

A large circular graphic composed of several overlapping circles, each containing a different action shot from a Gaelic football match. The shots include players in various jerseys (green and white, yellow and green) competing for the ball, a goalkeeper in a yellow jersey, and a crowd of spectators. The central area of the graphic is a solid gold color containing text and the GAA logo.

**AN
CHOMHDHÁIL
BHLIANTÚIL 2015**

2014 TUARASCÁIL AN ARD STIÚTHÓRA



ANNUAL CONGRESS





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AT A GLANCE



1,541,309

Supporters attended
2014 Inter-County
football and hurling
championship games



315

International Clubs
affiliated to the
Association



2,014

Affiliated GAA Clubs
playing our games



89,000

Children participated
in Kellogg's GAA
Cúl Camps



307,000

Followers of GAA on
Twitter and Facebook



3,000,000

Visits to GAA.ie
in 2014



2,400,000

Minutes watched on the
'Official GAA' YouTube
channel in 2014





AN CLÁR

AN CHOMHDHÁIL BHLIANTÚIL 2015

An Aoine, 27 Feabhra 2015

2.00pm	Registration for all Congress delegates
4.00pm	Workshops/Ard Chomhairle meeting
6.15pm	Tea
7.30pm	Opening of Congress (Adoption of Minutes & Standing Orders)
7.45pm	Ard-Stiúrthóir's Report
8.30pm	Youth Committee presentation
8.45pm	Adoption of Accounts Adoption of Insurance and injury scheme accounts
9.30pm	National Draw
10.00pm	Congress adjourns

An Satharn, 28 Feabhra 2015

9.00am	Resumption of Congress - Consideration of motions
10.00am	Election for position of Ionadaithe na Chomhdhála
10.30am	Consideration of motions continues
12.30pm	Óráid an Uachtaráin
1.00pm	Lón
2.15pm	Resumption of Congress - Consideration of remaining Motions
4.30pm	Installation of Uachtarán nua agus Óraid an Uachtaráin nua
5.00pm	Conclusion of Congress
5.30pm	Coiste Bainistí/Ard Chomhairle meeting
6.30pm	Mass
8.30pm	Congress Banquet

STANDING ORDERS

In order that the proceedings of Annual Congress be carried out without delay, the following Standing Orders will be observed:

1. The Proposer of a Resolution or of an Amendment thereto may speak for five minutes, but not more than five minutes.
2. A delegate speaking to a Resolution or of an Amendment must not exceed three minutes. A maximum of two delegates from any one County shall speak on any one motion.
3. The Proposer of a Resolution or an Amendment may speak a second time for three minutes before a vote is taken, but no other Delegate may speak a second time to the same Resolution or Amendment.
4. The Chairman may at any time he considers a matter has been sufficiently discussed call on the Proposer for a reply, and when that has been given a vote must be taken.
5. A delegate may, with the consent of the Chairman, move "that the question be now put", after which when the Proposer has spoken, a vote must be taken.
6. Where the Congress considers it appropriate, a vote may be by secret ballot.
7. A speaker to the Ard Stiúrthóir's Report/Workshop reports or to any other general discussion shall not exceed three minutes on any one topic.
8. Any motion seeking to amend a rule in the Official Guide must have a majority equal to two-thirds of those present, entitled to vote and voting.
9. Standing Orders shall not be suspended for the purpose of considering any matter on the Agenda except by the consent of a majority equal to two-thirds of those present, entitled to vote and voting.
10. The Chairman may change the order of items on the agenda with the support of a simple majority of those present, entitled to vote and voting.

Ainmiúcháin Ionadaithe na Chomhdhála Nominees for election of Representatives of Congress

Niall Arascain, Dún na nGall
Labhrás Mac Cárthaigh, Nua Eabhrach
Séamus Ó Aldrí, Cill Dara
Micheál Ó hÁgáin, Cill Mhantáin
Seán Ó hUaine, Longfort
Pádraig Ó Neachtain, Maigh Eo



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REPORT OF THE ARD STIÚRTHÓIR PÁRAIC Ó DUFAIGH

ALL-IRELAND SENIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS

I began my Annual Report to last year's Congress by remarking that GAA followers would look back 'with special appreciation on the 2013 hurling and football championships'. The individual parts that make up the whole of a championship year are, by definition, unique, therefore unrepeatable, yet the 2014 championships, in the latter stages in football but throughout in hurling, contrived to offer us another summer of memorable games and unexpected rises and falls of pretenders and champions. The year 2014 proved conclusively how difficult it is to dominate in Gaelic games at senior inter-county level for even two successive seasons, just as it revealed the fine margins that separate victory from defeat. Who would have claimed that Limerick would not have deserved a victory over Kilkenny in hurling, or Mayo over Kerry in football, despite the merits of the actual winners? Beyond these encounters, 2014 produced the extraordinary fact of a third successive drawn All-Ireland hurling final, and the resurgence of certain counties, sometimes unsurprising, sometimes occurring, seemingly, out of the blue.

HURLING

For consistency of excitement and drama, hurling in 2014 deserved the accolades it received. It asked too much of Clare to repeat their thrilling campaign to ultimate victory in 2013. The determination and effort were there, but they could not find enough for a victory, either in Munster or in the qualifiers. It was in the latter, indeed, that one of the great stories of the championship season, in either hurling or football, began. No one really saw Wexford coming, but their draw against Clare in the qualifiers in Ennis set them up for a memorable and titanic victory in the replay a week later, after extra-time, in Wexford Park. Wexford were now on a roll, bringing their wonderful support with them, and the bandwagon moved to Nowlan Park, where this great hurling county won back its pride with another exceptional victory, this time over Waterford, on an occasion full of atmosphere and colour. If a fourth championship game on four successive weekends in July ultimately proved too much for Wexford against an impressive Limerick team, 2014 offered convincing proof of a true renaissance in Wexford hurling.

Pages 8-9. 30 November 2014; The Nire supporters Tiernan Moore, age 5, left, and Diarmuid Ryan, age 4, ahead of the game. AIB Munster GAA Football Senior Club Championship Final, Austin Stacks v The Nire. Páirc Uí Chaoimh, Cork.

21 September 2014; Kerry joint captains Fionn Fitzgerald, left, and Kieran O'Leary lift the Sam Maguire cup. GAA Football All Ireland Senior Championship Final, Kerry v Donegal. Croke Park, Dublin.



Limerick qualified to meet Kilkenny in the All-Ireland semi-final in what was to be one of the great games of the year. In the rain of Croke Park, this was a riveting, epic game of hurling. Neither team seemed to countenance defeat, and one marvelled at the valiant efforts of Limerick to chip back at a slender Kilkenny lead and at the extraordinary resistance of a Kilkenny team that defended as if life itself, and not just the outcome of a hurling match, were at stake. Kilkenny proved that day how difficult they are to beat, and did so again in two thrilling hurling finals against a reborn Tipperary. A puck away from defeat they may have been in the first extraordinary game but Kilkenny under Brian Cody is an exemplary hurling team, and they are deserving champions of 2014. Beyond the victories, defeats and dramas of the hurling year, as well as the skill, fitness and commitment that we again witnessed, we ought to salute the sheer honesty of effort that was again on display in hurling, remarkable in such a tough, fast and physical game.

FOOTBALL

In football, it was again in Ulster that the provincial championships provided the most fiercely contested and closest encounters, beginning in the preliminary round between Tyrone and Down, which needed a replay. One, two and three points were the respective winning margins in three of the Ulster quarter-finals, while the final produced another close, relentless contest, with Donegal reclaiming the title taken from them by Monaghan a year earlier. The value placed on winning an Ulster senior football championship was clear from the intense celebrations

in the Donegal camp at the final whistle, and this from a team that had already won two Ulster titles and an All-Ireland title. In Leinster, no team managed to push Dublin all the way, while Kerry and Mayo emerged as convincing winners after their respective provincial finals. A noteworthy fact was that these four provincial champions all reached the All-Ireland semi-finals, although Armagh's surprisingly quick return to the top level nearly had them snatch a shock victory over Donegal. Neutrals, unfairly, probably would not have thanked Armagh had they won, as it would have prevented the semi-final pairing desired by the GAA football world, between a resurgent and focused Donegal and the apparently untouchable and classy attacking fluency of Dublin. In the build-up to this semi-final, in the intensity and drama of the match itself, and in Donegal's post-match celebrations at their outstanding performance and victory, the game had all the trappings of an All-Ireland final.

It says a lot for the excitement and exhilaration provided by the two Kerry-Mayo games that the other semi-final was not at all overshadowed. We could have done without the controversy of the fixing of the replay for Limerick, but in Limerick it was, and no one who attended the game could deny that the venue added to what was an incomparable GAA match experience. There was a terrific atmosphere in the city and at the game, and both teams gave a display of commitment and skill that did them great credit. Kerry's victory gave them a momentum that brought them on to victory in the final, in which they displayed all the composure and self-belief

that tradition can confer. It was a remarkable title victory, even for Kerry. A narrow-enough Munster semi-final victory over Clare in June hardly suggested an All-Ireland title in September. But that's Kerry.

Elsewhere, other noteworthy features of the championships were the All-Ireland title doubles achieved by Kilkenny's minor and senior hurlers and by Kerry's minor and senior footballers. Exceptional, too, was Clare's achievement in winning their third successive All-Ireland U-21 hurling title. Finally, Dublin are to be saluted for winning their third All-Ireland U-21 football title in five years.

BLACK CARD

In my report to Congress 2014 I looked ahead to the implementation of the black card rule and to how it might affect the way Gaelic football was played. I expressed the view that teams that played football in the correct spirit had nothing to fear from the introduction of the black card, which I saw as a first step in the effort to have Gaelic football realise its full potential. It was inevitable that there would be controversy generated by the application, or non-application, of the rule, a destiny duly fulfilled in the early weeks of the year. There was indeed some inconsistency in the application of the rule by referees, and work remains to be done in communicating the precise nature of black card offences to spectators. Inevitably, too, there was a negative reaction by some to the new rule, but, after a full year of club and inter-county championship football, it is indisputable that the changes advocated by the Football Review Committee (FRC) have brought the



“...average number of scores per game has risen by over 9% at senior inter-county level; equally positive is the drop in the number of fouls committed and cards shown.”

intended improvements to the playing of the game. Instances of players being dragged to the ground are now rare, while the body-collide, an ugly and negative foul that marred the game, has been virtually eradicated. It is no coincidence that the average number of scores per game has risen by over 9% at senior inter-county level; equally positive is the drop in the number of fouls committed and cards shown. This is a very positive outcome and a clear vindication of the FRC’s work.

FRC PART II

Part II of the FRC report was presented to Central Council in December 2013. Counties were given ample time to discuss the report before its recommendations were placed before Central Council for decision at a special meeting in June 2014. Counties had been encouraged to hold a meeting of their county committee in advance; it was clear from the contributions at the Central Council meeting that the report had received due consideration. In general, the response to the FRC proposals was positive, and, even where specific proposals were rejected, it was clear that delegates realised that the issues raised needed attention.

The rationale for most of the FRC proposals was the creation of a more favourable environment for the playing of club games, particularly during the summer months. In this regard, its most significant proposal was that the All-Ireland club championships should be completed in the calendar year, with the intention of pressurising counties to complete their championships during the summer months so as to ensure

entry for their clubs to the provincial competitions. Central Council accepted the proposal in principle for both football and hurling, and established a Work Group to examine how the FRC proposal could best be implemented, with instructions to revert to Central Council with its suggestions. The meeting agreed that if the Work Group proposals were deemed feasible, and if any necessary changes to rule were accepted at Congress 2015, the calendar-year competitions programme would take effect in 2016. The document prepared by the Work Group was presented to Central Council on 17 January 2015 and is currently under consideration.

The FRC suggestion that Central Competitions Control Committee (CCCC) should have overall responsibility for the co-ordination of all fixtures at national, provincial, county, club, post-primary and third levels was also approved, on the basis that CCCC would hold a series of meetings with their fixtures-making bodies to ensure the maximum possible co-ordination of fixtures plans. It would be unrealistic to expect CCCC to exercise control over the day-to-day fixtures-making decisions of any of these units, but the decision to grant CCCC this overall responsibility should encourage a more cohesive approach to the scheduling of fixtures. Provincial Councils, in particular, still have an important role to play in ensuring that fixtures are made in a way that best meets the needs of both county and club players. Our rules give Provincial Councils the power to carry out a games audit, to examine the fixtures programme in each of the counties under their jurisdiction and to monitor the progress of each

county’s championship on a monthly basis. It is crucial that they continue to discharge these responsibilities as we strive to provide an adequate programme of games at adult level.

Among the other FRC proposals that Central Council accepted was that *A National Strategy for Less Successful Counties* should be formulated to develop a three- to five-year plan to provide financial assistance and other resources and expertise to counties that would benefit from such an investment. Central Council turned down the FRC’s revised structure for the provincial championships, which would have made adjustments to ensure provincial competition on the basis of four groups of eight. The debate on the proposal, however, highlighted the concerns of many delegates about the inherent imbalance in the current structure, both in terms of the number of counties in each province and the gulf between competitive and non-competitive counties. However, there remains a strong attachment to the provincial system, so it is very difficult, within that structure, to develop workable alternatives to the current model.

There appears to be some support for the idea that less successful counties could participate in a separate competition after their elimination from the provincial championship, rather than entering the All-Ireland qualifiers. Another suggestion is that the winners of such a competition could re-join the qualifiers at the final round. It could be argued that this would create an inherent unfairness by creating a place in the closing stage of the championship for an uncompetitive team, although it would provide a more meaningful profile of games for less successful counties. As noted by the FRC in their Part II report, players

in these counties have shown little interest in an exclusive, stand-alone competition, and we would do well to recall our experience with the Tommy Murphy Cup, a competition that had to be abandoned. There may be a demand to make some revisions to the championship structure, at least in terms of the All-Ireland qualifiers, but reaching a consensus is proving difficult and any proposals for change must not have a negative impact on the playing of club games.

I would like to acknowledge the excellent work undertaken by the FRC and also the important and positive effects of the proposals they brought forward. The group was initially established to examine the state of Gaelic football, to review the game as it was played, and to consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of its rules and changes that would improve it. Chaired by Eugene McGee, the members of the committee included a good mix of managers, coaches, players and administrators, and their broad experience in developing the game at club and county level served them well. They succeeded in initiating and winning support for proposals that have already had, and will continue to have, a very progressive influence on the game of Gaelic football and on the playing experience for players. They deserve our gratitude.

CLUB FIXTURES AND PLAYER WELFARE

In its Part II report, and in its advocacy of a calendar-year fixtures schedule, the FRC considered the serious imbalance that we have allowed to develop in our fixtures scheduling. The GAA is, above all, about our games and about those who play them, yet our fixtures calendar has created an unacceptable distortion whereby the vast majority of our players do not

have a planned and fairly scheduled set of fixtures, fixed and known in advance. This 'vast majority' refers, of course, to our club players, the lifeblood of our games. It is not that this imbalance and unfairness to club players was planned; it is simply that, over the years, inter-county games have been allowed to take precedence over club games, for reasons that are not in themselves wrong or to be condemned: inter-county competitions, particularly at senior level, draw the big attendances and provide our games with a vital and exciting national profile for the greater part of the year. The task facing us, then, is this: how do we provide a fair schedule of fixtures for club players at the same time as providing an inter-county programme that, on account of its national profile and appeal, continues to offer the Association the means to promote and develop our games? This, in itself, is a difficult task, but is rendered more complex as it is inseparable from other issues, such as players playing on several teams and in two codes, and the continuing risk of player burnout.

In January 2008 we held a special Congress to consider proposals on ways of providing a better programme of games for club players and to examine the findings and consider the proposals of a Task Force, chaired by Dr Pat O'Neill, on player burnout. The same issues were addressed by the FRC in 2013 and in the reports of the Minor Review Workgroup and of the Hurling 2020 Committee in January of this year. The Minor Review Workgroup pointed out that 'many young players are participating in excessive training sessions and matches, usually with numerous teams in multiple competitions', and went on to propose a series of recommendations relating to the minor grade. It also noted that 'issues that exist within the Under-21

grade were highlighted on a number of occasions, most acutely by the Player Focus Group. The inter-county football competition is played at a busy time in the calendar where players have multiple commitments'. The Hurling 2020 Committee pointed out that 'in many counties, the games of hurling and Gaelic football are trying to co-exist within a window which is getting increasingly smaller while at the same time club competitions have moved away from traditional knockout structures to leagues and round-robins. So the club, in a county where an inter-county team(s) may be successful on a regular basis, is now totally reliant on the success or otherwise of the inter-county teams and their management'.

We have now had five major reports that, from varying perspectives, have addressed many of the same issues concerning club fixtures, the needs of the club player, inter-county competition structures and player welfare. All of these reports have contributed to an understanding of the problem and persuaded Congress to pass rule changes that would produce a more balanced programme of games at club and inter-county level. For all that, the feeling within the Association is that we have made little substantial progress. Why is this? In some instances we have simply failed to implement our own decisions (e.g. the closed season), while in others we have reversed decisions previously made (e.g. the playing of extra-time in the preliminary rounds of the inter-county senior championships). Sometimes we have half-heartedly engaged in agreed initiatives that could make a difference, such as with the Managers Charter, which has the potential to establish the rights of clubs. We have made some progress, yet the reality remains that club players are getting a raw deal and that we have serious player-

PLAYER WELFARE





welfare issues among elite players in the 17-22 age group. A positive response to recommendations in the Minor Workgroup and Hurling 2020 proposals at Congress will make a contribution to improving the current situation; however, it was not within their remit to deal with many of the outstanding problems.

Where do we go from here? Both the Uachtarán-tofa, Aogán Ó Fearghail and I agree that we do not need another work group or committee to bring forward proposals. The potential solutions already lie within the five major reports noted above and in proposals made by the Fixtures Planning, CCCC and other committees since 2008. It is my intention that my office, in conjunction with our Games Administration and Player Welfare section, will produce an extensive paper later this year – based on the wide range of proposals already made – that will draw on all of these proposals and allow the Association to decide how it will address these player welfare issues and the needs of the club player.

PLAYER WELFARE MENTORS

During the year Central Council backed a proposal, on a pilot basis, to appoint Player Welfare Mentors in each county to mentor young players (aged 15 to 22) in county squads. This is a practical response to the situation of talented young players trying to manage the physical and psychological demands of fulfilling club, county, and school/college playing commitments on top of the normal demands of their daily lives. The piloting of the role in several counties in 2015 will ensure that a

suitable person is available to listen to the concerns of young players and to refer them to the appropriate people who can address these concerns. I look forward to the development of this proposal in the hope that such a resource will be available in all counties over the next few years.

INJURY PREVENTION

The formal launch of the 'GAA 15' injury-prevention programme, which aims to reduce the number of lower-limb injuries sustained by our players, took place in 2014. The programme, which can be completed by teams as a standardised warm-up before training and games, is being implemented through our coach-education structures. By so doing, we seek to minimise any gap between research and practice.

Research is ongoing to evaluate the programme, and will continue over the next five years. The GAA 15 programme has the potential both to improve player welfare and to reduce the cost of injury. Claims from the GAA Injury Benefit Fund total several million euro every year; as two-thirds of injuries sustained by GAA players are to the lower limbs, there is a clear incentive to successfully implement GAA 15.

CONCUSSION

The issue of concussion is one that the GAA continues to take seriously, a fact recognised when Dr. Sean Moffatt and Ger Ryan, on behalf of our Medical, Scientific and Welfare Committee, presented to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children in October on the medical implications of the injury.



Pages 16-17. 13 September 2014; Wexford substitutes warm up during the game. Bord Gáis Energy GAA Hurling Under 21 All-Ireland 'A' Championship Final, Clare v Wexford. Semple Stadium, Thurles, Co. Tipperary.

19 July 2014; Wexford's Lee Chin celebrates after the game. GAA Hurling All Ireland Senior Championship, Round 2, Waterford v Wexford, Nowlan Park, Kilkenny.



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Our guidelines are clear: any player suspected of having concussion should be removed from play and referred to a medical doctor for a diagnosis. Such a player should be permitted return to play only after following the prescribed GAA protocol and having obtaining medical clearance.

It was re-assuring to witness several incidents during the year when the appropriate action was taken to remove a player from play. Education has been the cornerstone of the concussion management programme; players, coaches, parents, referees and medical personnel receive information through a well-structured educational programme, a policy we will continue to actively promote in 2015.

ANTI-DOPING

The GAA continues actively to educate players and their support personnel on the Association's anti-doping policies. 90 inter-county players were tested in 2014, which is consistent with the testing level of recent years. There were no adverse findings, which is a positive indication of the integrity of our games and the commitment of our inter-county players to the anti-doping policy.

Last year Central Council discussed the issue of certain counties failing to supply accurate and up-to-date information on the whereabouts of their training sessions. This latter fact led to the Irish Sports Council making eight unsuccessful attempts to locate teams. It is heartening to note that this number reduced to three in 2014. Counties must be commended for their efforts in this regard.

GPA

Congress 2010 passed a motion recognising the GPA as the official representative body for senior inter-county players. The Recognition Protocol governing the formal recognition of the GPA by the GAA, and the relationship between the two, included the GPA's commitment to the amateur status of the GAA, its role as a player-welfare body, and the fact that all GPA expenditure would be devoted to player welfare and administration. This agreement was a significant breakthrough in what had been, at times, a difficult relationship between the two associations. It is timely, to make a few observations on the experience of the past five years.

It is clear that the recognition of the GPA has brought several benefits: the amateur status of the GAA has been protected; there has been a significant reduction in contentious issues between county committees and players; there has been important progress in the player-development programme in the areas of career opportunities, education, health and well-being and life skills, and, crucially, there is now a means to respond to critical instances of mental health issues. The GPA can be proud of the impressive suite of services they provide to inter-county players and it is a positive step, too, that there is formal input into the development of player-relevant policies by inter-county players.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that, within the GAA, there continues to be a degree of resistance to the GPA and to the GAA's formal recognition of it. At the heart of this, I believe, is an unwillingness by some to accept that amateur inter-county players invest a huge amount of time

into playing at the top level of hurling and football, in addition to their commitment to playing for their clubs. There is also a certain resentment that the GPA, in representing inter-county players only, are seen to be exclusively representing elite players, and annoyance at constant references to the burden of playing at inter-county level. Most GAA members recognise the investment in time of inter-county players, but believe that it is also valid to point out that GAA volunteers, too, devote a huge amount of time in making their contribution to the Association.

However, not all of the criticism of the GPA has been fair. Some of those who criticise the GPA for not being militant enough now were the very ones who criticised it for being too militant when outside the GAA. Being militant for the sake of it would amount to posturing, and would be unproductive. The GPA and the GAA have a framework in which both associations sit down together to discuss and resolve issues for the overall betterment of the Association.

This is not to say that the relationship is always easy; there is a healthy tension between the two bodies, which is as it should be. Over the course of the past five years, there have been many disagreements and difficult conversations between the GAA and the GPA; many issues between players and county committees have arisen, and there has been tension along the way. However, few of these issues have made it into the public domain as we now have a mechanism for dealing with disagreements between players and officials. Surely it is progress that the GAA and its inter-county players are not constantly and publicly at loggerheads. To some,



Push bar to open

perhaps, a constructive relationship is a disappointment, but for our officials, our players and all those who genuinely care about the welfare of our players, this co-operation is a sign of a mature and necessary mutual respect.

THE ALL-IRELAND FOOTBALL SEMI-FINAL REPLAY

The decision to fix the Kerry v Mayo All-Ireland football semi-final replay for Limerick, due to the non-availability of Croke Park because of the Penn State/UCF American football game, was greeted with indignation by many supporters – and especially by supporters of Mayo – and embroiled the Association in a major controversy. In the latter context, and when emotions are high, it becomes next to impossible to have one's case heard and considered. Before making the case here, I have to acknowledge that we took a risk that backfired on us, a consequence of what proved to be an over-optimistic assessment of the unlikelihood of a replay. A decision made in the best interests of the Association ended up causing offence to supporters, an outcome that I very much regret.

It is important, nonetheless, to outline here the reasons for the decision we took. The overarching reason relates to the need for the GAA to continue to be in a position to fund its development. The strategy of bringing an American football game to Croke Park arose from the necessity to widen our funding base. Elsewhere in this report delegates will see that the demands on our funds are enormous. To take just two current projects: the Casement Park redevelopment will

cost the GAA €15 million sterling, and the redevelopment of Páirc Uí Chaoimh will cost Central Council in the region of €20 million. To that I could add the cost of the redevelopment of Ruislip in London, GAA development at the National Sports Campus at Abbotstown and the National Education and Research Centre at DCU. The list goes on, extending into games development, player welfare, and the development of club and county grounds. It is a financial fact of life for the Association that it must put Croke Park to use in the necessity to increase our funding base. I utterly refute the claim that the American football game was part of a simple money-making exercise for the sake of pure financial gain. We simply don't think that way; we think only in terms of generating income that will go back out to our clubs and counties, and that will help us fund projects already decided on.

Now that the temperature surrounding the issue has lowered, it is the time to make a few other points. In doing so, I fully accept that some people cannot get beyond the emotional point that All-Ireland semi-finals should be played in Croke Park, and it may be that Limerick was a once-off event. That said, it should not offend anyone to point out that there was, ultimately, near-unanimous praise for the manner of the staging of the replay in the Gaelic Grounds. Limerick County Committee and Munster Council did an outstanding job in hosting the replay, the atmosphere in Limerick and during the game was wonderful, and many, indeed, were converted to the cause of the staging a semi-final replay outside of Dublin. For the future, we should not allow this

controversy to restrict our efforts to stage big events in Croke Park, including American football games. For our part, we have been reminded that certain traditions are very dear to our supporters.

PLAYING RULES OF HURLING

At Congress 2013 a motion from the Standing Committee on the Playing Rules sought to address concerns about the dangers posed by penalty pucks and 20-metre frees being struck at a point much nearer than 20 metres from the goal. The motion was withdrawn due to opposition to a wording that addressed all free pucks. In spite of its reservations about safety, Central Council decided at its meeting of March 22, on the advice of Coiste Bainistí, to take no immediate action, but agreed that it would sponsor a motion to Congress 2015 proposing that 20-metre free pucks and penalty pucks be struck from the 20-metre line and that the motion would deal with these two instances only. However, an incident in the Cork v Waterford Munster senior hurling championship game on June 8 changed the situation. Based on advice that had been given by the National Referees Committee on the implementation of Rule 4.17, defenders felt empowered to leave the goal-line to run towards the penalty-taker as soon as the latter lifted the sliotar before striking it. This defensive tactic, occurring simultaneously with the penalty-taker striking the sliotar well inside the 20-metre line, raised serious concerns about player safety. It was the view of the Association's legal advisors that if a player were seriously injured through the striking of a penalty puck close to goal, or through the penalty-taker being confronted by (a) charging defender(s), a claim would likely be brought against the

7 December 2014; Ballyhale Shamrocks captain TJ Reid leads his team out for the warm up before the start of the game. AIB Leinster GAA Hurling Senior Club Championship Final, Ballyhale Shamrocks v Kilcormac Killoughey, O'Moore Park, Portlaoise, Co. Laois.



relevant units of the Association, including Central Council. Coiste Bainistí decided that urgent action was necessary and recommended a number of Interpretations of Rule to Central Council to address these safety concerns. As a result of their acceptance of these Interpretations, a player taking a penalty or a 20-metre free puck may bring the ball back to up to seven metres from the 20-metre line for the purposes of making a traditional run at the ball, but shall strike the ball on or outside the 20-metre line, but not inside it; equally, the players defending a penalty or free puck awarded on the centre point of the 20-metre line shall stand on their goal-line and may not move towards the 20-metre line until the ball has been struck.

It is fair to say that, where player safety is concerned, the action taken by Central Council achieved its objective. However, the new interpretations may have created another problem, namely that, for many observers, it is now too difficult to score a goal from a penalty puck and that, as a consequence, fouls inside the large parallelogram are not sufficiently punished. Many suggestions have been made to address these objections; the task now is to reach a consensus on a solution. Congress will address the issue, but the one outcome that cannot be allowed is a return to the practice that prevailed in the first half of last year. To revert to that position, which would put players at risk, would be reckless and irresponsible.

PLAYER-NUMBERING PROPOSAL

I must return to an issue I have raised in previous reports to Congress. A minority of counties continue to be unwilling to observe the protocols outlined in rule concerning match programmes and team line-outs. There is an issue here of responsibility to the paying public. Naming ‘dummy’ teams or fielding players not named in a match programme frustrates supporters and journalists. Equally unacceptable is the practice of delaying the naming of panels for championship games in order to – so this odd theory goes – keep the opposition ‘guessing’. Such practices limit media coverage of our game, create difficulties in producing match programmes on time, and treat our supporters with a degree of contempt.

However, the most important knock-on effect of delaying a panel or team announcement is that players outside the permitted match-day panel of 26 do not know whether they will be involved with their county team on a given weekend. If such players knew earlier in the week that they would not be involved, through confirmation of the official panel, they could commit to being involved with their clubs, something that both the players concerned and their clubs would greatly appreciate. One would think that inter-county managers would see the benefit of such players having a competitive game at club level rather than being left idle due to involvement with an extended county panel.

Therefore, I support fully the motion before Congress that seeks the registration of a binding 26-man panel on the Thursday morning before a senior inter-county championship match. It will benefit the Association in many ways: it will increase pre-

match publicity around the naming of panels, ensure that supporters are getting value for money when they purchase match programmes, and, most importantly, will allow players on extended inter-county panels to have more involvement with their clubs.

INTERNATIONAL RULES

The International Rules Tour to Australia in November was seen by many as a last chance for a series that had suffered greatly in 2011 and 2013 on account of the failure of Australia’s best players to commit to their national team. The fragile state of the series was intensified by the inevitable drop-off in attendances and competitiveness, historical disciplinary issues, and a perception that the International game was no longer a priority for the AFL.

In the winter of 2013 we had strongly represented our view to the AFL that the series had no future unless the 2014 version met several important objectives:

the participation of Australia’s best available players; evidence of significantly increased marketing/promotion of the event by AFL; the engagement of the Australian public in the form of attendance; a quality football game devoid of major disciplinary issues.

The 2014 event successfully met these objectives. The AFL team was selected solely from those with All-Australian awards; there was much greater visibility of the event both on TV and in the printed media; and a sell-out attendance in Perth highlighted the attractive nature of the game when the best players are involved. The new rule changes, in particular that all kick-outs had to travel beyond the 45m line, ensured a very attack-minded game and added notably to the entertainment value.

It is also important to record that the game was played in a thoroughly sporting manner. It was a tough, hard game with no holding back on either side, but there were no incidents that required further action from the disciplinary authorities. The quality of kicking and fielding on both sides was excellent, and, judging by the wonderful atmosphere in the ground and the reaction of supporters afterwards, the game gave the lie to the oft-asserted, and foolish, view that, without the “punch-ups” and scraps, the game has no physicality and is not enticing to supporters. Perth proved this to be false.

A further significant change in 2014 related to the timing of the series: it took place in mid-November rather than in mid- to late October, as before. This was a positive development from a GAA perspective, as it means that there is less overlap between the series and the club championships, and fewer players are precluded from participation with the Irish team due to club commitments.

While the concept of a one-test series was met initially with a degree of scepticism in Ireland, there is no doubt that it served the immediate needs of the International Rules project in terms of regaining the commitment of the top Australian players and allowing the AFL to devote all of their resources to the promotion of one major event. It is debatable whether the one-game concept is in the best long-term interests of the series; however, in terms of restoring credibility to the series and regaining the support of a public that had begun to lose interest, this approach proved effective in 2014 and has to be considered as a serious option if the series goes ahead in Ireland in 2015.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the commitment of the outgoing Irish management team,

under the leadership of Paul Earley, not only for the team’s preparation, but for their commitment to the series and to the concept of International Rules football. Paul, in particular, was an outstanding ambassador for the game; his positive, attacking philosophy ensured that, in both 2013 and 2014, Ireland played an entertaining brand of football that showcased the positive skills of our game.

Discussions on the future of the series were held in Perth. While no firm commitments were made, it was the view of both organisations that the series should continue, subject to the approval of the GAA Central Council and the AFL Commission. Central Council subsequently gave the necessary approval at a meeting on January 17.

There is no doubt that the International Rules series is highly treasured both by those selected to play in it and by the thousands of young Irish people who constitute our diaspora in Australia. The carnival atmosphere created by the latter over three days in Perth, their enthusiasm for the GAA’s efforts to let them see the best Gaelic footballers representing their country in Australia, and the palpable link with home that the series creates will be abiding memories from this year’s tour.

One final observation; as I noted above, the rule change that all kick-outs had to travel beyond the 45m line ensured a very attack-minded game and greatly increased the number of high catches in the midfield area. Surely this is worthy of consideration as a possible amendment to the rules of Gaelic football. It would end the

current practice of uncontested kick-outs and greatly reduce the volume of hand passing that is so prevalent in the way that football is now played. A decision by Central Council to ask the Standing Committee on Playing Rules to examine the merits of such an amendment to our rules would be extremely positive.

INFRASTRUCTURE

I have previously emphasised the need to increase our efforts to address issues that will encourage attendance at our games and to make the match-attendance experience as enjoyable as possible. Nothing is more important in this regard than the facilities at our major grounds. The investment by our units in facilities, particularly over the past thirty years, has been remarkable; in terms of major stadiums we are very well-equipped in that we have ample spectator capacity. Taking into account the pending redevelopment of both Casement Park and Páirc Uí Caoimh, the Association now has 10 stadiums with a spectator capacity of more than 25,000: Semples Stadium, Fitzgerald Stadium, the Gaelic Grounds, Páirc Uí Chaoimh, Pearse Stadium, McHale Park, St Tiernach’s Park, Kingspan Breffni Park, Casement Park and Croke Park while a further two grounds (Nowlan Park and Dr Hyde Park) can cater for between 22,000 and 25,000. Based on attendance patterns of recent years, only five fixtures outside of Croke Park are likely to attract an attendance in excess of 25,000: the Munster hurling and football finals, the Connacht and Ulster football finals, and the All-Ireland hurling championship quarter-finals. There will be the odd exceptional additional game that will



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cross the 25,000 figure, but we should plan for the future on the basis that we have nine stadiums (excluding Croke Park) to cater for a total of six or seven fixtures small number of games that may test their capacity. Clearly, if we were planning stadium provision for the GAA from scratch, we would develop fewer stadiums with a 30,000+ capacity than we currently have available to us. Be that as it may, we have 10 large stadiums in fixed venues; we now need to develop a stadium strategy that will serve the needs of the Association into the future.

Casement Park and Páirc Uí Chaoimh represent perfectly the dilemma that we now face. The arguments for developing both stadiums were indisputable. On safety grounds alone, neither could have continued to operate in its existing state. The decision to proceed with a new stadium in Belfast was relatively straightforward based on the level of funding from the Northern Ireland Executive (£62.5 million), which

means that a modern all-seater stadium will be built at a cost to the GAA of £15 million sterling. The outcome of a judicial review on the planning process has delayed the project, but I am confident that we will resolve the outstanding issues in 2015. The redevelopment of Páirc Uí Chaoimh has presented a greater financial challenge, even with a generous support from the Irish government of €30 million and Cork County Committee's own investment of over €10 million. That said, the redevelopment of Páirc Uí Chaoimh will mean that we will have a modern stadium in each of our three largest cities, capable of meeting our needs well into the future. When complete, the new stadiums will represent a good return on a Central Council investment of around €40 million. The challenge will be to provide a sufficient number of major events to ensure, at the least, that they cover their costs.

Now is the time to look at our large-stadiums provision and to consider the needs of the Association over the next 20 years. The developments in Cork and Belfast will be impressive, but other aspects of our current provision need quite urgently to be addressed. The issue is not one of overall capacity, but rather the increased demand for seated accommodation. This is a major deficiency in current provision, one highlighted on the occasion of the All-Ireland hurling quarter-finals in Thurles, where the venue simply could not accommodate the demand for stand tickets. Many people who would have attended the games if seating had been available decided to stay at home rather than stand on the terraces. This is a trend we cannot ignore, so any further development of our existing stadiums must take this into account, beginning with Páirc Uí Chaoimh.

Assessing current provision on a provincial basis, the opening of Casement Park will leave Ulster in a strong position when one considers



that the grounds in Ballybofey, Omagh, Derry, Cavan, Enniskillen, Armagh and Newry have all undergone a degree of modernisation in recent years and are well geared to meet the needs of their counties for the foreseeable future. The main problem facing Ulster relates to the future of Clones, a ground with a capacity of 35,000 but where major investment in terms of both maintenance and modernisation is needed.

Connacht could be said to have an issue with over-capacity. Sligo and Leitrim have grounds that meet their needs, but, in any three-year period, the current safe capacity of Pearse Stadium (25,341), Dr. Hyde Park (23,470) and McHale Park (28,187) is unlikely to be tested more than once or twice. In Munster, too, there is clearly more capacity than required. Semple Stadium, with a safe capacity of 46,414, Limerick's Gaelic Grounds (44,082), Páirc Uí Chaoimh (45,000) and Killarney (38,325) will be competing to host a maximum of five major championship games in any one season, although Semple Stadium has the reasonable expectation of attracting additional knock-out games in both league and championship. The situation in Leinster is different. O'Moore Park, O'Connor Park, Wexford Park and Nowlan Park can cater for attendances of between 17,000 and 22,000, and while one can argue the need for a stadium that will host 30-35,000 spectators, Croke Park meets the province's requirement for coping with attendances beyond 25,000.

The reality is that we have too many grounds with excess capacity. This poses a number of problems. All of these grounds are expensive to maintain and require the funding from match-day rental to meet basic overheads. Maintenance and repair costs will continue to rise, and simply maintaining these grounds at their current level of comfort and facilities will be costly. And even that will not suffice. In only a handful of grounds will current facilities meet the expectations and requirements of future spectators. 2014 saw a considerable investment in Croke Park in enhancing catering facilities. That will continue during the closed season and into 2015 to ensure that Croke Park meets the standard of major international stadiums. The current phase of improvement will carry a bill in excess of €5 million and there is still more to do. It is easy to say now that the GAA needs about five major venues strategically located around the country, and which should be developed to the highest specification. Four of those venues are Croke Park, Casement Park, Páirc Uí Chaoimh and Semple Stadium, with a need to identify the priority venue in Connacht. Even if there were to be agreement on the five venues, it still leaves the future of the next five stadiums to be addressed. We need to agree a long-term strategy dictated by our needs.

The furore over the venue for the Kerry v Mayo All-Ireland football semi-final replay emphasised that Croke Park is the venue of choice for most counties. However, I would argue that the experience of that game suggests that we should consider holding replays of All-Ireland quarter- and semi-finals outside

Croke Park. Limerick demonstrated in style its capacity to stage a semi-final, providing the best atmosphere at any football championship game in 2014. Leaving aside for a moment the circumstances of the non-availability of Croke Park for the replay, the Limerick experience suggests that we should consider using our larger and better-equipped provincial venues when such an opportunity arises. The truth is that games that attract fewer than 40,000 spectators will generate a much better atmosphere in a stadium with a smaller capacity than that of Croke Park.

One final point in relation to our grounds is worthy of mention. The National Health and Safety Committee (NHSC) has been very active in 2014, and notable progress has been made in raising the standards of training on matters of safety. High-quality training is essential if we are to establish a culture that recognises the importance of safe practice on every property and at every event. The Event Controllers Course, developed and delivered in partnership with IT Carlow, is the first of its kind in Ireland. The first running of the course was successfully completed last December in Portlaoise, and further courses will commence shortly at venues in Munster, Connacht and Leinster. It is encouraging, too, that over 500 stewards have already completed the NHSC Stewards Training Course, run in conjunction with the Portobello Institute. It represents a new awareness of safety that is be encouraged.



9 November 2014; A general view of St Eunan's warming up before the game. AIB Ulster GAA Football Senior Club Championship, Quarter-Final, St Eunan's v Roslea Shamrocks, O'Donnell Park, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.

PITCH MAINTENANCE

In my report to the 2014 Congress I highlighted the fact that, despite the high level of usage, our Pitch Manager Stuart Wilson and his staff have never failed to present an excellent playing surface. Use of Croke Park far exceeds the combined usage figures for Wembley Stadium and the Millennium Stadium, making it the most-used major stadium in Europe. On 24 May last, Stuart made an excellent presentation to Central Council in which he outlined all the measures necessary for the

preparation and maintenance of the Croke Park pitch surface to a high standard. The presentation prompted Central Council to request that we hold a seminar for groundsmen in Croke Park later in the year. This was duly organised and facilitated by Stuart in November, and was attended by 39 representatives from 28 counties. Feedback on the seminar was very positive. Apart from the seminar's value as a learning exercise, it also drew attention to a number of deficiencies in current practice, and highlighted the difficulties many groundsmen encounter in

maintaining their own pitches: overuse and high wear, not enough recovery time between games, poor drainage, inadequate maintenance routine, lack of knowledge and training, use of outdated equipment, insufficient funding, lack of qualified and appropriately trained ground staff, etc... On the positive side, there was an obvious enthusiasm to address these issues and an acceptance that, despite the huge investment in ground development in recent years, we have been slow to develop a more scientific approach to pitch maintenance. The growth in the



number of county training centres and the increasing number of clubs that are developing additional pitches emphasise the importance of properly protecting and sustaining these important assets. The seminar offered a number of useful suggestions that will require an investment in both training and equipment. I believe that a work group should be formed from within the national infrastructure and safety committee to work with counties and provinces and to take responsibility for effecting a major improvement in pitch preparation and maintenance.

GAMES DEVELOPMENT

The support of thousands of volunteers in providing games opportunities to all those who wish to play Gaelic games is vital for the future successful growth of our games. For the Association's part, one of our most enduring and expensive investments over the past decade has been in Games Development. In 2013, €16.5 million was invested in the employment of games personnel, with €6 million coming through from provinces, €5 million from counties, €3.1 million from Central Council funding and €2.4 million from the Irish Sports Council. 240 people are employed on a full-time basis: 61 in Dublin, 60 in the rest of Leinster, 59 in Ulster, 33 in Munster and 27 in Connacht. A further 58 people are

employed on a part-time basis; they undertake a substantial body of work including overseeing Cúl Camps and Skills Hubs for 90,000 participants, delivering a Go Games Coaching Programme in 3,061 Primary schools, providing around 800 coaching courses annually and supporting Talent Academy squads in football and hurling. As with our volunteers, it is also important to acknowledge that, at every level, our Games Development personnel – Games Development Managers, Games Development Administrators and Games Promotion Officers – work hard to realise our objectives in the key areas of the Grassroots to National Programme (GNP).

MILESTONES

Below are some of the key achievements by Games Development personnel and volunteers in 2014:

NATIONAL GO GAMES WEEK

The first-ever national celebration of GAA Go Games took place in the week of April 14-20. A national blitz took place in Croke Park on April 14, involving teams from each county, with over 1,000 children participating. A central Go Games blitz also took place in each county. The aim of this initiative was to raise the public profile of GAA Go Games by promoting it through national and local media and by marking the start of the GAA Go Games playing season. Central to this was a celebration of the Go Games' participative ethos expressed through the motto of 'Every Child Gets a Go.' The event was covered by most of the print media and by RTÉ, and an information video was prepared and shown at half-time during all games at Croke Park during the season.

PE CÉIM AR AGHAIDH

One of the major functions of our Games Development section is to design and deliver resources to support coaching and games on the ground. The completion and launch of the PE Céim ar Aghaidh as a Gaelic games resource for primary school teachers was a key objective in this regard, and was completed in September 2014.

KELLOGG'S GAA CÚL CAMPS

The 2014 Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps were a resounding success: total participant numbers increased to

89,022, a 9.5% increase on 2013.

The high level of participation is a testament to the standard of coaching provided at the camps and the quality of the kit and bag supplied.

LENOVO/GAA SKILLS HUBS

It was recommended by the National Games Development Committee (GDC) in early 2014 that the Lenovo/GAA Skills Hubs should be implemented under the management of GDC and the supervision of the County Games Development Managers. This recommendation was adopted, and 15 Skills Hubs took place in 13 counties, with inter-county players in key coaching roles.

TALENT ACADEMIES

A key objective in this area in 2014 was to extend the Smartabase (software for tracking player performance and activity levels) pilot to more counties. In total, sixteen counties – four more than in 2013 – registered as pilot participants in 2014. It is intended that the software will be utilised as a key tool in the monitoring of activity levels from a player welfare perspective.

TÁIN HURLING LEAGUE

In Connacht, the Adult Táin Hurling League (Division I; II; III) was a real success, reflected in the fact that it is proposed to have an U-16 competition in 2015. In 2014 the Ulster Adult Táin Hurling League – previously played in February/March – was fixed for April and May, and met with a very positive response. Commitments have been made at county and provincial level to build on this from 2015 onwards.

FÉILE COMPETITIONS 2014

Throughout his term of office, Uachtarán Liam Ó Néill has prioritised the need for a child-centred approach to games at underage level. It was in this context that a review of Féile competitions was commissioned in 2013. The review work-group reported that, although Féile na nGael and Féile Peil na nÓg were popular competitions, the approach of some clubs had become elitist and that the level of club participation was quite low. Only 14 counties had hosted Féile na nGael since its inception in 1971, while 17 counties had hosted the football event since 1982.

The changes made following the workgroup report meant that, in 2014, almost 15,000 boys and girls (an increase of 40% on 2013) participated in festivals of Gaelic games played in a child-friendly environment. The additional competitions generated an excitement for clubs who had not previously enjoyed the Féile experience. There was a 100% increase in the number of games played, totalling 977 over two weekends. In addition, the average winning margin was reduced, meaning more evenly contested games. The new policy will help to realise the vision that, over a ten-year period, every county will be given the opportunity to host the events and that all clubs will be given an opportunity to participate. The success of Féile 2014 should create a platform for the future growth of the competitions, as well as setting a template for improving player retention in the youth sector.

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PARTICIPATION IN FÉILE 2013 AND 2014:

	No. of Teams (National)	No. of Teams (Provincial)	No. of Teams (Regional)	Total No. of Teams	Total No. of Players
2013 (Football)	152	77	-	229	5496
2013 (Hurling)	144	64	-	208	4992
2013 TOTAL	296	141	0	437	10488
2014 (Football)	184	66	46	296	7104
2014 (Hurling)	168	75	76	319	7656
2014 TOTAL	352	141	122	615	14760



GAA GAMES DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

The 2014 Liberty Insurance Games Development Conference took place on Saturday January 11 in Croke Park. The theme of the conference was 'Inspiring Children: Fostering a Love of Gaelic Games', and focused on supporting the Child Coach. Over 700 delegates attended the conference which also featured the first GAA Researchers' Forum. The Researchers' Forum provided an opportunity for researchers from Ireland and overseas to present their work and its significance to delegates. Each researcher was given five minutes to outline his/her work, followed by a Q&A. Presentations from the Research Forum and the conference are available online at learning.gaa.ie/coach.

COACH EDUCATION

The implementation of the Action Plan to update the GAA's Coach Education Programme (CEP), based on recommendations of the Report of PE expert Professor Bryan McCullick of the University of Atlanta, continued in 2014. Through the network of Coach Education Tutor Trainers, tutors and staff, the relevant playing capacities across all stages of the GAA Player Pathway have been identified and the competencies required of coaches to support players at each stage established.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PORTAL AND ONLINE ACTIVITY PLANNER

The GAA's Learning and Development Portal www.learning.gaa.ie was a success in 2014, proving to be one of the most effective ways to promote and disseminate best practice. The website is used to publish e-learning content and resources from the GAA Coach, Referee, Player

and Administrator Development Programmes; it also provides an opportunity for registered users to learn from one another. There are currently over 15,000 registered users, and the Twitter account @GAAlearning now has over 3,000 followers. In addition, over 800 videos have been published to the GAA Learning YouTube account.

The portal also provided the platform for the GAA's Primary School Teacher Summer Courses, the main objective of which is the advancement of teachers' pedagogical, teaching and learning, and management skills in the context of Gaelic games within the primary school physical education (PE) curriculum. The course is organised by Local Education Centres under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills, and is delivered by GAA Games Development staff and tutors on a blended basis, i.e. face-to-face and online. The face-to-face element runs over three days, with approximately eight hours of online modules to be completed thereafter. Fifteen Primary School Teacher Summer Courses (thirteen of which were blended) were registered with the Department of Education and Skills and took place during July and August 2014.

One of the most innovative developments in 2014 in terms of supporting coaches was the publication of the GAA Activity Planner at learning.gaa.ie/planner. This online Coaching Session Planner allows users to create, save and print coaching sessions specific to the age-group and code (hurling, football, handball, rounders) of their team from a selection of activities presented in video, diagram and text format.

A new Learning and Development email Newsletter has also been established to promote the portal.

SUPER GAMES CENTRES

The GAA, in conjunction with the University of Stirling, is also conducting research into youth drop-out in Gaelic games through a PhD research study. The aim of the study is to pilot a GAA games-based offering that motivates players to continue participation in GAA sport. The pilot is being delivered through key participation hubs called GAA Super Games Centres, which are located in 10 venues across the provinces.

The Super Games Centres provide an opportunity to pilot a recreational GAA games-offering for youth players. Players are given the opportunity, over an eight-month period, to provide feedback and input into the key features of a positive GAA youth-games experience. The study involves testing whether a regular programme of games has a positive impact on a young player's intention to continue playing GAA. The findings of the study will help the Association to create practical guidelines for clubs to ensure that the needs of young players are provided for through the games experiences organised by coaches, parents and local volunteers.

Finally, the Games Development section has developed a coherent planning and review process to ensure that the work undertaken by personnel is as productive and sustainable as possible, and that it is providing value for money for the Association. This is a vital process that facilitates analysis of issues that may be preventing the provision of the best possible games development



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programme at club and county level. One important lesson learned from the review process has been that the level of effectiveness and overall impact of Games Development personnel is intrinsically linked to the quality of the administrative, organisational and governance structures at county level. There is clearly a need to enhance the role of club and County Coaching Officers and to ensure that the relationship between the County Coaching Officer and Games Development Manager is a positive one. Equally, there is a responsibility on key county officers to actively monitor and support the work of Games Development personnel.

THE GAA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, the European Union (EU) acquired, for the first time, a specific competence in the area of sport. Under the governance of the Directorate General for Education, Culture and Sport, the EU now has a dedicated annual budget to support the development of sport in Member States, with specific reference to developing cooperation with international sporting bodies.

Over the past number of years the GAA has been working to cultivate links with and to develop networks within the EU, participating in EU-funded projects including the Replay Project, as well as a project led by The Association for International Sport for All (TAFISA) that aims to preserve and promote the heritage of traditional sports in EU Member States. In 2013, the Association received official recognition of its contribution to Irish society when it was awarded the European Citizens Prize 2013 by the European Union for its role in promoting enhanced mutual understanding and closer integration between citizens.

In 2014, it was announced by the EU that the Erasmus+ Programme (2014-2020) is specifically focused on grassroots sport and that it serves to co-fund initiatives, helping to develop, share and implement innovative ideas and practices EU-wide, nationally and at regional and local level. Through this programme, a budget of €14.7million will be provided to suitable initiatives. We are committed to pursuing the opportunity to cultivate links at this level with a particular view to progressing – on an EU-wide basis – a grassroots sports coaching qualification that dovetails with the GAA's Coach¹⁰/MVA model. Due to the relationships with the EU that have been developed over the course of the past few years (under the direction of Pat Daly), this is not a purely aspirational objective, especially when one considers that our framework for Applied Lifelong Learning (ALL) was recently recognised by Pierre Mairesse, Director General for Education and Culture in the European Commission, who commented that:

“[the GAA's] creative proposals for Applied Lifelong Learning struck me as aptly bringing together learning in its many dimensions, going beyond the traditional divides between sports, youth work, citizenship and education.”

ALLOCATION OF MEDIA RIGHTS

In late 2013 we set in motion the process of negotiations for the allocation of new broadcast rights and formulated the objectives we hoped to achieve. First among our objectives was the need to make our games more easily available to Irish people living abroad. This issue of accessibility to our games on live TV had been, over several years, the main issue raised with the Uachtarán and I when we spoke with our members

outside Ireland. In planning our negotiations of these new contracts, we felt that we had an obligation to Irish people living abroad to respond to their requests on this issue, if for no other reason that many of them, while living at home, had contributed to the GAA as members, and were now continuing that work in GAA clubs abroad. There are now 400 affiliated GAA clubs overseas, double the number of just a decade ago, and they are spread across the world – in Britain and North America, in continental Europe and Australia, in the Middle East and Asia. This is, in part, an indication of the popularity of Gaelic games, and in part a reflection of the sheer size of the Irish family abroad. And this expanding Irish diaspora was the reality facing us as we approached the negotiations for new broadcast contracts.

I think it is fair to say that, for many Irish people, the GAA and its games are an important part of their Irish cultural experience: many Irish people love Gaelic games, and, for those of them who now live abroad, not being able to follow Gaelic games in their home was felt as a real loss. It was this cultural yearning that the Uachtarán and I had been made constantly aware of, and with increasing intensity, over several years. So when we first considered the new TV rights contracts, this was the priority issue.

There were two other important objectives that we wished to achieve. First, we needed to ensure that our games would continue to be widely available on TV and radio to our domestic Irish audience. Our home base of members and supporters, attached to their clubs and counties, constitute our single most important audience. And second, we needed, as any responsible organisation must do, to protect the important part of our revenue generated by income from broadcast rights. The GAA can



27 September 2014; A general view of a television camera monitor. GAA Hurling All Ireland Senior Championship Final Replay, Kilkenny v Tipperary, Croke Park, Dublin.

only achieve its goals if it retains its capacity to fund the work of its clubs and units at home and abroad.

The main elements of the agreements reached with our broadcast partners, in relation to the senior championships, can be summarised as follows:

- first, five more championship games would be made available for TV broadcast for the 2014-2016 period (45 games versus 40) compared to the period 2011-2013;
- second, RTÉ would broadcast the same number of games as under the previous contract – 31 in total.
- third, of the eighteen most important championship games of the year, namely the six major provincial finals, the six All-Ireland quarter-finals, four All-Ireland semi-finals and the finals in hurling and football, sixteen would be broadcast free to air on RTÉ. Only two football quarter-finals were not free to air.
- fourth, Sky Sports, a subscription channel, would exclusively broadcast fourteen games in total, eight of which would be All-Ireland qualifier games. Sky, in a simulcast arrangement with RTÉ, would also broadcast live the All-Ireland football and hurling semi-finals and the All-Ireland finals. Irish people living in Britain would be able to watch twenty matches live on TV, via Sky, in their homes.
- finally, a new joint venture with RTÉ Digital, GAAGO, would provide access to all championship games to Irish people in 157 countries via the internet, a hugely significant development for Irish people abroad. (We might note here that, in 2015, approximately 100 games, along with RTÉ’s ‘The Sunday Game’, will be available to supporters abroad through GAAGO).

The GAA has done all in its power in recent years to make its games available to its domestic audience,

while at the same time needing to protect the special experience of supporters attending games. With the current contracts, over 100 games are broadcast free to air, covering all levels of GAA’s competitions – senior, minor, under-21, colleges and universities. Over the years, there has been a constant increase in live TV coverage of our games. There is hardly a single weekend from the beginning of February to the end of November that live GAA championship games are not available on free-to-air terrestrial TV. In fact, the new broadcasting contracts ensure free-to-air live TV coverage of GAA games on at least 40 of the 52 weekends of the year.

If one had followed the debate generated by the new allocation of broadcast rights, one might well have had the impression that, previously, *all* senior championship games had been covered live on TV and that, under the new contracts, an entitlement to see all our championship games free to air had been withdrawn. But it has *never* been the case that all championship games have been broadcast live on

domestic TV – far from it. We have always had to find a balance between live TV coverage and our objective of encouraging our supporters to attend matches: the presence of supporters at matches is the lifeblood of our games and is vital to the special atmosphere of GAA matches. There is absolutely nothing new in the fact that a substantial proportion of our championship matches are not broadcast live on TV. Quite the contrary – supporters of Gaelic games, in order to follow the fortunes of their county team, have long been going to matches, or following their progress on radio, or watching highlights on TV. In this respect, the new TV contracts changed absolutely nothing.

In light of the fierce national debate that followed the announcement of the new TV contracts, and in light particularly of some of the wilder comments that emanated from those who preferred not to consider the situation of GAA supporters and members living abroad, we can, now that the first season of the new TV contracts has ended, consider a few simple facts. Due to the growing interest in the games as the season progressed (helped by an excited Twitter reaction), 427,000 people in the UK watched Sky's coverage of the drawn Kilkenny v Tipperary hurling final, helping to make it the most-watched hurling final of all time. It is also clear that the Sky coverage has given a major boost to Gaelic games in the UK. There has been a huge increase in interest in our games, notably among young English-born people, who have been arriving in substantial numbers at our UK clubs seeking to take up football and hurling. Many of these newcomers have no background in Gaelic games, but were simply enthralled by what they saw on TV.

The GAA, from the outset, understood fully that the decision to award a small number of games to Sky would not meet with everyone's approval. It was not a decision taken easily, and was discussed at length by Coiste Bainistí in January 2014. Tradition, and the amateur ethos of the Association, led some to feel that we should never offer our games to a subscription channel. This is a respectable position, and one fully respected by the Association. But those in the GAA with whom lies the responsibility of safeguarding the status and position of our games, not just in the present but – even more importantly – in the future, are obliged to take into account factors that supporters, journalists and pundits can afford to ignore. Whether we like it or not, commercial and marketing factors are a feature of the world in which the GAA must operate, and the allocation of broadcast rights is vital to the well-being of the Association from a number of perspectives, i.e. the proper promotion of our games, the standard to which the games are promoted on broadcast media, the territories in which our games are broadcast, our ability to negotiate from a position of strength in a very competitive sports-viewing market, and, of course, the revenue generated by the sale of broadcast rights to our games, the latter vital to our ability to fund the development of the Association. It was not, for example, a commercially ideal situation for the GAA that RTÉ were seen to have an automatic right to all our matches. Lack of competition undermines the value of our TV broadcast rights, while awareness of one's monopoly position might not be the best context to encourage innovative coverage. Observers of these matters noted a

marked improvement in the quality of RTÉ's coverage of our championships in 2014. RTÉ are to be commended for their enhanced coverage of our games. Equally, we wish to praise the very high standards of Sky's coverage, to which they brought their vast experience of sports broadcasting. Sky's very positive presentation of our games, as well as its innovative use of technology in match analysis, contributed very significantly to the more dynamic and exciting presentation of football and hurling on TV in 2014.

Only one year of the new arrangements has passed. It will take more time for us to judge the outcomes of our choices. It is also the case that the television landscape and the public's viewing behaviour and patterns are changing very quickly on account of new technologies and new media. For the time being, however, we can make the following points: first, with a hundred or so live games broadcast free to air, and with the highest-ever level of TV live coverage of our games in Ireland, it seems fair to say that our home-based supporters have not been neglected; second, the quality of the TV coverage and presentation of our games has improved; third, there is a growing interest in our games in Britain; and, finally – and surely this is cause for a little rejoicing – our loyal Irish GAA supporters and members abroad can now follow live TV or internet coverage of many (in some cases, all) of our championship games – which is what the Association set out to achieve at the start of 2014.

We believe that we achieved a balance in the allocation of broadcast rights that meets the needs of our





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supporters at home and abroad, a balance that we will seek to maintain into the future. We will monitor the impact of these arrangements over the next two years, but it is important to state here that, beyond 2016, our games will continue to be widely available as free-to-air TV broadcasts to Irish audiences and that there will be no reduction in the number of live championship games shown free to air.

In acknowledging the important role of TV coverage of Gaelic games in 2014, I would like to congratulate TG4 for the continuing breadth and excellence of their coverage. For many Sundays in the year, it is to TG4 alone that GAA supporters turn for coverage of matches in the leagues and club championships and in the U-21 and third-level competitions. This acknowledgement extends, too, to Setanta, which continued to provide welcome coverage of weekend national league games. I would also like to acknowledge the high standards and professionalism of TV3 during their years as a TV rights-holder.

SPONSORSHIP

We greatly appreciate the major contribution of sponsorship in both games promotion and funding, and we extend our gratitude to all our sponsors for their ongoing support at all levels of the Association. Sponsorship is a vital revenue stream for the GAA in the funding of clubs and counties, so it is important that we do all we can to meet our sponsorship commitments and that we protect the investment of our sponsors from ambush from unofficial brands.

Our sponsorship section has been extremely successful in maintaining an impressive portfolio of sponsors in 2014, a notable achievement at a time when competition for sponsorship investment has never been greater. A few developments in 2014 merit specific mention.

- Kellogg's have announced the renewal the sponsorship of the hugely successful Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps. In 2014 over 89,000 children attended the camps, bringing the number of participants to over 250,000 children in the three years of the Kellogg's sponsorship.
- Independent.ie has joined the GAA's sponsorship programme by becoming the title sponsor of Higher Education competitions.
- Liberty Insurance won the Sponsorship Management Award at the Marketing Institute's All Ireland Marketing Awards (AIM's).
- In November AIB's sponsorship of the AIB GAA Club Championships won two Irish Sponsorship Awards for Best Sports Sponsorship and Best Use of Social Media in Sponsorship Activation.
- In January 2015, the Irish Life Corporate Social Responsibility initiative for the GAA Healthy Club Programme was announced.
- The partnership between the GAA and MRPI (SuperValu and Centra) recorded over €6.6million in ticket sales in 2014.
- In a worldwide first, the All-Ireland hurling final and replay were broadcast live on board Etihad aircraft flying at 30,000ft.

THE GARTH BROOKS CONCERTS

I (more than most) appreciate the sentiment that we have all heard and said enough about the Garth Brooks concerts issue; I would certainly prefer not to have to discuss it in my Annual Report. It is important for us all to move on, and I am anxious to restore the good relations the Association has had with Dublin City Council. However, it is the function of the Ard Stiúrthóir's Annual Report to inform Congress (and our wider membership) of the Association's activities for the year. I must, therefore, address the issue here. In addition, I have a responsibility to ensure that our membership is fully informed of the GAA's role in the series of events prior to the cancellation of the concerts, given the extensive national news coverage of the affair and the criticism by some of the GAA, in which both the Association's reputation and the manner in which it conducts its business were called into question. There is also the fact that the cancellation of the concerts cost the Association up to €5 million in lost revenue, a significant loss in difficult economic times.

Before addressing some of the reasons offered by Dublin City Council (DCC) for the refusal to grant a licence for all five concerts, I would like to clear up some confusion that seems to exist in the public mind about the number of concerts permitted in Croke Park. The GAA has planning permission for three concerts in Croke Park per annum. This is in-perpetuity permission. If we wish to hold additional events catering for more than 5,000 people, we must apply for a special-events licence. The Garth Brooks concerts were such



“The Rising Stars Dance School” were one of 32 local groups that received funding from the Croke Park Community Fund in 2014. Over €100,000 in funding was allocated to local community groups by the stadium’s community fund last year.

events. Special-events licensing is the most common approach employed in Dublin in these circumstances, and Croke Park’s use of this mechanism is not unusual. For example, concerts in Marley Park, Phoenix Park and the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, as well as the St Patrick’s Day Parade, are all licensed on this basis.

We have successfully applied for special-events licences in the past and had never been refused by Dublin City Council. Legally, there is no limit to the number of special-event licences we may apply for.

At a hearing of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications on July 18 2014, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of DCC, Mr Owen Keegan, acknowledged that, in early February, he had indicated to our Stadium and Commercial Director, Peter McKenna, that he would be supportive of an application for a total of five Garth Brooks concerts; he identified two issues that would have to be addressed before a licence would be granted, stating: ‘I would have made it clear to Mr McKenna there were two key considerations. The first was to ensure no issues emerged from the One Direction concerts and the second was to deal with the legitimate concerns of residents’. Following upon this indication to Peter McKenna that the CEO of DCC would

be supportive of an application for five Garth Brooks concerts, the GAA left no stone unturned in addressing the two issues identified by the CEO. The first task was to ensure that the One Direction concerts held in Croke Park on May 23, 24 and 25 would be staged to the highest possible standard. It was decided that the three One Direction concerts would be used to trial additional event-management measures. These new measures were hugely successful, and only three complaints were lodged with DCC over the three nights of the concerts, a low figure that is unprecedented in the running of major events in the city. It is reasonable to assert, then, that the first of the two issues identified by the CEO of DCC was successfully addressed.

A similar urgency was applied to the second issue raised by the CEO, that of dealing with the legitimate concerns of residents living close to Croke Park. It is important that our membership be aware of the positive elements of the relationship we have developed with residents of areas close to the stadium, notably through our Community Gain initiatives. The GAA spent €1.5 million to provide a community centre on Distillery Road, and we employ a full-time Community and Public Relations Officer to liaise with local residents. We established the Croke Park Community Fund in 2009, through which the GAA donates €100,000 every year to the community located within 1.5 km of Croke Park. Since 2009 we have allocated over €575,000 to local community initiatives, groups, charities, and to individual streets and associations. In 2014 alone, the GAA funded 32 local groups, covering street committees, local sports and cultural groups, and local charities and day-care centres. Under our Youth Community Gain Initiatives, the GAA subsidises the participation every year of children from the area in the Croke Park Community GAA Cúl Camp: last summer over 200 local children participated in the camp. The GAA also distributes match and concert tickets to local residents, and we also run a weekly CoderDojo (computer coding) class in Croke Park for children from the community; these are free of charge and are well attended every week. Elsewhere in 2014, in a composting and recycling initiative, 15 tonnes of Croke Park compost was given free to local community gardens and homes. And, finally, every Christmas the GAA organises and funds a Christmas Party for Senior Citizens from the local community – the 2014 party was attended by 600 local people.

These facts, I hope, give an indication of how seriously the GAA takes its relationship with the local Croke Park community, and how it strives to treat this community with respect and consideration. And it is these same principles that informed our engagement with this community over the Garth Brooks concerts. We were genuinely concerned about the impact on the local community of a larger-than-usual number of concerts taking place on successive evenings. The GAA, therefore, in conjunction with Aiken Promotions, undertook an extensive and vigorous consultation process with the local community so as to better understand – and to address and resolve – local concerns relating to access, parking, cleaning and any possible anti-social behaviour that might arise from the concerts. The feedback from residents that we received through this process was recorded, reviewed and used where possible in the drafting of a hugely comprehensive event-management plan that was ultimately submitted to Dublin City Council as part of the licence application.

In addition to all of this, we invited the Chairman of the Labour Relations Commission, Mr Kieran Mulvey, to prepare a report on the long-term management of concerts/special events in Croke Park over the next five years. His report, which was issued in advance of the decision by DCC on a licence for the Garth Brooks concerts, made eleven major recommendations on the organisation of future concerts/special events in Croke Park, including the establishment of a special 'Legacy Fund' of €500,000 from the Garth Brooks concerts. The GAA accepted all the recommendations in Kieran Mulvey's report.

In remarks to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on July 18, the CEO of DCC stated that if the legitimate concerns of residents had been properly addressed by the GAA, it would have been possible to have given a licence for all five concerts. He said: 'I felt that if serious efforts were made with the residents it should have been possible to get a reasonable degree of residents' support to hold the event over five nights. As it happened they were unable to do that'. A reasonable person might well ask what more the GAA could have done to deal with the residents' concerns. A more relevant perspective on the affair is that many of the submissions received by DCC that objected to the holding of five concerts, and that undoubtedly swayed DCC not to grant a licence for the five concerts, were found to be fraudulent.

Alerted to this fraud a full three weeks before reaching the decision to grant a licence for three concerts only, DCC should have taken the time to cast a more rigorously sceptical eye on both the nature and extent of the opposition to the five concerts. Had it done so, it might well have reached a different decision. Yet DCC, in its submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee, dismissed the impact of the proven manipulation of its licensing process with remarkable brevity and surprising serenity, in the following short comment: 'Accordingly, while it is disturbing that so many submissions may now be called into question, it does not, in the opinion of the City Council, interfere with the integrity of the decision arrived at'. One is left genuinely puzzled how DCC can admit that 'so many submissions may now be called into question', how it can find this 'disturbing', then conclude that this did not interfere with the 'integrity' of their decision. Surely that is exactly what the fraudulent submissions



AMATEUR STATUS



Pages 44-45, 9 February 2014; Monaghan ball boy Peter Fitzpatrick. Allianz Football League Division 2 Round 2, Monaghan v Meath, St Tiernach's Park, Clones, Co. Monaghan.

did. The rest of us can only conclude that DCC's own recognition of fraud is conclusive proof that the integrity of its decision had been undermined due to the submissions process being manipulated and distorted in the unique goal of persuading DCC not to grant a licence for five concerts. It is a sorry conclusion to have to reach that fraud was allowed to exercise such a vital influence on the decision not to allow the five concerts to go ahead.

Another reason offered for the refusal of the licence for five concerts is that the Garth Brooks and the One Direction concerts together would have, for DCC, represented 'an over-intensification of use' of Croke Park. This is an argument that was employed rather selectively, and not only by DCC. We did not hear anything about over-intensification of use of Croke Park during the redevelopment of Lansdowne Road, when Croke Park was needed to host international soccer and rugby internationals, which were, of course, in addition to Croke Park's own schedule of match days and concerts. And we know that, should the IRFU's application to host either the 2023 Rugby World Cup in Ireland be successful, Croke Park will be required for a total of seven matches, again in addition to Croke Park's own schedule of match days and its quota of three concerts. Is there anyone who seriously imagines that an argument about over-intensification of use of Croke Park will be allowed to interfere with these seven Rugby World Cup matches in Croke Park?

Croke Park and the GAA felt let down by this whole process. Most people who followed the Garth Brooks affair found the decision to refuse a licence for five concerts incomprehensible. And they were right. Consider the

reality of what *we all knew* when the licence application for five concerts was submitted: DCC had created a legitimate expectation that a licence would be granted for five concerts; 400,000 people – 330,000 of our own citizens and 70,000 tourists from abroad – had paid a substantial sum of money to buy tickets; and the concerts were set to present the country with the gift of a massive economic uplift. DCC told us that the decision reached was, I quote, 'appropriate, balanced and reasonable'. But was it so for the 400,000 people who had already bought tickets and who were looking forward hugely to the concerts? We had the opportunity to enjoy a unique experience that we would have fondly remembered for years. We lost all of this, just as the GAA lost out in all the ways I have identified.

'CORPORATE GAA'

Certain commentators, not averse to finding a bandwagon to jump on, and happier with a slogan than serious analysis, got good mileage out of a so-called 'corporate' GAA, by which they mean that the priority of the GAA is to make money. This bandwagon, it should be pointed out, was started by some of those opposed to Croke Park concerts. If the charge had any truth in it, it would be a serious matter deserving public discussion. But this is an utterly bogus charge, and a non-issue. As these commentators well know, the GAA is a not-for-profit organisation that generates revenue uniquely in order to fund the Association's activities. Some of these commentators seem to consider themselves better, purer GAA members than the rest of us, but it's easy to act the purist when one has only to talk, as opposed to taking

decisions in the real world, where the calls on our revenue from our units are enormous and unending, and where we must compete vigorously to maintain the public's loyalty to our games.

Although the facts about GAA revenue sources and funding commitments are easily available to anyone interested in having a genuine debate, it seems that they need re-stating. Over 80% of GAA income is distributed to clubs, counties and the provinces and there are the once-off big projects for which we have to find the funding. Currently, these are the redevelopments of Páirc Uí Chaoimh and Casement Park, but we are also funding the GAA development at the National Sports Campus at Abbotstown, as well as Centres of Excellence in many counties. And that is only in Ireland; because we have a responsibility to our clubs and supporters living abroad, we are funding the redevelopment of our facilities in Ruislip and are developing the Shannon Gaels and Rockland grounds in New York. The GAA is not, of course, the sole funder of these projects, but these are, nonetheless, hugely expensive projects for us, for which the funding has to be found by the Association. In addition, we need constantly to improve our facilities in grounds throughout the country.

Gate receipts represent the single biggest GAA revenue source, but this income is not nearly adequate to meet the funding demands we face. It is a simple reality that we need the income derived from concerts, sponsorship, broadcast rights and other events. The false impression is created by some commentators that the GAA could fund its developments and compete with its sporting competitors by relying solely on gate receipts. It

“...the GAA will continue its not-for-profit mission to fund its games and look after its members and supporters.”

must be remembered that the GAA does not have the lucrative revenue sources of international competitions, such as World Cups, available to soccer and rugby in Ireland. Equally, the marketing opportunities that such competitions present to the FAI and IRFU means that the GAA must allocate greater funds to market its games; for indigenous games, it is not an easy task, nor a cheap one, to maintain its visibility and promote its games against international competition. Croke Park, too, as a concert venue has to compete with other stadiums. And the wider context of all of this is increased competition for what has been, in recent recession years, reduced revenue sources and a big reduction on Government funding. The commentators who criticise us might like the GAA to drastically cut the funding of improvements in our grounds and facilities, the commitment to our exiled supporters, the player-welfare initiatives, the training and mentoring of our officials, the promotion of our games, the provision of full-time coaches (I could go on), but in the real world, where one has to take responsibility and make decisions, the GAA will continue its not-for-profit mission to fund its games and look after its members and supporters.

NUMBER OF CLUBS

In my report to Congress 2014 I raised some concerns about the number of delegates attending Congress, not based on any notion of its optimal size but on whether the numbers attending were in line with the requirements of our rule book. Representation to Congress is clearly defined in Rule 3.35 on the basis of

one delegate from each 10 affiliated clubs, with a minimum representation from counties of four and a maximum of 10. The number of clubs per county as submitted to my office did not seem to reflect either the representation on the Club Wall in Croke Park or in Injury Scheme contributions. At its May meeting, Central Council, too, expressed its concern at the discrepancy between the number of affiliated clubs, on which voting strength at Congress is determined, and the numbers recorded on the electronic membership system and through participation in the Injury Scheme. These apparent discrepancies raised the question as to whether representation at Congress was equitable and totally democratic.

What should have been a fairly simple process to determine the correct number of clubs in Ireland proved to be quite a protracted exercise, but one that eventually produced a more accurate figure. The outcome will be a reduction of thirty-one in the number of delegates from Irish counties attending Congress, and, while some counties have seen a significant reduction in delegate numbers, representation at this year's Congress will be as laid out in rule. Having determined the exact number of clubs in Ireland, which allowed us to implement Rule 3.35 as intended, it was also right that the representation of overseas units be reviewed. Existing representation at Congress does not reflect the relative strength of clubs abroad, so a motion before this Congress is an effort to reflect more accurately and fairly the number of clubs at home and abroad.

INTERNATIONAL UNITS

One of the more remarkable successes for the Association over the past decade has been the growth of our games abroad. Emigration has undoubtedly fuelled that growth, and it is important that we recognise the extraordinary passion of those members who undertake the hard graft, so familiar to club members in Ireland, needed to recreate in their adopted homes the community spirit that propels the GAA in Ireland. Whether in Britain, Europe, North America, the Middle East, Asia, Australia, or elsewhere, the story is one of growth and development. While some of the challenges of fielding teams and raising funds are the same as those in Ireland, the structure of local GAA abroad is different. Clubs abroad are generally fully integrated; the one-club model that encompasses male and female games is the norm overseas.

Perhaps the most notable and gratifying feature of the new GAA world abroad is that clubs have become the centre of a genuine social network for our emigrants. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFA) has been consistently generous in its praise of the work done by our international clubs in this regard. In April 2014 the Clinton Institute in UCD published the report of a Research Project funded by the DFA's Emigrant Support Programme. It stated that 'examples during this research of the capacity of the GAA to bring the Irish community together, across socioeconomic or demographic divides, points to the organisation as a driver in breaking down barriers to participation within the Irish communities abroad. Whether in Australia, Asia or Argentina, the GAA has replaced the Irish pub as the central cultural hub through which all generations of Irish meet, network and share their



19 October 2014; Cian O'Connor, Moorefield, reacts after being shown the yellow card by referee Noel McKenna. Kildare County Senior Football Championship Final, Sarsfields v Moorefield, St Conleth's Park, Newbridge, Co. Kildare.

lives ... The GAA is a striking instance of an organisation that is adapting successfully to shifting vectors of diaspora networking and need'. That is a wonderful endorsement of the work of our members in international units. However, it is not enough simply to praise the work of our volunteers abroad. Although we have increased the level of funding to international units that are undertaking infrastructural development (helped by the financial support of the DFA), we need to do more. The demand for resources at home will, of course, continue to grow, but it is time to undertake a re-examination of the method and extent of resource allocation to international units. I believe that many members in Ireland are not aware of the extent of the expansion that has taken place abroad, nor of the number of non-Irish who are now playing our games. The most rapid growth in clubs in Europe has come from non-Irish-led indigenous development

in areas such as Galicia in Spain and Brittany in France. In November we had the first-ever internationals in Gaelic football, ladies football and handball between France and Italy in Toulouse, when all players involved were born in, or were citizens of, the two countries. This same pattern of non-Irish participation will be obvious when the World Games take place in Abu Dhabi in March of this year. This extension of non-Irish participation in Gaelic games is being encouraged by the availability of our games to a wider audience on Sky Sports and GAAGO. It is a positive and intriguing development to which we must remain alert and to which we must respond.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The *National Strategic Vision and Action Plan 2009-2015* addressed areas of activity organised under 11 themes. Significant progress was made in the implementation of the

plan in each of the themes. Among the key achievements: the adoption of Go Games as national policy; the introduction of the GAA Code of Best Practice; the implementation of the GAA email solution to 11,000 club and county officers; the development of match-attendance initiatives; the introduction of a county financial software package; and the development of Club Planning programme and the online club manual.

The overall mission of the GAA has not changed since 2009. We continue to be a community-based volunteer organisation promoting Gaelic games and lifelong participation. Ireland, however, has changed significantly since the *National Strategic Vision and Action Plan 2009-2015* was prepared: the economic recession and the increase in youth emigration have had a major impact on clubs, creating challenges not envisaged when the 2009-2015 plan was formulated.

It was time, therefore, to redefine our goals and actions to reflect both the progress achieved through the implementation of the *2009-2015 Plan* and the changed circumstances of Ireland today.

In October 2013 a representative group of volunteers and staff were selected to participate in a steering group to develop a new plan. The role of the steering group was to define the criteria for a successful Strategic Plan, to identify the priority action areas to be addressed and to design a consultation process for the plan's formulation. The steering group participants were: Liam Ó Neill; Páraic Duffy; Des Cullinane, Corcaigh; John Horan, Áth Cliath; Arlene McMahon, Fear Manach; John Murphy, Sligeach; Germaine Noonan, Áth Cliath; Pat Teehan, Uibh Fhailí; Michael McGuire, Ros Comáin; Noel Quinn, Dún na nGall; and Colin Regan, Liatroim. The Uachtarán-tofa, Aogán Ó Fearghail, joined the group after his election at Congress 2014.

The plan covers the period 2015 to 2017, and has been developed following a focused consultation process. It sets goals to guide our activities in six areas, identifies specific strategies to achieve each goal and defines measures of success. Unlike the previous plan, it sets goals only for Central Council staff and national committees of volunteers. Provinces, counties and clubs will be encouraged to develop plans to realise their own goals within the framework of national policy. An Implementation Committee will take responsibility for overseeing the plan's enactment, its first task being to determine responsibilities and timelines for the implementation of the different elements of the plan.

Coiste Bainistí will regularly review progress and the Implementation Committee will, after 18 months, provide a formal report on how objectives are being met. The objectives of the plan are ambitious but achievable, and will assist both Central Council staff and national committees in supporting the efforts of our clubs to reach their full potential.

CLUB OFFICER TRAINING

One of the key challenges facing the Association is the recruitment and training of officers at club level. It has been noticeable that, in recent years, a significant number of clubs have had difficulty in filling officer positions at annual general meetings. In some instances, it is because of pressures created by debt and constant fund-raising. But there is a wider concern about the reluctance of members to take on positions of responsibility, and we accept that our administrators are not receiving the education, training and support needed to fulfil their roles effectively. This is not just an issue at club level; our county officers require training on managing people, effective communications, appointing team managements, managing sponsors and capacity building. Our investment in coaching and coach education has not been matched at administrator level, and there is a clear need to develop leadership skills, management skills, competencies in conflict management, and budgeting and teamwork among our club administrators. The Association is still largely dependent on voluntary members to realise its objectives at every level, so a long-term plan to meet the needs of volunteer leaders is essential.

The National Officer Training and Development Committee, in a document presented to Coiste Bainistí in August last, highlighted the failings in our current model of officer training and outlined a series of strategic objectives that must be achieved if we are to develop the skills our officers will require in the future. The document provides a useful template for the incoming committee and it is imperative that a major programme of officer training is launched this autumn at club and county level.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The report, *Examination of the position of the GAA in Primary Schools with particular reference to Cumann na mBunscol*, was submitted in 2014. It was a comprehensive analysis prepared by a work group chaired by George Cartwright, Cavan. The report confirmed that Gaelic games are in a strong position in many of our primary schools, thanks to the great support of teachers, the intense coaching programme undertaken by clubs and county committees, and the work of Cumann na mBunscol in providing a games programme for schools. No other profession has been more supportive of the GAA than teachers, yet the report emphasises that we cannot be complacent. It reminds us that supporting the primary schools and teachers that promote our games is a vital responsibility for administrators at club and county level. Teachers face an ever-increasing workload as part of their professional duties, and it is essential that they receive every possible encouragement in their efforts to develop our games. The report presents a range of practical proposals to enhance the place of Gaelic games in our schools; the implementation of these proposals must be a priority for us in 2015.

THE CHALLENGE OF URBANISATION/CENTRALISATION

None of our committees or work groups has faced a more daunting challenge than the National Urban work group (NUWG). It has undertaken significant research in identifying the challenges facing the GAA from demographic movements of recent years, among which are: the huge imbalances in population all over the country; our lack of penetration in many urban areas; the fall-off in participation at certain age-groups; the impact of decreasing population in rural areas; and the lack of resources available to county committees and clubs to deal with these issues. The data on demographic movements are particularly telling and must inform the Association's planning and strategy over the next few years. A key element of the NUWG proposed solution, in terms of urban areas, is the creation of an investment fund of about €30 million to fast-track the development of 3G pitches in key areas throughout the country to assist clubs in catering for bigger numbers. These would be developed in locations approved by Provincial Councils, where maximum utilisation of facilities would be ensured, and where annual operational costs would be covered. While it is a proposal with obvious benefits, finding the required funding will not be easy in the short term.

“We must find ways to foster greater collaboration between clubs; we must think creatively about club structures in urban centres;...”

The provision of facilities is one aspect of the task facing us in urban areas, but it is our lack of progress in increasing participation levels in these areas that should really concern us. Why are there large provincial towns all over the country fielding just one team at minor level? How can we improve on that? It is great to have 90,000 children attending our summer camps, but how many of these children will still be active participants when they reach the age of 18? If we fast-track the development of 3G pitches, how can we know that participation will actually increase? I have addressed these and other relevant questions in previous reports to Congress, but progress in increasing participation in urban areas has been slow. We must find ways to foster greater collaboration between clubs; we must think creatively about club structures in urban centres; and we must consider seriously the possibility of hybrid and satellite clubs. At the moment, we seem to find it extremely difficult to give priority to the collective good of the Association over the good of individual clubs. We will continue to struggle in this area until we change this mind-set.

The growth of cities and the continuing trend in the global transformation from rural to urban societies (and particularly to metropolises) is challenging for the GAA, whose greater strength lies in rural Ireland and provincial towns. Every year brings a reminder of the worrying decline in local services and resources, as concentration and centralisation in large urban centres is reinforced. We have seen the impact of the closure of banks, post offices and hospitals, while

recent changes in the deployment of the Defence Forces will have an impact on the GAA. Members of the Defence Forces have always played a pivotal role in the Association at club, county, provincial and national levels, both on the playing field and in its administration. The disestablishment of the 4th Western Brigade in 2012 is likely to have a negative impact on clubs in its former area of operation in the midlands, west and north-west as career-oriented Defence Forces personnel are less likely to put down family roots in this extensive former area of operation. It is another reminder of the need for us to pay serious attention to demographic changes and population trends that have direct consequences on the strength and functioning of the Association.

ONLINE TRANSFER SYSTEM

Last year, Congress gave permission for the piloting of an online transfer system in 2015. The existing paper-based transfer system creates a huge amount of work for club, county and provincial secretaries and is not conducive to the maintenance of easily accessible records. The online pilot scheme will be implemented alongside the existing paper-based model; our hope is that the pilot scheme will identify the issues we need to address before we implement an online-only system. I appeal to counties and clubs to cooperate with the online scheme this year in the knowledge that a successful transition to an online system will mean a user-friendly and less labour-intensive process of player transfers.



NATIONAL EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CENTRE

Over the past year the GAA and DCU have been collaborating on setting up a GAA National Education and Research Centre (NERC) to be based at the DCU Sports Campus on Ballymun Road in Dublin. A project-management group has been in place for a number of months and has agreed broad principles governing the operation of the centre. The three areas of activity of the centre will be research and innovation, individual and team performance analysis, and its function as an education and training centre for GAA personnel. It has been agreed to set up a number of sub-groups, comprising both GAA and DCU personnel, to articulate in greater detail how the NERC should operate in these areas. We will continue to update Central Council and Coiste Bainistí as developments occur.

EMPLOYMENT OF COUNTY SECRETARIES

In early 2014 Coiste Bainistí initiated a new arrangement whereby a number of County Secretaries opted to be employed by Central Council; as a consequence, the latter now assumes the burdens, risks and financial exposures of the employer. In circumstances where the agreement of a County Secretary to a change of employer was not forthcoming, the change in contract will be implemented on the occasion of the expiry of the current fixed-term contract, so that, where a renewal of contract is offered, it will be a Central Council contract, and not a County Committee contract.

As of now, 10 County Secretaries report to Central Council through my office, and also report, in respect of operational matters within the county, to the County Chairperson/ County Management Committee. This

new arrangement is still in its early stage; 2015 will be the first full year of operation. But from our experience to date we can say that the willingness of the County Secretaries to engage in the training and development opportunities provided by Central Council has been encouraging, and their performance in meeting our requirements at national level has also been positive.

Within each county, it is important that the relationship between Chairperson and Secretary is a positive one. It is vital, too, that the goals set by the Chairperson are both challenging and realistic, and that they reflect the priority needs of the county. It is also crucial that the Chairpersons avail of training opportunities to develop their performance-management skills.

HUMAN RESOURCES

An important priority in 2014 for the Human Resources (HR) department was the implementation of the aforementioned new reporting and employment structure for full-time county secretaries. The new structure generated a range of issues, and HR dealt with concerns and queries relating to, and gave advice on, pensions, payroll, employment legislation, annual leave allowances and performance reviews. Of the 17 full-time County Secretaries, ten have so far migrated to the new reporting structure.

A Training Needs Analysis was completed in early 2014 to determine the training and development needs of staff. HR has since worked with the Irish Sports Council to provide an extensive training and development programme to employees at county, provincial and national level. A total of 57 training courses were made

available to staff, with a wide range of topics and skillsets offered. The feedback on these courses has been positive, and a number of employees have also availed of our Further Education Policy to complete third-level studies.

The development of a HR toolkit is underway and will be made available to people-managers at all levels in 2015. The toolkit will give essential advice and guidelines in the areas of employment legislation, employer obligations, and employee handbooks.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATIONS

A number of significant IT and telecommunications developments were undertaken during 2014; more are planned for 2015. Among the key projects was an upgrade of the Croke Park Stadium network. In late 2013 Croke Park Stadium awarded its catering contract to Aramark and undertook a major upgrade and redesign in the concession outlets on Levels 3 and 7 to allow patrons a better choice of food and beverage, and better value in an improved environment. The 20% increase in unit numbers, the addition of 80 extra till points and the installation of IPTV were very positive improvements. However, with the growth in smart devices being used by patrons in the stadium on match days, it was necessary to hard-wire all EPOS Tills on Levels 3 and 7 to enable permanent connectivity to the new core fibre stadium network. This demanding project, undertaken in the context of further requirements for upgrading the existing Croke Park wi-fi and the installation of HD wi-fi in the bowl of the stadium, was completed in December 2014.



MINISTEOR

RÉITEOR

GAA Hurling
All Ireland Senior
Championship Final

4-13 3-14

Immediate challenges in IT and telecommunications extend beyond Croke Park. It is necessary to provide wi-fi access at main county grounds on match days. This is needed for ticket scanning, specifically in Semple Stadium, Páirc Uí Chaoimh and Casement Park (scanning at other grounds requires a different approach), media services, including photographers, and administration. Many county grounds already have a wi-fi service installed, but in all cases this needs to be reviewed to ensure the service is fit for purpose.

HAWKEYE

Following the completion of its trial period, a review of the current Croke Park Hawkeye technology from an infrastructure and support perspective commenced in early 2015. The review will also cover Hawkeye requirements for Semple Stadium, Páirc Uí Chaoimh and Casement Park.

TICKETING SERVICES

Our ticketing services are provided by www.tickets.ie. We are currently reviewing all aspects of our ticketing requirements to ensure that the needs of our supporters are met and that access to tickets is available to as wide a range of patrons as possible. A review of our current ticketing technology is also underway. This will include a decision on workable scanning solutions at all main county grounds (aside from Croke Park, Semple Stadium, Páirc Uí Chaoimh and Casement Park, which are, or will be, wi-fi-enabled grounds).

MICROSOFT OFFICE 365 AND CLUB WEBSITES

The transfer of GAA e-mail services from Google to Microsoft, which took place in late 2013, was a mammoth undertaking. I accept that some members experienced difficulties

during the transition process and I regret the impact this had in some units. At this stage, we are happy that the system is now being widely used throughout our Association. The switch to Microsoft Office 365 meant that club websites developed using Google Sites technology could no longer be supported. During the past year, we have engaged with a number of parties aimed at developing an alternative website solution for clubs. The new club-website template has now been developed by Ergo using Microsoft SharePoint technology. This is currently being introduced to clubs that wish to use the new website template with priority being given to clubs who were using the Google Sites solution. The GAA's partnership with Microsoft allows us to explore new technology solutions to support a wide range of IT projects, including a club app development, data back-up services using Microsoft's Azure platform (this specifically relates to services hosted in Croke Park's IT environment), and the hosting of the GAA's digital library platform and the Boston College History Project in the Cloud using Microsoft's Azure platform.

CORE GAA SYSTEM

Over the next 18 months, it is envisaged that a number of enhancements will be made to key GAA operational and management systems supported by Servasport. These enhancements will include:

- Improved reporting on coaching and games activities (to be completed in Quarter 1/2015).
- Additional functionality to insurance module (to be completed in Q1/2015).
- New online Player Transfer System (recently developed and being piloted in 2015).

- New online Referee System to record/manage all match details and referee expenses (to be ready for testing in the second half of 2015; live in 2016).
- New Disciplinary Management System to incorporate the latest GAA disciplinary rules. This will eliminate the current manual system (to be ready for testing in early 2016; live in late 2016).
- GAA/Club App, with support from Microsoft (to be ready for testing in mid-2015). One of the key features of this new app will be the ability of clubs to communicate directly with members/players who are registered on the GAA Membership System, thus eliminating (or at least significantly reducing) the cost of sending text messages.
- System to enable the feeding of GAA Fixtures/Results to websites developed using Word Press software (to be ready by Q3/2015).
- System to manage requests from GAA units/others seeking access to GAA Fixtures/Results (to be ready by mid-2015).

GAA WEBSITE - WWW.GAA.IE

The GAA will commence a wide-ranging process of engaging with key stakeholders in early 2015 aimed at identifying the features and functionality for a new GAA website. The new website will be enabled for accessibility on smart devices. Given the extent of the investigative work to be undertaken, the new website should not be expected before the second half of 2016.



14 September 2014; Limerick's Rebecca Delee after the game. All Ireland Intermediate Camogie Championship Final, Kilkenny v Limerick, Croke Park, Dublin.

DIGITAL GAMES ARCHIVE

The securing of funding from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) has enabled the GAA to undertake a project to develop a digital library of televised games covering the past 50 years. The work is being undertaken in collaboration with Nemeton, and we are working with Microsoft to determine the appropriate way of hosting the digital-games archive.

SMART STADIUM INITIATIVE

In September 2013 Dublin City University (DCU) and Arizona State University (ASU) signed a Transatlantic Higher Education Partnership. One year later, the two universities staged a special celebration event to

highlight the successes of the past year in the areas of health technology, digital learning, smart cities and conflict resolution. At this Phoenix event further collaborations were announced including a Smart Stadium project – a joint collaboration between DCU, ASU, Intel and the GAA. Teams at the Sun Devil Stadium at ASU, Tempe and Croke Park in Dublin will work with DCU, ASU and Intel to deploy pilot 'Internet of Things' technologies to test their capabilities in these unique environments. It is a partnership that, through time, will enhance our supporters' match-day experience.

CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

In the second half of 2014, Iar-Uachtarán, Nickey Brennan, operated as an interim Chief Information Officer on a voluntary basis. He brought a remarkable energy and expertise to the role, and I wish to record my gratitude to Nickey for his outstanding contribution. I am delighted that Tomás Meehan will shortly join our Croke Park team as Chief Information Officer.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Over the past 12 months the Community and Health section in Croke Park, under the direction of the National Health and Wellbeing Committee, has been supporting the establishment of county Health and Wellbeing committees. Their positive influence is already being felt. Conferences and education opportunities for members have addressed a wide variety of topics, covering suicide awareness, player welfare, mental health, juggling the demands of education and sport, and alcohol, drug and gambling awareness. The Mental Health charter was launched in April to coincide with our new mental health packs, 'Play in my Boots', developed in partnership with St. Patrick's Foundation, Dublin. These player-orientated packs offer simple advice on how to develop and maintain one's mental fitness. I would like to thank the many inter-county ambassadors from across the codes for contributing to the packs' content. The GAA also supported the National Office for Suicide Prevention's #littlethings campaign (see details at www.yourmentalhealth.ie). We should be grateful to those players who have spoken in public about their mental health; in doing so, they help confront the stigma that still attaches to the topic.

The GAA's partnership with Samaritans has also worked towards tackling this stigma. Our members have an additional support network available to them through the Samaritans' 24-hour, 365-day helpline **(ROI: 116123 / NI: 08457-909090)**. Through a major presence at the Connacht and Ulster football finals and the first All-Ireland hurling semi-final, the charity distributed almost 20,000 pens and wristbands with their contact numbers to supporters. Every club in the country also received

posters promoting the partnership, encouraging those with any concerns to heed the Samaritans' call to 'Talk to Us'.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITY

A resource for members moving abroad was launched at the International Rules series in Perth. The 'Striving and Surviving in Australia' wallet card was developed following extensive consultation, via questionnaires, with members in our Australasian club network. This resource aims to highlight key issues to be aware of if travelling through, or moving to, Australia, including top tips from Irish people who have already gone through this experience. Also included are links to social media sites and other services designed to support Irish people in Australia. All GAA members applying for an international transfer to Australia will be given a copy of the wallet card, while all clubs in Australia will be issued with a digital version of the resource for distribution among members and the local Irish community.

THE HEALTHY CLUB PROJECT

The innovative Healthy Club project, launched in March 2013 in partnership with the HSE and the National Office for Suicide Prevention, is now nearing the end of its two-year Phase 1. The interim report by the independent evaluation team from Waterford IT highlighted the exceptional work being undertaken by the participating clubs and the positive impact this is having on members and their communities. It also highlighted the benefit of expanding this programme and making it available to a greater number of interested clubs. This initiative requires support, in financial and resource terms, as well as a

certain long-term commitment. In January the GAA was pleased to announce the new Corporate Social Responsibility partnership with Irish Life to help make this extension of the initiative possible.

DERMOT EARLEY YOUTH LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

In October, the first wave of the Dermot Earley Youth Leadership Initiative participants graduated from NUIG with their Foundation Certificate in Youth Leadership and Community Action. This pilot, available to young club members aged 15-18 in counties Kildare, Roscommon and Galway, in partnership with NUIG and Foróige, has been positively evaluated. Work is underway to explore how this valuable opportunity can be made available to a greater number of counties.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS

Over the past number of years the Community and Health section has supported many units in responding to critical incidents, ranging from a tragic death of a member through SADS, suicide, or a road traffic accident, to serious injuries sustained in a game, in training or in club activities. The response of our clubs, counties, volunteers, and officers in the face of some very difficult situations has been impressive. However, it is clear that the Association would benefit from a simple and clear document offering reassurance and best-practice guidance to anyone responding to a critical incident in the future.

To ensure that the experience of those who have gone through such circumstances is captured in this resource, a workshop was facilitated in Croke Park in January. Members were taken through their experiences





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Marble & Showen's

Email: jmcnrod@eircom.net



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Email: jmcnrod@eircom.net

by trained professionals – from both within our membership and without – with knowledge and experience in handling critical incidents. The final document will be launched at the National Health and Wellbeing conference in March.

COMMUNITY AND HEALTH PRESENCE ON GAA.IE

All these new resources, and indeed many more relating to the broad and varied work of the GAA's Community and Health section, will be available in the new subsection on GAA.ie – www.gaa.ie/community For the first time, our members and our units have a one-stop shop on the GAA website where they can access all material necessary to inform and support their health and wellbeing work on behalf of their members.

THE SOCIAL INITIATIVE

A small but dedicated band of clubs continue to engage in the GAA's Social Initiative. A workshop of representatives from some of the most active Social Initiative clubs and counties took place in Croke Park in August to plan for its future. Alignment with the new county health and wellbeing committees will be essential for this, and we encourage all counties and clubs to explore how they can make the Social Initiative part of their annual activity calendar. I would encourage clubs to make a special effort to engage with those who are isolated or lonely; it was to counteract social isolation that then-President Mary McAleese turned to the GAA, seeing our extensive club network as an important means to offer company and comfort to members with decreasing contact with their communities.

CHILD WELFARE AND PROTECTION

The Association is very committed to the issue of child welfare and protection. 62,196 of our members who work with underage teams have been vetted via the Garda Vetting Bureau, while 13,847 have been vetted by AccessNI in the Six Counties. The level of vetting undertaken by the GAA compares very favourably with other voluntary organisations and, indeed, with statutory agencies.

An important advance in 2014 in our engagement with this issue was the agreement reached with Ladies Football, Camogie, Rounders and Handball to adopt a new Child Welfare Awareness Training Programme and a new Code of Behaviour (Underage). Apart from establishing a revised training programme and a comprehensive code for those working at underage level, the agreement ensures that a realistic and much-improved training programme, based on the day-to-day reality of playing of Gaelic games, can be delivered by a shared pool of Child Welfare tutors within all four Associations. The Code of Behaviour (Underage) is a practical booklet that contains guidance on the minimum levels of behaviour that we expect from our coaches, parents, players and clubs. It is available to download section by section, at www.gaa.ie/clubzone. The new Child Protection Awareness in Sport Programme is primarily for coaches of underage teams. Both documents set a high standard in child protection for our large cohort of volunteer coaches.

In addition to the above training, the Association also offers Club Children's Officer training, training for Designated Liaison Persons who deal with allegations of abuse, and a

Tackling Bullying Workshop. In 2014 a specially designed information workshop was provided to Club Children's Officers in 29 counties. In the absence of an agreed joint sports-sector Designated Liaison Person Training Programme, we continue to implement our own pilot project on a county-by-county basis, as invited. The GAA Tackling Bullying programme continues to progress. With more than 40 tutors trained to deliver the programme nationwide, the uptake of and response to this programme has been encouraging. Such has been its impact that, following a joint initiative with the Irish Sport Council, representatives from 18 other sports organisations have now been trained to offer this anti-bullying programme within their own organisations.

The quality of our training programmes is dependent on the ability of tutors to deliver them in a professional and engaging manner. Our Tutor Development Programme is a support mechanism for tutors that promotes consistency and quality in the provision of training, affords a self- and peer-monitoring aspect, and enables us to validate standards. One of the objectives of the Child Welfare Training Committee in 2015 will be to establish mechanisms to measure the outcomes of programmes. This will prove challenging, but, when achieved, will enable us to validate a 'quality assurance' aspect to our child welfare training.

CHILD WELFARE INFORMATION SEMINAR

The 5th Annual Child Welfare Information Seminar took place in Croke Park on September 13 2014, and was well attended. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr. James Reilly, T.D., endorsed and launched the new Code of Behaviour (Underage) and the ISC-accredited Child Protection Awareness in

Sport Programme. The seminar also discussed new and pending legislation, including the Children First Bill, the proposed commencement of the National Vetting Bureau Act, and the establishment of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

It was noted that some of the Association's policies will require re-examination and amendment in light of pending legislative changes, and that changes to the GAA Guidelines for Dealing with Allegations of Abuse and the Association's Safeguarding Policy statement will be governed by amendments to the Children First Bill.

AN GHAELIGE AGUS CULTÚR

Riamh anall, bhí baint chomh tábhachtach céanna ag an nGaeilge agus ag an gCultúr Gaelach le féiniúlacht agus le prionsabail Chumann Lúthchleas Gael agus a bhí ag na cluichí. Níl aon athrú ar sin. Chomh fada agus a bhaineann sé le go leor de na baill, is cuid bhunúsach iad den eagraíocht lena mbaineann siad. Arís an bhliain seo caite bhí rian na teangan le feiscint agus chun cinn i ngach gníomhaíocht a bhain leis an gCumann.

Cuireadh spéis ar leith i Scór 2014 os rud é go raibh athraithe déanta ar roinnt de na comórtais thraidisiúnta. Ní ar mhaithe le isliú-caighdeán a déanadh na hathraithe sin, ach chun a chinntiú go mbeadh leagan amach orthu a luífeadh isteach leis na hathraithe atá tagtha ar an gCumann Lúthchleas Gael sa saol nua-aoiseach seo. Molaim iad siúd atá sáite i Scór agus i gcur chun cinn an chultúir agus na gcaitheamh-aimsire tradisiúnta. Creidim gur furasta an ceangal tábhachtach atá idir iad agus na cluichí náisiúnta a aithint.

Molain freisin an feachtas a thionscnaigh Coiste na Gaeilge agus a bhuaigh duais na Gaeilge ag Gradaim Chumainn Mhargáíochta na hÉireann. Sa bhfeachtas sin, taispeáineadh cuid de na peileadóirí agus de na hiománaithe is cáiliúla atá againn ag gríosadh baill CLG chun úsáid a bhaint as an méid Gaeilge atá acu. Taispeáineadh na fiseáin ar na scáileáin mhóra ag cluichí an bhliain seo caite agus freisin i 2013. Mheas lucht margáíochta go mba sár-scéim a bhí inti.

Chomh maith leis sin bhí colún seachtainiúil Gaeilge ar shuíomh idrlín an Chumainn le linn shéasúir na gCraobhchomórtaí agus as seo go ceann cúpla mí tá súil again teacht ar bhealaí a chinnteoidh go mbeidh breis den teanga le feiceáil ansíúd.

Ó am go chéile tugann eachtraí nach mbíonn pleanáilte léargas nádúrtha ar an áit áta ag teanga na Gaeilge laistigh den Chumann. Ar péire acu sin bhí bua Phobalscoile Chorca Dhuibhne i gComórtaí Choirn Uí Ógáin an bhliain seo caite agus óráid Lester Ryan tar éis bua Chill Chainnigh in athrimirt Chluiche Ceannais Sinsir Iomána na hÉireann.

Níorbh aon chur i gcéill ceachtar ócáid acu sin, ach '*Beart de réir a mBriathair*' ón nádúr.

LIAM Ó NÉILL

This Congress marks the end of Liam Ó Néill's term as Uachtarán. Liam can look back with pride on his work and achievements over the past three years. He established clear and well-defined priorities for his term as Uachtarán, and achieved his goals in every case. The establishment of the Football Review Committee under the Chairmanship of Eugene McGee led to major changes in the way that Gaelic football is played, an initiative that has proved to be of benefit

to the game and the Association. Similarly, he gave hurling – players, coaches and administrators – the opportunity to consider the state of the game by establishing the Hurling 2020 committee, with Liam Sheedy as Chairman. He also brought radical and badly-needed changes to the structure of the Féile competitions and modernised Scór (in the face of strong opposition).

Another of Liam's priorities was the establishment of structures to facilitate the promotion and management of all Gaelic games within one organisation. This is an ongoing process, but the progress made to date will inevitably lead to a successful outcome; Liam's contribution to its realisation will have been immense.

Liam brought invaluable insight and understanding to the role of Uachtarán, talents that bore fruit in the manner in which he inspired and provided leadership to our volunteer members. And he understood clearly the differing roles and functions of Uachtarán as Chairman and those of the Ard-Stiúrthóir as Chief Executive. We had an excellent working relationship and I am very grateful to him for his sensible advice and unflinching support at every turn. Liam has much more to contribute to the GAA, be it in Trumera or at county, provincial or national level. I hope he will find a satisfying way to do so. We wish Liam, his wife Áine and family well in the years to come.

AOGÁN Ó FEARGHAIL

Aogán Ó Fearghail assumes the office of Uachtarán at Congress 2015. He is exceptionally qualified to do so. He brings a wide range of experience at school, club, county and provincial levels to the highest office in the GAA: he has had a lifelong involvement with his club,

Drumgoon; he has represented Cavan on Ulster Council for 25 years; he has served as President of that Council from 2010 to 2013; and he has been a member of Coiste Bainistí for four years. This deep involvement at all levels of the Association makes him fully aware of, and prepares him well for, the challenges facing us. During his year as Uachtarán-tofa he has worked methodically to prepare for his role as Uachtarán. As a member of the sub-committee that drafted the 2015-2017 Strategic Plan, he has been an active participant in preparing the programme of work that will set the important objectives for Central Council over the next three years.

The position of Uachtarán is a demanding full-time role, and I am well placed to see the huge commitment of time and energy required to visit, support and motivate our 2,000 clubs. Aogán is well equipped to fulfil that challenging aspect of his new role. An excellent public speaker, his understanding of the GAA's historical and cultural place, along with his personable manner, will serve him well. He will be a very good ambassador for the Association. We wish him well and hope that Aogán, his wife Frances, daughters Niamh and Cliona and sons Aogán Óg and Conall enjoy the next three years.

COMHBHRÓN

The death of Andy Kettle in December came as a great shock, notwithstanding our awareness of his health problems. Andy had been his usual lively self at the November meeting of Coiste Bainistí, demonstrating the enthusiasm, good humour and positive demeanour that marked his involvement with every aspect of his GAA life. He will be greatly missed as a friend and colleague by members of Central Council and Coiste Bainistí, by Dublin

County Committee which he chaired at time of his death, and by his beloved Fingal Ravens. But Andy was first and foremost a family man, and his loss will be felt most keenly by his wife Phyllis, sons Patrick, Peter and Eoin, daughters Niamh, Orla and Ciara and his wider family circle. Go ndéana Dia trócaire ar a anam.

Pat Egan was the second member of Central Council to pass away recently. Although his death on January 1 2015 followed a long illness, the sense of sadness and grief was genuine and widespread throughout the Association. We knew Pat in a range of roles in Corofin, in Galway, as a referee and, at national level, as a member of Coiste Bainistí and Central Council. Pat brought the same energy and enthusiasm to every role, and the positive results of his leadership as Galway Football Board Chairman and in Corofin are acknowledged throughout the county. He was always great company and embodied the very best qualities of volunteers within our organisation. We extend our sympathy to his wife Nora, sons Ulick and Noel and other family members. Solas na bhFlaitheas dá anam uasal.

The untimely deaths of Limerick referee Shane Hourican and Offaly Under-21 hurling manager Dermot Hogan devastated their families and shocked us all in 2014. In January 2015 former Tipperary Secretary Tommy Barrett passed away, as did Tom Walsh, a former President of the Irish Handball Council and, latterly, a colleague on the Croke Park staff.

Among others who passed away since I wrote my last report were Tom Collum (Tiobraid Árann and Luimneach); Owen McCann (Dún na nGall and Áth Cliath); Muiris Prenderville (Áth Cliath); Tony Jordan (Áth Cliath); Frank Tierney (Áth Cliath); Greg Hughes (Uíbh Fhailí); P.J. McIntyre (Uíbh Fhailí);

Ciarraí); Joe Dooley (Uíbh Fhailí); Jim Bermingham (Uíbh Fhailí); Owen Bannigan (Muineachán); Dónal Donnelly (Tír Eoghain); Declan Molloy (Cill Mhantáin); Gerry Finneran (Ros Comáin); Brendan Lynch (Ros Comáin); George Geraghty (Ros Comáin); Ted Nealon (Sligeach); Edward Neary (Sligeach); Shem Downey (Cill Chainnigh); Martin Treacy (Cill Chainnigh); Tommy Cooke (Luimneach); Liam Hogan (Luimneach); James McNaughton (Aontroim); John Donlon (An Longfort); John Martin (An Longfort); Tony Herbert (Luimneach and Áth Cliath); Flor Coffey (Tiobraid Árann); John Hannigan (Dún na nGall); Pat Doyle (Ceatharlach); Liam Willie Walsh (Ceatharlach); Ted Joyce (Ceatharlach); Tim Flood (Loch Garman); Peadar Smith (An Lú); Eamon Carroll (An Lú); Mickey Fagan (An Iarmhí).

BUÍOCHAS

Michael Delaney retired as Secretary of the Leinster Council in 2014. Michael gave wonderful service to the Association in this key role since 1976. He earned a reputation as a progressive and enlightened administrator whose primary concern was always the best interests of the Association. Over the past seven years as Ard Stiúirthóir, I had ample opportunities to appreciate his common sense and sound advice. Michael is held in enormous respect throughout the GAA, a respect earned by years of outstanding service. I hope that he will continue to enjoy his lifelong relationship with the GAA and I wish Michael Reynolds well as his successor.

On a personal note, I am indebted to the Uachtarán and to the members of Coiste Bainistí and Ard Chomhairle for their support during 2014, and for their optimism and determination to do what is best for the Association.

Every day I see these same qualities, combined with great energy, in the county and provincial secretaries and officers with whom my office works so closely. I never take any of this for granted and I thank all for their continued assistance.

I am blessed to work with a wonderful team of people in Croke Park. For all of them, working for the GAA is no ordinary job and they work tirelessly for the common goal of improving and strengthening the Association. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the work of the staff in my own office. Our Operations Manager Treasa Ni Raghailh demands the highest standards of efficiency; she and her colleagues Lorena Ní Cheallaigh and Aine Ní Mhainín work hard to provide a high quality of service to our counties and volunteers.

CONCLUSION

The reading of this report gives, I hope, a sense of the responsibilities and duties, issues and challenges, constraints and opportunities that dictate both the day-to-day operations and the longer-term planning of a large organisation such as the GAA. By definition, each organisation is different, but it is fair to say that the GAA is like no other, particularly in its unusual multi-level structure ranging from local to national levels – now more and more extended to an international level by Irish emigration – in its essentially volunteer character, and in its tradition and history. Due to this special character, the Association's approach to the resolution of problems or to the assessment of opportunities cannot be the same as another big organisation that is purely commercial and that has different mechanisms at its disposal

to deal with issues. A commercial organisation, for example, does not have to worry about tradition when confronted by a major problem. The GAA, however, must take account of tradition in making policy decisions. Commentators sometimes criticise the Association for being slow to make decisions, but it is right that it moves slowly on certain occasions – this is both the effect of our democratic structures and decision-making, but also of our awareness that the traditions and values embodied in the GAA must be carefully considered in any major change of policy. For many of our members and supporters, the GAA represents strong and personal meanings; one cannot treat these lightly when considering major policy or rule changes.

Parallel to the desire to preserve important traditions is the necessity to stay in touch with and be relevant to the society in which we function. We must recognise that we operate in an economy and a world of new technologies and means of communications that demand that we adapt to new ways of seeing and doing things. We must, in other words, find ways to balance tradition and innovation. In seeking to find that balance, we do not always please our members and supporters (the Sky deal is one example), but it is an irrefutable fact that, if we do not adapt to the modern world, we will not survive in such a way that allows us to develop as we have been doing. Do we wish to develop our facilities and our grounds? Do we wish to look after our players well? Do we wish to ensure that our games receive the exposure and promotion they need to compete against the vast resources of professional sport? If we answer 'yes'

to these questions, and we do, then we have to recognise, if we are honest and serious, that tradition cannot be the only criterion in our decision-making, that it must be balanced by a realistic recognition of the need to adapt to the changes in the world in which we operate. The GAA cannot stand still for the simple reason that our country, culture and the wider world do not stand still.

In adapting to this changing environment, as well as to new legislation (for example on vetting, or health and safety), we recognise that an increasing burden falls on our volunteers. One obvious and important solution to this is to recruit new volunteers. We need to invite new people into the Association, to find ways to make membership of the GAA a worthwhile endeavour as a community activity.

The new Strategic Plan is an important document. It is a three-year plan, and its most significant general feature is that it is a plan for Central Council staff and our national committees alone. Clear objectives and strategies are laid out in the plan, with a strong onus on both staff and committees to play their part. Above all, it is a document outlining what I, as Ard Stiúrthóir, need to achieve during the life of the plan. But I am enthused by the challenge as I believe that, if we all play our part to achieve the objectives set out in the plan, the Association will be in a stronger position at the end of it.

If the plan sets out the strategy for Central Council alone for the next three years, it is because we believe that it is important for provinces, counties and clubs to formulate their own strategic plans. We need

TUARASCÁIL AN ARD STIÚRTHÓIRA

to improve and re-invigorate the planning process at all levels of the Association, and not just in Croke Park. Strategic plans help greatly to achieve this, as they oblige us to assess where we are now, what we are doing well, what we are doing less well or not at all, and how we should address the issues that need to be addressed. Strategic plans represent important stock-taking exercises, and give a focus and a direction to our efforts to keep the Association vibrant and relevant. Strategic plans are, of course, one of the modern methods we have turned to that might

seem alien to some of our members, but I would suggest that we should see them as carefully reflected and planned ways to guide our activities as we lead the Association towards the future and that allow us to find the proper balance between tradition and innovation.

On a final personal note, I would like to express my gratitude to Coiste Bainistí at the decision to extend my contract as Ard Stiúrthóir. It is an enormous privilege to occupy this position. All my efforts will continue to be directed towards achieving what is good for the Association, with the overarching

responsibility and objective – that we all share as guardians of a tradition and a history – of leaving it better off than we found it.

Páirc Ó Dufáigh

Páirc Ó Dufáigh
ARD STIÚRTHÓIR



INCLU



SIVENESS



TICKETS

	2013	2014	2014 Replay
Overall Capacity	82006	82006	82006
County Allocations	56910	57553	58677
Provinces	355	355	205
Overseas	472	472	450
Ard Chomhairle & Iar Uachtaran	772	788	788
Camogie	120	140	140
Ladies Football	150	100	100
Rounders & Handball	147	212	212
Sponsors	879	947	904
Press	254	254	254
TV & Radio	74	74	74
Schools and Educational Bodies	2229	2229	1724
3rd Level	240	240	120
Croke Park Residents	240	200	200
Match Officials and National Referees panel	105	128	78
Health Bodies & Irish Sports Council	60	60	60
Match Day/Vertigo/Minor Teams	128	148	128
Staff & Sub committees	557	698	554
Jubilee Teams	66	70	0
Mini Games	244	230	230
Term Tickets	4144	4144	4144
Season Tickets	3322	2436	2436
Number available for distribution	71478	71478	71478
Premium & Corporate	10528	10528	10528
Total	82006	82006	82006

Pages 64–65. 14 July 2014; Players from the Ferns GAA Club, Co. Wexford, wearing red and white shirts, including three year old Paudie Moynihan, third from left, shake hands with the Camross GAA Club, Co. Laois, players after their game. Camross GAA Club, Laois, v Ferns GAA Club, Wexford, Leinster GAA Croke Park Go Games 2014, Croke Park, Dublin.

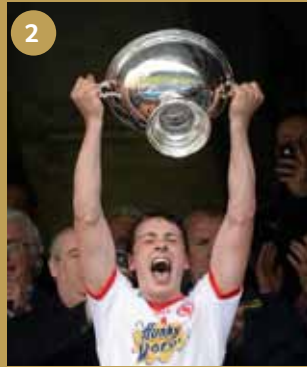
22 June 2014; Local official Michael Moloney reaches for a nail in his pocket as he nails on the admission price in advance of the game. Munster GAA Football Senior Championship, Semi-Final, Clare v Kerry, Cusack Park, Ennis, Co. Clare.

TO TERRACES
& NTH. STAND

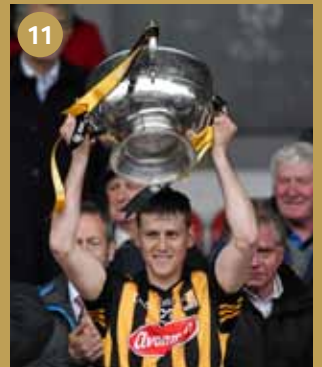
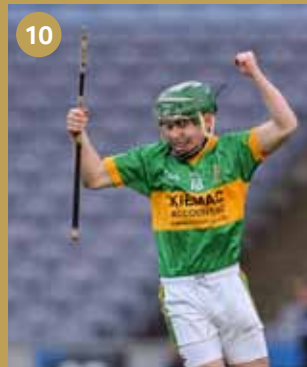
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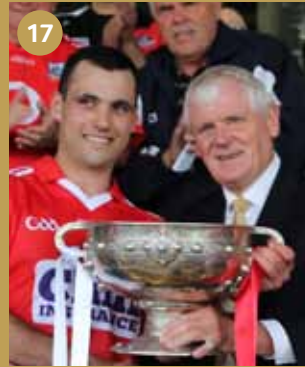
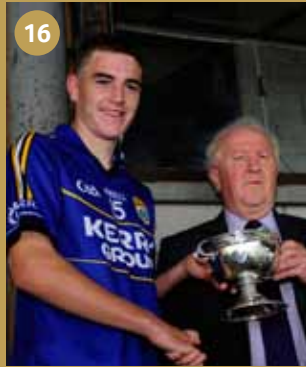
PAIRC CHIOSÓG
INIS

€15



TIME TO CELEBRATE





1. GAA Hurling All-Ireland Senior Championship Final; 2. Nicky Rackard Cup Final; 3. Lory Meagher Cup Final; 4. Christy Ring Cup Final; 5. Electric Ireland GAA Hurling All Ireland Minor Championship Final; 6. Bord Gáis Energy GAA Hurling All Ireland U21 A Championship Final; 7. Bord Gáis Energy GAA Hurling All Ireland U21 B Championship Final; 8. AIB GAA Hurling All-Ireland Senior Club Championship Final; 9. AIB GAA Hurling All-Ireland Intermediate Club Championship Final; 10. AIB GAA Hurling All-Ireland Junior Club Championship Final; 11. Allianz Hurling League Division 1 Final; 12. Allianz Hurling League Division 1B Final; 13. Allianz Hurling League Division 2A Final; 14. Allianz Hurling League Division 2B Final; 15. GAA Football All-Ireland Junior Championship; 16. All Ireland Minor B Hurling final; 17. All-Ireland Intermediate Hurling Final; 18. Allianz Hurling League 3A; 19. Allianz Hurling League Division 3B Final; 20. GAA Football All-Ireland Senior Championship Final; 21. Electric Ireland GAA Football All-Ireland Minor Championship Final; 22. Cadbury GAA All-Ireland Football U21 Championship Final; 23. AIB GAA Football All-Ireland Senior Club Championship Final; 24. AIB GAA Football All-Ireland Intermediate Club Championship Final; 25. AIB GAA Football All-Ireland Junior Club Championship Final; 26. Allianz Football League Division 1 Final; 27. Allianz Football League Division 2 Final; 28. Allianz Football League Division 3 Final; 29. Allianz Football League Division 4 Final

RESULTS



PEIL

AIB GAA Football All Ireland Intermediate Club Championship 13/14	Kiltane	2-13	v	2-21	Truagh
AIB GAA Football All Ireland Junior Club Championship 13/14	Fuerty	1-11	v	5-7	Two Mile House
AIB GAA Football All Ireland Senior Club Championship 13/14	Castlebar Mitchels	2-11	v	4-12	St Vincents
Allianz Football League Roinn 1 2014	Dublin	3-19	v	1-10	Derry
Allianz Football League Roinn 2 2014	Donegal	1-10	v	1-16	Monaghan
Allianz Football League Roinn 3 2014	Cavan	0-18	v	1-17	Roscommon
Allianz Football League Roinn 4 2014	Tipperary	1-16	v	1-15	Clare
Cadburys GAA Football All Ireland U21 Championship 2014	Dublin	1-21	v	3-6	Roscommon
Electric Ireland GAA Football All Ireland Minor Championship 2014	Kerry	0-17	v	1-10	Donegal
GAA Football All Ireland Junior Championship 2014	Cavan	2-14	v	0-14	Kerry
GAA Football All Ireland Senior Championship 2014	Kerry	2-9	v	0-12	Donegal
GAA Football Interprovincial Championship 2014	Connacht	2-19	v	1-7	Ulster



IOMÁINT

AIB GAA Hurling All Ireland Intermediate Club Championship 13/14	Kilnadeema-Leitrim	1-9	v	1-16	Rower Inistioge
AIB GAA Hurling All Ireland Junior Club Championship 13/14	Ballysaggart	5-12	v	2-21	Creggan Kickhams
AIB GAA Hurling All Ireland Junior Club Championship 13/14 (Replay)	Ballysaggart	1-7	v	1-11	Creggan Kickhams
AIB GAA Hurling All Ireland Senior Club Championship 13/14	Mt Leinster Rangers	0-11	v	0-19	Portumna
Allianz Hurling League Roinn 1 2014	Tipperary	1-27	v	2-25	Kilkenny
Allianz Hurling League Roinn 2A 2014	Kerry	3-16	v	3-13	Carlow
Allianz Hurling League Roinn 2B 2014	Down	1-18	v	0-23	Wicklow
Allianz Hurling League Roinn 3A 2014	Roscommon	2-14	v	4-12	Donegal
Allianz Hurling League Roinn 3B 2014	Tyrone	0-13	v	1-9	Leitrim
Bord Gais Energy GAA Hurling All Ireland U21 B Championship 2014	Kildare	1-14	v	1-11	Roscommon
Bord Gais Energy GAA Hurling All Ireland U21 Championship 2014	Clare	2-20	v	3-11	Wexford
Christy Ring 2014	Kerry	2-22	v	4-18	Kildare
Electric Ireland GAA Hurling All Ireland Minor B Championship 2014	Meath	2-15	v	3-18	Kerry
Electric Ireland GAA Hurling All Ireland Minor Championship 2014	Kilkenny	2-17	v	0-19	Limerick
GAA Hurling All Ireland Intermediate Championship 2014	Cork	2-18	v	2-12	Wexford
GAA Hurling All Ireland Minor C Championship 2014	Mayo	2-11	v	1-10	Monaghan
GAA Hurling All Ireland Senior Championship 2014	Kilkenny	3-22	v	1-28	Tipperary
GAA Hurling All Ireland Senior Championship 2014	Kilkenny	2-17	v	2-14	Tipperary
GAA Hurling Interprovincial Championship 2014	Connacht	0-16	v	1-23	Leinster
Lory Meagher 2014	Fermanagh	3-16	v	3-18	Longford
Nicky Rackard 2014	Fingal	1-16	v	1-17	Tyrone

ALL-IRELAND SENIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS RESULTS



Round 1A	Wicklow 3-12 v 0-17 Offaly
Round 1A	Derry 2-14 v 2-16 Longford
Round 1A	Laois 1-19 v 2-15 Fermanagh
Round 1A	Limerick 1-16 v 1-13 London
Round 1B	Cavan 1-15 v 1-14 Westmeath
Round 1B	Tyrone 2-21 v 0-10 Louth
Round 1B	Carlow 0-17 v 1-13 Waterford
Round 1B	Down 4-18 v 0-9 Leitrim
Round 2A	Wicklow 0-10 v 0-12 Sligo
Round 2A	Tipperary 2-17 v 0-6 Longford
Round 2A	Limerick 3-11 v 0-15 Antrim
Round 2A	Wexford 0-17 v 0-18 Laois
Round 2B	Cavan 0-5 v 0-16 Roscommon
Round 3A	Laois 4-9 v 3-17 Tipperary
Round 3A	Sligo 0-12 v 0-10 Limerick
Round 2B	Tyrone 0-10 v 0-13 Armagh

Round 2B	Carlow 2-13 v 4-26 Clare
Round 2B	Down 0-11 v 1-18 Kildare
Round 3B	Clare 0-12 v 0-13 Kildare
Round 3B	Roscommon 1-12 v 1-17 Armagh
Round 4A	Galway 4-17 v 4-12 Tipperary
Round 4A	Cork 0-21 v 1-11 Sligo
Round 4B	Monaghan 2-16 v 2-14 Kildare
Round 4B	Meath 0-13 v 0-18 Armagh
Quarter Final A	Mayo 1-19 v 2-15 Cork
Quarter Final A	Kerry 1-20 v 2-10 Galway
Quarter Final B	Dublin 2-22 v 0-11 Monaghan
Quarter Final B	Donegal 1-12 v 1-11 Armagh
Semi Final	Mayo 1-16 v 1-16 Kerry
Semi Final - Replay	Kerry 3-16 v 3-13 Mayo
Semi Final	Dublin 0-17 v 3-14 Donegal
Final	Kerry 2-9 v 0-12 Donegal



Promotion Play Off	Westmeath	2-22	v	2-13	Kildare
Round 1	Waterford	2-22	v	1-15	Laois
Round 1	Antrim	1-20	v	2-19	Offaly
Round 1	Tipperary	3-25	v	4-13	Galway
Round 1	Clare	2-25	v	2-25	Wexford
Round 1 - Replay	Wexford	2-25	v	2-22	Clare
Round 2	Tipperary	5-25	v	1-20	Offaly
Round 2	Waterford	2-15	v	3-15	Wexford
Quarter Final	Tipperary	2-23	v	0-16	Dublin
Quarter Final	Limerick	4-26	v	1-11	Wexford
Semi Final	Kilkenny	2-13	v	0-17	Limerick
Semi Final	Cork	1-11	v	2-18	Tipperary
Final	Kilkenny	3-22	v	1-28	Tipperary
Final - Replay	Kilkenny	2-17	v	2-14	Tipperary

2014

HURLING COUNTY CHAMPIONS



GALWAY
Gort



LEITRIM
St. Mary's Carrick-on-Shannon



MAYO
Ballyhaunis



ROSCOMMON
Four Roads



SLIGO
Calry/St. Joseph's



CARLOW
St. Mullin's



DUBLIN
Kilmacud Crokes



KILDARE
Coill Dubh



KILKENNY
Ballyhale Shamrocks



LAOIS
Rathdowney-Errill



LONGFORD
Wolfe Tones



LOUTH
Knockbridge



MEATH
Kiltale



OFFALY
Kilcormac/Killoughey



WESTMEATH
Raharney



WEXFORD
Shelmaliers



WICKLOW
Bray Emmetts



CLARE
Cratloe



CORK
Sarsfields



KERRY
Lixnaw



LIMERICK
Kilmallock



TIPPERARY
Thurles Sarsfields



WATERFORD
Ballygunner



ANTRIM
Cushendall



ARMAGH
Keady



CAVAN
Cootehill



DERRY
Slaughtneil



DONEGAL
Burt



DOWN
Portaferry



FERMANAGH
Lisbellaw



MONAGHAN
Castleblaney



TYRONE
Carrickmore

2014

FOOTBALL COUNTY CHAMPIONS



GALWAY
Corofin



LEITRIM
Aughawillan



MAYO
Ballintubber



ROSCOMMON
St. Brigid's



SLIGO
Tubbercurry



CARLOW
Rathvilly



DUBLIN
St. Vincent's



KILDARE
Moorefield



KILKENNY
Railyard



LAOIS
Portlaoise



LONGFORD
Killoe Young Emmetts



LOUTH
St. Patrick's



MEATH
Navan O'Mahony's



OFFALY
Rhode



WESTMEATH
Garrycastle



WEXFORD
St. Anne's Rathangan



WICKLOW
Rathnew



CLARE
Cratloe



CORK
Ballincollig



KERRY
Austin Stacks



LIMERICK
Ballylanders



TIPPERARY
Loughmore-Castleiney



WATERFORD
The Nire



ANTRIM
St. Gall's



ARMAGH
Crossmaglen Rangers



CAVAN
Cavan Gaels



DERRY
Slaughtneil



DONEGAL
St Eunan's



DOWN
Kilcoo



FERMANAGH
Roslea



MONAGHAN
Clontibret



TYRONE
Omagh

2014 CHAMPIONSHIP ATTENDANCES

Date	Competition	Teams	Venue	Attendance
27/4/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Londain v Ceatharlach	Ruislip	250
27/4/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Aontroim v An Iarmhí	Ballycastle	450
04/5/2014	Connacht Senior Football	Nua Eabhrach v Muigheo	Gaelic Park, New York	4,879
04/5/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Ceatharlach v Aontroim	Dr Cullen Park	620
04/5/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	An Iarmhí v Laois	Cusack Park, Mullingar	600
11/5/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Aontroim v Londain	Ballycastle	350
11/5/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Laois v Ceatharlach	Portlaoise	1,327
17/5/2014	Leinster Senior Football	An Iarmhí v An Lú	Cusack Park, Mullingar	3,500
18/5/2014	Connacht Senior Football	Ros Comáin v Liatroim	Dr Hyde Park	8,055
18/5/2014	Leinster Senior Football	Longfort v Uíbh Fhailí	Glennon Brothers Pearse Park	2,921
18/5/2014	Leinster Senior Football	Cill Mhantáin v Laois	Aughrim	3,200
18/5/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Londain v Laois	Ruislip	143
18/5/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Ceatharlach v An Iarmhí	Dr Cullen Park	450
18/5/2014	Ulster Senior Football Preliminary Rd	Tír Eoghain v An Dún	Omagh	13,266
24/5/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	An Iarmhí v Londain	Cusack Park, Mullingar	280
24/5/2014	Ulster Senior Football Preliminary Rd Replay	An Dún v Tír Eoghain	Páirc Esler, Newry	14,064
25/5/2014	Connacht Senior Football	Londain v Gaillimh	Ruislip	2,967
25/5/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Laois v Aontroim	Portlaoise	1,850
25/5/2014	Munster Senior Hurling	Corcaigh v Port Láirge	Semple Stadium, Thurles	16,025
25/5/2014	Ulster Senior Football	Doire v Dún na nGall	Celtic Park	15,883
31/5/2014	Munster Senior Football	Luimneach v Tiobraid Árann	Gaelic Grounds, Limerick	2,216
01/6/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Aontroim v Loch Garman	Portlaoise}	-
01/6/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Laois v Gaillimh	Portlaoise}	5,464
01/6/2014	Munster Senior Hurling	Tiobraid Árann v Luimneach	Semple Stadium, Thurles	24,962
01/6/2014	Ulster Senior Football	Fear Manach v Aontroim	Brewster Park	8,256
07/6/2014	Leinster Senior Football	Longfort v Loch Garman	Glennon Brothers Pearse Park	3,345
07/6/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Cill Chainnigh v Uíbh Fhailí	Nowlan Park	11,841
07/6/2014	Munster Senior Football	An Clár v Port Láirge	Cusack Park, Ennis	1,783
08/6/2014	Connacht Senior Football	Ros Comáin v Muigheo	Dr. Hyde Park	15,873
08/6/2014	Leinster Senior Football	An Lú v Cill Dara	Páirc an Chrócaigh}	-
08/6/2014	Leinster Senior Football	Áth Cliath v Laois	Páirc an Chrócaigh}	40,960
08/6/2014	Munster Senior Hurling Replay	Corcaigh v Port Láirge	Semple Stadium, Thurles	22,094
08/6/2014	Ulster Senior Football	Ard Mhacha v An Cabhán	Athletic Grounds	14,991
14/6/2014	All Ireland Hurling – Promotion Play Off	An Iarmhí v Cill Dara	Cusack Park, Mullingar	370
14/6/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Loch Garman v Áth Cliath	Wexford Park	14,000
14/6/2014	Munster Senior Football Replay	Port Láirge v An Clár	Dungarvan	1,376
15/6/2014	Leinster Senior Football	Ceatharlach v An Mhí	Dr Cullen Park	4,813
15/6/2014	Munster Senior Hurling	An Clár v Corcaigh	Semple Stadium, Thurles	28,660
15/6/2014	Ulster Senior Football	Muineachán v Tír Eoghain	Clones}	-
15/6/2014	Ulster Senior Hurling	An Dún v Dún na nGall	Clones}	20,268
15/6/2014	Ulster Senior Hurling	Ard Mhacha v Doire	Athletic Grounds	191
21/6/2014	Connacht Senior Football	Sligeach v Gaillimh	Markievicz Park	8,505
21/6/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 1A	Luimneach v Londain	Gaelic Grounds, Limerick	608
21/6/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 1A	Laois v Fear Manach	Portlaoise	3,162
21/6/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 1A	Doire v Longfort	Celtic Park	2,093
21/6/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 1A	Cill Mhantáin v Uíbh Fhailí	Aughrim	1,700
21/6/2014	Munster Senior Football	Corcaigh v Tiobraid Árann	Páirc Uí Chaoimh	4,192
22/6/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling	Gaillimh v Cill Chainnigh	O'Connor Park, Tullamore	13,162
22/6/2014	Munster Senior Football	An Clár v Ciarraí	Cusack Park, Ennis	5,984
22/6/2014	Ulster Senior Football	Dún na nGall v Aontroim	Clones	11,795
28/6/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 1B	Ceatharlach v Port Láirge	Dr Cullen Park	650
28/6/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 1B	Tír Eoghain v An Lú	Omagh	3,921
28/6/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 1B	An Cabhán v An Iarmhí	Kingspan Breffni Park	4,910

STATISTICS 2014

Uladh **174,897** | Mumha **164,445** | Laighean **268,113**
 Connacht **67,017** | Provincial Total **674,472**

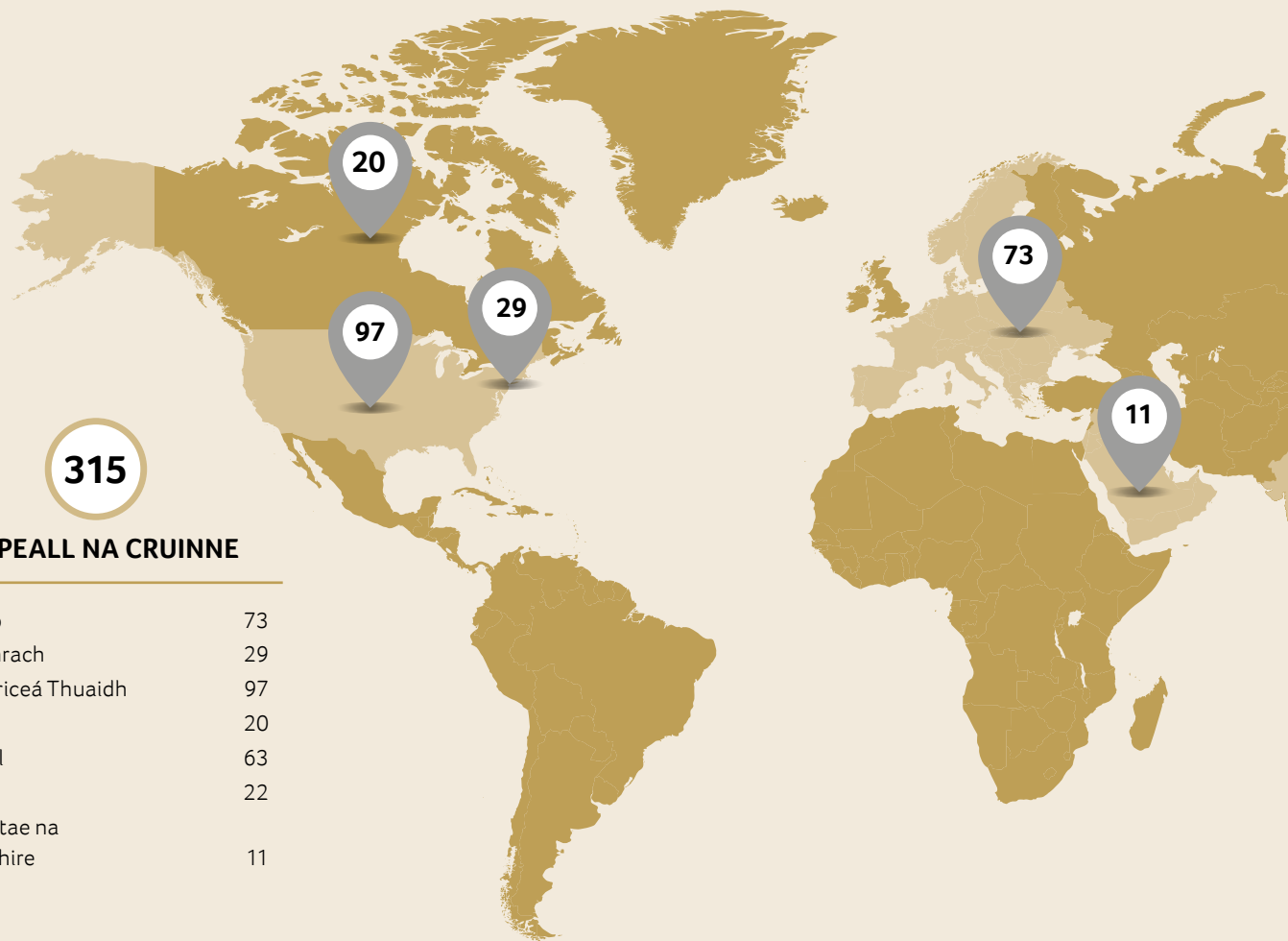
Total **1,541,309**

Date	Competition	Teams	Venue	Attendance
28/6/2014	All Ireland Hurling Qualifier Rd 1	Port Láirge v Laois	Walsh Park	4,725
28/6/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling Replay	Cill Chainnigh v Gaillimh	O'Connor Park, Tullamore	17,059
28/6/2014	Ulster Senior Football	Ard Mhacha v Muineachán	Clones	18,886
29/6/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 1B	An Dún v Liatroim	Páirc Esler, Newry	3,323
29/6/2014	All Ireland Hurling Qualifier Rd 1	Aontroim v Uíbh Fhailí	Ballycastle	1,812
29/6/2014	Leinster Senior Football	Cill Dara v An Mhí	Páirc an Chrócaigh}	-
29/6/2014	Leinster Senior Football	Áth Cliath v Loch Garman	Páirc an Chrócaigh}	46,279
29/6/2014	Ulster Senior Hurling	An Dún v Doire	Clones	363
05/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 2A	Luimneach v Aontroim	Gaelic Grounds, Limerick	684
05/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 2A	Tiobraid Árann v Longfort	Semple Stadium, Thurles]	-
05/7/2014	All Ireland Hurling Qualifier Rd 1	Tiobraid Árann v Gaillimh	Semple Stadium, Thurles]	18,647
05/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 2A	Cill Mhantáin v Sligeach	Aughrim	1,700
05/7/2014	All Ireland Hurling Qualifier Rd 1	An Clár v Loch Garman	Cusack Park, Ennis	12,871
05/7/2014	Ulster Senior Hurling Replay	An Dún v Doire	Athletic Grounds	316
06/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 2A	Loch Garman v Laois	Wexford Park	2,471
06/7/2014	Leinster Senior Hurling Final	Áth Cliath v Cill Chainnigh	Páirc an Chrócaigh	32,567
06/7/2014	Munster Senior Football Final	Corcaigh v Ciarraí	Páirc Uí Chaoimh	21,093
06/7/2014	Ulster Senior Football Replay	Muineachán v Ard Mhacha	Clones	23,442
12/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 3A	Sligeach v Luimneach	Markievicz Park	2,695
12/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 3A	Laois v Tiobraid Árann	Portlaoise}	-
12/7/2014	All Ireland Hurling Qualifier Rd 2	Tiobraid Árann v Uíbh Fhailí	Portlaoise}	9,611
12/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 2B	An Cabhán v Ros Comáin	Kingspan Breffni Park	8,031
12/7/2014	All Ireland Hurling Qualifier Rd 1 Replay	Loch Garman v An Clár	Wexford Park	15,195
13/7/2014	Connacht Senior Football Final	Muigheo v Gaillimh	Elverys MacHale Park, Castlebar	26,738
13/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 2B	Ceatharlach v An Clár	Dr Cullen Park	1,230
13/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 2B	An Dún v Cill Dara	Páirc Esler, Newry	6,368
13/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 2B	Tír Eoghain v Ard Mhacha	Healy Park, Omagh	10,981
13/7/2014	Munster Senior Hurling Final	Corcaigh v Luimneach	Páirc Uí Chaoimh	36,060
13/7/2014	Ulster Senior Hurling Final	Doire v Aontroim	Owenbeg	1,264
19/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 3B	Ros Comáin v Ard Mhacha	Dr Hyde Park	7,163
19/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 3B	An Clár v Cill Dara	Cusack Park, Ennis	7,445
19/7/2014	All Ireland Hurling Qualifier Rd 2	Port Láirge v Loch Garman	Nowlan Park	18,964
20/7/2014	Leinster Senior Football Final	Áth Cliath v An Mhí	Páirc an Chrócaigh	62,682
20/7/2014	Ulster Senior Football Final	Dún na nGall v Muineachán	Clones	31,912
26/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 4A	Corcaigh v Sligeach	O'Connor Park, Tullamore}	
26/7/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier Rd 4A	Gaillimh v Tiobraid Árann	O'Connor Park, Tullamore}	7,800
27/7/2014	All Ireland Hurling Quarter Final	Luimneach v Loch Garman	Semple Stadium, Thurles}	
27/7/2014	All Ireland Hurling Quarter Final	Tiobraid Árann v Áth Cliath	Semple Stadium, Thurles}	43,088
02/8/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier 4B	An Mhí v Ard Mhacha	Páirc an Chrócaigh}	
02/8/2014	All Ireland Football Qualifier 4B	Muineachán v Cill Dara	Páirc an Chrócaigh}	26,581
03/8/2014	All Ireland Football Quarter Final A	Ciarraí v Gaillimh	Páirc an Chrócaigh}	
03/8/2014	All Ireland Football Quarter Final A	Muigheo v Corcaigh	Páirc an Chrócaigh}	37,888
09/8/2014	All Ireland Football Quarter Final B	Dún na nGall v Ard Mhacha	Páirc an Chrócaigh}	
09/8/2014	All Ireland Football Quarter Final B	Áth Cliath v Muineachán	Páirc an Chrócaigh}	69,559
10/8/2014	All Ireland Hurling Semi Final	Cill Chainnigh v Luimneach	Páirc an Chrócaigh	45,478
17/8/2014	All Ireland Hurling Semi Final	Corcaigh v Tiobraid Árann	Páirc an Chrócaigh	68,741
24/8/2014	All Ireland Football Semi Final	Muigheo v Ciarraí	Páirc an Chrócaigh	52,500
30/8/2014	All Ireland Football Semi Final Replay	Muigheo v Ciarraí	Gaelic Grounds, Limerick	36,256
31/8/2014	All Ireland Football Semi Final	Áth Cliath v Dún na Gall	Páirc an Chrócaigh	81,500
07/9/2014	All Ireland Hurling Final	Cill Chainnigh v Tiobraid Árann	Páirc an Chrócaigh	82,179
21/9/2014	All Ireland Football Final	Ciarraí v Dún na nGall	Páirc an Chrócaigh	82,184
27/9/2014	All Ireland Hurling Replay	Cill Chainnigh v Tiobraid Árann	Páirc an Chrócaigh	81,753

Total Attendance

1,541,309

2014 AFFILIATED CLUBS



315

TIMPEALL NA CRUINNE

An Eoraip	73
Nua Eabhrach	29
Bord Meiriceá Thuaidh	97
Ceanada	20
An Astráil	63
An Áis	22
Bord Contae na Méan Oithire	11

213

CONNACHT

Gaillimh	81
Liatroim	24
Maigh Eo	50
Ros Comáin	32
Sligeach	26

560

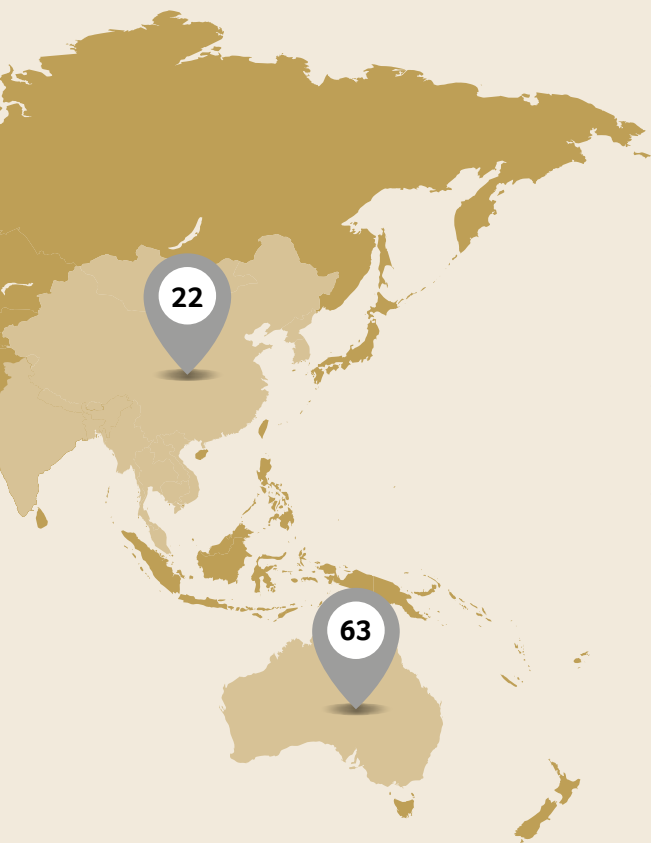
LAIGHEAN

Ceatharlach	30
Áth Cliath	92
Cill Dara	50
Cill Chainnigh	41
Laois	46
Longfort	24
An Lú	41
An Mhí	59
Uíbh Fhailí	42
An Iarmhí	47
Loch Garman	49
Cill Mhantáin	39

468

MUMHA

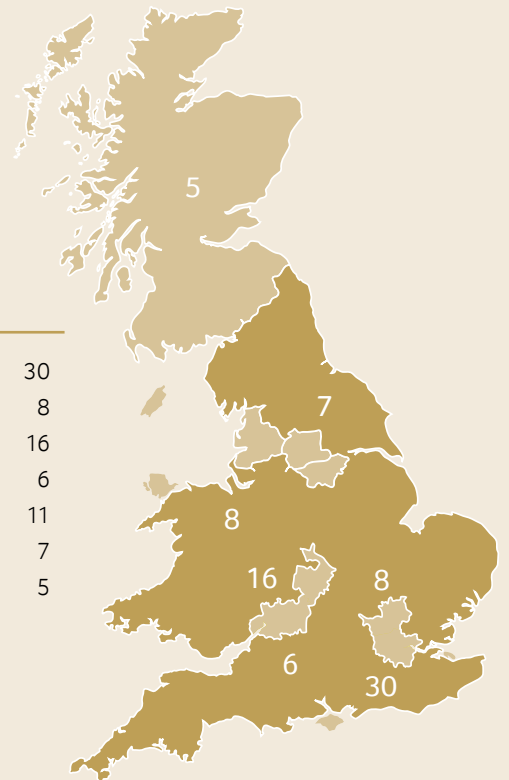
An Clár	53
Corcaigh	155
Ciarraí	70
Luimneach	69
Tiobraid Árann	72
Port Láirge	49



83

AN BHREATAIN

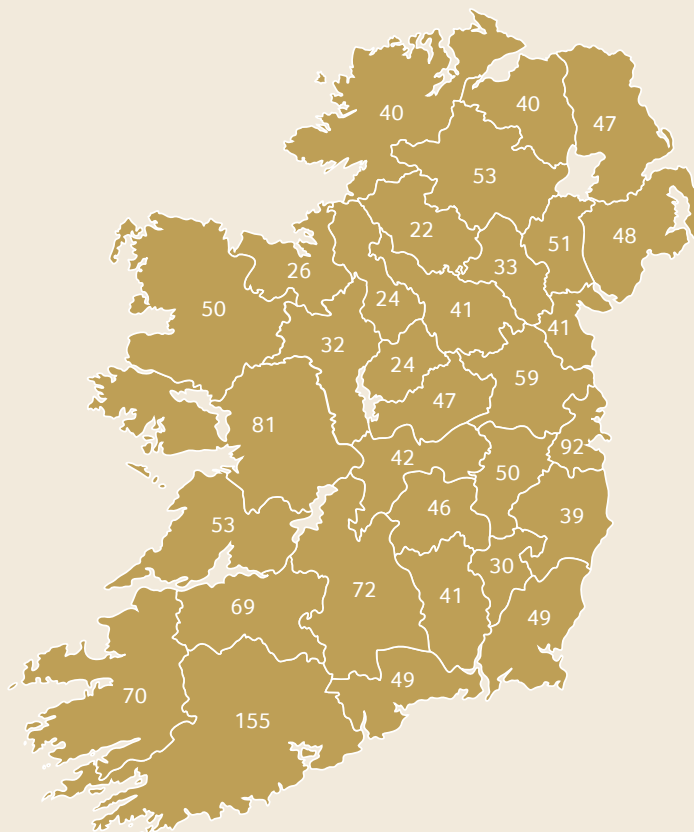
Londain	30
Hertfordshire	8
Warwickshire	16
Gloucestershire	6
Lancashire	11
Yorkshire	7
Scotland	5



375

ULADH

Aontroim	47
Ard Mhacha	51
An Cabhán	41
Doire	40
Dún na nGall	40
An Dún	48
Fear Manach	22
Muineachán	33
Tír Eoghain	53



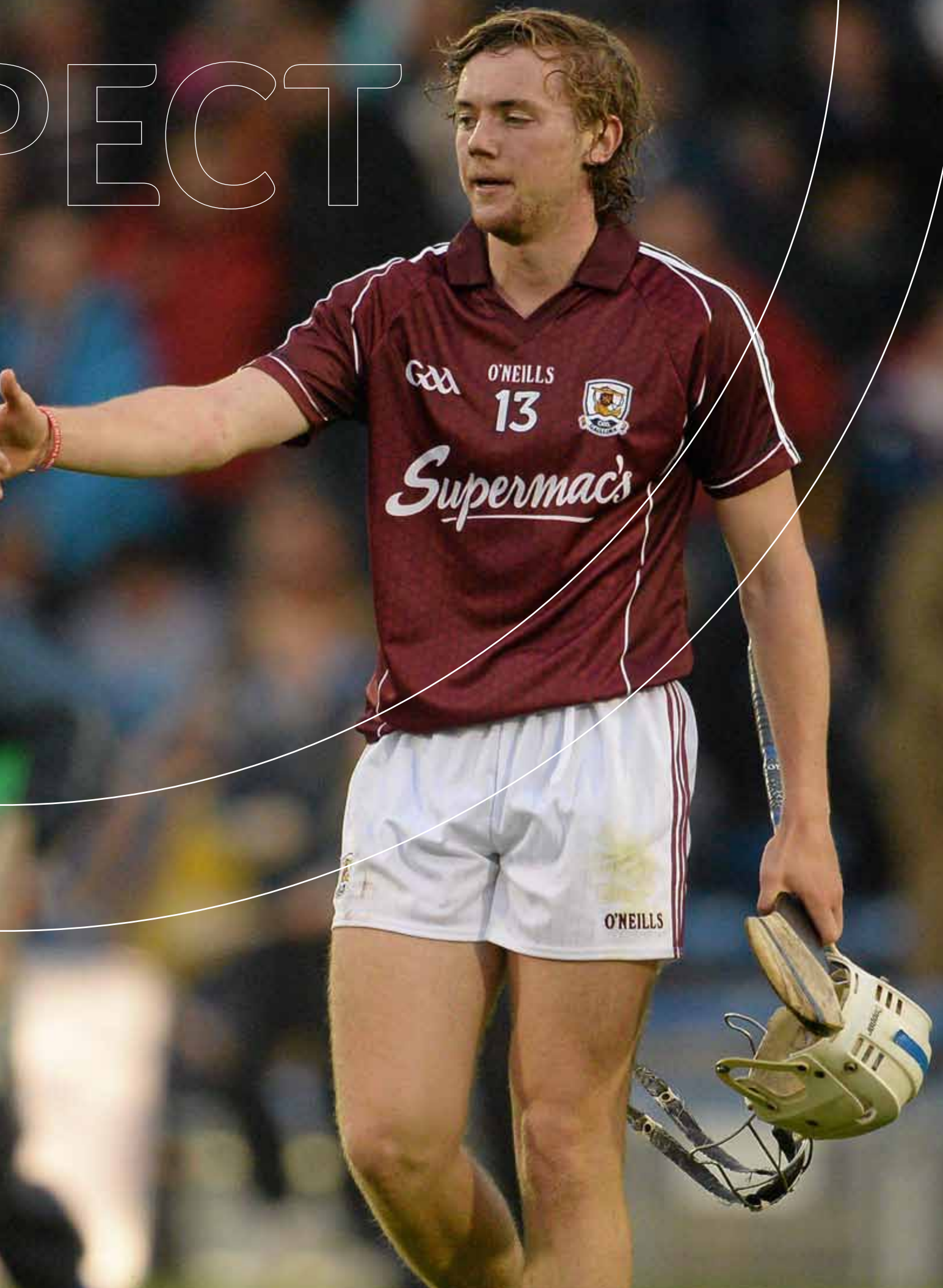


RESF

an clár

7

PECT





Peil

Senior Football Review 2014

It starts out in moderately low key fashion navigating its way through the remove before winding up hinging on a 70 minute plus period as the embers of summer are fading.

Pages 80-81. 24 August 2013; Galway's Pádraic Brehony shakes hands with Stephen O'Halloran, Clare, after the game. Bord Gáis Energy GAA Hurling Under 21 All-Ireland Championship Semi-Final, Galway v Clare, Semple Stadium, Thurles, Co. Tipperary.

21 June 2014; Linesman John Hickey signals to referee Conor Lane. GAA Football All-Ireland Senior Championship, Round 1A, Wicklow v Offaly, Aughrim GAA Grounds, Aughrim, Co. Wicklow.



Crystalised, whittled down and laid bare the ultimate prize of the summer-long national voyage comes down to a one off, trap-door winner takes all showdown that captures the imagination like no other sporting contest on the island.

The football championship 2014 intrigued for a number of reasons - not least because we ended up with a novel final pairing - but also because of the sub plots and sideline stories that accompanied proceedings from beginning to end.

The age old debate about whether or not the defending champions – in this instance Dublin – could make a rare successful defence of the title re-surfaced and it did so with renewed gusto thanks to some ebullient form.

The introduction of the new black card was also keenly monitored and viewed in many quarters as an added dimension to another potent championship tale of allure and suspense.

In many ways both pre-summer sub plots proved hollow with far less controversy surrounding the application of the black card than had been predicted in some quarters and Dublin's much vaunted early season form proving somewhat misleading.

Once the finale of the club scene saw St Vincent's claim another national title after a Dermot Connolly inspired masterclass on St Patrick's Day, inter-county league action was allowed to assume centre stage with spotters for early season promise out in abundance.

Despite some bumps along the way it was Dublin who once again finished top of the pile for the second year running.

Defeat to Derry away in the group stages was followed by remarkable gung-ho comebacks in the outings against both Mayo and Cork (semi-

final) before a final blow out against Derry which avenged their earlier Celtic Park defeat.

The natural order of the Dublin dominance outlook was taking shape and there was little offered up in Leinster to challenge it either.

Laois did put on a first half show before running out of steam against the Leinster kingpins and despite noteworthy wins for Longford and Louth in early outings against Offaly and Westmeath respectively, the latter stages of the competition took on a familiar look.

With Jim Gavin's men accounting for Wexford in the semi-final and Meath holding off the challenge of Kildare, a traditional Leinster final pairing emerged before a disappointingly one sided affair that saw the champions emerge on top.

Not for the first time in recent seasons Ulster put its hand up for official recognition as the most consistent and competitive of the four provincial championships with more contenders deemed worthy of consideration for Anglo Celt Cup than in any of the other provinces.

Donegal started as they intended to continue meeting neighbours and beaten league finalists Derry on away soil in their opening assignment and despite the stern test received it was one they navigated confidently.

Down almost caught Tyrone in Healy Park and would rue their failure to get the job done at the first time of asking losing the replay by a distance.

Defending champions Monaghan ended Tyrone's hopes before themselves needing two outings against Armagh to book a final date against Donegal in what was a rematch and eventual reversal of the final meeting of 12 months earlier.





“The football championship 2014 intrigued for a number of reasons – not least because we ended up with a novel final pairing – but also because of the sub plots and sideline stories that accompanied proceedings from beginning to end.”







6 July 2014; A general view of St Tiernach's Park, Clones. Ulster GAA Football Senior Championship, Semi-Final Replay, Armagh v Monaghan, St Tiernach's Park, Clones, Co. Monaghan.

30 August 2014; Mayo captain Andy Moran leads his team-mates out to the pitch ahead of the game. GAA Football All Ireland Senior Championship, Semi-Final Replay, Kerry v Mayo, Gaelic Grounds, Limerick.

Kerry had lacked traditional sparkle in the earlier part of the year, struggling in the league and working hard to overcome the challenge of Clare in their first Munster assignment.

Cork too had waned after an exciting league start and needed Aidan Walsh's late intervention as a substitute to claw past Tipperary in their semi-final.

Éamonn Fitzmaurice brought his men to Páirc Uí Chaoimh for the stadium's last inter-county fixture in early July still smarting from a bad home beating on the league circuit.

It was more than avenged.

James O'Donoghue shined brightest on the day of an attacking master class and an unanticipated double score success for the men in green and gold was the final product.

It led to something of a re-assessment of the pecking order.

Cork and Galway were the teams who made the most of the second chance accounting for Sligo and Tipperary respectively while Monaghan edged Kildare leaving Meath as the only beaten provincial finalist not to advance.

That could be put down to Armagh's improvement, a stand out feature of the All-Ireland series and one that almost ended Donegal's push for honours at the quarter-final stage.

The Ulster champions survived that contest and Dublin made the most of Monaghan's arduous schedule to leave us with what was commonly accepted as the strongest four teams remaining.

Kerry and Mayo renewed their rivalry and in so doing produced two of the games of the year.

Mayo appeared to have done everything bar win the initial outing at Croke Park before Kieran Donaghy grabbed the game and by extension the season by the scruff of the neck and turned it on its head.

His late introduction in the Croke Park drawn game was the reason for it ending in parity and his involvement in the late James O'Donoghue goal added crackle to an already absorbing encounter.

Honours even, the two counties made for Páirc na nGael in Limerick where one of the contests of the year saw Kerry survive an extra-time examination as their young emerging team showed further admirable signs of maturity.

It was cruel on a Mayo team who contributed so much and the result heralded the end of James Horan's reign.



21 June 2014; Adrian McIntyre, Sligo, in action against Aongus Tierney, Galway. Connacht GAA Football Senior Championship, Semi-Final, Sligo v Galway, Markievicz Park, Sligo.

The following day the full house signs were needed around Jones' Road as Dublin and Donegal locked horns for the first time since their infamous 2011 clash that ended in a 0-8 to 0-6 win for the men in blue.

This contest didn't in any way resemble the former instalment and despite a dream Dublin start which also included two goal opportunities that went begging, Donegal powered their way back into an absorbing contest to win in style.

It left us with an all green and gold final affair – on the double thanks to the same minor line up – as Kerry and Donegal met in an All-Ireland final for the first time ever.

The final may not have outshone the semi-finals that spawned the decider pairing but it was intriguing nonetheless.

Kerry displayed the full array of their skills and flexibility by adopting what might have been described as an unorthodox Kerry approach and in essence they took Donegal on at their own game.

To that end it was never going to be high scoring and so it proved as a chess like encounter unfolded which in the end was settled primarily by a handful of seminal incidents.

Kerry's dream start, courtesy of a long ball in the direction of Paul Geaney, saw a green flag raised inside the first minute. Later that man Donaghy gathered a mis-directed Paul Durcan kick out to shake the net for Kerry for the second time.

In contrast Donegal failed to register any goals exemplified by the late goal chance that fell to Colm McFadden but rebounded off a Davin End post.

Kerry's resolve – most admirable amongst their lesser known faces – and leadership were enough to close out the game and ensure the most called on county name on the roll of honour was once again inscribed on the plinth of the Sam Maguire.

It all had a familiar feel to it and may have heralded the onset of a managerial career that has the potential to leave an indelible mark on the game in the years ahead.



Iomáint

Senior Hurling Review 2014

The superlatives abound. One great game after another. Titanic clashes. The fittest and best conditioned hurlers ever to grace our fields and the crowning glory – it just keeps getting better.

10 August 2014; Limerick manager TJ Ryan, during the game. GAA Hurling All-Ireland Senior Championship, Semi-Final, Kilkenny v Limerick, Croke Park, Dublin.



SENIOR HURLING REVIEW 2014

The common consensus as we all filed out of Croke Park in the Autumn of 2013 after witnessing another epic All-Ireland final, this one a replay won by Clare, was that expectations needed to be curbed.

For sheer entertainment, bordering on bewilderment, we had no right to expect the trajectory to keep travelling upwards in entertainment measurement stakes.

But that's precisely what it did as 2014 offered up another year to remember including a replay for a third consecutive season.

The two September encounters involving old friends Kilkenny and Tipperary were games to savour and the first one in particular will be remembered for its intensity, unerring accuracy in attacking play and the finale of finales as Hawkeye intervened to bring us all back for a second instalment.

We weren't exactly dragged back kicking and screaming.

While Kilkenny's coronation was the bookend to another remarkable year it was a long route to that juncture.

Mount Leinster Rangers lit up the early part of the season by qualifying for the All-Ireland SHC club final on the back of a semi-final win over Loughgiel Shamrocks. Their Leinster voyage also included wins over Ballyboden St Enda's and Oulart - The Ballagh.

Their involvement in the St Patrick's Day showpiece crowned a remarkable run but romance was in short supply on the day of the final as Portumna annexed another national title to add to their glittering collection.

When inter-county league action resumed, the season started to assume a familiar feel to it.

Clare carried over the good form of the previous season into their early league action and despite a reversal to Dublin they topped their division with Kilkenny close behind.

Tipperary pipped Dublin into the quarter-finals and in so doing set in motion a train of events that would see themselves and Kilkenny contest both national finals in 2014.

The league version required extra-time before a last minute TJ Reid point claimed honours for Kilkenny. It produced more high octane quality fare in keeping with the expectations that now surround meetings of these two counties.

The league win left them in fine fettle for the onset of championship and it steeled them for two testing encounters with Galway in Tullamore that announced the arrival of summer for hurling followers everywhere.

The finale to the drawn game as served up by Joe Canning and Henry Shefflin was something to behold. In terms of sheer drama it would prove to be a portent of things to come although at the time we couldn't have known it. The replay outcome was shaded in black and amber.

Elsewhere a young Waterford team served up a fright for Cork - a superb Austin Gleeson goal crowning a display that announced his arrival at hurling's top table - before Cork battled back for a draw.

Defending Munster champions Limerick edged out Tipperary to book a Munster final slot and Cork buoyed up by their replay win over Waterford, accounted for defending All-Ireland champions Clare.

It meant all roads led to Páirc Uí Chaoimh for that's venue's last ever inter-county hurling match and there could hardly have been a more fitting occasion than a Munster final that ended in a Cork win.







“...all roads led to Páirc Uí Chaoimh for that’s venue’s last ever inter-county hurling match...”





13 July 2014: The Cork and Limerick teams march around the pitch behind the Artane Band during the pre-match parade. Munster GAA Hurling Senior Championship Final, Cork v Limerick, Pairc Uí Chaoimh, Cork.

29 June 2014: Offaly supporters David Shields and Oisín McCormack, from Birr, Co. Offaly, at the game. GAA Hurling All-Ireland Senior Championship, Round 1, Antrim v Offaly, Ballycastle, Co. Antrim.

A sunny day on Leaside and a packed stadium drowned in red and green provided the perfect backdrop to a fixture that allowed Cork to avenge defeat in the same fixture against the same opposition 12 months previously.

It would mark the zenith of Cork's season but there were matters aplenty to resolve elsewhere before the All-Ireland series came into sharp focus.

Kilkenny's win over Galway had been accompanied by a success over Offaly while Dublin resisted the strong challenge of a Wexford team whose merits would be laid bare as the season went on.

The final paired Dublin with Kilkenny but the wheels came off the Dublin challenge on a day when they never found rhythm and Kilkenny's Leinster record was further embellished despite the fact that goals unusually eluded them on the day.

It all made for an interesting All-Ireland series.

In the background both Tipperary and Wexford had generated momentum.

Wexford's trip to Ennis to face Clare in the qualifiers produced another memorable clash and despite extra time the teams could not be separated.

Another helter skelter instalment followed at Wexford Park and the resulting Wexford success – extra time was once again needed – before a massive scalp was claimed and Clare's defence of the Liam MacCarthy ended.

Wexford also accounted for Waterford as Tipperary navigated the challenges of Galway and Offaly in some style to advance to the quarter-final.

While Tipperary made full use of the familiar surroundings of Semple Stadium to end Dublin's interest in the championship – and by extension Anthony Daly's tenure – Wexford's

campaign ran aground in dramatic fashion against Limerick on a day when their challenge never left the starting blocks.

And so there were four.

Tipperary's rejuvenation – and it was that – pitted them against Cork in a first ever Croke Park championship encounter that captured imaginations far beyond the two Munster hurling strongholds but the pre-match expectation levels were not matched on a day when Cork never motored.

The other semi-final was a different scenario.

Played in biblical rain for the best part, Limerick and Kilkenny served up another contender for contest of the year.

The application of the players in the most difficult of conditions deserves special elaboration as many present could not recall hurling played in Croke Park in such a deluge.



27 July 2014; Wexford supporter James Lawless, aged 9, from Caim, Co. Wexford. GAA Hurling All Ireland Senior Championship Quarter-Final, Limerick v Wexford. Semple Stadium, Thurles, Co. Tipperary.



13 July 2014; A Limerick supporter during the last few minutes of the game. Munster GAA Hurling Senior Championship Final, Cork v Limerick, Pairc Uí Chaoimh, Cork.

A ten minute spell in the second half from resurgent Limerick threatened to rock Kilkenny and Séamus Hickey's contribution in particular deserves special mention.

However, Kilkenny's multi-faceted skill set once again showed that they can deliver any way they have to and their physical prowess allowed them to deal with Limerick's push and advance.

It all meant that Kilkenny and Tipperary were bound for yet another September date in Croke Park and even allowing for the catalogue of classic encounters these two counties have served up for what seems like forever, the latest offerings rank favourably alongside any.

Whether it's the rivalry bolstered by a cosy proximity or the healthy respect engendered by the frequency of contests, these two counties rarely fail to bring the best out of each other. And so it proved.

The standard of forward play was at times bewildering with Tipperary's points cancelling out Kilkenny goals with a steady flow of points. Despite the ebb and a flow of another modern day classic it all came down to a free opportunity at the death which the impressive John O'Dwyer struck from his own half.

The uncertainty that accompanied the effort was only added to by the drama that the call for Hawkeye created. And while in years past the hordes of Tipp supporters behind the goal might have gone some way to influencing the decision, on this occasion the graphics showed a missed effort – albeit by a matter of millimetres.

Instalment number two was a different type of spectacle but no less captivating.

On a day when Tipperary never raised the same gallop Kilkenny brought an incredible work ethic based on defence in every line of the field.

Séamus Callanan fuelled the Tipperary challenge with two goals but their forward unit never found anything like the same fluency as the drawn game, the Power brothers Richie and John, delivered a contribution that proved crucial.

Kilkenny disrupted the Tipp charge sufficiently to boss the game for spells and although three points separated them at the death, there was little disputing the outcome.

The win meant a tenth All-Ireland medal for Henry Shefflin and the same achievement for Brian Cody as a manager.

We didn't know it at the time but it would herald the end for some of the most decorated and accomplished hurlers of the modern era.

What a stage to depart from and what a way to go.



TEAMWORK









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