

CLG ULADH

AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL 2025

10 EANÁIR 2025





05 TUARASCÁIL AN RÚNAÍ

Over 140 years ago Michael Cusack had a vision that Irish people should take control of their own sporting affairs.

He realised that the management of athletics was in the hands of people whose outlook was British in nature and he believed that people of an Irish persuasion, the majority on the island, were being excluded from the sport.

Cusack was a strong advocate of the Irish language and a founder member of the Gaelic League, who felt that it was time for Irish nationalists to take control of their own affairs and to revive the ancient games of Hurling and Gaelic Football under new rules, so he called a meeting for The Commercial Hotel in Thurles on 1st November 1884. The rest is history!

A couple of years later Cusack wrote that “the Association swept the country like a prairie fire.” That fire continues to burn brightly, not only across Ireland but across the world as the GAA now has a presence across the globe. The strength of the GAA lies in its community ethos – and that ethos is as important in Brisbane, Madrid, Singapore or Toronto as it is in Burren, Maghera, Scotstown or Termon. The efforts of all the players, volunteers and supporters over the last 140 years have made this great Association what it is. We can look back on their efforts with pride and gratitude. I’m sure Cusack and his colleagues who gathered in that Tipperary hotel all those years ago would approve of how their dream has lived out.

We have much to celebrate. A big well done to everyone who has made us what we are!” The baton has been passed from generation to generation and as long as each generation continues to instill a sense of pride

and responsibility to the next one, that baton won’t be dropped. Much has been achieved and much more can be accomplished. What we bring forward is, perhaps, even more crucial than what we leave behind. We can all play a part in ensuring that this great organisation continues to grow and continues to keep serving our communities.

‘ANNUS MIRABILIS’

In years to come when people look back at the 2024 GAA season, the achievements of Ulster teams will undoubtedly be the topic of many conversations. While there was modest success on the hurling field, the ‘clean sweep’ of major football trophies at Inter-County, Club, Post Primary and Higher Education levels by Ulster sides is something unparalleled in the Association’s history and it may be many years before this feat is emulated by any other province. 2024 truly was Ulster GAA’s “annus mirabilis.”

The success of the Armagh footballers in capturing the Sam Maguire Cup for only the second time in their proud county’s history was the ‘icing on the cake’ and so ensured that The All-Ireland Senior, U-20, Minor and Tailteann Cups’ were resting in the northern province. Earlier in the year the All-Ireland Club Senior, Intermediate and Junior titles were all captured by Ulster teams, while the Sigerson Cup was won by Ulster University and the Hogan Cup was retained by Omagh CBS. Quite a remarkable achievement by all.

Allied to this, Derry and Donegal won the Allianz National League Division One and Two titles respectively and there were also national titles at lower grades for Down at inter-county U20 and Minor levels and for Abbey

Vocational School in Donegal at Post Primary Schools’ level. In hurling there were successes for Donegal in the Nickey Rackard Cup, Fermanagh in The Lory Meagher Cup, Down the Richie McElligott Cup and St. Killian’s, Garron Tower in The Paddy Buggy Cup. To cap it all, Ulster won the one-off Football Development Committee organised inter-provincial series to ‘trial’ new proposed rule changes in football, while Tyrone retained their All-Ireland Masters Football title. It is beyond all doubt that Ulster reigned supreme on the football fields in 2024.

GAMES ACTIVITY 2024

The 2024 Ulster Senior Football Championship occupied an earlier slot in the GAA fixture schedule once again. The championship started on 7th April with the final taking place on Sunday 12th May. The beginning of the championship saw Monaghan host Cavan at St. Tiernach’s Park and a mere five weeks later, we were back at the same venue as Donegal took the Anglo-Celt ‘back to the hills’ for the first time since 2019. Congratulations to Donegal on winning the 2024 Ulster Senior Football Championship.

The Ulster Under 20 Football Championship operated on a round robin basis for the first time. The three teams who did not qualify for the quarter finals entered into a Tier 2 competition which was won at Provincial and then National level by Down. Derry and Tyrone met in the Ulster U20 Final and the Red Hand County won out eventually, after extra time and penalties, in a brilliant game of football. Well done to Paul Devlin and the Tyrone team.

The Ulster Minor Football Championship was organised in the same format and this year, tiered



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national competitions followed the provincial championship. Derry won the Ulster Minor Football Championship in a cagey final against Armagh at O'Neill's Healy Park and went on to defeat the same opposition in the All-Ireland Final at the same venue, to claim back-to-back National successes. Congratulations Derry.

The Allianz Football League again had contrasting fortunes for the Ulster counties. Derry, Monaghan and Tyrone competed in the top tier. Derry topped the division and defeated Dublin, on penalties in the final, Tyrone retained their Division 1 status while Monaghan finished bottom and were relegated. In Division 2, Donegal and Armagh held the top two spots and Donegal won the League Final by a point. Cavan finished third while Fermanagh finished second bottom and were consequently relegated. Division 3 included Antrim and Down. Down topped the group but lost the final to Westmeath while Antrim occupied the fifth slot to retain their status and ensure that all nine of the Ulster counties stayed in the top three divisions for 2025.

In the Allianz Hurling League, Antrim competed in Division 1B where they lost all five games but due to restructuring, remain in that division in 2025. Down participated in Division 2A where they finished third and were then beaten by Laois in the semi-final. In Division 2B, Derry, Donegal and Tyrone occupied the top three spaces at the end of the group format. Tyrone defeated Donegal by a point in the semi-final but then were defeated by Derry in the final at Owenbeg. In Division 3A, Cavan, Armagh and Monaghan all participated. Cavan finished third and were beaten by Sligo in the semi-final, while Armagh

finished fourth to regain their status. Monaghan finished bottom of the group and were therefore relegated. Finally, in Division 3B, Fermanagh topped the group but were beaten by Warwickshire in the divisional final.

In the 2024 Bank of Ireland Dr. McKenna Cup Final, Derry defeated Donegal at O'Neill's Healy Park, one week before our counties commenced their Allianz Football League campaigns. The Conor McGurk Cup was won by Donegal, as they defeated Down in the final at the Dub Arena, to make it back-to-back successes for the county.

SENIOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2024 Ulster Senior Football Championship commenced with Cavan defeating Monaghan by 3-12 to 1-12 in the First Round. The following weekend two quarter-finals were played; Fermanagh hosted Armagh in Brewster Park and the visitors progressed 3-11 to 0-09 scoreline, while Down finished strongly to emerge 0-13 to 0-09 winners over

Antrim, in Páirc Esler.

The next weekend, we had two utterly compelling clashes. Donegal travelled to a packed Celtic Park where Jim McGuinness's side took on a Derry side now managed by Mickey Harte. Goals proved to be the difference as Donegal ran out 4-11 to 0-17 winners. The following day, we were treated to another fabulous game of football at Kingspan Breffni. Cavan and Tyrone couldn't be separated at full-time, so extra-time followed and the visitors just won out by the bare minimum, 1-23 to 3-16.

The Ulster Senior Football Championship semi-finals also provided us with two intriguing contests in different circumstances. Armagh just edged out Down, thanks to a last-minute point by Jason Duffy, to win by 0-13 to 2-6 at Clones and so secured their spot in another final. The following day, extra-time was needed in Celtic Park for the Donegal and Tyrone clash. A late Ciaran Moore point forced the additional two periods of ten minutes and when Patrick





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McBrearty thumped over a late point, the scoreboard read Donegal 0-18 Tyrone 0-16, after a pulsating ninety minutes.

The Ulster Final took place on Sunday 12th May in front of a full house in St. Tiernach's Park, Clones. The colour and noise on show was a joy to behold. The presence of the Kingscourt Band, Cumann na mBunscol games and honouring our Jubilee team (Armagh 1999 which our current Uachtarán CLG, Jarlath Burns captained) contributed to a marvellous event. In keeping with the competitive nature of our provincial championship, Donegal and Armagh could not be separated in normal and extra-time, as the teams were tied at 0-20 apiece. Donegal held their nerve to win through in a sudden death penalty shoot-out and so claimed the Anglo Celt Cup for the first time since 2019. Patrick McBrearty accepted the cup on behalf of his county on a memorable day.

For Armagh it was further penalty heartbreak and it was undoubtedly a bitter pill to swallow, having lost the previous year's provincial final in the same dramatic fashion. While they bounced back in style, there is a compelling case for provincial finals to be treated in the same way as All-Ireland Finals and go to a replay if the sides are level after extra time in the first encounter, as there is a trophy at stake. There will be a motion at Congress to this effect and let's hope that it gets the necessary support to carry on the day.

ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

With the third year of the Tailteann



Cup, the All-Ireland Senior Football Championship went straight into group stage after the provincial championships concluded.

Ulster had six counties involved in the group stages. There were four groups of four teams with Armagh and Derry pitted in Group 1, along with Westmeath and Galway. With the top three teams qualifying it was envisaged that some of the group stages could peter out but this certainly wasn't the case here as Derry defeated Westmeath in the final round at Páirc Esler to secure the third qualification spot. The following day, a late fisted point by Stefan Campbell at Markievicz Park ensured that Armagh secured a draw with Galway and so topped the group and progressed straight into the quarter-final. Galway finished second to secure the home Preliminary Quarter Final place.

In Group Two, Cavan were placed in a tough group where they faced Dublin, Mayo and Roscommon. Unfortunately

for the Breffni County, they were defeated in all three games with the final game against Roscommon deciding their fate and eliminating them from the championship.

In Group Three, Ulster champions Donegal and Tyrone were up against their Munster counterparts, Cork and Clare. This group went down to the final round with three teams having a chance of topping the group and grabbing the All-Ireland Quarter Final slot on offer. Tyrone defeated Cork at Tullamore and Donegal comfortably beat Clare at Castlebar, meaning that it was Donegal who secured the last eight spot with Tyrone finishing second.

In Group Four, Monaghan faced Kerry, Meath and Louth. Kerry topped the group, as expected while Monaghan just missed out on the home preliminary quarter final spot to Louth on scoring difference, meaning they faced a third game in three weeks.

In the Preliminary Quarter Finals,



played over the weekend of 22nd / 23rd June, three Ulster counties were involved. Monaghan travelled to Galway and were unlucky to be beaten by 0-14 to 0-11 in a brave performance. Also, that day Tyrone hosted Roscommon and the Rossies flew out of the traps to establish a 0-9 to 0-3 lead. Tyrone battled gamely in the second half but it wasn't enough as they succumbed to a 0-14 to 0-13 defeat at O'Neill's Healy Park. Derry made the long journey to Castlebar to take on a fancied Mayo side. Extra time and penalties was required and it was the Oak Leaf County who secured a morale boosting victory, thanks to Conor Doherty's winning penalty. Therefore, three Ulster counties made it to the All-Ireland Quarter Finals.

On Saturday 29th June, Armagh faced Roscommon in the first of the four games and goals from Barry McCambridge and Conor Turbitt helped secure a 2-12 to 0-12 win. The following day, again in Croke Park, Donegal and Derry were in action. Donegal outscored Louth by 1-23 to 0-18 in a free-flowing affair, while Derry were beaten by Kerry by 0-15 to 0-10 in a much more rigid encounter

which never reached the heights of the previous year's encounter.

The All-Ireland Semi-finals were played over the same weekend where Armagh faced Kerry and Donegal faced Galway. Armagh trailed by five points early in the second half but it was Kerry who needed a late score to force extra time, after Barry McCambridge's goal had swung the momentum. Armagh played better as the game progressed and deservedly defeated the Kingdom by 1-18 to 1-16 to send the Armagh fans into raptures. The following day another tight tussle ensued between Donegal and Galway. A freakish first half goal for Galway in the first half put them into the ascendancy, albeit Donegal had got back level by half time. In the second half Donegal's shooting accuracy deserted them and this ultimately proved decisive as the more economical Tribesmen secured a 1-14 to 0-15 win.

On Sunday 28th July, Armagh faced Galway in the All-Ireland Senior Football Final with Tyrone referee Sean Hurson the man in the middle. It was a fantastic event with both counties bringing tremendous colour and noise

to Jones' Road. The sides were tied at 0-6 apiece at half time but a first ever goal for Armagh from full back Aaron McKay put The Orchard County into a lead which they never relinquished and when the final whistle sounded they held a slender, but crucial, one point lead. Armagh's winning score of 1-11 to 0-13 was enough for them to capture the Sam Maguire Cup for just the second time in what was their fifth final appearance.

The display of euphoria from the Armagh faithful was a sight to behold as An tUachtaran CLG Jarlath Burns, whose son Jarly Og had the ball in his hands when the final whistle sounded, had the pleasure of handing Sam Maguire over to Armagh captain Aidan Forker. Warmest congratulations to Armagh on this outstanding achievement and manager Kieran McGeeney joined an exclusive club of individuals to have both managed and captained All-Ireland winning teams.

TAILTEANN CUP

There were 17 teams in the 2024 Tailteann Cup, including three from Ulster. Antrim, Fermanagh and Down qualified from their groups to the knockout stages. After finishing second in their group, Antrim faced London in the Preliminary Quarter Final at Corrigan Park and won out 3-11 to 2-10 winners. Down and Fermanagh topped their groups so moved straight into the quarter finals.

In the quarter-finals played on Saturday 15th June, Down had a comfortable 1-18 to 0-12 victory over Wicklow at Páirc Esler to progress to the last four. Later that evening, Antrim recovered from six points down to defeat Fermanagh by 1-11 to 0-11 at Brewster Park and so gained a semi-final place the following weekend. In





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the semi-final double header at Croke Park, Antrim lost out by 3-11 to 1-12 to Laois, while Down had a thrilling 1-20 to 2-15 extra time victory over Sligo.

Three weeks later, Down met Laois in Croke Park in The Tailteann Cup Final. The Mourne men got off to a great start but a shock Laois goal put them ahead. The third quarter belonged to the Mourne men but a cracking Laois goal late on – a clear contender for goal of the season - brought the lead back to two points. Down withstood one last attack and became the first Ulster side to collect the Tailteann Cup and consequently secure their spot in the All-Ireland Senior Championship for 2025. Well done to all involved.

MINOR FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

The 2024 Electric Ireland Ulster Minor Football Championship was played on a round robin basis, with a group of five and a group of four. The top team in each group, Derry and Donegal, progressed directly into a home semi-final, while the second and third placed team in each group met each other in two quarter-finals.

In the quarter-finals, Tyrone defeated Cavan narrowly and Armagh defeated Monaghan to progress to the semi-final stage. Derry had home advantage over Tyrone and a strong second half performance was enough to see them run out 2-14 to 1-10 winners at Owenbeg. In the other semi-final at Ballyshannon, Armagh produced a great team performance to emerge as 2-8 to 1-7 winners. In the Ulster Minor Football Final played at O'Neill's Healy Park, Derry just about did enough to take the Fr. Murray Cup on a 0-12 to 1-7 scoreline.

While this format was well intentioned and designed to give our counties



more games, the benefit of hindsight suggests that the range in quality from the top teams to the bottom teams was so vast that it resulted in a number of mismatches in the group stages. The three teams that did not qualify from their group (Antrim, Fermanagh and Down) went into a National Tier Three competition. Limerick beat Fermanagh and Laois beat Antrim in the first round. Down defeated Limerick, Leitrim and Westmeath to subsequently win the competition outright. Well done to all involved in this national success.

The two teams that lost out at both the Quarter Final and Semi Final stage then entered the National Tier Two competition. Monaghan were beaten by Wexford in their first game to end their involvement. Cavan beat Wicklow, Tyrone beat Wexford and Donegal beat Sligo as all three teams reached the semi-finals. Cavan defeated Tyrone by 0-16 to 1-10 and Kildare beat Donegal by 3-12 to 1-13 in a double header at Clones. The following weekend, Kildare collected the Paul McGirr Cup by beating Cavan on a 2-12 to 1-10 scoreline, at Navan. In the All-Ireland Tier quarter-finals on Saturday 8th June, the games involving both Ulster counties were played as a double-header in Kingspan Breffni. Derry defeated Dublin by 0-18 to 2-10 while Armagh overcame Longford on a 1-16 to 1-03 scoreline to cap a great day for the Ulster teams. In the semi-finals, Derry saw off Kerry by 1-13 to 1-12 at Mullingar while the following day, a

very controlled performance from Armagh saw them defeat Mayo by 0-16 to 1-06, at Longford. For the second year in a row, the All-Ireland Minor Football Final was an all-Ulster affair. On Sunday 7th July, a massive crowd turned up to O'Neill's Healy Park for the All-Ireland Minor Final between Derry and Armagh – a repeat of the Ulster Final. Derry managed to keep Armagh at arm's length with the goals proving crucial as they retained the Tom Markham Cup on a 2-07 to 0-10 scoreline. Congratulations to the players and management on this remarkable back-to-back All-Ireland success and well done to Armagh on reaching another All-Ireland final.

UNDER 20 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

In 2024 the EirGrid Ulster Under 20 Football Championship returned to its traditional Wednesday night slot in the springtime. It must be noted that the competition was played amidst the Ulster Senior Football Championship, somewhat reducing exposure for this important age group as the playing of so many games across different grades in close proximity impacts negatively on the number of patrons attending games. Invariably, it is the levels below senior grade that are affected most. Player eligibility has been an issue throughout this competition in recent years, though a rule change, which will take effect from 2025, will allow players to play in both the SFC and U20FC if the start time of the second game is at least 60 hours after



the start time of the first game. This is a welcome development, but it will effectively mean that most U-20 games will have to be scheduled on a Wednesday evening.

The 2024 EirGrid Ulster Under 20 Football Championship was played on a round robin basis, as per the minor championship, with a group of five and a group of four. The top team in each group, which were Tyrone and Donegal, progressed straight into a home semi-final, while the second and third placed team in each group played each other in two quarter-finals. In those games, Derry defeated Cavan and Monaghan beat Armagh. One point proved to be the difference in both semi-finals, as Tyrone edged out Monaghan at O'Neill's Healy Park and Derry defeated Donegal at Ballybofey. In a highly competitive final, Tyrone and Derry could not be separated on a 2-13 to 3-10 scoreline after extra-time. Penalties followed and it was

Tyrone who secured the Corn Dónall Ó Murchú.

In the All-Ireland semi-final, Tyrone easily defeated Roscommon and then faced Kerry in the Final at Portlaoise. In a brilliant attacking display, the Red Hand County collected the All-Ireland title on a 1-20 to 1-14 scoreline. Well done to all concerned.

In the Tier Two Competition, Fermanagh defeated Antrim in the semi-final but lost out to Down in the final as the Mourne County collected the Leo Murphy Cup. In the All-Ireland Semi Final they defeated Mayo and then went on to edge out Westmeath in the final, which was played at Navan. Congratulations to the Down management team and squad.

CLUB CHAMPIONSHIPS

2023 finished with the concluding stages of the AIB All-Ireland Club Championship. In the Senior Hurling

Championship semi-final on 17th December, Ruairí Óg Cushendall were so unfortunate to lose out by the minimum to O'Loughlin Gaels (Kilkenny) in Páirc Tailteann. On the same day, in the Intermediate Hurling semi-final, Setanta lost out to Kilkenny opposition, as a powerful Thomastown outfit at Páirc Esler on a 6-26 to 1-08 scoreline. In the Junior Championship, Ulster champions, Castleblayney travelled to Ruislip and defeated Sean Treacy's by 5-24 to 3-18 but then, just like their Senior and Intermediate counterparts, fell to Kilkenny opposition in the semi-final, losing by 3-20 to 1-11 at the hands of Tullogher Rosbercon.

In the football competition, Ulster teams had unprecedented success. In the Junior Football Twinning Final, Arva from Cavan defeated Wandsworth Gales by 2-08 to 1-03 at Kingspan Breffni on the 9th December. In the All-Ireland semi-final, they defeated Milltown by 2-16 to 1-7. In the All-Ireland Final at Croke Park, they faced Listowel from Kerry and after a poor first half, the men from Cavan, inspired by team captain Ciaran Brady, stormed back to claim the title on a 0-13 to 0-10 scoreline. Well done to all concerned. It was only the third Ulster success at this level and the first since 2007.

In the Intermediate Football semi-final, St. Patrick's, Cullyhanna just edged out Allenwood from Kildare by 1-11 to 0-11 at Páirc Tailteann. In the final at Croke Park, the Armagh men saw off Cork side Cill na Martra by 1-8 to 0-7 and claimed another title for Ulster. Congratulations to all involved in what was to be a momentous year for some of these players, who would later in the year claim further national honours at senior inter-county level.





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In the Senior grade, Glen deservingly defeated Kilmacud Crokes in the All-Ireland semi-final, at a foggy Páirc Esler, on the scoreline of 1-14 to 2-10. They progressed to their second successive Senior Cub Final where they faced St. Brigid's from Roscommon. In a game that seemed to be slipping away from the Ulster champions, a first half goal from Jody McDermott had kept Glen in touch but the Roscommon side still led entering the final stages. Big games require big players to stand up and up stepped Conor Glass to kick a spectacular goal in the dying stages to level matters and then Conleith McGuckian emerged as the hero when he kicked the winning score to cap off a brilliant comeback and a first ever Andy Merrigan Cup for the Maghera based club. Immense congratulations to all involved in this wonderful success.

The 2024 Ulster Club Championship began on the weekend of 26th October with 43 games taking place over seven weekends. Once again, the fare was of the highest quality, and it resulted in the following clubs lifting the provincial silverware;

- Senior Football – Errigal Ciaran
- Senior Hurling – Sleacht Néill
- Intermediate Football – Ballinderry
- Intermediate Hurling – Carey Faughs
- Junior Football – St. Patrick's, Muff
- Junior Hurling – Ballinascreen.

Congratulations to all of them and I wish them all every success in the All-Ireland series.

INTER-COUNTY HURLING CHAMPIONSHIPS

In the Leinster Hurling Championship,

Antrim were again guaranteed five games in the group stages. They had a very impressive two-point win over Wexford in Round 2 and backed this up with another home win against Carlow to finish fifth in the table on four points. Carlow finished in bottom place and will compete in the Joe McDonagh Cup in 2025.

In the 2024 the Joe McDonagh Cup, Down were the only Ulster representatives. In a tough group they played five games where they beat Meath and drew with Westmeath and so secured their status, as Meath were relegated to the Christy Ring Cup for 2025.

In the Christy Ring Cup, Derry and Tyrone made up the Ulster representation. In the six-team group, Tyrone finished with four points to occupy the fourth slot at the end of the group stage, securing their Christy Ring Cup status. Derry finished in second place on eight points and this qualified them for the final. In that Christy Ring Cup Final, Kildare defeated the Oak Leaf County on a scoreline of 4-20 to 1-22 at Croke Park. This was Derry's third final defeat in four years and no doubt they will be striving to avenge this in the 2025 season.

In the Nickey Rackard Cup, Ulster were represented by Armagh, Donegal and Monaghan. In the six-team group, the three counties all experienced very different campaigns. Monaghan finished bottom of the group and were subsequently relegated to the Lory Meagher Cup. Armagh had two wins and three defeats to finish fourth in the group and secure their status, while Donegal finished top and qualified for the final. In the final, played at Croke Park, Donegal hit two late goals to defeat Mayo by 3-17 to 0-22 to claim

the Nickey Rackard Cup for the fourth time. Congratulations to all involved in this wonderful success.

In the Lory Meagher Cup, Fermanagh and Cavan both competed in the six team group. Cavan finished third after a solid campaign and just missed out on a final spot, while Fermanagh topped the group with three wins and two draws. Subsequently, they faced Longford in the decider at Croke Park. In a great game of hurling, Fermanagh won out by 3-22 to 2-20 to collect a third Lory Meagher Cup for the county. Congratulations to them.

In 2023, Ulster re-introduced the U20 Hurling Competition on a round robin basis involving Antrim, Derry, Donegal and Down. In 2024, Donegal dropped down leaving only three teams in the Hurling Cup. Derry defeated Down in the semi-final to set up a final against Antrim. This game was played at Corrigan Park where a great game ensued and it was Derry who





won out on a 2-15 to 2-12 scoreline and progressed to the Leinster Championship, where they competed at Tier Two level, but lost out to both Meath and Westmeath and so ended their interest in the competition. Ulster again organised an U20 Hurling Development League in 2024 and this provided competitive games at their own level for the other six counties in advance of some of these counties competing in the All-Ireland U20B competition. Donegal won this league by virtue of winning all five games.

We had four counties participating in the All-Ireland Under 20B Hurling Championship (Richie McElligott Cup). In the quarter-finals, Down beat Armagh, while Tyrone and Donegal lost out to Wicklow and Mayo respectively. Down defeated Wicklow in the semi-final and then in the final, which was played at Croke Park, Down claimed the Richie McElligott Cup by defeating Roscommon on a 0-20 to 0-11 scoreline. Well done to the players and management.

The province also had three counties participating in the re-introduced All Ireland Under 20C Hurling Championship (Andrew O'Neill Cup). In the quarter-finals, Fermanagh received a walkover against Louth, while Monaghan defeated Longford by a point. In the semi-finals, Leitrim beat Fermanagh and Monaghan edged out Cavan. In the final, Monaghan and Leitrim could not be separated as they were tied at 1-17 apiece after extra time. Leitrim won the penalty shootout to claim the silverware. These B and C competitions, along with the U20 Ulster Hurling Development Leagues, are providing additional games for our counties at their own level and this is a hugely positive development.

In 2023, Ulster had re-introduced the Minor Hurling Championship (Danny McNaughton Cup) on a round robin basis and the 2024 competition involved Antrim, Derry and Down, with each team guaranteed two games.

After the group stages, Antrim and Derry occupied the top two places and faced each other in the final. Played at Dunsilly on 10th March, Derry ran out deserving 1-19 to 1-14 winners to secure the Ulster Minor Hurling Championship. Derry didn't go forward to the Leinster Minor Hurling Championship but Antrim proceeded to win the Peadar O'Lathain Cup, the Leinster Minor B Championship.

The Ulster Minor Hurling Development League provided competitive games at their own level for the other six counties and Louth, who had requested to enter, in advance of these counties competing in the Celtic Challenge competition. Donegal topped this section winning all of their games.

In the Celtic Challenge there was success for Tyrone and Fermanagh who won Divisions' Four and Six respectively, while Monaghan succumbed to Louth in the Division Five final.

OTHER ULSTER CLUB COMPETITIONS

Omagh St. Enda's were crowned as the first Ulster Junior B champions. Fifteen clubs competed in the South Ulster Adult Club League with Truagh Gaels, Lisbellaw, and St. Finbarr's emerging as champions of their respective divisions. Thirty-three clubs participated in the CúChulainn League with Naomh Colum Cille taking the Division 2 title.

Táin Óg involved over 80 clubs from 15 counties. A new South Ulster Minor

Tournament for Minor clubs in South Ulster saw Carrickmacross crowned as champions, in a series aimed at enhancing youth competition in the region.

CONOR MCGURK CUP

Donegal retained the Conor McGurk title, defeating Down in the final. Unfortunately, this competition will not take place in 2025 due to scheduling changes which have resulted in the loss of pre-season competitions for the 2025 calendar year.

HURLING/SHINTY INTERNATIONAL

Ulster players and management represented the winning Ireland side in the annual Hurling/Shinty match win against Scotland, which was played in Ennis on 26th October. Terence McNaughton was joint manager and Gerard Walsh (Antrim), Caolan Taggart (Down), Daithí Sands (Down), Steven McBride (Donegal) and Luca McCusker (Fermanagh) all played their part in securing an Irish victory. Well done to all involved.

POC FADA

Conor McAlister and Ciarrai Devlin won the Ulster Poc Fada Senior Championships, with a strong turnout and performances in Senior and U16 categories.

The Ulster Hurling Development Programme continues to deliver on grassroots development, focusing on annual games programmes, coaching support and educational initiatives. The appointment of Hollie Doherty in the Gaeltacht region of Donegal increased our number of Regional Hurling Officers to eight. Key objectives for the staff include the organising of annual participation games, delivering development



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coaching at U14-U17 ages, providing club support, and promoting coach and referee education. The 2024 Indoor Hurling series included 92 teams across several age groups. County Academy squads took part in a competitive development game at U14-U17 levels, and 84 players from our nine counties attended the Players' Camp focusing on skill development, leading to 40 players playing in a series of games against Dublin. Over 180 schools received targeted coaching support, particularly for developing clubs, to increase youth participation in hurling. Ulster Hurling Staff hosted two Hurling Roadshows and delivered Introduction, Award 1 and Award 2 Coaching Courses across the province. A huge thanks is due to Michael Geoghegan (Chairperson) and the Hurling Development Committee, which includes representation from all counties in the province, for their ongoing efforts in the promotion and development of the game.

REFEREES

In concluding my summary of games activity in 2024, I wish to sincerely thank and pay tribute to our match officials. I praise all our referees for their time, commitment and involvement in the delivery of our extensive games programme. The Referees Pathway document for Ulster is now in situ, as we strive to develop and retain our match officials. Without referees, there are simply no games. All our referees make themselves available and some at very short notice.

A huge congratulations goes out to Sean Hurson who refereed his second All Ireland Senior Football Final in 2024. I congratulate also Colm McDonald who took charge of the Joe McDonagh Cup Final and Peter Owens



who was the man in control of the whistle in the Nickey Rackard Cup final.

I thank the Referees Committee, under the stewardship of Sean Rooney and Jim O'Rourke and pay tribute to staff members Stephen Donnelly, Ryan Mellon and Gary Mallon for their continued work in this vitally important area.

PRE-SEASON COMPETITIONS

At their meeting on 7th September the GAA's Ard Comhairle passed a resolution to suspend the pre-season competitions for one year, meaning that the Bank of Ireland Dr. McKenna Cup and The Conor McGurk Cup Competitions won't be played in 2025. This was a disappointing decision and one which was taken without any prior consultation with the Provincial Councils. A motion to reverse this decision at the October Central Council meeting fell just two votes short of securing the required 60% of voting members.

A questionnaire issued by the Central Competitions Control Committee (CCCC) to all counties on the future structure and format of the Football

Championships, included a question on the pre-season competitions. The results showed that 61% of counties opted for pre-season competitions to be retained, 10% wished them to be abolished and 29% indicated that they would prefer a suspension of these competitions for a trial period. Based on this feedback which indicated that a clear majority of counties favoured the status quo, the CCCC recommended to Ard Comhairle that the pre-season competitions be retained.

The Gaelic Players Association (GPA) argued that player welfare was paramount and if there were no pre-season competitions, inter-county players would not have to return to train collectively in November. Others argued that the pre-season competitions were not the problem as counties were back in collective training even prior to the return to train protocols and that without pre-season competitions counties would organise challenge games, which would be equally competitive.

We must remember that our players are amateur and their welfare must be paramount, and we must also recognise the importance of the proper



balance being struck between the welfare of our players and the overall games programme.

As the body responsible for championing the welfare of their members, there is an onus on the GPA to ensure that their members adhere to the 'return to train' date. The date agreed by Central Council for the return to 'collective training' was 7th December for senior inter-county teams. Did this happen?

The GPA issued a strong statement highlighting that November should be 'a zero contact' month. If even a fraction of the reports of inter-county collective training sessions taking place in November are true, then the December 7th date was flouted high and wide across the country. Did the GPA say or do during this time to call this out? I'm not sure if they did or said anything. It seems as if they were true to their word and had 'zero contact' with their members on the issue during this time. It seems as if the argument of abandoning the pre-season competitions in order to save inter-county footballers from collective training in November was a fallacy.

There were no winners from the decision – only losers. County players seemingly still trained in November, supporters missed out on pre-season competitions, inter-county football teams missed out on an opportunity to trial the new rules in a semi-competitive environment, fringe county players missed out on the opportunity to represent their county, referees on a development pathway missed out on the opportunity to officiate at a higher level, Provincial Councils lost out on a significant revenue source and had the unenviable task of explaining to sponsors how

competitions could be removed at a whim. Ultimately, clubs and young people lost out due to a reduction in both grants and programme delivery due to the associated revenue loss. One can but hope that the pre-season competitions will be restored to their rightful place in 2026.

NEW PLAYING RULES

Shortly after assuming the Presidency of the Association, Jarlath Burns appointed a Football Review Committee (FRC) to formulate a series of proposals which, if passed by a Special Congress, would enhance the playing rules of Gaelic Football. After a one-year trial the proposed rule changes would be put to another Special Congress where a vote on their permanency, or otherwise, would be taken.

Appointing Jim Gavin to chair the committee was a masterstroke. His methodical approach, attention to detail, forensic research, high level of consultation and trial games in different formats meant that when delegates met on 30th November to vote on the proposed rule changes for a one-year trial, their passing was almost a formality. And that proved to be the case.

Of course, Jim did not act alone as he had some of the GAA's best minds serving with him on the FRC, including the Ulster trio of Michael Murphy, Alec McQuillan and Malachy O'Rourke.

All 48 motions, plus an enabling motion, addressing 17 aspects of the game were overwhelmingly voted through. While there will no doubt be teething problems, and particularly at club level, it was important that the trial changes were brought in at club as well as county level, given that club players make up 96% of the playing

population.

When Gaelic Football is played well it is an exciting spectacle but as the game and coaching methods evolved, in many cases tactics have overtaken skill. This led to many games, or at least parts of them, being played like what many have described as 'a game of chess' - and often at the same pace! The very nature of the proposed changes, particularly the 3 v 3 rule, will automatically generate more space and the enhancements to the game brought about by these changes will generally lead to a more exciting spectacle. Even a fail-safe mechanism has been built in, which will allow for amendments to be made to the trial rules during the course of the one-year trial. An exciting 2025 awaits.

FEARGAL, BRIAN & CHRISSEY

On 26th August came the news that Feargal Logan and Brian Dooher had stepped down as joint-managers' of the Tyrone Senior Football team after four seasons at the helm. Their All-Ireland triumph in their first year at the helm elevated them alongside Mickey Harte as All-Ireland winning managers from the O'Neill County and firmly established their place in the annals of Tyrone GAA history. As both players and managers, they left no stone unturned in their service to the GAA in the county and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

On 18th November came the news that Chrissy McKaigue had retired after 15 years of inter-county football. One of only two players to win National league medals in all four divisions, Chrissy also won an All-Star in 2022 and back-to-back Ulster Senior Football Championship wins in 2022 and 2023, being honored with the captaincy in the former year. He started in 49 of



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Derry's 51 championship games during his inter-county career and always represented the Derry hurlers with distinction over many years. A great servant of the Oak Leaf County, let's hope that we will continue to see him in the famous maroon and white of his beloved Slaughtneil for many years to come.

ANGLO-CELT CUP

In 1925 John F. O'Hanlon, the Managing Director of 'The Anglo-Celt' newspaper in Cavan, presented a trophy to the Ulster Council which was to be presented to the winners of the Ulster Senior Football Championship. Later that year Cavan defeated Antrim in the replayed Ulster Final and Ballyconnell's Standish O'Grady had the honour of being the first team captain to lift the famous trophy.

A century later 'The Anglo-Celt Cup' is still being presented to the Ulster Champions and it is important that this special anniversary is appropriately marked in the coming year. While our friends in the Breffni County will, no doubt, be hoping that it will 'come home' again in 2025, eight other counties will be hoping likewise. Like every year it will be a very special Ulster Championship - this one will just have that piece of added symbolism!

COACHING AND GAMES DEVELOPMENT

2024 was an amazing year for Gaelic Games in Ulster. Our Coaching and Games personnel supported all codes, encouraging them to be the best that they can be. In so doing, there is support from full-time staff through the programme for games, coach and referee education and engagement across all abilities and backgrounds. The legacy and learning from our COVID experience has continued to

result in a blend of online webinars/ workshops and the more formal face-to-face engagement, through our Conference, Regional Workshops Programme and Coach and Referee Education Programme.

Work within primary and post primary schools, further and higher education and our club coaching programmes continues. Demand for support has also spread to the Games for All Hubs and the special schools. Interest and requests from schools and clubs for handball has also expanded. Cross community activity is evident in the work that we have done with the other governing bodies and within our own games' programmes. Coaches have been busy in schools supporting the excellent work of Cumann na mBunscol and Ulster Schools GAA. I acknowledge the excellent work that is being done in sustaining and promoting our games across these environments and the support for our games from school and college staff and from our club and county-based volunteers. I also acknowledge the work of full-time staff who have been through a significant change in their roles. I thank them for their patience and continued dedication to developing our games.

Pathway Delivery Programmes

Ulster GAA has embedded the FTEM player pathways and provided opportunities for training and development around this. We have led out on expanding this pathway, applying it to the coaching and refereeing pathways. Programmes have been designed with each stage of the pathways in mind. Opportunities presented to our volunteers are designed to meet the needs of the target audience at the various stages of the pathways. Through 2024 we have worked closely with the Sports

Institute (SINI) to provide High Performance support opportunities to our Provincial Referees and to Ladies Gaelic Football. This was well received with input from SINI and a good attendance at our Provincial Referee's Conference in February. Some of the Senior County Ladies teams have also availed of additional support. Sport Science has been embedded through Performance and Lifestyle interventions and a new Athletic Development Programme (accredited to level 3).

Funding Support

Development work could not happen without the support of our funding partners. Funding to sustain Coaching and Games Development continues to come from five sources: Sport Northern Ireland, National GAA, Ulster GAA, County Boards and the array of corporate sponsors within our systems. The significant investment by county boards continues to be important and the investment of time and money from volunteers and clubs make the programmes happen.

Sport NI is a significant funder for our work. In 2024 they extended their funding support for a second year, under their transition programme. This has allowed us to continue our direct support to key areas such as handball, disability, club coaching support, football, ladies football and hurling. As we move towards 2025, we are aware that this will continue for another year (April '25 to March '26) and post '26 this programme funding will be opened up to other agencies and become multi-annual. Ulster GAA funding secured is invested across our codes (Handball, Football, Hurling and Ladies Football) and will work to retain our funding pot over the next 12 months.



Department for Education NI were a significant funder for our Curriculum Sports Programme from 2007. This programme was embedded for over 18 years but was reduced from 30 staff to 10 core staff before being terminated due to lack of funding. Ulster GAA has lobbied to have it re-instated, and we have met both the Education Minister (March) and the Education Committee (October). All parties recognise the huge benefits from the programme and the value for money it presents, though we still await a decision as to whether the required funding can be made available to support the return of the initiative.

The Sports Institute doesn't provide direct funding for development, but it provides agreed service delivery options for Ulster GAA. In the past year this was used to support one-to-one engagement with players, the support of Ladies Senior Inter County teams, to support Handball players who travelled to the World Championships in Limerick, to support our Provincial Referee's panel and wider workshop delivery. It is an important partnership and it is our hope that that we can encourage more of our Ladies Senior teams to engage in the programme.

National GAA also continue to financially support our County and Provincial staffing structures. It must be noted that both county and provincial committees also make a significant contribution to the staffing costs. The last three years has seen implementation of new HR arrangements, centralising the employment, payroll and expenses to Croke Park. Anomalies still exist where staff doing the same or similar jobs are supported by different funders and it is



important that the views of these staff are taken fully on board in any future agreed arrangements.

GAMES DEVELOPMENT

Hurling Development in our counties continues to be supported centrally by Ulster GAA development officers assigned to regions. Initiatives are closely linked with National programmes and regional competitions involving teams from North Leinster and Connacht continue to be challenging and successful. They provide the right level of competition. The competitions do require more referees and counties need to be fully aware of this and build their fixtures into their overall fixture's plans.

Throughout the winter months indoor blitzes aimed at the smaller clubs are organised and cross-community initiatives continue in the integrated sector and through our Cuchullian's

Coaching Programme. In all Codes, Coaching in Schools, development of new Referees, Coach Education and Academy support provides a focus for the development officers.

RESPECT

Ulster GAA are working to challenge spectators, coaches and players to look at their behaviour on and off the pitch. The Coaching & Games and Community Development Departments come together to deliver key messages on Respect, Crossing the line and One Punch, embedding these messages within programme delivery. This important work must continue as we strive to instil a culture of total respect across all facets of the Association.

COACH EDUCATION

Our Coach Education Programme continues to provide challenging opportunities for coaches at all levels. Ulster GAA works with the National



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Committee to develop the learning space in line with the Talent Academy Player Development Review, creating a flexible learning environment for all so people can learn at their own pace and in a manner that suits them. Provincial support has been delivered to some Senior Intercounty Ladies Football teams, to Coach Academies (Nursery, Club and Talent), to club referees and to our Referee's Academy and Provincial Referees Group.

The Coaching Conference for 2024, sponsored by O'Neill's, was back as a face-to-face event. Four workshops that focused on coaching practice were delivered by Ulster GAA staff, with keynote speeches given by Liam Moggan and Nick Winkleman. The feedback from the delegates was highly positive and this is a testament to the quality of our staff in the delivery of the workshops.

PROGRAMMES IMPACTING OUR SYSTEM

Our interventions continue to have an impact on the quality of coaching, player development and the physical and mental wellness of our members. They continue to help our sports develop and be sustained. Ulster GAA continues to be creative in our programme delivery and we welcome the embedding of the online Athletic Development Programme introduced in 2023. We also welcome the input from our volunteers on the expansion of our Games for All initiative. This has increased from 13 to 46 clubs with festivals, participation in half-time games and on Croke Park open days.

As we move forward to 2025, the focus will continue on embedding a safe place for coaches and players with robust vetting and safeguarding procedures. We will work to sustain

participation, fine tune performance opportunities, develop and embed the high-performance culture and ensure equality, inclusion and diversity in our games. Our challenge is to provide support with a view to "raising the bar" with best practice in all areas of our sports development. Finally, I would like to thank the personnel who are leaving the Provincial Coaching and Games Committee for their hard work and pay a particular thank you to outgoing Chairperson Garrett Coyle from his drive, passion and commitment.

ULSTER GAA HANDBALL

Newly allocated Sport NI funding has allowed for re-structuring within Ulster GAA Handball with two full-time staff members employed, a Handball Manager, supported by a Handball Development Officer. Funding from the RANK Foundation, which supported the Development Officer post prior to the onset of the Sport NI funding, continues until April 2025 and this has allowed for the creation of a new temporary handball coaching post, with a particular emphasis on developing the game in Fermanagh.

GAA Handball President Conor McDonnell, the first Uachtarán from the province since the mid-1990's, is a driving force for the game and the hosting of World GAA Handball Championships in Limerick was a huge success. The story of the year was the victory of Cavan's Paul Brady at the age of 45 in the Men's Open Singles competition.

There were many Ulster successes at national level across the four GAA Handball categories and I extend my congratulations to all the medalists. I thank also the Ulster GAA handball Committee for their tremendous work in their continued promotion of the game in the province.

ROUNDERS

The game of Rounders is continuing to develop in pockets of the province, with more and more young people being introduced to the game. Naomh Colmcille of Donegal affiliated this year, with a few other clubs within the province showing significant interest in affiliating this coming season.





It was an all-Ulster affair in the All-Ireland Senior Mens competition, with Erne Eagles overcoming Carrickmacross Emmets on a 10-8 scoreline. There was, however, some silverware for Monaghan, with Inniskeen Grattan's triumphing in both the Junior Men and Junior Mixed National competitions. Erne Eagles also won the Girls U-16 All-Ireland title.

Ulster hosted the GAA Rounders Mixed U-14 Championships, with Sean Connolly's of Monaghan defeating Erne Gaels of Cavan in the final. Ulster also hosted the Provincial cup event in October, in the fabulous Monaghan Centre of Excellence in Cloghan. This saw Kilmeena bring home the Provincial Cup and Wolfe Tones of Greencastle bringing home the Provincial Shield.

I commend all those people who are devoting their time to bring this wonderful game to a wider audience. All in all, a very successful year of rounders was had.

FINANCE

Financially, Ulster Council activities have presented an operating surplus for the year of £153k, compared with a deficit of £49k in 2023.

The Council benefitted from an increase in overall income levels due to enhanced Central Council coaching and games funding for counties and an increase in Sport NI funding. Attendances and gate receipts have been relatively consistent on previous years, with the exception being an USFC semi-final between Down and Armagh which had a much smaller attendance than the 2023 equivalent fixture.

The Ulster Council continues to

reinvest significant funding back out to our affiliate units via a variety of channels, including the county and club infrastructure grants, club distributions, field rents, team expenses, administration grants, as well as increased expenditure in other strategic areas such as safeguarding and inclusion.

In thanking our Ulster GAA Cisteoir Declan Woods, special praise is required for our Finance and Audit and Risk Committees' who put in tireless work in the areas of financial governance to protect our assets and to ensure that all necessary financial controls are in place.

I wish to acknowledge the contribution and efforts of the Ulster GAA Finance Team led by Brian Mallon, with Ruairi Cunningham and Paul Sanders in support. With the ever-hectic provincial and national fixtures schedule, I thank our Ticketing Officers Laura Woods and Ashelene Groogan for their extreme commitment and dedication to their roles.

I also thank our County Treasurers' and relevant county personnel for their much-valued assistance throughout the year and for their help in the co-ordination and hosting of our games.

SAFEGUARDING

The Safeguarding landscape in Sport continues to grow apace, and to ensure we continue to be to the forefront in this vital area of our operations we took the decision to add to our Senior Management Team, creating the position of Head of Safeguarding role for Ulster GAA. Bernie Fox was successful in the open recruitment process for this post and this appointment is evidence of our continued commitment to

Safeguarding in the GAA in Ulster and will help us ensure that there is a Strategic Safeguarding lens across all of our operations.

Ciara McCrory joined our team in June as the Ulster GAA Safeguarding Manager, where her infectious energy, professionalism and positivity have been a welcome addition to the Safeguarding Team. She is putting her professional expertise to use through the development of policies, procedures, practice and training in the fields of GAA for All, Tackling Bullying and dealing with challenging behaviour during GAA activities. All of these are valuable additions to our Safeguarding support for our members and volunteers.

Our ongoing Safeguarding response, through advice, guidance and assistance to our members and constituent units reaffirms that they are indeed having to navigate some very complex and sensitive Safeguarding matters and highlights the importance of supporting them through their journeys on these cases. The commencement and ID Validation, along with Club Children's Officer Verification processes in our Access NI process, has moved to Foireann. This is a welcome development for Ulster GAA, wherein this will ensure that all of the Safeguarding information (Vetting, Safeguarding Training, Coaching Qualifications) for members is on the one system. Expiry date reminders are sent to each member and to their club, so ensuring that Safeguarding Compliance is at the highest possible level across our Associations.

The recommendations of the McGibbon Review 2023 have progressed towards implementation within the Associations with the



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appointment of the National Adult Safeguarding and Culture Review Taskforce and we look forward to learning of the the outworkings of this group early in 2025.

Our Safeguarding Policies are comprehensive in content and robust when applied as required in our work with children and young people wherever they partake in Gaelic Games and associated activities. We can never allow ourselves to become complacent in their application and we welcome and encourage all members to respectfully challenge inappropriate behaviours through the channels that exist within the structures of the Associations.'

There are many wonderful volunteers within our clubs and counties who work tirelessly and give up so much of their time freely to the benefit of others. I take this opportunity to remind you all that it is a legal requirement and indeed Association rule that anyone who wishes to take up a role working with children, or vulnerable groups within our

Association, are adequately trained and appropriately vetted prior to taking up their role. They should then be supported by their club committees' as they carry out their functions. Club Chairpersons, ably assisted by their Club Children's Officers and Designated Liaison Persons, must continue to lead on safeguarding matters in their respective units and ensure that there is compliance with legal and best practice requirements. I acknowledge and thank the members of an Choiste Slánchumhdaithe Uladh, which was chaired by Anne Fortune until she took up a post on the Ulster GAA Management Committee in May 2024. Antrim's Barney Herron took over the reins and has brought the same drive and commitment to the post, as he continues to 'double-up' with his additional role as County Children's Officer. I am grateful to Anne and Barney for their leadership and continued support to Safeguarding in Ulster. To our County Chairpersons, Designated Liaison Persons and Children's Officers and all of those who support them in this area of work, I

also give a huge debt of gratitude.

Ulster GAA are also indebted to our Safeguarding Tutors for their sterling work in ensuring that all members who attend our safeguarding courses are trained to the highest possible standard.

I commend our key partners across Statutory Agencies, Government Departments and other sporting organisations; it is through working together that we will continue to raise safeguarding standards across the board and indeed learn from one another as we do so.

I thank the Ulster GAA Safeguarding Team of Bernie Fox, Ciara McCrory and Conn Stevenson for their amazing work in what is a highly challenging environment and I also thank Michelle Harte and her team in the National Children's Office in Croke Park for their valuable assistance throughout the year.

STRATEGIC PLAN

One of the first acts undertaken by Jarlath Burns after becoming President of our great Association was to launch our strategic plan for 2024-28, entitled "Ulster GAA: A Future for All."

The document charts the direction of the GAA in the province over the next five years, addressing the requirements needed to keep Ulster GAA as the province's leading amateur sporting, cultural, community and volunteer led organisation.

Five high level strategic themes have been identified and they are informed by 32 underlying objectives. They are ambitious, but achievable, and running through them all is a connection with our people, our membership, our clubs,





counties and communities.

The plan was published after extensive engagement with key stakeholders and much credit must go to the Leadership & Planning Committee under the direction of Kieran McKeever and Bronagh Lennon. I commend also the Ulster GAA officers and staff, with particular thanks to Diarmaid Marsden, for their invaluable input in the creation of this blueprint.

Like any strategic plan, it is, however, only as good as how the objectives are acted upon and delivered. At the time of writing 88% of these objectives are being addressed, with 11% already completed. Actions in relation to the remaining objectives will commence and worked upon during the remaining life cycle of the strategic plan. So, even in the nine short months since its publication, much progress has been made. Much more remains to be done.

CASEMENT PARK

It has been a very busy year for the team involved in the Casement Park project. Despite our disappointment at the forced change in our contracting strategy at the end of last year there was a fresh focus on tackling obstacles to bring the project forward in the past twelve months.

Several significant milestones were achieved including Ulster GAA directly securing €50m from the Government of Ireland Shared Island Fund which brought our own partnership funding contribution for the project up to circa £58m sterling.

Ulster GAA also commenced site clearance works to ensure that the future procurement processes to be taken forward by Government

could follow soon after, including crucial site clearance and demolition works. A parallel investment in new temporary premises for the Casement Social Club was also progressed and is now complete. This can facilitate the demolition of the old stand in the New Year, after the members make the transition to the new facility at St Agnes' Hall.

Tremendous progress was also made with our partners at the Irish Football Association and with government departments across these islands on developing a design at Casement Park which would be capable of hosting fixtures at the UEFA Euro28 Tournament. Our own project team and designers worked diligently to amend our stadium plans (internally) following a visit by UEFA senior executives to Belfast in February 2024.

February 24 also saw the return of devolution to the North and the appointment of Gordon Lyons, MLA, as Minister for the Department for Communities (DfC), our project partners for the delivery of Casement Park.

Our team continued to work closely with the DfC Stadium Team following the restoration of devolution, though it soon became clear that the Minister was not particularly enthused at the prospect of Euro 28 games being played at the West Belfast venue. Momentum for meeting the challenging deadlines of UEFA began to slip and the decision not to commence the procurement process for a new contractor, coupled with the absence of action from the UK Government, despite written assurances made by the former Secretary of State Chris Heaton-Harris, MP, in March 2023, would ultimately

prove costly.

By the summertime a UK General Election was in full swing and it came as no surprise to anyone when the new Labour Party administration late in the evening of Friday 13th September blew the final whistle on the collective ambitions of many to have Casement Park funded and built in time for the UEFA Tournament in 2028. As others have stated elsewhere, it seems that in the North of Ireland, we never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity!

From the moment this happened the entire focus of Ulster GAA and our team has returned (as it should) to the delivery of our Gaelic games stadium in Ireland's second city. We have made clear our intention to build what has been promised to us in successive Programmes for Government, and for what we eventually secured planning approval for in July 2021. That is a 34,500-capacity stadium, a more modest stadium that would have been necessary to enable the hosting of Euro 2028 games.

While some £120m has been secured for delivery of the stadium, a significant funding gap remains. Current estimates are that the final figure will be well below the wildly exaggerated costs of £400m plus, which were reported a few months back. Ulster GAA has recently met both the DfC Minister and the new Secretary of State, Hilary Benn, MP, and we have made clear the GAA's intentions and our members' right to see the delivery of what has been promised consistently for well over a decade. A clear strategic case has long been made for a Provincial sized stadium in a city that has not hosted an Ulster Football Final since 1971, and an updated delivery plan is being



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progressed. Central GAA, Ulster GAA and Antrim GAA are absolutely aligned on the need to finish what was started at Casement Park. Promises made must now be delivered upon.

I wish to acknowledge our project leadership team lead by Tom Daly, the Executive team, headed up by Stephen McGeehan, who both work diligently on the project on a daily basis, including directly negotiating the unprecedented Irish Government grant aid for a Belfast based GAA project. I commend the Irish Government for the constructive manner in which they engaged with us at all times.

Tom and Stephen are ably supported by Brian Mallon, Tim Harkin, Geraldine McKavanagh, Rory Miskelly and Paul McGurk on various aspects of the project. On behalf of the Council and the Officers', I thank them for all they do for us in a challenging environment at times.

At Central level, the appointment of CLG Uachtarán, Jarlath Burns has added a hugely positive dimension advocating and lobbying at the highest level to support our efforts in this cultural transformation of the Association in Belfast and Antrim. Thanks to Tom Ryan and Ger Mulryan (CLG) for their continued support at Board level. At Antrim GAA, we have strong support from Chairperson Seamus McMullan, who participates at Board level with DfC and UCGAA. Central Council delegate Terry Reilly and Rúnaí, Frankie Quinn also continue to contribute positively at all times.

Sincere thanks to Colum Boyle, Emer Morelli and the Engaged Communities team at DfC who worked closely with us during the year and despite their best collective efforts the Euro ambition we jointly worked towards

was not possible in the end.

I also thank Heron Bros Ltd and Marcon Ltd for the delivery of the contracts on site during 2024 and Mott MacDonald for their continued support during the year.

SEAN BROWN & FERGAL MCCUSKER

There are a lot of similarities connected with the murders of Sean Brown and Fergal McCusker. Both men were from Derry and both were members of the GAA. Sean was abducted as he locked the gates of Bellaghy Wolfe Tones GAA pitch and murdered on the night of 12 May 1997. Fergal was murdered behind a youth club in his hometown of Maghera on 18 January 1998. The Loyalist Volunteer Force carried out both killings and there is a strong suspicion that state agents were involved in both killings.

During the past year two coroners' inquests were halted by respective judges for similar reasons. Both Mr. Justice Kinney, who presided over the Sean Brown inquest, and Mr. Justice McGurgan, who presided over the Fergal McCusker inquest, recommended that a public inquiry should be held into the respective killings. The reasoning in both cases was similar; both judges concluded that their inquests could not proceed due to the amount of confidential information being withheld by the Government on grounds of national security.

Both families were advised by the Secretary of State that a public inquiry would not be held into the deaths of their loved ones. Instead, he has referred them to the recently established and much maligned Independent Commission for Reconciliation & Information Recovery

(ICRIR). Both families have stated that they don't have confidence in the ICRIR, stating that they don't believe it has sufficient powers to properly investigate the allegations of state collusion in both murders.

Sean Brown's widow, Bridie, took a Judicial Review against the Secretary of State for his failure to hold a public inquiry into the death of her husband. It was heard in the High Court at the start of December. At the time of writing, judgment has not been delivered. Whatever the outcome, the Brown and McCusker families deserve to know the truth about what really happened to their loved ones. As an Association we stand behind these two families and other families still searching for the truth. It's the least they can expect and we'll be with them every step of the way in their quest for that truth.

A5

In early October the NI Executive made the long overdue announcement that the upgrade of the A5 road would commence early in 2025. Earlier in the year the Irish Government pledged €600m towards the project. The A5 is the main north-south route in the west of the province and it links with the A4, the main arterial route between Belfast and the west. Carrying over 20,000 vehicles a day, the road, which is currently single carriageway apart from occasional overtaking lanes, was earmarked for upgrade by the Executive in 2007, shortly after its restoration. Between that announcement and the decision to give the 'green light' for the upgrade, 56 people lost their lives on that 58-mile stretch of road.

While to be welcomed, the upgrade has come too late for those souls but the courage of their families in campaigning for the upgrade will



undoubtedly save lives in the future. Among those who lobbied for the upgrade was the 'A5 Enough Is Enough Group' which was launched in January 2023 by Niall McKenna and others, in the aftermath of the tragic death of Killyclogher footballer John Rafferty.

Many in the GAA family got behind the campaign, made their views known at the public inquiry and fought tirelessly to reduce the numbers of broken families which are an unfortunate and tragic legacy of this notorious road. We are gathered at this Ulster Convention this evening, just a couple of hundred yards from where Nathan Corrigan, Peter Finnegan and Petey McNamee tragically lost their lives in the early hours of 27th December 2021 and as we remember them and all those who lost their lives on this road, you can all take great pride in your efforts in pursuit of improving safety standards on the A5. Your actions aptly demonstrate how the grassroots can mobilise together for the common good.

The fight, however, is not yet over as a fresh legal challenge has been issued against the Department for Infrastructure by applicants opposed to the upgrade. While a disappointing development, the decision of Mr. Justice McAlinden to deal with the

case as expeditiously as possible is to be welcomed.

CLUB & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Club and Community Development Department is responsible for Club and Volunteer support, Irish Language and Culture, Health and Wellbeing of our members, Community Outreach and promotion of Sustainability and Environmental awareness across our units. Funding was recently secured from Sport NI for an Equality Diversity and Inclusion Officer. This role will address EDI issues promoting best practice and respect across our association. It is a point of contact for all clubs to receive guidance on club matters and volunteer development, plays a role in public affairs and contributes to relevant engagements with public representatives and external agencies and organisations.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS & ENGAGEMENTS WITH EXTERNAL AGENCIES

Dept of Foreign Affairs – Funding through the reconciliation fund for Sport Uniting Communities came to an end in 2024, but Ulster continue to receive a contribution through the reconciliation fund to assist delivery of our Cuchulainn initiative.

PeacePlus – The multisport partnership of Ulster GAA, Irish FA, FAI and Ulster Rugby have submitted a fresh application to the PeacePlus EU funding programme entitled “Sport for Peace,” with Ulster GAA as lead partner. A decision on this is expected in early 2025.

Community Relations Council – Ulster GAA have successfully been awarded a two-year extension through the CRC Core Funding Programme. The programme (as outlined in detail below) helps to deliver GAA activities to non-traditional GAA groups and schools.

Local Authorities and SOLACE

- Ulster GAA continue to work with local authorities in respect of Sports facilities, Health initiatives, Sustainability issues and promoting Good relations.

PSNI - Ulster GAA continues to engage with the PSNI on areas such as the “One Punch Can Kill” campaign, Road safety and raising awareness of scams through our involvement in the Scamwise partnership. In Summer 2024 fifteen PSNI officers were trained up as GAA coaches through the Introduction to Gaelic Games Coaching Award and also availed of further coach education sessions. Ulster GAA Good Relations Officers contributed to a multisport Halloween camp organised by the PSNI delivered to a group of Muslim children in the Belfast area. We continue to deliver “Getting to Know the GAA” talks to police students as part of their training in community engagement. Ulster GAA submitted a response to the PSNI Race and Ethnicity action plan consultation process, and also to the consultation on the Policing Plan 2025-2030.





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NI Human Rights – Ulster GAA continue to sit on the Sport and Human Rights forum and during the year members of our Coaching and Games department presented to the forum on the opportunities within the GAA for those with learning and physical disabilities and highlighted some of the initiatives that have been delivered.

Belfast Pride – Ulster GAA in conjunction with Ulster LGFA, Ulster Camogie and Ulster Handball, joined Aeracha Uladh in taking part in the Belfast Pride parade in July.

Integrated Education Fund – Ulster GAA has continued to meet with the IEF to explore new ways of encouraging GAA activity within the Integrated school sector. Numerous schools have availed of the Integrated Education Sports Equipment Grants to acquire GAA equipment and some schools have availed of GAA coaching sessions. Increasingly we are seeing more Integrated school participate in Ulster Schools competitions. Integrated schools receive coaching through the CRC funding as well as a significant number participating in the Cuchulainn initiative. Our EDI officer engages directly with Integrated schools and

met with CEO of the Council for Integrated Education to help promote Gaelic Games opportunities for Integrated schools.

Thinking Futures; Building

Recognition – The Dept of Foreign Affairs granted funding to the Institute of Irish Studies at Liverpool University to deliver presentations across Ireland to GAA members from a Unionist perspective. The final event, hosted by Munster Council, took place in Limerick in January. A report and video of the project was subsequently shared across the media.

Community Outreach – Ulster GAA has engaged with numerous other organisations to promote community outreach and promotion of Gaelic Games including Community Relations in Schools (CRIS), Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC), Together Building a United Community (T-BUC) and Unite Against Hate.

GREEN CLUBS

The Green Club Programme continues to raise awareness of environmental issues and address sustainable development goals through our club units. Phase Two of the programme recently concluded with 46 clubs from

Ulster involved. Clubs received training webinars in the use of the Toolkit, club and community consultation and sustainability action planning as well as thematic webinars in Water, Biodiversity, Energy and Waste. Partnerships with organisations such as RSPBNI, NI Water, Keep NI Beautiful help to guide our clubs on this journey. The Sport NI Renewable Energy Pilot Fund is progressing with a significant number of GAA clubs involved in this process.

SPORTING NATURE

Ulster GAA, as lead partner, were successful in acquiring funding from the National Lottery Community Fund under the Nature and Climate fund. Our partners include RSPB NI and NI Water and the project employs a project manager and a project officer to engage with 30 GAA clubs across the province in improving biodiversity, training club volunteers, and making an impact within the local community. The project is funded for three years and clubs have signed up to commit to the project for this period and will receive some seed funding to deliver biodiversity projects on club facilities. An orientation day for all clubs was held in Dungannon in November and we hope to see great success with this project in the coming years.

CLUB DEVELOPMENT

Club Maith

Since 2007, Club Maith has been the recognised standard of excellence for GAA clubs in Ulster. Over the past year, three clubs across the province— St. Mary's Aghagallon, St. Patrick's Donagh, and Tempo Maguires— achieved Club Maith status. Moving forward, clubs will pursue accreditation through the Club Compás Programme,



managed by National GAA. In the past 18 months, Ulster GAA, along with other provinces, has collaborated closely with the Association centrally to help develop this new accreditation framework.

Club and County Planning

Strategic planning has long been recognised within the Association as essential for sustained growth and development, especially at the club level. A well-defined plan provides clubs with direction and enables them to look beyond day-to-day operations, helping to clarify their long-term vision. Through the National GAA Club Planning Programme, clubs have access to support and guidance from trained club planners within their counties.

In 2024, Antrim and Cavan embarked on the strategic planning process with the goal of developing a five-year strategy for their counties.

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GAA Planning and Training Committee

Ulster GAA maintains a strong partnership with National GAA through the newly established Planning and Training Committee. This close

collaboration has allowed the Ulster GAA Volunteer Development Pathway and the National Club Leadership Development Programme to work in tandem, creating a more streamlined process and avoiding duplication of events across the province.

VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT

Investing in Volunteers

In 2024, Ulster GAA once again achieved the Investing in Volunteers Standard. This is the culmination of a comprehensive process, which included: Completion of a Self-Assessment; Development of an Improving Practice Plan; Completion of Volunteer Selection Process for Interviews; Co-ordination and completion of 36 Volunteer Interviews; Completion of four Staff Interviews; Completion of Achievers Feedback. I thank all our volunteers who assisted in this process.

Volunteer Policy and Handbook

Through the Investing in Volunteers process a full review of Ulster GAA's Volunteer Policy, Handbook and Volunteer Policies and Procedures was undertaken. Our updated 2024-2028 Volunteer Handbook and Policy are available to view on our website. Ulster GAA also contributed to the development of National GAA Volunteer Strategy.

Volunteer Development Pathway

Ulster GAA completed its Club Officer Training Programme for 2024 with 649 new club officers engaged through this programme, 519 club officers attending live training.

Ulster GAA, in partnership with Croke Park through the National Club Leadership and Development Programme delivered training for Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, PRO

and Coaching Officer. In addition to this Ulster GAA ran Club Officer Induction Training for Development Officers, Children's Officers, Healthy Club Officers and Cultural Officers.

The programme targeted all club volunteers new to their role in 2024 and the training was role-specified. The training was also open to officers in LGFA and Camogie Clubs.

Sports Inspire Award

The Sports Inspire Award operates in partnership between Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and the Irish FA, recognising outstanding youth volunteering in sport for young people aged 14-24 years old. The Programme encourages young people interested in sport to get active in volunteering within their sports club. Volunteering opportunities in sport are very wide-ranging including coaching, mentoring, fundraising, administration, pitch maintenance, match officials, stewarding and helping with catering and events. The young volunteers are required to keep a record of their volunteering hours and are recognised with the Sports Inspire Award on achieving 50, 100 and 200 hours. Over 300 people attended the MAC Theatre, Belfast, in March 2024 for the annual Sports Inspire Awards Ceremony, a prestigious event organised jointly by Ulster GAA, Ulster Rugby and the Irish Football Association, which celebrates young people volunteering in sport. In 2024, Ulster GAA was awarded a Volunteer Impact Award for its work on youth volunteering from Volunteer Now.

Ulster GAA Young Leaders Programme

Ulster GAA hosted its annual Young Leaders Programme 2024 with 27 young GAA members across the province aged 16-24 years old participating. The programme offers



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

In 2024, the programme extended across six months and included: Three-Day Young Leaders Academy in July, Two Day Hiking Expedition in July, Four Online Workshops in July/August, 12-week volunteering July-September, Six months physical activity May-October. Ulster GAA Wheelchair Hurler Paul Hannon who was the special guest at the 2024 Ulster GAA Young Leaders Programme. He provided huge inspiration for the young people and my thanks go out to him.

The Joint Award: Gaisce – The President’s Award & the Duke of Edinburgh Award

Ulster GAA continued its role as a Licenced Organisation to deliver this Award, offering young GAA volunteers the opportunity to achieve Bronze, Silver, Gold in either Gaisce – the President’s Award, Duke of Edinburgh or Duke of Edinburgh International Award, through the Joint Award Initiative.

134 young participants have worked towards completion of each of the sections in volunteering, skills development, physical activity and a coordinated expedition in 2024, many receiving their awards between October-December 2024.

In 2024, Ulster GAA delivered five hiking expeditions in the Mourne’s with 104 young people completing their bronze expedition and eight completing the silver expedition.

In the past year we also played an important role in the Joint Award Initiative 25 years Anniversary Celebrations, including a Wheelchair Hurling demonstration at St. Catherine’s College, Armagh with the Duke of Edinburgh in attendance. Paul Hannon

and Armagh footballer Paddy Burns were special guests at this event.

DfC Programme and Key Objectives

“Sport - A Home for Lifelong Volunteering” continues to be the primary programme through which club and volunteer development is delivered through Ulster GAA. This programme is jointly delivered with the Irish FA and Ulster Rugby and is funded by the Department for Communities. There are several Ulster GAA specific initiatives as well as Joint initiatives for the 2024/25 programme. These include: Volunteer Charter for clubs to adopt, Club Inclusion Charter, Annual Multisport Youth Forum, annual Multi-Sport Volunteer Forum and three Lifelong Learning Volunteer Workshops.

Through the partnership we have also secured funding from the David Cross Foundation and Sir George Quigley funding for the development and delivery of a volunteering initiative targeting young people, including: the development of videos to showcase the role of young volunteers in sport, Education related bursaries for those

who have achieved Sports Inspire 200 hours and our Young Leaders development of an Inclusion and Diversity webinar.

Translink Awards: Young Volunteer of the Month

Now in its seventh year, the Translink Ulster GAA Young Volunteer Award is an initiative designed to celebrate the important contribution young members of the Association make to their clubs and communities. The overall winner of the Young Volunteer Award for 2023 was Oisín Barr (17) from the Doire Colmcille club in Derry.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Healthy Club Programme

Phase six of the Irish Life GAA Healthy Club Programme began in earnest in early 2024 with 606 clubs in total involved in the programme, 159 of which are from Ulster. Clubs continue to report on their key programmes, working towards accreditation at either Foundation, Silver or Gold level.





Promotion of the Social Return on Investment research has been a key feature of the Healthy Club Programme for 2024. Six short videos were broadcast on GAA social media channels in October and November to highlight the incredible impact the Healthy Club Programme is having on Irish society. This year a decision was taken to run the National Healthy Club Conference biennially, with provincial events taking place in the intervening year. Ulster hosted their event on 17th October in the Tyrone GAA Centre, Garvaghey. Over 120 club members attended what was a very enjoyable, informative and successful event. Thanks are extended to our eleven external partners who liaised with patrons at their information stands.

Charity Partner

2024 welcomed the introduction of Autism NI as Ulster GAA's charity partner. This timely partnership complements the incredible growth in our GAA Games for All, and All-Stars programmes. A hugely in-demand and successful Building Autism Accessibility and Inclusion Workshop was delivered by Autism NI in November which aimed to boost the confidence of clubs to get involved in inclusive games and extend the growing "Games for All" club network. Our work with Autism NI will no doubt extend long into the future as this remarkable area of activity goes from strength to strength.

Improving Mental Health

I welcome the financial support from the Public Health Agency (PHA) which enables work in health improvement and emotional wellbeing. Through the PHA we have replenished the mental health pitch-side banners which promote help-seeking behaviour for those in need of support. Work is also ongoing in the area of an Ulster GAA

Respect campaign which coalesces with other areas of ongoing work with referees and the 'One Punch Can Kill' campaign.

The 'Movember: Ahead of the Game' programme continues to be rolled-out to clubs across the country. The programme is aimed at building resilience in young people (13 and 15 years of age) through sport-related scenarios. At least two workshops are delivered in each club; one for young people and another for parents and coaches. Phase 1 (2023 – 2024) involved delivery to 100 clubs with excellent feedback. Phase 2 began in April 2024 and is being well received.

The GAA Substance Use programme, with support of the Drug Taskforces continues to be rolled-out in Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal. Clubs in the 'Six Counties' are directed to substance-use awareness workshops delivered through ASCERT and Start360.

In March Ulster GAA, Ulster Camogie, and Ulster LGFA come together to host the 'Folláine: Spring into Life' wellbeing event. This provided an opportunity for our volunteers to come together for a day of relaxation, enlightenment, and camaraderie. My thanks to staff and colleagues from our GAA family for collaborating to host a very successful event.

Getting Fit for Equality

Ulster GAA has worked alongside the GAA nationally to organise Ulster-based focus groups on the consultation process in relation to the GAA's role in tackling societal gender-based violence. Focus groups took place with the Ulster GAA Young Leaders group in July, and an adult group in August. This work broadens Ulster GAA's ongoing work with White Ribbon NI on their Listen, Learn, Lead programme. Consent workshops, delivered by White Ribbon NI, are offered to clubs as part

of our Club Engagement Programme, and Never Cross the Line #getconsent campaign.

One Punch

A highlight of the year was the launch of our 'One Punch Can Kill' campaign video. Much thanks must go to our Health & Wellbeing Manager Maura McMenamin for her work in co-ordinating this and I extend thanks to Niall Murphy, Dr. Shane McCarney, Martina Jordan, Tony Scullion and the Haigney Family on their invaluable contribution to this thought-provoking production.

It is our hope that every club in the province will engage in the programme as we aim to eradicate one punch and off-the-ball incidents in our games. To date, delivery in clubs and schools has been widespread, with excellent feedback. The 'One Punch Can Kill' video is accessible on the GAA TOBAR platform and I encourage everyone to view it.

Live To Play – Share the road to Zero

Ulster GAA continues to promote road safety awareness amongst our members. Department for Infrastructure Minister John O'Dowd met with representatives from Ulster GAA and Armagh GAA to reiterate the message that all road users are responsible for the safety of ourselves and others on the road. My thanks are extended to Rory Grugan for his endorsement of the Share the Road to Zero campaign. Ulster GAA also maintains a strong relationship with the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) who deliver road safety awareness workshops to club members through their Your Choice campaign.

CPR

Ulster GAA continue to partner with the British Heart Foundation



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on CPR and AED support. The Call Push Rescue programme continues to be rolled-out through the Club Engagement Programme and on request from clubs and schools. BHF have developed a new RevivR app which aims to equip anyone, whether trained or not, with the knowledge of the Chain of Survival, and CPR skills. My thanks to BHF and the IHF for their continued support.

Health & Wellbeing at Ulster Championship

The 2024 Ulster Championship was a busy and productive opportunity for key campaigns to be promoted to our GAA family. It was great to see County Health and Wellbeing Committees take an active role in promoting campaigns close to their heart. With so many strands of health and wellbeing covered through our work, it is often difficult to find appropriate opportunities to promote all our worthy causes. The USFC is increasingly becoming a great opportunity to generate greater awareness of important campaigns to the GAA public.

Campaigns promoted during the USFC in 2024 included:

- Testicular Cancer Awareness with The Oddballs Foundation and Movember
- HSCNI Foster Care
- Road safety awareness through Share the Road to Zero
- GAA Games for All with Autism NI
- Care in the Sun with Cancer Focus
- Stem Cell & Bone Marrow Donation with Eimear's Wish
- Older People's project Good Vibrations with Age NI

My thanks are expressed to volunteers from all counties who made this possible, and to our partners who provide their expertise on important matters.

IRISH LANGUAGE & CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Coiste na Gaeilge agus na hOidhreacht

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

Cúrsa de Faoite sna Dúnaibh

Ulster GAA's annual Cúrsa de Faoite in Downings took place in a slightly revised format in July 2024. The course included four classes of varying abilities, with successful evening events including a quiz, music and dance, and a keynote address from Uachtarán CLG Jarlath Burns.

Gaeilge sa Chlub: Scéim Scoláireachta

The continued success of this Ulster GAA and Ulster University collaboration provides financial support for GAA members and continues to be a fantastic pathway to a high level of proficiency in Irish. This partnership not only opens the door to third-level education for many but also allows GAA clubs to benefit from increased awareness and promotion of Gaeilge. It aims to provide our clubs with the infrastructure to support the use of Gaeilge within our clubs and communities across all age groups. 2023-2024 saw a range of projects at club level: after school clubs as Gaeilge, classes for adults, singing and cooking workshops, Pop Up Gaeltacht at club matches, town land information nights and much more.

For the 2024-2025 academic year, 14 students have been awarded the Gaeilge sa Chlub scholarship. They hail from clubs across the province and have commenced their studies across four campuses. We look forward to supporting them through their projects.

GaelpHeil: Coaching Initiative

Ulster GAA has partnered with Fearghal Mag Uiginn, the Derry man of BBC Gaeilge fame, on a resource aimed at coaches with little to no Irish to help them integrate simple and effective Gaeilge into club training sessions. This idea came to fruition due to club demand, and a project previously filmed by Ulster GAA with Steelstown in Doire back in 2021.

The resource was filmed by Ulster GAA in November 2024 with assistance from CLG Chlann na nGael, Ard Mhacha, and children from Bunscoil na mBráithre Críostaí, Ard Mhacha. A special word of thanks to Ronan Mac Liam who served as the coach for the series.

Foghlaim sa Chlub agus Ollscoil Uladh / Ulster University Partnership

CLG Uladh, supported as a special project by Foras na Gaeilge, and in partnership with Ulster University, created and launched the 'Foghlaim sa Chlub' teaching resource in 2022. Ulster University has been an excellent partner to CLG Uladh for many years with regards to promoting Irish, and it is due to the success of the Gaeilge sa Chlub scheme, that the decision was taken to expand upon the brand and create the Foghlaim sa Chlub resource. This resource is designed to ease pressure on our volunteers and provide a high standard of Gaeilge to all clubs. Clubs are welcome and able to register onto the scheme at any stage of the year. The educational resource aspect



of the Oifigeach Gaeilge role within Ulster GAA is integral to the post itself, and this is reflected not only in Foghlaim sa Chlub, but in the regional dianchúrsa held in Clann na nGael for 2024, with a full house of four class levels attending the clubhouse on a Saturday morning in July. Clubs can learn Gaeilge in their own communities with our resource, then attend the dianchúrsa, giving themselves a goal to work towards with regards to language acquisition. They can of course then attend Cúrsa de Faoite as a final stop on the education pathway for the year, before returning to their classes in the Autumn.

Feiceáil na Gaeilge / Visibility of Irish

An Ghaeilge is to the fore in all Ulster GAA publications, council meeting minutes, on social media and across all our units. Gaeilge was central to CLG Uladh programmes throughout the year, including the Ulster championship, Scór programmes and much more, with a bilingual format in place for much of the aforementioned. We provide translation and proofing services for counties and clubs to ensure Gaeilge is across their documentation, on their social media platforms and websites, on club signage and on team sheets. The voice of CLG Uladh can be heard through the medium of Irish on all topics on Irish media and radio, including on both Scór Sinsir and Scór na nÓg Ulster Final livestreams to an audience of over one thousand listeners. CLG Uladh continues to foster relationships with the Irish language media, with regular interviews and pieces covered by BBC Gaeilge, TG4, RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta, Raidió Rí-Rá, Raidió Fáilte, Meon Eile and Molscéal.

Ag Cothú Caidreamh le hEagraíochtaí

Eile san Earnáil / Relationships with Irish Language Organisations

An integral part of promoting Gaeilge is ensuring that we, as an organisation, interact with and support community-based Irish language groups across the province and the entire island. An ongoing relationship exists with Glór na nGael as they continue to provide their outstanding Joe McDonagh Foundation service, a project that successfully guides GAA clubs through a process of language acquisition and promotion to achieve a high standard of Irish within their club. This year the scheme saw record numbers of registrations, and a continuation of the working relationship between CLG Uladh and Glór na nGael through the beginnings of the Club Forum Campaign in 2024.

Fóram na nÓg has been an excellent source of support in 2024 as we work towards a more comprehensive plan to provide volunteer and upskilling opportunities to our young members across all units and codes through Gaeilge. Ulster GAA is now a registered provider of youth services with the EA via Fóram na nÓg.

Ulster GAA continues to promote our counties and other organisations in the provision of Gaeltacht scholarships for school students and adult learners of Irish, and we have worked with a branch of Conradh na Gaeilge, Boirche Íochtar, on an event funded by Foras na Gaeilge in October 2024. Children from the Isle of Man came to North Down to spend time with Irish-language speaking children from Gaelscoil na mBeann. Ulster GAA assisted in the Gaelic Games section of the trip, with two coaches providing taster sessions in football and hurling skills, from Laochra Loch Lao and East Belfast GAA, as well as support from Down GAA's coaches. BBC Gaeilge and Meon Eile covered the event, which

depicted how acquisition through sport can indeed be one of the most successful language learning tools we have.

Tráth na gCeist #GAAGaeilge

There was national success for Cornafean (Cavan) at the All-Ireland Final of Tráth na gCeist Bord last January and 15 clubs competed in the 2024 Ulster Final which was held in Armagh on 22nd November. As always, the standard was exceptionally high with Bredagh (Down), Burren (Down) and Aodh Ruadh (Donegal) earning the three qualifying spots and so progressed to the All-Ireland Final stage of the competition, which will take place in the New Year. Comhghairdeas leo!

Seachtain na Gaeilge agus Club Gaeilge na Bliana

Ulster GAA promoted Seachtain na Gaeilge 2024 by spotlighting the clubs who shortlisted for Club Gaeilge na Bliana. Four clubs made the shortlist, with Club Gaeilge na Bliana 2023 being awarded to CLG Ruairí Óig, Aontroim. Comhghairdeas ó chroí leo uilig, tá obair na gcapall ar bun, ní amháin sna clubanna seo, ach i gclubanna eile fud fad an chúige.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Cúchulainn Initiative

The Cúchulainn Initiative aims to afford young people from different backgrounds the opportunity to engage with one another and to educate people not traditionally involved with the GAA. Taking part in the Boys' section in 2024 were



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Ballymena, Strabane, Cavehill and Downpatrick. In the Girls' competition Belfast, Coleraine, Lurgan and Strabane were represented. In preparation for the Cúchulainn Blitz, schools were given six "GAA Taster Sessions" in which pupils who had never played Gaelic Games, or had very little interaction with the Games, were taught the basic skills of Gaelic Football and Hurling. Taster Sessions were provided in 20 schools with over 500 Year 11 boys and girls getting an opportunity to sample what the GAA has to offer. In addition, "Getting to Know the GAA" presentations were delivered to participating schools which helped to promote greater understanding and respect for other cultures; a key aim of the Cúchulainn Initiative. The Cúchulainn Cup Blitz took place on Thursday 21st March in Meadowbank Arena, Magherafelt. After a very enjoyable day of games the Ballymena Cúchulainns emerged as winners of the Boys' blitz whilst the Lurgan Cúchulainns collected the honours in the Girls' section. As a result of funding being awarded from the Department of Foreign Affairs through their Reconciliation Fund, the Ballymena Cúchulainns were offered the opportunity to represent Ulster at the Northern Games in Manchester in June. The group consisting of players from Dunclug College and St. Patricks Ballymena enjoyed a three-day trip culminating in success in the shield competition. In 2024 Ulster GAA was unsuccessful in our application for funding for the programme from The Executive Office Good Relations Fund. However, a decision was taken to continue to engage with the Strabane Girls Cúchulainns team to prepare for the ABC games in London in July. Many thanks to Ulster LGFA who contributed towards the cost of the trip. The girls acquitted



themselves extremely well and were narrowly defeated after extra-time in the cup quarter-final. The Strabane Cúchulainns were made up of girls from Holy Cross College and Strabane Academy. Despite being a team made-up of players who had little or no experience playing Gaelic Games, the Ballymena and Strabane Cúchulainns represented themselves with distinction showing some incredible skills, passion, and teamwork as they came up against club teams who have had several years of experience playing together.

Community Relations Council Funded Programme

The Community Relations Council supports staff through their Core Funding programme for delivery of specific activities and initiatives that address good relations under the strategic areas of Shared Communities and Safe Communities. Some examples of these activities include: The School Engagement Programme which sees teachers in non-traditional GAA secondary schools assist Ulster GAA's Community Sport Development Officers deliver a 6-week coaching programme in Gaelic Games; The Club Engagement

Programme which brings young people from the GAA community together for a four-week coaching programme, including engagement on workshops with statutory bodies and external organisations, each promoting community safety; The 'GAAME of Three Halves' Programme which provides the opportunity for young people to try out Gaelic Games, many of whom have no previous history with the association and Getting To Know The GAA, a programme that allows staff to meet people who are not traditionally from a GAA background and lead a workshop based on getting to know the GAA as both a sporting and community organisation.

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, IABA and Belfast Giants work in partnership to deliver workshops and practical sporting and volunteer experiences to young people from areas of high social deprivation. In the last year Ulster GAA



have delivered modules to participants from Carrickfergus, Downpatrick, Coleraine, West Belfast and Limavady. Over a 16-week period the participants had opportunities to try out each of the different sports, learn about sports volunteering, nutrition, disability sports, mental health and first aid, as well as attending a game organised by each of the four sports organisations. Ulster University (UU) once again produced a great piece of research and evaluation on the programme which confirmed the positive impact sport has for the young people in areas of high social deprivation. A celebration event was held at Kingspan Stadium (Ulster Rugby) in October where attendees heard from sports leaders, the UU research team and from some of the young participants.

Additional Outreach Work

Ulster GAA's Community Sports Development Officers engaged with Knock Presbyterian Church and Causeway Coast and Glens Council to provide GAA coaching to non-traditional GAA groups. Coaches from the three sports delivered 'Game of Three Halves' events to various groups such as, inmates from Hydebank and Maghaberry Prisons', a group of children from the Muslim community, and young people from Fostering NI. Ulster GAA now has a presence in many integrated schools and increasingly more schools from the controlled sector are enquiring about participating or embracing Gaelic Games taster sessions or multisport activities.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The appointment of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer, funded by Sport NI, formalises our commitment to further progression

in these areas. We are proud of our national motto "Where We All Belong", which highlights our intentions to cater for everyone within our organisation. With this comes the responsibility to implement practical measures in order to ensure this becomes a reality. As outlined in our Strategic Plan, Ulster GAA intends to assist all our units in becoming more diverse and inclusive, and provide educational support and resources to assist inclusion at club level. We are currently reviewing existing policies around equal opportunities, equality, inclusion and diversity and we are grateful to support provided by the Equality Commission for their guidance and advice

Ulster GAA has a zero-tolerance approach to racism, sectarianism, discrimination and bullying. In conjunction with our safeguarding team, we are developing a "Respect" workshop which encapsulates all areas of racism, sectarianism and discrimination.

Our EDI Officer, Niamh McElduff, provides support to the regional development officers in GAA 4 ALL programmes and the review of our disability policies/strategies. She and the Good Relations Development Officers continue to provide cross community taster sessions for those who have not had the opportunity to engage with Gaelic Games. Local authorities and other groups have availed of these multi-sport opportunities. Several clubs have reached out to Ulster GAA for support in relation to community outreach initiatives in 2025.

Ulster GAA has made a concerted effort to engage with those from non-traditional GAA backgrounds, including ethnic minority groups. This has included meeting with a range of ethnic minority support groups at local level, along with good relations officers

in the local councils. As referenced previously taster sessions were provided to children from the Muslim community. We are collating best practice guidance and initiatives for clubs in relation to catering for asylum seekers and refugees with the support of the Law centre and others.

The EDI Officer's role also includes support to the Community and Health manager in providing community health initiatives for clubs and the wider community. Many clubs have demonstrated good practice in relation to providing opportunities for our elderly members such as Céilí dancing classes, music sessions, "Sporting memories" events, trips away to other clubs and locations, tours, walking Gaelic football initiatives, arts and crafts and other social events and workshops. Many clubs act as a valuable hub for signposting to other services and organisations which are of value to our elderly members.

Additional Outreach Work

Ulster GAA has formed a workgroup to focus on the Diversity Mark accreditation which we are working towards with the help of the Diversity Mark team. This journey will also involve the creation of an overall EDI policy and strategy document, including subsequent action plans, along with other agreed key objectives regarding gender diversity in our organisation. It will serve as a formal recognition of our work in these areas and continue to provide valuable networking opportunities with other organisations and businesses on the same journey.

We have also engaged with Sport NI's "moving to inclusion" forum and continue to be guided by the moving to inclusion framework in becoming more equitable, diverse and inclusive. Our EDI Officer attended Westminster



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Insight's EDI in sport event in London, chaired by Sport England, where best practice was observed from a range of different international sports. The area of EDI is always evolving, and it is vital that we continue to engage with these events and with other sports. Ulster GAA will also continue to engage with our external partners in the local district councils, including Good Relations Officers, Equality Officers, Older People Officers, as well as Sport NI, the Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission, Disability NI, Inclusion Ireland, AGE NI, the Law Centre and many others.

GAMBLING BILL

The Gambling Regulation Act enacted by the Dáil in October is an attempt to further regulate the industry and address the issue of problem gambling but it could impact on the revenue generating capability of GAA clubs, County Committees and other sports units across the country.

The new legislation effectively prohibits the advertisement of prize draws on 'television, radio or an on-demand audio-visual media service' between the hours of 5.30 am and 9.00 pm if the maximum winnings exceed €10,000.

While fully appreciating the desire to limit media exposure to commercial gambling outlets and companies, especially amongst young people, it is disappointing that the Association's efforts to include not-for-profit community organisations, like the GAA, to be included in the group of 'exceptions', alongside charitable and philanthropic bodies, were not taken on board by the Government. After all, when people buy a ticket for a club or county fundraising draw, they are not doing so with any great expectation of

winning, but rather to lend support to the venture which will invariably be to the benefit of the entire community. Meanwhile the Stormont All Party Group on Gambling Harms' calls for problem gambling to be recognised as a public health issue. The launch of YouGAMSI's 'Code Red: Young People and their Exposure to Gambling Marketing through Media and Live Sport on the island of Ireland' report paints a damning picture. Ulster GAA formally responded to the Department for Communities initial Gambling Code of Practice document, with the final document to be issued in 2025. We will carry-on working with national GAA and expert partners in both jurisdictions to help reduce gambling harms.

Awareness to members about the potential risks of gambling continues to be delivered through our relationship with the charity Gambling with Lives. Feedback has been hugely positive, and Ulster GAA will continue to work with the GAA at national level and with suitable partners as policy develops in this area.

TWINNING ARRANGEMENTS

Again, over the past year Ulster GAA continued to offer valuable support to our twinning partners, Britain and Canada, and, in conjunction with World GAA, have made progress in establishing formal structures in the GAA in Argentina/South America.

Formal meetings are held on a quarterly basis with Britain and Canada, which World GAA also attend, and other meetings take place periodically, as required. Ulster GAA delivered a Coach Developer Course in Toronto in September and played a pivotal part in organising the second ever Canadian National Championships

(CNC's), which took place in Burnaby at the end of August. 93 games across four codes were played on four pitches on Municipal playing Fields in the city and it proved to be a highly successful weekend. Particular thanks must go to the Mayor of Burnaby, Mike Hurley, a native of Lavey in Co. Derry, who played an important role in securing the venue for the CNC's.

The GAA Council of Britain are in the process of finalising their application to achieve formal recognition by Sport England and Ulster GAA have been assisting them in their application.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

2024 saw a fuller roll out of Ulster's newly designed visual identity and brand guidelines across more touchpoints, including the Ulster Senior Football Championship collateral.

Offices branding has been initiated and I am pleased to say we are progressing through planning permission for an iconic front of building sign on our Market Street headquarters. This will be more than just a decorative element; it will be a powerful tool for Ulster GAA's brand identity, recognition and professionalism in what we do. A major development during the year was the return of Ulster GAA and the Ulster Senior Football Championship to TV advertising after a gap of over ten years. This platform is still an excellent mechanism for reaching a large audience, building awareness of the brand, our primary competition and players. Whilst there was also a generic national GAA championship ad this year, it was an immensely strong message to have our nine counties given the exclusive focus on the small screen.

Digitally Ulster GAA remains strong.



We again enjoyed impressive follower growth in 2024 – X now has 107k (+6%), Facebook 78k (+14%) and Instagram 39k (+30%). The Ulster GAA TikTok platform was launched just ahead of the Ulster Championships in April to engage with a younger demographic and it has delivered exceptional growth with 21k followers and 1.3 million likes at the time of this report.

At the heart of successful social media marketing lies one vital element: content. It plays a crucial role in creating Ulster GAA's identity via consistent, quality posts that allow standout in a crowded digital landscape. My thanks to all our staff, Officers and delegates who contribute to our communications calendar to plan potential content topics. May I be forgiven for highlighting the exceptional work of our Digital Content Creator, Michael Canavan, who has elevated the level of our outputs with his expertly crafted video cuts throughout the year.

On a commercial level, I wish to thank our corporate partners who committed

to Ulster GAA for another season. We were delighted to host a Partners Lunch Day in the Titanic Hotel Belfast in September, accompanied by ten All-Ireland trophies won by teams within the province in the 2024 calendar year. Our valued partners in attendance were; O'Neill's, Bank of Ireland, Ulster Independent Clinic, Translink, MCS Group, McKeever Sports and UTV. We were honoured to have Armagh's All-Ireland winning captain Aidan Forker, Derry's back-to-back All-Ireland Minor winning manager Damien McErlain and Olympic bronze medalist Philip Doyle as our special guests. I thank all our corporate partners for their support.

As highlighted earlier in my report, the suspension of the Dr. McKenna Cup was a blow for us financially and commercially and this has resulted in Bank of Ireland opting out of being involved with Ulster GAA for the first time in very many years on a one-year standstill basis. This is obviously a huge disappointment. Our established commercial workgroup will now be focussed on adding new organisations

to the roster, before the hopeful return of the pre-season competitions in 2026.

I make reference to our PR & Marketing team under the guidance of Paul McGurk elsewhere in my report. I thank also the PRO's and communication teams in all our counties for all their excellent work and I thank, also, the written, broadcast and digital media for their ongoing coverage of our affairs.

'LOST GAELS'

'The Troubles' impacted negatively on the lives of many people living on this island and beyond. Most affected was obviously the northern part of the island. For many people, the grief and pain of this terrible time in our troubled past continues to live on. The aftermath lives on for all of us. Like many facets of society, the GAA was not immune and many of our members made the ultimate sacrifice. But how many? Until now there has been no detailed record of the number of GAA members killed during that period.

Thanks to the painstaking work of Peadar Thompson and some of his colleagues in Relatives for Justice, we now have a publication which details the known GAA members who died. 'Lost Gaels' is part of a wider GAA legacy project and each person killed is listed in the book. Families were asked to contribute, to tell of the story of the deceased member. Some were happy to do so. For some it was an opportunity to break their silence. For others, it was just too painful. This is understandable.

The testaments tell of the person; the individuals behind what for many was just another number in a long list of 'Troubles' victims. The book does not dwell on the circumstances behind each of the deaths. It closes a gap in



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our legacy from the past and is a fitting way to remember our colleagues who died violently and tragically. Everyone has a story to tell – theirs is being told through their families.

CONGRATULATIONS

There were three winners from the province at the annual GAA President's Awards ceremony which was held in Croke Park on 2nd February and televised live by TG4. Steelstown's Ann Lindsay picked up the Ulster provincial award, while Paula Clarke from Killyclogher was honoured with the Handball award, completing a 'family double' as her husband Sean was a previous winner in his category. Completing the triumvirate of Ulster successes on the night was Seamas Mac Ruairi from Naomh Muire, Iochtar na Rosann who was a deserving winner of the Irish language Award.

Watty Graham's reward for winning the All-Ireland Senior Club Football title was to have six players selected on the AIB Club Football Team of the Year with Emmett Bradley, Michael Warnock and Ryan Dougan collecting his coveted

honour for the second year in a row and being joined on the team by Conor Glass, Ciaran McFaul and Eunan Mulholland. There was further success for Conor Glass, whose late goal proved to be the pivotal score of the final, as he was named the AIB Club Footballer of the Year. Scotstown's Rory Beggan was named as goalkeeper on the Team of the Year.

Cushendall's reward for winning the Ulster Club Hurling title was to have two players selected on the AIB Club Hurling Team of the Year, namely the tenacious Paddy Burke in defence and the inspirational Neil McManus in attack.

There were great scenes of celebration as the Sigerson Cup returned to the Ulster University for the first time since 2008, as they defied the odds to defeat a highly fancied UCD team in the final which was played in Tralee. The reward for the Belfast based team was to have seven players selected on the Electric Ireland GAA Higher Education Rising Stars Football Team of the Year, with winning captain Ryan Magill (Burren) being joined on the team by his colleagues Josh Largo Ellis (Irvinestown),

Ronan McCaffrey (Teemore), Ben McCarron (Steelstown), Oisín McCann (Killyclogher), Niall Loughlin (Greenlough) and Darragh Canavan (Errigal Ciaran). There were two other recipients from the province, both of whom played for beaten finalists UCD, namely David Garland (Donaghmoynce) and Donncha Gilmore (Steelstown), making it a double celebration for the club from Derry city.

Tyrone triumphed in the Eirgrid U-20 Football Championship for the second time in three years and their attacking wing back Shea O'Hare was honoured by being named the Eirgrid U-20 Player of the Year for his performances throughout the campaign.

Talented Derry captain James Sargent (Lavey) was named as the Electric Ireland Minor Star Football Player of the Year and his team colleagues Ronan Canavan (Brian Og's, Steelstown), Luke Grant (Greenlough), Eamon Young (Newbridge) and Dylan Rocks (Loup) joined him on the Minor Star Football Team of the Year. Not surprisingly, for the second consecutive year the team was dominated by Ulster players as beaten provincial and All-Ireland finalists, Armagh, picked up four awards of their own, with the honours going to Conall Wilson (St. Peter's), Diarmaid O'Rourke (Dromintee), Dáithí O'Callaghan (Carrickcruppen) and Eoin Duffy (Culloville Blues).

There was strong Ulster representation across The Champion 15, Joe McDonagh and Tailteann Cup Teams of the Year Awards. Six Ulster players were selected on The Champion 15 Team, which recognises the achievements of players who competed in The Ring, Rackard and Meagher Cup competitions, namely, the Donegal trio of Stephen Gillespie,





Gerard Gilmore and Liam McKinney, Mark Craig (Derry), Ryan Bogue (Fermanagh) and Nicky Kenny (Cavan). Liam McKinney also achieved the accolade of Nicky Rackard Cup Player of the Year.

Down's Daithí Sands was named on the Joe McDonagh Cup team of the Year for the third time, adding to his previous awards from 2019 and 2022, while there were six spots claimed by players from the province in the Tailteann Cup team of the Year, with the Down quintet of Pierce Laverty, Ryan McEvoy, Daniel Guinness, Odhran Murdock and Pat Havern being joined by Antrim's Kavan Keenan. Pat Havern was rewarded for his achievements throughout the campaign by being named as The Tailteann Cup Player of the Year.

Twenty Ulster players were nominated for PwC GAA/GPA Awards, with nine being selected on the team. The Armagh players; Barry McCambridge, Aidan Forker, Ben Crealey, Rian O'Neill, Oisín Conaty and Conor Turbitt, were

joined on the team by the Donegal pairing of Peadar Mogan and Oisín Gallen and Tyrone's Niall Morgan. The Tyrone netminder's inclusion added to his 2021 award and he was the only player on the team that had been selected previously. There was further honour for Oisín Conaty, the Player of the Match in the All-Ireland Final, as he was chosen by his peers as the Young Player of the Year. The Antim duo of Paddy Burke and James McNaughton were also included amongst the All-Star Hurling nominees.

Armagh Ladies Footballers won the National league and reached the All-Ireland semi-final and their players Grace Ferguson, Lauren McConville and Aoife McCoy were rewarded with LGFA All-Star Awards, while Down native Niamh Mallon, who is now playing with Galway, deservedly picked up a Camogie All-Star Award. The GAA annually recognises excellence in Communications through the MacNamee Awards and again there was success for the province. The Best GAA Publication Category brought honour to

the Clan na Gael Club in Lurgan for their excellent club history when is entitled 'More Than A Club.'

'The Irish News' journalist Brendan Crossan received The National Media Award for his brilliant article on the late John McKillop, who really was the doyen of the Cushendall team. John, himself, picked up an Ulster GAA President's Award several years back.

It's not often that I get to reference The Stadium Business Design & Development Awards but the success of Cavan GAA's Accessible Facilities & Sensory Room in the Community Project award is to be loudly lauded. To win such an award is an immense honour for the county, their Health & Wellbeing Committee under the leadership of Tony Ryan and Anne Fortune, and the wider GAA family. By their actions Kingspan Breffni Park has become an amphitheater of inclusion and this success is a fitting testament to their vision and foresight. I'd say to anyone who has not yet seen it, a visit to the sensory room in the stadium will be a worthwhile one.

Just to gauge the scale of this achievement, it is worth noting some of the other winners at the awards ceremony in Manchester on 3rd December. They included the The Sphere in Las Vegas, The Bernebau Stadium which is the home of Real Madrid, The Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, The Johan Cruyff Arena in Amsterdam, The O2 in London and The Paris 2024 Aquatic Centre. They were all in good company with Kingspan Breffni! It's also worthy of mention the upgraded Cusack Stand in Croke Park was also nominated, in the Project of The Year Category.

SCÓR



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Once again there was a high standard of competition in the Ulster Scór Sinsir and Scór Na nÓg competitions and what a day it was for the St. Mary's, Glenuillin Club at the Ulster Scór Sinsir Finals when they captured three provincial titles, triumphing in the Ballad Group, Instrumental Music and Set Dancing competitions. There was further success for Derry when Watty Graham's, Glen won the Céilí Dancing competition. Méabh McNeill from the Lámh Dhearg Club in Belfast triumphed in Solo Singing, with Andrew Ranahan from the St. Eunan's Club in Letterkenny taking the honours in Recitation. The St. Mary's, Aghagallon Club took the honours in the Nuachleas Competition while Cornafean (Cavan) were successful in Question Time, with Bredagh (Down) and Aodh Ruadh, Ballyshannon also qualifying for the All-Ireland Final.

At the All-Ireland Final in Killarney there were two successes for the province, with Méabh McNeill capturing the Solo Singing title with a stunning rendition of the Altan song 'Cumha an Oileán', while there was also success for the excellent Glenuillin Ballad Group.

The Ulster Final of Scór na nOg took place in Silverbridge on 30th November and it was a night to remember for the host county, with five provincial titles going to the Orchard County. The winners were; Céilí Dancing - Killeavy (Armagh), Solo Singing - Niamh Neode (Mullaghbawn, Armagh), Recitation - Enya Ní Dhoinnleibhín (Clan na Gael, Armagh), Instrumental Music - Whitecross (Armagh), Nuachleas - Enniskillen Gaels (Fermanagh), Ballad Group -

Clan na Gael (Armagh), Set Dancing - Glenuillin (Derry) and Tráth na gCeist - Naomh Columba, (Donegal). Congratulations to all the winners and I extend best wishes to them for the All-Ireland Final which will take place in Monaghan at the end of January.

PROVINCIAL COUNCIL & STAFF

Ciarán McLaughlin today completes his three-year term as President of Comhairle Uladh. The Strabane Sigerson's man has led from the front and has made an indelible mark on the Association in the province. He has been a champion of many causes, Games for All and the province's strategic approach to floodlighting infrastructure projects being just two of particular note, and in the last year he has somehow managed to combine his provincial duties with that of Chairperson of World GAA. We owe Ciarán an immense degree of gratitude and I thank him for his unstinting service to the GAA in the province and for his unwavering support to me. I wish him well in his future endeavours, both within the GAA and outside of it.

Leas-Cathaoirleach Michael Geoghegan today becomes the fifth Armagh man to reach the prestigious office as President of the Ulster Council. Armagh men are now at the helm of the Association both nationally and provincially - and need I mention that 'Sam Maguire' currently resides in The Orchard County too - and Michael's elevation rounds off a magnificent twelve-month period for the county. Michael is a former Chairperson of the Development Central Competitions Control Committee and he brings a wealth of experience to the role. He has also represented the interests of Ulster GAA on the Belfast Partnership Board and his experience and insightful knowledge is highly valued.





He is an inspirational volunteer and a tireless and diligent worker who is totally focused on the task at hand. I wish him well for his term in post and look forward to working with him in his new role.

After having completed three years as Treasurer, Declan Woods today assumes the role as Leas-Cathaoirleach of Comhairle Uladh. A diligent and conscientious volunteer, Declan is a strategic thinker and he brings a wealth of experience to the top table of GAA administration in the province. As Treasurer he has led us at a time when the re-configuration of the GAA season has placed some additional financial pressures on the Council and he has given both wise counsel and strong oversight to our financial processes.

Over the past three years our PRO Michael McArdle has given strong leadership to us in the field of communications. He has embraced both new and traditional methods and has ensured the affairs of Ulster GAA remain at the forefront of the sporting sector in the province. A strong communicator, he has dealt with the media in a highly professional manner and we are highly indebted to his enthusiasm and expertise.

Our officers are supported by a highly efficient Council membership. I thank every member of the Council for their commitment and dedication. Every Council member serves on at least one sub-committee and they make a significant and telling contribution to the many facets of Ulster GAA activity. I make special mention of those Council members who are leaving the Council at Convention and wish them well in the future GAA activities. I welcome to the fold the new Council

representatives from their respective counties and look forward to working with them during their tenure on the Council.

The Ulster Council has some 28 sub-committees and several workgroups – a testimony to the wide, varied and diverse remit we hold. I pay tribute to the many people who voluntarily give their valuable time to serve on these committees – without you Ulster GAA could not fulfill its broad range of functions. While all committees serve a particular remit, some by their very nature need to meet more regularly than others. They all, however, play a vital role in our affairs and I commend all our volunteers that sit on them and our loyal and dedicated staff members that service them.

I thank our senior staff members Eugene Young, Stephen McGeehan, Diarmaid Marsden, Brian Mallon and Bernie Fox and their respective departmental teams. A quick glance through the Convention Booklet before you, gives an excellent overview of the amount of work being undertaken across the Ulster GAA team and I thank everyone for their efforts.

I thank our hardworking duo of Stephen Donnelly and Carly McClean who have the mammoth task of scheduling and overseeing our fixtures programme, while Sean O'Hare, who is covering for our HR Co-Ordinator Kathy Kelly, has provided strong support, help and guidance to both the Provincial Council and our counties in this vital, and at times challenging, area.

The PR & Marketing Team of Paul McGurk, Michael Devlin and Michael Canavan continue to ensure that our messaging is clear and of high quality.

Our digital content has, in particular, received many accolades and this is an area that we will continue to champion as we strive to promote the Ulster GAA brand to an ever growing audience.

I've stated many times before – and I repeat again – where, really, does one begin to properly reference the work of my esteemed colleague and Secretary, Geraldine McKavanagh. She is the eyes and ears of Ulster GAA and her meticulous ways and in-depth knowledge of Ulster GAA affairs is immeasurable. No words of mine can adequately convey my appreciation for her efforts and I thank her for her continued loyalty, support and guidance.

OBITUARIES

We were shocked and saddened to learn of the death of Hugh McParland on 16th December. Hugh a loyal steward at the Athletic Grounds in Armagh and indeed was on duty at the Ulster Club football final just six days before his passing. A native of Ballymoyer in Armagh, Hugh lived in Dundalk for many years, where he was a valued member of the Dowdallshill Club and he managed them to win a Junior League and Championship double in 2023.

Hugh was Centre Half Back on the All-Ireland Junior winning team of 1964, a year when he also captained Ballygalget to the County Senior Hurling Title. He was a man whose inter county career spanned the period from 1955 where he started as a goalkeeper right through to 1969 when he played as corner forward, the highlight of course being the All-Ireland Junior win in 1964. From 1956 to 1970 for 12 Seasons, Hugh was an ever present on the Ulster Railway Hurling Cup Team, where he pitted his



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wits against the greats of the game from the other provinces including the legendary Christy Ring.

In 1967 Hugh became the first Ballygalget man to compete in the All-Ireland Poc Fada, finishing fourth overall and together with Hugo O'Prey their combined scores earned Down second place in the Team competition, no challenge was too great for Hugh. He was a committed Ballygalget clubman too, being involved in the purchase of and development of Mitchel Park and in 1970 saw that dream come to fruition when Ballygalget played Portaferry on the new pitch with Hugh lining out at full forward. When Hugh retired as a player he took on the role of Team Manager and even returned to have a spell as player manager in 1971. Hugh was also a county selector on more than one occasion over the years.

The sudden and tragic deaths of two young GAA members on consecutive days just before Christmas caused great pain and heartache in their respective communities and across the wider GAA family. On 23rd December young Kickham's Creggan player Michael Murray passed away and the following day 16-year-old Ballinagh player Tyler Haynes, who was a student at Breifne College and a member of the Cavan minor panel, also departed this world much too soon.

In the final hours before the year 2023 drew to a close, we were saddened to learn of the death of David (Davy) Cunningham, a former player, referee, and club officer with Newry Shamrocks. Davy was a native of Dundalk but soon became an adopted son of Newry Shamrocks and Down, where he undertook many roles within the Club, including that of

Club Chairperson. He was best known to many GAA and players as Chief Steward on match days at Páirc Esler.

On the night of 6th January we said goodbye to Belle O'Loughlin, a stalwart of Camogie and the wider GAA family all her life. Born in Newry, Belle played with the local St. Bridget's Camogie Club and soon found favour with the county selectors and she won Ulster and All-Ireland Junior Camogie medals in 1968. After her marriage she moved to nearby Warrenpoint and immersed herself in the local St. Peter's Club. Belle excelled as a referee, a coach and an administrator and had the honour of refereeing two All-Ireland Senior Camogie Finals, in 1982 and 1988. Belle also served as both Chairperson and Secretary of the Ulster Camogie Council and in 1994 she was elected to the esteemed office of President of the Camogie Association, where she served until 1997. Belle was also a keen tennis player and, indeed, continued playing until shortly before her death. At the time of her passing she was Joint-President of the Down Camogie Committee.

On the evening of 26 January Brendan 'Bing' Kennedy played a game of handball – something he had been doing since he was a teenager. Unfortunately, that was to be his last game as he collapsed shortly after coming off court and sadly passed away. Brendan, who was a loyal member of the Pomeroy Plunkett's club, was devoted to the promotion of handball and was, himself, a former Ulster champion. He also served as Chair of the Tyrone handball Committee from 2006 to 2010.

On 1st February Tyrone and Ulster lost one of the most influential and dedicated officials that have ever served the association in the province.

Brendan Harkin held many roles at club, county, provincial and national levels and he served as Club Secretary of his beloved St. Mary's, Killyclogher for an incredible 54 years (1965-2008 inclusive), assuming the role at just 16 years of age. He continued to serve as Assistant Secretary until his passing. He served two terms as Tyrone County Chairman, held the roles of County Secretary, PRO and Hurling Officer and, indeed, served as manager of the Tyrone Senior Hurling team. He also represented Tyrone on both the Ulster Council and Ard Comhairle. Brendan was known all over the country and he will truly be remembered as one of the great GAA stalwarts.

The death of Steven Ingram, affectionately known as 'Nudie' on 8th February was met with great sadness across Fermanagh and particularly in his native Donagh. Steven, who fought a great battle after being diagnosed with leukemia, was a player, coach and administrator with the St. Patrick's Club, with whom he won a minor championship medal in 1996. He also won an All-Ireland Vocational Schools medal with Fermanagh, on a team which included the late Paul McGirr, and he also served as both Treasurer and Youth officer for his club. He also spent a period in the USA, where he played for the Shannon Blues Club in Boston.

On 3rd March, as the Down footballers played host to Sligo in the Allianz Football league, news began to filter through that Dan McCartan, a legend of Down GAA, had been called to his eternal reward. 'Big Dan's' senior inter-county career spanned 18 Seasons, during which time he played in a remarkable 16 Ulster Championship finals. One of four Down men to have won three Celtic Crosses, he also won



three National League Medals, eight Ulster Senior Football Medals and four Railway Cup Medals. A renowned handballer, Dan won titles at both national and provincial levels. While a student at St. Colman's College in Newry, he won two MacRory Cup medals and won two Down Senior Football Championship medals with Glenn, in 1959 and 1963, and also played on the Tullylish team that lost to Bryansford in the 1971 final. He finished his club career with Carryduff, where he lined out with his son Mark, himself an All-Ireland Senior Football medal winner with Down, in 1991. Dan also served as Down GAA Youth Officer and was part of the Down management teams' that won the Ulster Senior Football Championship in 1978, the All-Ireland U-21 title in 1979 and the All-Ireland Minor title in 1987. Dan sure did give a lifetime of service to the Mourne County!

On the evening of Tuesday 5th March the A5 claimed another life, when Caolan Devlin died after his car was involved in a collision with a lorry. Caolan was a hurler with the Naomh

Colmille Club in Tyrone and was a former player with the Coalisland Na Fianna Club. His brother Niall is a current Tyrone footballer and, indeed, captained the Tyrone U-20 team to the all-Ireland U-20 Football title in 2022. Caolan was the 49th person to die on this notorious road since a long-promised upgrade was announced in 2007.

On 12th March we said goodbye to former Britain GAA Chairperson, Eddie Hosty. The Mayo native spent much of his life in Leeds, where he was a member of the Hugh O'Neill's GAA Club and he was a great servant of the GAA, both in Yorkshire and throughout Britain. In his later life he resided in Tipperary, where he was a member of the Holycross-Ballycahill Club.

The sudden and tragic death of former St. Davog's LGFA player Emma Lynch on St. Patrick's Day brought great sorrow to the Aghyaran Club and wider West Tyrone area. The popular player had represented her club at all levels from U-12 upwards and she was also an avid Tyrone follower.

There was a deep sense of shock and sadness when popular St. Patrick's, Donagh clubman Tony Cannon dies suddenly on 23rd March. The St. Patrick's Club was Tony's pride and joy and he performed many roles within his beloved club and, in particular, he took immense pride in his capacity as groundsman for the the club. His death has left an irreplaceable void within the club and wider Donagh community.

On the afternoon of the 24th March news began to filter through of the death of young Clonduff footballer Lorcán Branagan. Lorcán, who represented his club at senior level, died tragically in Sydney, had been in Australia for several months where he was playing with the Young Ireland's GAA Club, and was due to return home the following month. A talented player, he was much loved and his death brought further heartbreak to his family as his older brother, Pearce, had died suddenly in June 2018.

On that same morning we had woken up to the awful news that four young people had died tragically in a road accident just outside Armagh. Martina Crilly from Ballymacnab, Emma Mallon from Middletown, Paul Mitchell from Markethill and Keith Morrison from Tynan all lost their lives in a single vehicle collision – Martina was the niece of Armagh GAA County Secretary Neilus Boyle.

Later on 24th March came more heartbreaking news with the tragic passing of young St. Ergnat's, Moneyglass footballer Jack McCoy. Jack, a relative of the famous jockey Tony McCoy, was a popular and talented footballer with the Antrim



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Club, with whom he won an Antrim Intermediate Championship medal in 2020 and Division Two title in 2022.

Just three weeks following the tragic death of Lorcan Brangan, there was further heartbreak for the Irish community in Sydney when Ryan Stranney, a former hurler and footballer with the Lámh Dhearg Club in Belfast and a former Antrim minor player, who was working as a civil engineer in Australia, died following a road traffic collision when a car being driven by an elderly man travelling the wrong direction on a major road, struck the vehicle in which Ryan was travelling. Just as was the case with Lorcan, the Kevin Bell Repatriation Trust was instrumental in bringing Ryan's body home for burial.

On 4th April former Cavan great Steve Duggan died suddenly in Miami. The Ballyhaise man represented Cavan at Minor, U-21, Junior and Senior levels, representing the Breffni men at senior level for 14 years. He won Ulster Senior Football Championship medals in 1967 and 1969 and a Railway Cup medal for Ulster in 1970. At club level he won an Intermediate Championship medal in 1968 and played in the losing Cavan Senior Championship finals of 1976 and 1978. A forward of renown, Steve

adorned the jerseys of his club and county with honour and distinction and when his playing days in Ireland were over, he emigrated to the USA. He was proprietor of the famed Paddy Reilly's Music Bar in Manhattan.

On 6th April we said farewell to Gerry McElroy, a proud Fermanagh and Lisnaskea Emmett's Gael. Gerry excelled on the field of play, on the sideline and in the committee room and has left an indelible mark on the Fermanagh GAA landscape. Gerry, who was playing senior football at the age of 15, had a glittering underage career, which was capped by winning a MacRory Cup medal with St. Michael's, Enniskillen and Sigerson Cup medals with Queen's University, Belfast. He won four Fermanagh Senior Football Championship medals with his beloved Lisnaskea Emmett's, where he held several administrative posts, including that of Club Chairperson. It is as a manager, however, that Gerry will be, perhaps, best remembered. Along with Pat King he steered Fermanagh to both an All-Ireland 'B' Football title and a Dr. McKenna Cup in 1996 and he will be forever revered in Lisnaskea where, along with Peter Clarke, he led the Emmett's to an All-Ireland Intermediate Football Club title in 2011.

We were saddened to learn of the death of Dr. Robert Maguire, on 24th April. Robert worked tirelessly for the development of Handball in the province and was widely respected throughout the sport. He was the Handball representative on the Ulster Council for over 14 years and also served as Secretary of Antrim Handball. Never one to seek praise, Robert's mission was always to help others.

On 29th April Kamile Vaicikonyte, a 17-year-old student at St. Ciaran's College, Ballygawley and her fellow students at the college took part in a demonstration calling for work on the much-needed upgrade of the A5 to begin without delay. Just over 24 hours later, Kamile and her 19-year-old boyfriend, Jamie Moore, were dead, the latest lives claimed by this deadly stretch of road.

Early on the morning of 8th May our trusted and much valued staff member Geraldine McKavanagh lost her beloved mother Cecelia, who passed away after a period of illness. She was a constant presence in Geraldine's life and a great void was created for her and her family with her mother's parting.

Also on 8th May, Down and Kilwarlin said a final farewell to one of Down's greatest ever defenders, George Lavery. George was a corner back on the famed Down All-Ireland winning teams of 1960 and 1961 and in 1963 he had the honour of captaining Down to an Ulster title and in so doing he became the first person to 'lift' the new Anglo-Celt Cup. He retired the following year, having represented his county for over a decade, as the proud holder of two All-Ireland medals,



two National League medals and four Ulster Senior Football Championship medals. He also won a Railway Cup medal with Ulster. In 1968 George was a selector as Down collected their third All-Ireland title.

On 28th May Gillian Devaney, wife of Down County Chairperson John, said goodbye to her dear mother Rose Watson, who passed away after a short illness and on 4th June, our esteemed work colleague Declan Sherlock lost his brother Patrick, who passed away after a period of illness.

The tragic death of four-year-old Fianna Grace Harkin on 8th June caused much sorrow and grief in her home area of Ballinascreen and the wider GAA community in the county. Fianna's sister Shannon was a member of the Derry LGFA minor and senior panels and her mother Karen was Secretary of Ballinascreen LGFA. A little angel taken from us long before her time.

In the early hours of 9th June James (Jimmy) McKenna died in a road traffic accident near Moville in Co. Donegal. Jimmy was the son of Donegal Hearings Secretary and LGFA Secretary, Michelle.

On 10th June the death occurred of Catherine Scully, wife of former Monaghan Secretary John Scully. On the same day our esteemed former President Michael Hasson said goodbye to his beloved sister Bernadette (Bernie) McAliskey. Bernie was an active member of the Derrylaughan Kevin Barry's GAC.

It was with great sadness that we learned, on the evening of 19th June, of the sudden passing of Fermanagh native Paul Coyle, who won five Senior

Football Championship medals with St. Mary's, Devenish and represented his native county across numerous grades of inter-county football from 1984 to 1995. He later became a selector with the Fermanagh Senior Football team under Malachy O'Rourke and was part of the management team which came so close to bringing the Anglo-Celt Cup for the first time to the Erne County in 2008. He later played club football for Loughmacrory and Swatragh and won both Ryan Cup and Sigerson Cup medals with UUJ in 1987.

On the morning of 24th June Mary Martin, mother of our esteemed colleague and Donegal County Secretary, Declan, was called to her eternal reward. A remarkable lady, she had at the time of her death no fewer than 42 grandchildren and 64 great-grandchildren.

We awoke on the 25th June to the news that Sean McCann had died suddenly the previous night. Most of us knew Sean through his role as the Public Address announcer at The Athletic Grounds in Armagh for many years. Sean was a member of the Wolfe Tones Club in Derrymacash and was a member of the first ever St. Colman's, Newry Hogan Cup winning

team of 1967. He also captained the UCD Freshers team but it was through his efforts as a GAA volunteer that Sean was best known to us. He held numerous portfolios at both club and county level and, as well as his love of the GAA, he had a keen interest in the Irish language. Like the great Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh, whom he predeceased by a number of hours, Sean was equally comfortable conversing in Irish or English. His attention to detail was legendary. He also gave a lifetime of service to Alcoholics Anonymous, helping to transform the lives of many people. He's missed by all in the GAA family, especially in his native Armagh. As Fr. Peter Clarke said at his funeral, "The Athletic Grounds will never sound the same again." How true! Later on 25th June we learned of the passing of two giants of RTÉ journalism, with the deaths that day of both Mícheál Ó Muircheartaigh and Tommie Gorman. Mícheál was a schoolteacher by profession but it was through his GAA commentaries that he became a household name across the country, and he joined RTÉ full-time in the 1980's. He was undisputedly 'the voice of the GAA' and he could bring a game to life through his poetic commentaries in his soft Kerry accent. Regularly switching between Irish and English, Mícheál often had a story to tell and many of his match-day quotes have become legendary. His first commentary was the 1949 Railway Cup final, which was all in Irish, and his final broadcast was the 2010 All-Ireland Senior Football final. He has left a legacy for the people of Ireland and the GAA is much richer for his seminal contributions over many years.

I got to know Tommie Gorman after his appointment as RTÉ's Northern Editor in 2001 and had many occasions to meet with him over subsequent years. Tommie battled illness most of





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his life, after a cancer diagnosis in the mid-nineties, but he fought his illness with bravery and continued in his broadcasting career until his retirement in 2021. The Sligo native made an impression on anyone who met him and he was a highly respected, admired and, above all, trusted journalist. I remember him phoning me the morning before the 2018 Ulster Final seeking media accreditation for the following day as, to quote him, "I know Arlene Foster is attending the game." We hadn't announced this – or indeed didn't - but Tommie was spot on the money. And he knew that I knew that his sources were not at a GAA level but at a political one! He got his accreditation and he got to interview Arlene pitch side prior to the final.

On the night of 28th June, Mullaghbawn man Peter Kelly died suddenly at home. He was the uncle of Armagh manager Kieran McGeeney and his death occurred just hours before Armagh took on Roscommon in the All-Ireland Senior Football quarter-final in Croke Park.

There was shock and sadness with the tragic death of young Silverbridge footballer Lochlann Murray on 5th July. Lochlann had an infectious smile and was universally liked by all who knew him. He won Minor Football Championship and U-16 Football League medals with his beloved Harps.

On the morning of the 7th July we lost a giant of the GAA world with the passing of John O'Mahony after a period of illness. John managed three different counties to win eight Connacht Senior Football titles, with Leitrim's success in 1994 (their first since 1927 and only the second in their history) being a particular standout moment. He delivered All-Ireland titles for Galway in 1998 and 2001 and while 'Sam' eluded his beloved Mayo during his two spells in charge, he won the JJ Nestor Cup

on three occasions during his time at the helm. A teacher by profession, he served as a TD from 2007-2016 and later became a member of the Seanad. He was also a Director of McKeever Sports Company, which is based in Armagh.

Tyrone and Ulster said goodbye to Declan O'Neill when he passed away on 11th July. Declan epitomised the great GAA 'gael' as he served his club, county and province in many roles. As a player with the Omagh St. Enda's he won a Senior Football championship medal in 1963 and later represented his county, with whom he won an All-Ireland Junior Football Championship medal in 1968. He served many roles with his beloved Omagh St. Enda's Club, including those of President, Chairperson (for a 19-year period over two spells) and Secretary. From 1993 to 1995 inclusive he was Chairperson of the Tyrone County Committee, and he was so proud of the team of 1995 which reached the All-Ireland final, only to fall short by a single point in somewhat controversial circumstances. He also served on the Ulster Council and was a key volunteer for many years. He received a well-deserved President's Award from GAA President Nickey Brennan in 2009.

On 11th July, Tony Ryan, member of the Ulster GAA Health & Wellbeing Committee and Chairperson of the Cavan GAA Health & Wellbeing Committee, said farewell to his mother Alice.

Along with many thousands of Armagh fans, Pdraig O'Neill was in Croke Park on 13th July to witness Armagh overcome Kerry to reach their first All-Ireland Final since 2003. That evening Pdraig took unwell and seven days later departed this world. Pdraig is from a family immersed in the GAA and it was fitting that he was remembered in Croke

Park just minutes before the throw-in of the final against Galway, eight days after his passing. Three of his nephews, Oisín, Rian and Callum were part of the winning Armagh panel. Pdraig himself represented both Armagh and Louth at inter-county level and played club football with both Killeavy and Cooley Kickhams. He also won Sigerson Cup medals with UUU in 1986, 1987 and 1991 and also won two Ryan Cup medals. With Paul Coyle's equally untimely passing just a month earlier, UUU had lost two members of that 1987 Sigerson and Ryan Cup winning team of 1987 in such a short period.

Late on 30th July Maura McCloy departed this earth after a courageous battle with illness. Maura was immersed in the GAA from an early age and she devoted a lifetime of service to the Camogie Association. It was fitting that she was remembered just prior to the throw-in of the All-Ireland Senior Camogie Final on 11th August. A player with both her beloved Bellaghy and Derry, Maura went on to be one of the leading administrators in the game. She served as Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Secretary of the Derry Camogie Board and was a member of the Ulster Camogie Executive Committee at the time of her passing. Despite being in failing health, Maura attended the Ulster Senior Camogie final between Antrim and Derry just over two months before her death. It turned out to be the last game she attended.

On 3rd August we said goodbye to one of the 'greats' of Ulster football. Such was his stature in the game, even from a young age it was clear that Jody O'Neill had a special talent. Aged just 19, in 1956, he captained Tyrone to their maiden Ulster Senior Football Championship title and added



a second Ulster Championship medal to his collection the following year. He represented the Red Hand County for 18 years and also represented his province with distinction, winning five Railway Cup medals in the 1960's. He was also a successful manager, masterminding Tyrone to an All-Ireland Junior Football title in 1968 and he also managed his native county to two Ulster U-21 titles and an Ulster Senior Football Championship title in 1973. As a club player with Coalisland Na Fianna he won a Tyrone Senior Football championship medal in 1955 and as a pharmacist and publican he gave a lifetime of service to the people of his beloved Coalisland.

On 13th August we lost two great stalwarts of the GAA, both of whom gave a lifetime of service as unwavering volunteers, Paddy Morgan and Seamus O'Hare.

Paddy was a loyal servant of the Kilcoo Club, having served as Club Secretary for over 30 years and at the time of his passing he was Club President, a role he held for two decades. He managed many Kilcoo underage teams and the first introduction to Gaelic Games of many of the Kilcoo players who became household names across Ireland, was under Paddy's tutelage. His proudest day was undoubtedly in January 2022

when Kilcoo became All-Ireland Senior Club champions. The smile on Paddy's face that day as large as the Mourne Mountains. A gentleman and a true gael, Paddy was the embodiment of the GAA volunteer.

Seamus O'Hare was a familiar face at Antrim, Ulster and Croke Park GAA fixtures as he served as a loyal steward for over 50 years. A familiar face at the 'back gate' of Casement Park, Seamus was a highly respected steward who treated everyone with dignity. He was first a member of the St. Colmcille's GAA Club in Belfast's East Belfast, before joining the famed St. John's Club across the city. He served as both Chairperson and Secretary of 'The Johnnies' and was also a very capable and highly respected referee. He was also part of the backroom team of numerous Antrim GAA teams and his lifelong devotion and service to the GAA was fittingly honoured in 2018 when he was presented with a 'President's Award' by then GAA President Aogán Ó Fearghail.

On 15th August, the North Antrim community was numbed by the tragic death of six-year-old Joe Hegarty in a quad bike accident on the family farm. Joe was a promising hurler with the Carey Faughs and Naomh Padraig

underage team and his passing has left a massive void in the lives of his family and friends. When his father, Michael, managed their Carey Faughs senior hurling team, 'Wee Joe' was an ever present by his side and he was affectionately known as the team's "26th man." A banner depicting his photo, with cáman in hand, was unveiled by the club after their county and provincial successes later in the year.

On 22nd August the Mourne community lost another of its great heroes of that great groundbreaking team of 1960/61, with the passing of Eamon McKay. Eamon, or 'Eddie' as he was often known as, was goalkeeper on that team and on the field of play won two Celtic Crosses to go with his three Ulster Championship medals and two National Football League medals and he also played for Ulster in the Railway Cup. He retired injured during the first half of the 1962 Ulster Final and, unfortunately, that proved to be his last appearance in the famous 'red 'n' black.' He later coached and managed numerous teams, including his native Dundrum, Longstone and Downpatrick.

On the morning of 23rd August we heard the news we hoped we would never receive, with the passing of young Crossmaglen player Caolan Finnegan. For exactly twelve months Caolan fought a brave, dignified and courageous battle against an aggressive form of cancer but ultimately that battle became too much. Caolan lived a stone's throw from Oliver Plunkett Park, which became his back garden growing up. Small in stature until his teenage years, he loved nothing better than having a kickabout with the bigger lads on that hallowed turf and his bravery and talent didn't go unnoticed at that early age. As someone remarked to me at his wake, "the bigger lads would



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cut lumps out of him but he loved every minute of it” and despite being small in stature he had a massive heart. That’s what earned him the nickname ‘Stringer’ - he bore so many similarities with diminutive Irish rugby scrum-half Peter Stringer. As Caolan grew, so did his talent and with a goal scoring talent second-to-none he soon delivered on the early promise he had shown. Aged just 18 he scored a goal for Crossmaglen Rangers in the 2022 Armagh County Final against Granemore and the same year he won a Danske Bank Ulster Schools Football All-Star Award, for his performances with St. Colman’s College. Caolan really was something special and while he is no longer with us his memory will live on. As Kieran McGeeney said, but for his illness he would have likely been part of Armagh’s All-Ireland winning squad. He did get to hold the Sam Maguire Cup before his death, a cherished memory for his heartbroken family. They’ll miss him, his team colleagues and friends will miss him and we’ll all miss the many more great goals he would have scored on GAA fields across the country. For that we’re all the poorer!

Just two days after Caolan’s passing we mourned the death of another man who

had endeared himself to the Armagh supporters of a different generation. At the age of just 18, Brian Seeley was Armagh’s youngest player on the team that heartbreakingly lost to Kerry in the All-Ireland Final of 1953. Two years earlier he had played on the Armagh Minor team that lost out to Roscommon in the delayed All-Ireland Final. Brian, affectionately known as ‘Caesar’ - and he displayed all the great leadership skills of the said Roman Emperor - was an iconic figure in his native county and nowhere more so than in his beloved Clan na Gael, with which he won four Armagh Senior Championship medals. However, it was as manager of the great Clan na Gael team that won three consecutive Ulster Club Football titles that elevated him to one of the great club managers of our time and had university teams not been permitted to compete in provincial and All-Ireland Club Championships, as is now the case, an All-Ireland title would, almost certainly, have been added to his great list of achievement. Fittingly, shortly before his death Jimmy Smyth, Stefan Campbell and Shane McPartlan visited Brian with ‘Sam’ - there could not have been a better ‘parting gift’ for Brian.

On 27th August we learned of the

death of former ‘Mourne Observer’ GAA correspondent Paddy McEvoy. A trusted journalist, Paddy gave unparalleled coverage to Gaelic Games in the Mourne County and was a highly respected reporter. A founder member of the Carryduff Club, Paddy became involved with the Russell Gaelic Union Club in Downpatrick when he later moved to the area and later served as Club secretary. He also wrote the Club history ‘The Russell Chronicles’, which was published in the GAA’s Centenary year, and he was a regular contributor to Down GAA Yearbooks and other GAA publications within the county. On 8th September Evan Craig, a talented footballer with the St. Patrick’s, Muff Club in Donegal finally succumbed to illness after a brave battle. His passing was met with heartbreak not only in his native Muff but all across the Inishowen Peninsula.

On 9th September we learned of the passing of Gerry Gallagher, a stalwart of the Erne Gaels Club in Fermanagh. Gerry represented Fermanagh with distinction for many years and was captain of the U-21 side which defeated Tyrone to retain their Ulster title in 1971. He also later managed the Fermanagh Minor Football team.



There was shock and dismay in Down with the sudden death of Tommy Daly on 10th September. The native of Ballygiblin in Cork, had immersed himself in ‘all things hurling’ in the Mourne County, where he was a member of the Cumann Pheadair Naofa Club in Warrenpoint. Tommy served two years as Down GAA Hurling Officer where he took the lead on the development of the Player Pathway Programme and he was instrumental in the formation of the Clann Mhurn Juvenile Hurling Club, which draws players from the five clubs of Mourne; An Riocht, Attical, Ballymartin,



Glasdrumman and Longstone.

The death of club stalwart Vincent Smith in a quad bike accident on 14th September caused widespread grief in Lisnaskea and in the wider Fermanagh area. 'Vinny' represented the Emmett's at all levels and was a dedicated club coach and volunteer.

On 23rd September we learned of the passing of Cathleen Treacy, wife of long serving Tyrone GAA official Jimmy.

There was great sadness when, on the morning of 27th September, news emerged of the death of young O'Donovan Rossa, Magherafelt footballer Tony Fitzpatrick, after succumbing to an aggressive brain tumour. Young Tony battled his illness with great courage and honour and was an inspiration to those who loved him. He also played football with Moyola Park AFC.

Later that day we learned of the death of former Down referee Dermot Collins. The Ballymartin whistler was well known in refereeing circles and took charge of the 1980 Down Senior Football Championship Final. A well-known barber in Kilkeel, Dermot served his community in this capacity for over 52 years.

On 11th October we said farewell to Hugh Cahill, father of Down County Treasurer, Diarmuid. Although a Monaghan man by birth, Hugh spent the vast majority of his life in Co. Down, living in both Newry and Cranfield. He won a Down Minor Football Championship medal with Newry Shamrocks but he is best remembered for his acumen off the field of play. Armed with a strong business acumen – he ran a successful and popular shoe retail business – Hugh served

as Development Officer in Down and worked earnestly with clubs to ensure their legal documentation was up to date and their deeds of trust were in order. He had a passion for good governance and was a strong advocate of the Comhairle Programme. In the days before online ticket sales, he was a regular attendee at Ulster GAA Monday gatherings when the cash from the weekend games was tallied and collated. Many a game was re-lived at those gatherings and Hugh, who loved to chat, was always front and centre. On the morning of 30th October the GAA lost an icon of the game with the passing of P.J. Carroll. A journalist by profession, P.J. won three Senior Football Championship medals with his beloved Cavan Gaels and he also managed clubs to County Championship successes in counties Meath, Monaghan and Leitrim. P.J. played underage football for Cavan but it is as a manager for which he is best remembered, managing three different inter-county teams at senior level. He took charge of his native Cavan for the first time in 1979 and 1980, and then managed the county U-21 and Minor teams at different stages, before moving to take charge of the Leitrim Senior and U-21 sides and he had the remarkable distinction of gaining three consecutive promotions with the O'Rourke County men, bringing them from Division 4 to Division 1. He also won two Connacht U-21 titles in that period. In 1993 he returned to manage the Cavan Senior team for a second time before moving to manage Sligo in 1995, a post he held for two years. P.J. wrote extensively on the game and he was widely respected throughout the GAA family.

On the night of 1st November we said goodbye to Aidan Doherty, husband of former Donegal County Secretary and Administrator Noreen and the

following day Paddy Ryan, father of Canadian GAA Secretary Maria, was also called to his eternal reward.

On 4th November, just over a week after his beloved club had recaptured the John McLaughlin Cup for the first time in 35 years, Newbridge lost their Club President Artie Cassidy.

On 2nd November Ryan Lyons captained Erne Gaels to their first fermanagh Senior Football Championship win since 1981 and four days later his brother Mark died suddenly in England. This is a prime example of how one's life can change in an instant. Mark was no mean footballer himself, having represented his club with distinction at all levels and he also represented his native Fermanagh at both Minor and U-21. He was also a hurler for both club and county.

On the night of 9th November news began to emerge of the death of Aisling McGivern, after a short illness. A member of the St. Peter's Club in Warrenpoint and a teacher at St. Louis Grammar School in Kilkeel, Aisling was steeped in the GAA. That was no surprise as she was following a great family tradition. Her grandfather Emmett was part of the 1946 Down All-Ireland Junior Football winning team and her father, also called Emmett, won All-Ireland Minor and U-21 Football medals with Down in 1977 and 1979 respectively and an Ulster Senior Football Championship medal in 1978. Aisling, however, carved out her own story in life. A kind and diligent worker, she was a giver. She gave so much time to her beloved Warrenpoint Club, where she held numerous roles, and she was also a member of the Down GAA Public Relations & Marketing Committee for



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many years. She was a member of MacNamee Award winning teams for both club and county. Just seven days before her death she provided score updates on the 'X' platform from Páirc Esler on the Bredagh v Burt Ulster Club Intermediate Hurling Championship game. She was a giver right until the end.

On the same day there was further sadness for the Warrenpoint and Swatragh Clubs' with the death of Mary McCormack. Her sister Anne is a stalwart of The St. Peter's Club, while her brother Paul was a medic for many Derry teams over the years. Mary was the sister-in-law of Fergal McCormack, who for many years was a member of the Casement Park Project Board.

On 15th November, just two days before he was due to line out in the Ulster Intermediate Club Hurling semi-final, James Black of the Carey Faughs Club said farewell to his father, also called James. The game against Castleblayney was postponed for one week.

On 21st November Paddy Hughes departed this world. Affectionately known as 'Doocher', Paddy was a

colossus of Ballycran, Down and Ulster Hurling. A formidable full-back, the unassuming Ballycran hurler won ten Down Senior Championship medals and two Ulster Club medals, including his club's breakthrough provincial success in 1974. He represented Down at senior level for 16 years was part of Ulster Railway Cup teams from 1974 to 1983 inclusive.

On 23rd November our loyal and longtime Ulster GAA steward Noel Hughes said farewell to his beloved wife Mona who died after a period of illness and on 1st December another young life was tragically cut short by the roads in Donegal as teenager Tiernan Doherty, a promising player with the Carndonagh GAA Club, departed this world.

On the evening of 9th December Damian Gormley posted the news that we were all expecting but never wanted to hear, that his brother Jody had passed away. Just a matter of weeks earlier Jody announced that he had been diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer and had only a short time to live. He approached his final days in a stoic but brave and courageous way. He

was generous with his time and his interview with 'The GAA Social' was truly inspirational. It will, undoubtedly, be a source of comfort not only for his family but for the many people who are also dealing with intense trauma. It was such a powerful message. He said he had no fear of death, and his sadness was not for himself but for those who were left behind. Incredible words, indeed.

Jody's heart was in his native Trillick and in Tyrone. On the field of play he won three Ulster Senior Football Championship medals and was unlucky to lose out on an All-Ireland medal in 1995. He also, briefly, played inter-county football with London. In his first year taking the senior team at the Abbey CBS in Newry, he led them to MacRory Cup and Hogan Cup honours and later that year Antrim came knocking on his door and he had his first foray into management of a senior team at either club or county level. In 2008 he led 'The Saffrons' to a Tommy Murphy Cup success, having narrowly lost out the previous year. At club level his greatest achievement was leading his beloved Trillick to a championship and league double in 2023. He came close to repeating the championship win in 2024, losing out by a point to an Errigal Ciaran team that would go on and win the provincial title. It was in the changing room after that game that Jody told his players of his cancer diagnosis. Jody made an indelible mark on many people, not only his family and friends, but those he taught and coached. At just 53 years of age, he was taken from us all too soon. His candle will, however, continue to burn brightly through his legacy! After hearing Paddy Heaney's incredible eulogy at Jody's funeral, perhaps we should all read Viktor Frankl's book, 'Man's Search For Meaning.'

May they, all and all the deceased gael





who have departed in the past year, rest in peace.

THANKS

I place on record my deepest gratitude to the many volunteers in our clubs and counties who continue to give of their valuable time in the furtherance of this great organisation. Our volunteer ethos makes us what we are. A recently published report undertaken by a team of experts from Sheffield Halem University concluded that the Social Value of Gaelic Games was worth at least €2.87 billion to the Irish economy annually. Much of that is down to the effort of volunteers.

I pay a special tribute to our team of stewards and gatepersons who answer the call when asked to 'turn out' for Ulster GAA. I thank in particular Chief Steward Michael McCarney, Deputy Chief Steward Terence McShea and Safety Officer John Connolly for their dedication and commitment.

I thank the officers of all nine Ulster counties and extend particular thanks to our County Secretaries' and County Chairpersons', with whom I would be mostly in communication. Your ongoing loyalty and support are most welcome and is greatly appreciated. May I be forgiven for making particular mention of Paul McArdle, Jack Devaney, Kieran Callaghan, Michael Carroll and Declan Martin who stepped down at their recent County Conventions.

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

Ulster GAA works closely with a range of National Committees' and I thank the membership of these bodies for their support. Our sponsors are very much part of Ulster GAA's partnership working and I thank all our main sponsors, O'Neill's International Sportswear and Bank of Ireland and all our corporate partners for their generosity and commitment to Gaelic Games in the province. Of course, if it wasn't for the players and their coaches there would be no games, so as an Association we owe you a massive debt of gratitude.

I thank also our colleagues in Ulster Camogie and Ulster LGFA for their support and understanding and trust that we will continue to work together on matters of mutual interest. In the course of our work Ulster GAA deals with many statutory and voluntary bodies across all levels of society and I thank all of them for their guidance and support.

Finally, I thank my wife Deirdre, who has been ever present at my side and is a constant source of encouragement. Thanks also to my children Étain, Ardán and Malacháí for their tolerance, patience and understanding.

Le meas,



BRIAN MAC FHÍOBHUÍ
RÚNAÍ



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