry GAA teams and his home club St. Colm's of Ballinacreeen and he will be missed by GAA followers everywhere and especially in his native Derry.

At the end of August we were deeply saddened to learn of the death of Jim Curran. The jovial Ardboe man, a former Club Chairman, was best known as a referee of some stature and among his many accolades was the Ulster Senior Football final of 1998 and the All-Ireland Club Football Final of 1993. In more recent times he was an integral part of the Tyrone Senior

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Football backroom team and he was well known in GAA circles across the entire country.

We were all saddened and shocked to learn on the evening of 2nd September of the untimely death of Gerard Devlin. The Armagh Cúchullainn's clubman, who also had a close association with the Pearse Og's Club, was an ever-present steward at games in the Athletic Grounds and he was a member of the Field Committee for the ground. A much-valued volunteer, Gerard was a highly respected referee of the small ball game and his proudest moment as a referee came when he was selected to take charge of the 1998 All-Ireland Minor Hurling Final between Cork and Kilkenny. He also refereed many other prominent games at club and county level and carried out tireless work in the field of referees mentoring.

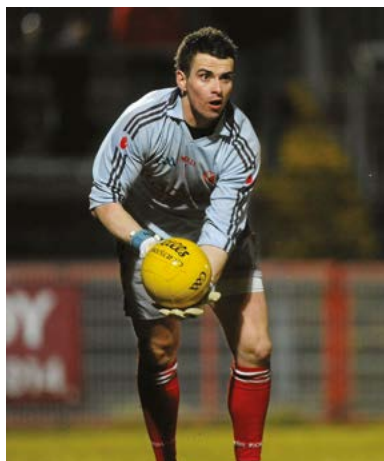
Burren and the GAA lost a great stalwart with the death of Noel Mussen after a period of illness. The former club chairman was especially well known for his dedication to Scór at county level and he was a dedicated worker for the GAA and numerous other community groups. Also in September, Corduff said farewell to Michael McEnaney, a member of that well known family which are totally steeped in the GAA tradition.

A well-known stalwart at Ulster Club Championship games in recent times was Michael Patrick Cassidy (known to all as Patsy) from the Slaughtneil Club. In the weeks and indeed days before his death on 11th October Patsy had the privilege of supporting the camogs, hurlers and footballers of the famous South Derry club to another three county senior titles and he will be missed at such games going forward.

On 12th October we were saddened to learn of the death of Enda Hamill, a player with the St. Mary's, Killeeshil Club. Enda lost his battle with cancer and was taken from this world at the all too early age of 29. He had been due to be married earlier in 2020 but the wedding was postponed due to COVID-19.

It was with utter disbelief that we woke up on the morning of 18th October to the shocking news that Jonny Curran had died during the night, at the young age of 33. The Coalisland man was part of many Tyrone squads winning an All-Ireland Senior Football medal in 2008, a minor All-Ireland in 2004 and he was the proud holder of three Ulster Senior Football Championship medals. A highly rated and respected goalkeeper Jonny, who retired from playing in 2017, also won a Tyrone Senior Football Championship medal with his beloved Na Fianna in 2010. Jonny unfortunately joins a list of young Tyrone Gaelic Footballers who have been called to their eternal reward much too soon.

On 22nd October Clan na Gael and



Armagh lost a great stalwart with the death of Marian McStay, who had done so much to promote Camogie in her native county. A former player for the Orchard County, Marian later served as Chair of the Armagh Camogie Board and she was President of the Board at the time of her death. She picked up many awards for her devoted service to the game she loved, including the 2016 Sighle Nic An Ultaigh Award and an Ulster GAA President's Award in 2019.

At the end of October Limavady Wolfhounds lost a great stalwart of Seamus McCloskey. He had been involved with the club since its foundation in 1980, serving two terms as Chair, and also served as Chair of the North Derry GAA Board. A tireless worker for the GAA, Seamus did much good work for the promotion of our national games.

All Saints' Day saw the passing of Sean Broderick, a man who had given a lifetime of service to Down GAA and the South Down GAA Board in particular. The annual South Down Awards Night was 'Sean's Night' and his other great passion was refereeing. As Referee's Co-Ordinator he spent many an evening by the phone (in a pre-mobile era ensuring games across the county were covered when there was a late referee withdrawal. A great servant who will be badly missed.

Coronavirus has taken many lives, all of them a tragedy but the deaths of husband-and-wife Owen and Bredge Ward within 12 hours of each other on 16 November brought a tear to all our cheeks. Owen was a great GAA stalwart who made a great contribution to the Strabane Sigerson's Club in Tyrone.



Those of us who have attended games in New York's Gaelic park would have no doubt met Seamus Dooley. Seamus held numerous posts in New York GAA, including President, and also served on Central Council. A larger-than-life figure Seamus always had a special bond with visiting teams from the province when they played in 'The Big Apple.' Although born in Teelin in Donegal, Seamus spent most of his early years in Monaghan where he won a Junior Championship medal with Killaney and he also played for the county at Minor and U-21 levels. In New York he became a member of the Monaghan Club and gave many years of service to the GAA in the city. He sadly passed away on 13th November 2020.

In December we said farewell to Dr Pat McEniff, brother of former Donegal and Ulster manager Brian and we also learned of the tragic death of former Fermanagh and Erne Gaels footballer Shane O'Brien in a road accident in Pretoria. Shane, a MacRory Cup winner in 2002, had been working in South Africa for the United Nations Refugee Agency.

It was with deep regret that we learned on 11th December of the death of Micheál Mac Giolla Easbuic (Gillespie). The jovial Kilcar man was one of the GAA's most respected administrators and he was well known far and beyond his native Donegal. He served as Donegal County Chairman from 1980-86 inclusive before becoming Central Council delegate for the North-West County. Widely known as 'The Chief' Micheál was a strong advocate of the Irish Language and all things Irish and he was acclaimed by fellow gael throughout the Association when he was elected a GAA trustee in 1991.

Micheál, who recovered from serious illness almost 20 years ago, was also a distinguished author in the Irish language.

Long time Ulster GAA gateman Patsy Bannon passed away on the morning of the 2020 All-Ireland Football Final. One of the 'Liatroim men' who assisted at Ulster Championship games over many years, Patsy was a dedicated and reliable Gael.

All of us at Ulster GAA were devastated to learn of the death of our former colleague James McVeigh on St. Stephen's Day. At the time of his death James was the Secretary of the South West Antrim GAA Board and just a couple of months before his untimely passing he had been part of the management team which delivered a first Antrim Intermediate Hurling Championship title to his beloved Tir na nOg, Randalstown. A passionate and hard-working gael, he made a lasting impression on all who met him.

Just before my report went to print, I was saddened to learn of the death of James McLean after a short illness. James was a lifelong gael who was the current Chairperson of his beloved Dunloy Cuchullains, a club he served in numerous capacities over many years. A former Chair of the North Antrim GAA Board, James also served on the Ulster GAA Council in recent times. His loss is a great one for the GAA family and nowhere more will this be felt than in his native Antrim.

To those and all the GAA members who died during the past year, may you Rest In Peace! Also, on behalf of Ulster GAA, may I extend my condolences to all members of the GAA family who have lost loved ones in the last twelve months.



## APPRECIATION

This evening we say good-bye to six members of the Provincial Council and I thank them sincerely for their outstanding contribution to our work. Alex McQuillan, John Connolly and P.J. McGowan have completed their five-year terms (John's was served in two phases) and each of them have left an indelible mark on the Council. Joe Edwards also served on the Council with distinction, with his knowledge of rules and disciplinary procedures proving particularly beneficial. I've no doubt each of you will continue to make a valuable contribution to GAA life. Seamus O Domhnaill and Benny Hurl served just one year on the Council and I found their support invaluable. They are now moving to different posts on their respective County Committees, Seamus as Vice-Chair in Donegal and Benny as Ard Comhairle delegate in Tyrone. I wish them well in their new roles. I also welcome and look forward to working with our new Council members, namely Sean Kelly, Seamus McMullan (both Antrim), Fergus McGee, Brendan Kelly (both Donegal), Marion Donnelly (Monaghan) and Conor Sally (Tyrone).

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## THANKS

Given the events of the past year we owe a debt of gratitude and thanks like never before to our members everywhere. More than ever your commitment has shone through. I am indebted to all the members of the Ulster Council – it is disappointing that we never got to meet as a group since last year's Ulster Convention but hopefully circumstances will change at some stage during 2021 and we will be able to come together as a collective in person once more. In particular I am indebted to the officers of the Council who have gone well and above the call of duty in these difficult times and who earnestly give of their time for the betterment of the GAA in the province. To Oliver Galligan, Ciaran McLaughlin, Michael Geoghegan and Declan Woods I say a big thank you. Your support for me is always appreciated and whatever duties you are asked to perform on behalf of the Council you do so with efficiency and enthusiasm.

On a personal level, it is important to state how delighted I was that Oliver Galligan was the person who had the privilege of presenting the Anglo-Celt Cup when it returned to his beloved Cavan for the first time since 1997. I thank also the members of all our sub-committees and the GAA members from the province who sit on national committees. To the staff of Ulster GAA, I thank you for your help and support during a most challenging year. You have been a support and comfort to me. Many of you have been furloughed for much of 2020 and everyone saw a salary reduction. You have always recognised the bigger picture and it is our steadfast hope that we will emerge from this pandemic as a wiser

and stronger workforce. The senior staff team of Eugene Young, Stephen McGeehan, Diarmaid Marsden and Brian Mallon have been close at my side and have been a source of confidence and inspiration during these unusual times.

Ultimately, we are a games-led organisation and getting games played in 2020 was a challenge in itself. My thanks go out to Stephen Donnelly, Niall Muldoon, Michael McGoldrick and Jim O'Rourke for the roles they have played in helping to brighten up the lives of so many people during the past year. It has been a particularly busy year for our HR Office Kathy Kelly who plays a vital role in dealing with staff related issues and I commend her for her efforts and I extend a special thanks to by Personal Secretary Geraldine McKavanagh for her loyalty and for 'keeping me right' on things. Geraldine, I'm truly appreciative of all your work.

I thank the Ard Stiurthoir Tom Ryan and all the staff at Croke Park for their valued advice and courtesy. I especially thanks the senior staff with whom I work closely. I thank also GAA President John Horan for his guidance and support during his Presidency. I know he will continue to do great things for the Association – I wish him well for the future and extend my best wishes to his successor Larry McCarthy.

I thank my fellow provincial Secretaries for their support and guidance and I commend the dedication and loyalty of the County Board officers in each of our counties, particularly the County Secretaries and Chairs with whom I have most dealings. I value highly your

friendship, courtesy and advice. I thank also our colleagues in our sister organisations' Ulster Camogie and Ulster Ladies Gaelic Football.

I thank also our twinning partners in Britain and Canada for your continued loyalty and support. It has been a particularly difficult year for our members abroad but you have valiantly kept the GAA flame burning. We can only but hope that 2021 will bring better cheer.

Finally, I thank the team at home and especially my wife Deirdre. I thank them for their patience, understanding (especially when I asked them to limit their wi-fi usage during those many hours of MS Teams and Zoom meetings!) and total support. It's a great comfort to know that you are behind me all the way.



**BRIAN MAC FHÍOBHUÍ**  
RÚNÁÍ CHOMHAIRLE ULADH CLG