

Donegal GAA Convention 2021 – Chairman’s Address

As County Board Chairman 2021 I would like to welcome you to our Annual GAA County Convention. Once again we use our communication technology to connect from all areas of our County to conduct our reports and decision making and I thank everyone who has assisted that process taking place this evening.

I again this year commence my address to Convention in acknowledging the tremendous attitude and commitment of our front line workers in the HSE who have worked through difficult and challenging times with Covid-19 related illness. We remember the 8,500 people who have died on our Island from this pandemic. I acknowledge the GAA Club members who undertook the management of Covid regulations within our clubs which ensured that a programme of games could take place within underage and adult fixtures.

In conjunction with our Treasurer Alan Boyd we visited all 40 clubs in June of 2020. We outlined that indicators at that time were pointing towards 2021 being a more difficult year than 2020, and the County Executive have worked towards managing those difficulties in a constructive and positive way.

The design and implementation of a County Draw to assist the Club Levy was welcomed by the majority of clubs and I thank those who worked on its success.

I encourage all our members to enrol in the National Vaccination and Booster programme in our continued battle with Covid, and with the discomfort it brings to our society.

Three - Year - Strategic Plan 2018 to 2021.

Our three year strategic plan concludes this year and I thank those who have assisted its implementation. The six areas of Review were:

1. Club Development;
2. Financial Planning;
3. Administration;
4. Our Infrastructure;
5. Games Development and Coaching; and,
6. A voice for our Youth.

It's of the utmost importance that we study and review our progress indicators and continue to plan a further 3 year strategic plan incorporating as already agreed Hurling, Coaching Restructure, new financial planning ideas, Club Officer Recruitment and Training, and other areas of improvement and change requiring review and implementation. It is our intention to launch the next stage of our Strategic Plan in the summer of 2022.

Health and Well-being

The area of health and well-being has a complete definition change in the last number of years. Covid related changes and Social media misuse has introduced a new arrival of mental and stress related issues. We must encourage the communication with our neighbours, family members and listen to the voice of the elderly and our youth. We have a good strong Committee in Donegal and their experience is a strength to our association.

CCCC

Both underage and adult CCCC concluded their fixtures in a shortened season, and I thank them for their input and management of our games. There is always room for tweeting regulations around what sometimes is deemed unfair or advantageous to one team or another, especially around venue selection. This should be cautiously avoided especially at underage level, where many parents and players are not fully understanding of how venue selection occurs. No club should have home advantage in a Regional final or thereafter in a competition unless agreed by both clubs, that is not interfering with CCCC fixtures, but outlining what is deemed a fair and transparent system. I thank all the members that served on both Minor and Senior Board County Control Committees and some who served on both.

Donegal GAA Centre

42 fixtures took place in the Donegal GAA Centre and a review on the amount of games taking place there is currently being undertaken, as the Centre was not designed or intended for that amount of games. The vision was to provide inspiration to the development of Gaelic games with modern facilities and to supply our coach's with an area of pitch's and auditorium rooms in the development and upskilling of our youth and our adult Inter-County teams. It is also goal setting that we bring our club coach's to a higher level of talent development, mental skills training, and preparing our players to perform at the best that they can be.

That our County coach's coached 4,650 children this year is a positive step forward, and that we upskilled 387 Club coach's is another positive step forward. We must strive to get that balance right with the proper coaching structure and to benefit from its usage. This year also saw the return of Cúl Camps with 3,500 children attending. I would applaud the Clubs, the coaches and the many parents who together assisted the success of such an operation in the Covid challenges that we have. This year also saw the introduction of early morning pre-class gymnasium education in 12 Secondary schools throughout our county. This is part of our overall academy strength and conditioning education, and there is an array of voluntary coaching taking place throughout this programme, with approximately 170 students taking part. There has been tremendous positive feedback on this introduction and it's been well received by the teachers, the students, and the parents.

The endorsement on our current restructure of Coaching by the head of Ulster Coaching, Eugene Young, and the National Director of Coaching and Games Development in Croke Park, Shane Flanagan, is indeed welcome, and I highlight the professionalism shown by our Games Development Manager Aaron Kyles in this field. Not everyone understands Sports Scientific principles, that modern day sports requires, but we must inspire people to achieve new heights, be more effective and reach high performance targets.

LYIT new 5 year partnership

We were delighted in the last few weeks to sign up to a new memorandum of understanding with Letterkenny Institute of Technology. In conjunction with our Coaching Officer, Conor McDermott, and Treasurer, Alan Boyd. We met over the last year in the preparation of this agreement and we thank the professionalism shown by Paul Hannigan, Henry McGarvey, and Michael Murphy on LYIT representation. We have agreed that many of our 3rd level students attending shall receive College scholarships where they are associated with Gaelic games, and many benefits for both sides has been included in the partnership.

Fundraising House Draw

The House Draw generated a healthy nett profit of €817,000 and we are now in the position to conclude our Donegal GAA Centre in 2022, with a 5th pitch which shall also be floodlit. The development of a team warm up area separate from our 5 pitch's shall prevent sod cutting warm up drills in the overall design, and I thank our Development Officer Charlie Kerr for delivering that part of the project on target this year.

In the process of concluding the Centre's development we have created full time jobs of employment on maintenance, caretaker, and our County Administrator Noreen Doherty, our Games Development Manager Aaron Kyles and our Senior Athletic Performance Coach Mattie Brady. All the aforementioned shall be situated in our offices there. Careful financial budgets must adhere to income, expenditure, in a business style management of such steps forward, and a complete transparent audit is being designed on this valuable asset to our association.

In conjunction with our previous asset of a dressing room we built at Drumboe, we did seek permission from our National, Provincial, and County trustees to seek planning permission to change its use from a dressing room to a domestic dwelling or similar. Planning permission was granted from Donegal County Council and an independent valuation was sought from the appointed auctioneer. We are pleased that the asking price has been agreed and a sale agreement has been reached in the last few months.

Scór agus Cultúr

It has been difficult with the management of indoor events and Covid regulations, but I recognise the workings in Catriona Sweeny's first year in her role. Your report shows the strong will in our county to have Scór as an identity to Donegal GAA.

Hurling

Difficulties with long journeys has been resolved with many hurling fixtures taking place at the GAA Centre in Convooy this year. This is just a stepping stone to improving the promotion of Hurling in our county. The Senior Hurlers are also training based there and this is again well received in retaining a continuity of progress overall. The news of the inclusion of a new Hurling Academy Co-Ordinator for 2022 is again a recognition towards the development taking place. I congratulate all the trophy winners in 2021, but a word of congratulations to St Eunans on winning the Senior championship and a very special word of congratulations to Dungloe on winning the Junior championship the first adult trophy in Hurling ever to go to west Donegal. Many thanks to Manus O'Donnell the Chairman of the Hurling Committee on your commitment throughout the year, and Frankie Doherty who assisted the liaison with the Senior Hurlers.

Football

Our introduction to a youth academy was launched in February and Karl Lacey has led by recruiting a backup of voluntary coaches to the implementation of a new step forward for our County. There are

many more miles to go on this pathway, and those who have been involved can see that we must have vision and belief in our mission. We must inspire all our future players to take this pathway, as their future development in sport and academy progress is very much connected, and it will have paramount direction in their lives going forward.

Our minor, u20, and senior football teams put in sterling efforts and performances, but trophies didn't transpire, and luck on certain days didn't materialise.

Referees Board

The Referees' committee covered all our fixtures and I thank Michelle Bennett and Frank Dooley for their workings. It's challenging to recruit new personnel currently, but it's an area that we have to address. It's been suggested that clubs without Referees should not have the same scope on home fixtures as those clubs who have, this might not be the correct direction to take, but the issue must be addressed going forward. I thank all referees for their commitment.

Ulster Council

Both Fergus McGee and Brendan Kelly represented our county in a constructive manner at Ulster Council level and are both recognized with respect in their posts.

Central Council

Sean Dunnion is a strong voice at Croke Park level and when I asked Sean and our Secretary Declan Martin to review and update the licensing and patent of our county crest, and the task of leading out on rule amendment to allow sponsors on our jersey sleeves, they delivered on our plan. This has allowed Donegal to design a new County Jersey in association with our fabric partner o'neills and I requested o'neills to assist my wish of a connection on the jersey to all of our 40 clubs. I thank them for that input and the initial response has been very favourable.

Development Officer

Charlie Kerr has been a strong addition to our Executive and his knowledge on his engineering background has fitted well with our infrastructure planning. We have applied for a Government Sports Capital Grant, and I look forward to the project being recognized on its merit.

PRO

The only thing I can say about John McEniff as our County PRO is excellent in his role.

Childrens' Officer

Daireen McMenamin brought her skills of being a solicitor to this very important role in our county. I have found her professionalism as County Children's Officer to benefit our management of issues as they arose. We thank you for your workings.

Every year seems to bring changes to the members of our Executive, and through the 5 year rule I wish Conor Mc Dermott the very best as he leaves his position after 5 years as County Coaching Officer. Conor also chaired the County Minor Board and has a great belief in the development of our young membership. He was on hand in many other duties and worked well as an Executive member.

Today also sees Séamus O'Domhnaill stand aside, and I would like to thank him for his input over the last number of years. Recognized at Provincial and National level in appointments at the top level, I do think that Séamus will be back in future years.

I thank Alan Boyd, our Treasurer, and Declan Martin, our Secretary, we get on well as a team, and I look forward to working with you in the next year.

I thank all our Regional Boards, and our sub-committees and our County Administrator, Noreen Doherty, who has assisted all committees and clubs when asked throughout the year.

I conclude by recognizing all our sponsors old and new, to our clubs, our many members and to all who have contributed to keeping Cumann Lúthchleas Gael the top sporting organization in Donegal. I look forward to working with you in 2022.

Is mise le meas

Mick.

Micheál MacCraith , Chairman CLG Dhún na nGall.

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