



*An Dún*



# DOWN COUNTY GAA 2023 ANNUAL CONVENTION



Cumann Lúthchleas Gael an Dúin  
**Comhdháil Bhliantúil 2023**  
Canal Court Hotel  
Céadaoin, 13ú Nollaig 2023  
7.30 i.n

**2023 Annual Convention**  
Down County GAA  
Canal Court Hotel, Newry  
Wednesday 13th December 2023  
at 7.30 p.m.



**Each Club is entitled to two delegates  
plus their 2023 County Board Rep**



**Proud Sponsors  
of Down GAA**

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*An Dúin*

# CUMANN LÚTHCHLEAS GAEL COISTE CHONTAE AN DÚIN

46 Main Street,  
Castlewellan,  
Co Down  
BT31 9DP

11ú Nollaig 2023

A Chairde,

The County Convention will be held in the Canal Court Hotel, Newry on Wednesday 13th December 2023 commencing at 7.30pm.

Your club is entitled to be represented by two delegates plus your county board representative of 2023.

A hot buffet will be served between 6pm & 7pm

Digital copies of the Secretary's Report, and Agenda are attached.

Mise le mor-mheas,

*Sean Og Mac an tSaoir*

Sean Og Mac an tSaoir  
Rúnaí Chontae An Dúin

## CLÁR OIBRE - AGENDA

1. Amhrán na bhFiann
2. Minutes of Previous Convention
3. Adoption of Standing Orders
4. Chairman's Address
5. Secretary's Report
6. Treasurer's Report
7. Adoption of Sub-Committee Reports
8. Election of Officers and County Representatives
9. Formal Elections of:
  - ◆ Chairperson and Secretary of the Divisional Committees
  - ◆ Representatives' of the Clubs

A Representative of each of the following Committees

  - ◆ County Handball Committee
  - ◆ County Primary Schools Committee
  - ◆ County Post - Primary Schools Committee
10. Motions and Recommendations

## RIALACHA SEASTA / STANDING ORDERS:

1. The proposer of a Resolution or an Amendment may speak for five minutes.
2. A delegate speaking to a Resolution or an amendment must not exceed three minutes.
3. The proposer of a resolution or an amendment may speak for 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. Standing orders shall not be suspended for the purpose of considering any matter not on the Agenda, except by the consent of a majority equal to two - thirds of those present and entitled to vote and voting.
7. A Speaker to the Secretary's Report/Sub Committee reports or to any other general discussion shall not exceed three minutes on any one topic.

# MINUTES OF DOWN COUNTY CONVENTION 2022

The Down County Convention was held on Wednesday 14th December 2022 in the Canal Court Hotel Newry.

The Minutes of the previous Convention were proposed by Thomas O Hare and seconded by Pat McColgan.

Standing Orders were proposed by Brendan Rice and seconded by Seán McCashin.

Amhrán na bhFiann was sung by Aoife Grant (Glasdrumman)

## CHAIRMANS ADDRESS

John Devaney opened his remarks as Gaelige and welcomed everyone back to an In-Person Convention. AN Cathaoirleach commended the Clubs on the work that they had undertaken in the community during Covid, it made one very proud to be a Down person.

A County is judged largely on two things, its County Team Performances, and the state of the County Finances. In relation to County Teams, it had been a difficult year for the Footballers and what happened was no reflection on Team Management, we need to have a vision for the future, and we need to ensure that Team Managements have the support of everyone. A change in our Culture is needed and the new Team Management have also identified that need.

In hurling we continue to make good strides brought about by pride, commitment, and good Team Management.

In the first quarter of 2023 we hope to launch our strategic plan, it will be key to our development, and it will be relevant to Down GAA in

2023 and beyond. We will need to invest, and we hope that in the year ahead work will be able to commence on Ballykinlar.

People are entitled to go to our games and feel safe, players, match officials and supporters, we have to move to a position where there is zero tolerance of any abuse. We also cannot accept or tolerate online abuse, where people hide behind anonymity and engage in character assassination.

Kilcoo in 2022 reached the summit when winning the All-Ireland Club Title, the greatest achievement for a Down Team since our All Ireland win of 1994, our Under 20 Hurlers also won the All-Ireland B for the first time. Liatroim did us proud in winning the Ulster Intermediate Hurling Championship, whilst Glasdrumman Ballad Group were the pride of Mourne with their All-Ireland win. On the Camogie front Clonduff crowned an excellent year with All Ireland success.

The Chairman thanked everyone across the County who had served Down GAA and offered his condolences to those who had lost loved ones. In his closing remarks the Chairman asked people to get behind the vision people shared for the County, be positive and let us work to restore our position in the GAA World.

## FINANCIAL REPORT

Darragh Cotter of Daly Park, County Auditor outlined the financial statement as per the accounts, an Cathaoirleach thanked Darragh for the presentation.

Donal Graham asked if there would be any merit in setting the sale of St Patricks Park against our existing Croke Park loan. Darragh concurred,

taking interest rates into account this would make sense.

County Treasurer Diarmuid Cahill outlined the good work in bringing a surplus to Convention.

In relation to Match Ticketing the My Ticket App has been successful and Diarmuid also praised the Gate personnel and those behind Down GAA TV as the streaming service had been good in 2022.

Diarmuid paid tribute to the late Hugh John Harper who had served as County Treasurer when it was not the most fashionable post. To James and Mary McGrath, we owe you both a huge debt for your management of the Clubs Draw.

Diarmuid also wanted to thank the Club Treasurers for their cooperation and support at every step of the way.

## ELECTIONS

The elections for various posts then commenced and Convention then proceeded by addressing the Secretary's Report.

The Report was proposed by Christopher Morgan and Seconded by Gerard O'Neill.

The other Officer Reports were proposed by Emmett Haughian and seconded by Paul Kelly.

In the election for position of Assistant Secretary Ryan Kelly of Ardglass was deemed elected and for Ulster Council, Sean Rooney and Sean McCashin were elected. As Ard Comhairle Delegate Conor Watson was elected.

# MINUTES OF DOWN COUNTY CONVENTION 2022

## MOTIONS

The Motion to introduce a new bye law 4.1 which would see the appointment of a Development CCC was proposed by John Devaney and seconded by Seamus Ennis.

Damian Brady St John Bosco spoke against the motion seeing it as a

further move away from the Divisional Committees.

On a Vote the Motion was defeated and this led to Motions 2 and 3 being withdrawn.

Motion 6 in relation to Age Grades was proposed by Ciaran O Keefe

and seconded by Mark McCartan, this motion was to proceed to GAA Congress and carried by delegates and would come into effect in 2024.



Constituted as Down County Committee in accordance with GAA Official Guide (An Treoir Oifigiúil).  
 County Bye-Laws; GAA Governance Code & Risk Register; 15 Core County Policies; Officer Responsibilities; and Remit & Responsibilities of Sub-Committees

# Down GAA CUMANN LUTHCHLEAS GAEL ORGANISATION CHART

**County Office:**  
 46 – 48 Main Street  
 Castlewellan  
 Co. Down  
 BT31 9BQ  
 T. 028 4377 0880

**County Ground:**  
 Pairc Esler  
 Warrenpoint Road  
 Newry  
 Co. Down

**County Colours:**  
 Red & Black



48 Clubs  
[www.downgaa.net](http://www.downgaa.net)  
 Twitter: @OfficialDowngaa  
 Facebook: OfficialDownGAA

**COUNTY COMMITTEE EXECUTIVE**

- Chairperson – John Devaney
- Vice Chairperson – Maureen O'Higgins
- Secretary & Risk Officer – Sean Og McAteer (non-voting)
- Assistant Secretary – Ryan Kelly
- Treasurer – Diarmuid Cahill
- Assistant Treasurer – Michael O'Rourke
- PRO – Paula Magee
- Central Council Delegate – Conor Watson
- Ulster Council Delegate 1 – Sean Rooney
- Ulster Council Delegate 2 – Sean McCashin
- Hurling Officer – Liam Quinn
- Planning & Training Officer – Patrick Savage
- Irish and Culture Officer – Donal McNally
- Coaching Officer – Karl Oakes
- East Down Chairperson – Ryan Kelly
- Sown Down Chairperson – PJ Quinn

**OTHER COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

- Club Delegate from each of 48 clubs
- County Primary School Rep: Brendan Rice
- County Post Primary Schools Rep:
- County Handball Rep: Sean Magone
- Down LGFA Rep: Paul Kelly
- Down Camogie Rep:

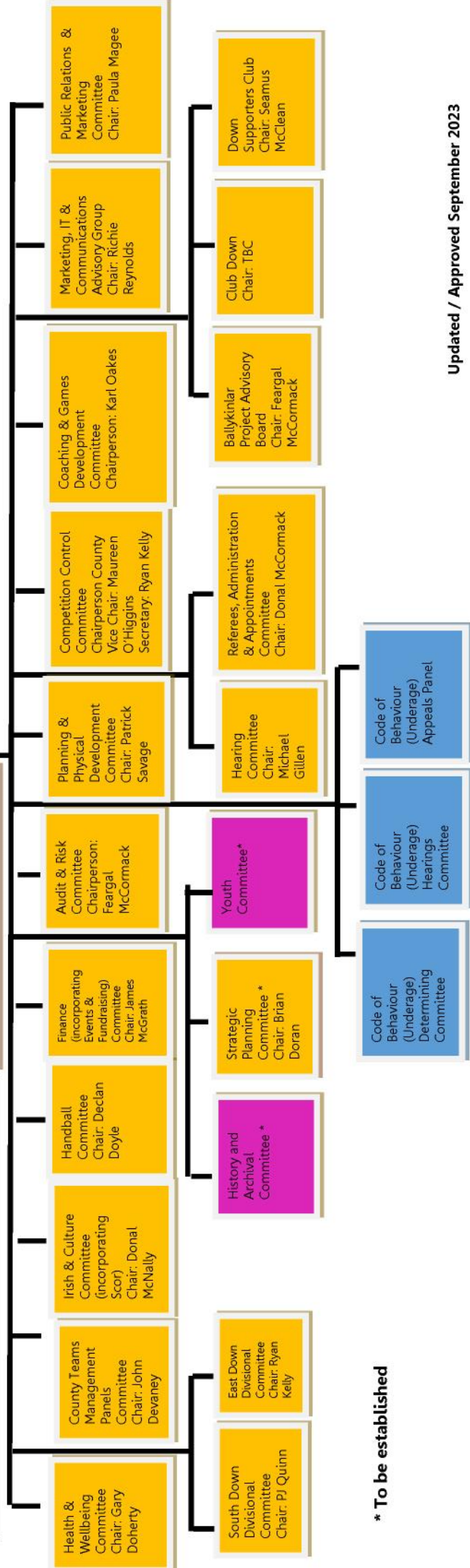
**DOWN COUNTY COMMITTEE**  
 Elected Annually by 48 Clubs at Annual County Convention

**OTHER OFFICERS REPORTING TO COUNTY COMMITTEE**

- County Children's Officer: Fergus Cooper
- County Health & Wellbeing Officer: Gary Doherty
- County Hearings Committee Secretary: Joe Ryan
- County Integration Officer: Sean Rooney
- County Safety Officer: Sean Og McAteer
- County Event Controller: Danny Baxenden
- County Referees Administrator: Sean Rooney
- County IT Officer: Diarmuid Cahill
- County Fixtures Analyst: Michael O'Rourke
- County Risk Officer: Sean Og McAteer

**STAFF**

- Down GAA County Secretary & Risk Officer  
Sean Og McAteer
- Down GAA Games Development Manager  
– Conor O'Toole
- Down GAA Coaching Staff (4)  
Brendan Coulter, Ambrose Rogers, Mark Poland & Liam Hardy



\* To be established



# DOWN GAA COUNTY MANAGEMENT 2022/2023

## CHAIRPERSON

John Devaney  
Bréadach  
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Email: chairperson.down@gaa.ie



## DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

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Naomh Colmáin Droim an Easa  
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Email: developmentofficer.down@gaa.ie



## VICE CHAIRPERSON

Maureen O'Higgins  
Fontigheannaí Liatroma  
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## COACHING OFFICER

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## SECRETARY

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## TREASURER

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## ULSTER COUNCIL DELEGATE

Sean Rooney  
Droichead Mhaigh Eo  
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## ASSISTANT SECRETARY & EAST DOWN CHAIRPERSON

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Ard Glas  
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## ULSTER COUNCIL DELEGATE

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## ASSITANT TREASURER

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## PRO

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## HURLING OFFICER

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## SOUTH DOWN CHAIRPERSON

PJ Quinn  
Sabhall  
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Email: chairperson.south.down@gaa.ie



# TURASCAIL AN RUNAÍ 2023

County Convention 2023 has to be the point where we in Down GAA push the Reset Button, it has to be the time when we say we need to recommit to the ethos and ideals of our Association. Since March 2020 when Covid entered our lives, there have been periods of change when we have experienced many different facets of life within Down GAA. There was that initial comradeship, where the GAA Family were magnificent in their response to a World-wide Pandemic, within Down GAA we saw openly that all Superheroes do not wear capes.

**There was a great spirit of everyone working together, everyone looking out for each other, and the Club and the County were to the fore. That response and good will got us through 2020-2021 and into 2022 but in the past twelve months there has been a marked difference in attitudes and behaviours. It is as if there has been in some way an anger in society that we missed out on life and aspects of life in those Covid years and we are angry and resentful that this should have happened to us. The outcome in 2023 was that we witnessed a change in the persona of people again, words like entitlement, challenge, argue, and resentment came to the fore and in the world of the GAA, these words came to the surface and bubbled, just waiting to be released.**

Decisions had to be challenged and even when in your heart and soul you knew you could not win it was still seen as being important to challenge, we were back to the belief that no one can tell us what to do. Rules were there to be broken or at the very least a loophole had to be found where the guilty could get a win and this would be seen as an achievement. People would act in a manner designed

only to cause hurt and upset to others, to prove a point, to ensure that the loudest voice was heard.

We need to reset, and County Convention is the ideal time to pledge ourselves once again to acting in a manner that befits the ethos and the strengths of Down GAA, we can start by doing so through the proper conduct of our games. In this aspect I invoke the pledge made by our then County Chairman Dan McCartan back in 1984 in the centenary year of the GAA. The pledge then made by the Clubs of Down was to work steadfastly together through the proper conduct of our games.

- **Their Skills and Discipline**
- **Their Manliness and Sportsmanship**
- **Their Excitement and Friendship**
- **Their Ethos and Spirit.**

These pledges and the areas identified are as relevant to Down GAA in 2024 as they were forty years ago in 1984, indeed if we were to honestly reaffirm our commitment to them, we would not have as many issues as we had in 2023. We have a Strategic Plan to deliver upon, an impressive document that sets out a pathway for the future of the Association in the County, we need now to make it a live document and to seek to implement its proposals.

Down is a great County and it has wonderful people, it is a County respected in every corner of the Country, I have said before to those of a different persuasion that it is the one thing that unites us when we can say without fear I am a Down Man, I am a Down Woman, I am a Down Person.

When we win, we should all win

together and when we lose, we should all lose together, when a Down Club goes into battle in Ulster, they are representing us all, we must all go to battle, there has to be a comradeship in our County and amongst its people. Down GAA is a family, and like any family there will be differences and there will be disagreements, but the strength of the Family is that it is a unit and that when one component of that unit is hurt then we are all hurt.

**Society has created the culture of challenge all driven by a sense of perceived wrong doing, this has transferred on occasions in 2023 into the world of Down GAA, when we don't like the decisions taken, we take our ball home with us, in other words we take the team of the field. What message does this set out to the young people whom we take off the field, is this part of manliness and sportsmanship, is it within the ethos and spirit of our Games? So, we say pause and let us Reset the button on Sportsmanship and Ethos and let us ensure that in 2024 no team leaves the field of play because we don't like the decisions perceived to be against us.**

In the same vein is manliness reflected in giving your opponent a busted lip, or broken nose or an injury that keeps him out of work, or an injury that can be career ending and life changing. We cannot condone such incidents on our playing fields and remember too that we are only ever one punch away from a tragedy for all parties.

Those incidents if taking place on the street, would be deemed to be common assault and for the perpetrator could potentially mean a criminal record. We have to take responsibility for our actions on the field of play and we have to accept that there are and will be



consequences. Within Administration we have a duty too, we have to apply the Rules of the GAA with vigour and with integrity and people too have to start accepting responsibility, for I ask the question too does, manliness also extend to finding whatever way possible to win a Hearing.

This year the DRA has never been busier that is a fact, I question here is it now too easy to take a case to the DRA, the fee to take a case sits currently at €1000.00, in the current environment that is a risk worth taking for Clubs or Counties. I would suggest that the fee for taking a case to the DRA should be a minimum of €10,000.00, I wonder then would people be as quick to seek a hearing at the DRA.

**It would be remiss of me in this context if I did not address the events surrounding the County Football Final on the 15th of October. It was a most stressful week for people involved, it was draining and energy sapping for all concerned, and I have to ask the question, was it all necessary, did it have to happen? The County Final our biggest day of the year was in doubt right up to fifty minutes before throw in, a live television audience wondered if there would be a game to watch, did this present Down GAA in the best possible light – the answer is undoubtably NO. and again I have to ask the question was it necessary?**

County Officers were faced with managing a situation, a situation that was in reality a no win for many of the parties and thankfully, we were able to resolve a situation and thanks to the integrity of the match officials, our County Final took place. All of the Individuals at the centre of the events of County Final day, the County Officers, the Referee, the Match Officials, Club Officers, Players, Management

Teams are all just human beings, with lives, with families, with stresses and concerns as to what their actions might lead to, we never know how something is affecting people. At no stage over the previous five days did anyone just stop and think is this right, is this really who we are and what are about, is this part of the ethos of our Association.

Are there lessons to be learned yes there are, and I say there are lessons to be learned by all parties, we in Down GAA know what we have to do to ensure that such a scenario never arises again. The quick fix is to take a motion to GAA Congress and to amend the rule that can be done in February, the greater challenge for all parties is to recommit to the values of ethos, manliness, sportsmanship, friendship, discipline, spirit and dare I say add a sprinkle of humility.

Winning is a great feeling but on this occasion by a quarter to four on that Sunday afternoon in Pairc Esler there was an emptiness and a tension in the air, the winning of the County Final, just didn't seem to have the same have that magic and that is not good either. For any day that you win a County title should be a great day, it should never lose its wow factor and yet sadly in Pairc Esler from 11.30 am that morning there never was going to be a wow factor, other events had taken over.

**Yes, as the dust settled and people moved away from the Ground or just wanted to stand about still reeling from the day that they had, a person lay ill on the pitch and the medical team of the County Champions came to the assistance of County Officers to be with the man, administer care and attention and wait for paramedics and an ambulance to take him to hospital. On a dark day this was a story of goodness and people working together, Danny and Maria from**

**Kilcoo tending to Philip whilst myself and others provided reassurance to him and liaised with his family. The GAA family working together ensuring that our good friend Philip Walsh was in good hands and would make a good recovery- for me that was hope and that was the true reflection of all that is good in Down GAA – Ag Obair le Chéile as it should be.**

2023 was a learning experience we now need to recommit, we need to say Covid is behind us but together we can build something better, we in Down GAA cannot operate in isolation and neither can any one of our Clubs, together we are an unbreakable force. So, we hit reset button, and we pledge to work together in the spirit and ethos of the GAA, to ensure that the events in the week of October 23rd and will never again happen in the world of Down GAA.

## **COUNTY TEAMS**

**So, the biggest challenge facing Down Football in 2023 is for me changing the Culture and we have two men at the helm in Conor Lavery and Benny Coulter who are up to that task.** Those are words from my Convention Report of 2022 and now as I reflect at the end of a season, I ask the question did we meet the challenge? my initial reaction is to say we didn't, but I am mindful to take greater stock of events and to say that in some ways we did, and I think it can be best defined as a work in progress.

The world of the Inter County player has changed over the decades, and it continues to change, and we are all expected to move with that change, as two words now tend to dominate, one is entitlement, and the other is expectation. We in Down GAA firmly believe in looking after our players, footballers and hurlers, everyone who dons the Red and Black in any given year we are committed to looking after them.



Looking after players involves ensuring that there are venues for the County Teams to train on, ensuring that players are looked after when injured with speed, care, and attention, ensuring that players have all the gear that they need to be seen to represent the County, ensuring that they are fed after training and before and after matches, the list can go on. In the present climate there is a huge cost involved in the preparation of County Teams and Down GAA bear that cost and thanks to the generosity of a number of Sponsors, we are able to maintain high standards.

It is though incumbent of me to issue a word of caution, and to say that this is not sustainable and here I throw my words back to the GPA, the Gaelic Players Association and say to them that there needs to be a reality check here, the GPA/GAA Charter needs to be revisited, for it is here you will find the word entitlement. There is no one size fits all, the charter be agreed between the GPA and the County Committee in each county based on what is achievable and what is sustainable. I accept that we sit down with players and management each year and sign off the Charter, but we are signing off on something that has been agreed on high and the players

believe they are entitled to all within the Charter.

My suggestion is that the GPA Officers sit down with the Officers of each County and agree a Charter for that County, in my 16 years now as County Secretary, I have never had a meeting with GPA Officers in any capacity. The GPA need to engage directly with the Officers in the Counties if they are to be seen as serious about working with us to ensure the best for our players. They cannot continue to issue dictates' from on high or conduct a survey amongst our players and not even inform the County of the outcome of any such survey, that leaves us shaking our head asking did that survey even take place.

In advance of Special Congress this year, we took soundings from our Senior Hurling Team Manager, who in turn spoke to players in relation to Motion One which was dealing with the Joe McDonagh Finalists not proceeding to play in the Liam McCarthy Cup that year. The feedback was that we should support the Motion and a following motion that gave a bigger window for the McDonagh Cup to be played, as the debate commenced our delegation was shocked then to hear from the GPA rep on Ard Comhairle as he addressed Congress

state that over 80% of the Down players surveyed opposed the Motion.

As County Secretary, I had certainly no knowledge of any Survey being conducted amongst Down players and indeed to quote an outcome that was at odds with what we as County Officers had established from our contacts, made us all scratch our heads.

In our attempts to change the Culture around County Teams, we need to be able to work from within to allow us to do that based on local agreement on local issues. We are not looking to skimp on the treatment of our players, but when you take the fact that a big percentage out of the 45p per mile mileage allowance is paid by Down GAA (the Clubs of Down) is it too much to ask that we should not have direct engagement with the Officers of the GPA.

Our players do us proud every time that they go out in the Red and Black it is a great honour for the player, his family, his Club every time that he pulls on that Down Jersey, he is the inheritor of a great tradition, and he is also the custodian of that great tradition. He is our player; he comes from our Clubs, he is the product of many

hours of voluntary investment from the age of 4, we want to look after him as he represents Club and County, and we want to do so in a manner that is sustainable. We want to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do, not something that is based on entitlement and expectation, and which only fuels a them and us scenario. We in Down GAA will not be found wanting, any agreement will only be for the betterment of the players who represent our County, it will create a better environment and a better culture.

I say to the GPA ahead of any charters being signed for 2024, go out to each County and meet the Officers of the County, engage, debate, and listen to the local concerns in each County and together share our concerns and agree a template for each County, that is sustainable and deliverable.

The Cobwebs were being blown away when we headed to Castleblaney on January 4th for Conor Laverty's first meeting as County Senior Football Team Manager as Down took on Monaghan in the Dr McKenna Cup. It was a foggy night, and we were hoping for a clear vision of what way Down were going to perform in 2023, the Dr McKenna Cup was an opportunity for the Team and Management to put down a marker.

Goals in either half by Andrew Gilmore and Odhrán Murdock made the difference for Down who could have made several other slick moves count in the form of three-pointers had they been more clinical in the final third. Monaghan were first off, the mark through Mícheál Bannigan and although a Barry O'Hagan point brought Down level, Bannigan quickly doubled his tally with a well-struck free.

Donagh McAleenan and Andrew Gilmore pushed Down ahead for the

first time and with the forwards creating numerous goal chances, it seemed like only a matter of time until they would hit the net.

A slick move eventually teed up Andrew Gilmore to do just that and with O'Hagan and Gilmore both adding points and Monaghan's only replies coming through Seán Jones and Conor McCarthy, the Mourne men were well worth their 1-6 to 0-6 half-time lead.

Down doubled their lead soon after the restart when Man of the Match Odhrán Murdock, who helped them dominate the midfield battle for much of the second half, charged through the heart of the home defence to rifle home a well-taken goal. Monaghan did manage a brief purple patch via points from Francis Hughes, Bannigan, and lively substitute Stephen O'Hanlon, but with the number of subs made climbing well into double figures, their momentum was short-lived.

Down's subs made their presence felt, with Michael Ireland, Rory Mason and Patrick Branagan all getting on the scoresheet during the final quarter to keep Down clear. On a cold night, there was a spring in the steps of the Down players, management, and supporters as they left Castleblaney, Donegal were next up in Newry and sure nothing beats a win in January.

Sunday afternoon saw Donegal make their first of two journeys to Pairc Esler in 2023 and with a good home crowd in attendance, Down people were looking forward to seeing how much progress was being made. Liam Kerr and Conor Francis' goals in the first 35 minutes laid the foundation for Down, as did five scores from Pat Havern at full-forward, with Down running out winners with seven points to fare. This was a first win in Newry since 2021 and it was well deserved as some players seemed determined

to set down a marker for the year ahead.

For fare on January's first Sunday, it was pretty open and pretty entertaining, with both teams willing to show a variation between fist and kick pass, certainly to begin with. Down settled quicker and soon had the home support behind them, points from Niall Donnelly and Barry O'Hagan got things moving for the home side and only six minutes had been played when they got in for goal. Liam Kerr came running through like a train and, when found by Danny Magill, barely had to break stride as he shot low across Michael Lynch in the Donegal goal.

Four minutes later, Donegal manufactured a goal when Stephen McMenamin made a break into Down territory and with the home defence hesitant, found Jamie Brennan to his right. Brennan, who put on the burners on a few occasions when in possession, saw Daire Ó Baoill inside and a simple squared ball towards the Gaoth Dobhair man, who netted a tap-in goal from the edge of the small square.

Play ebbed and flowed and both teams had their moments on top, with Havern's name becoming an important facet of the contest, with four first half points from play.

He had three in the bank by the time the first quarter rolled into the second, although it was 1-5 to 1-5, with Brennan skipping inside to point for Donegal and Patrick McBrearty taking responsibility with three. His marked point on 17 minutes was top class, having fetched a brilliant pass from Thompson, who, moments later, drove a shot just wide when going for goal after a Brennan turnover. Down, though, were to have their spell in the ascendancy and made plenty from it before the break. A Patrick Branagan stinger brought a



good save from Lynch at the concession of a point and in a spell of 1-4 without reply, also scored points from O'Hagan, Conor Francis, and Havern.

The goal, on 31 minutes from Bredagh's Conor Francis, concluded a rapid-fire movement of fist passing with O'Hagan, Branagan and Conor Fitzpatrick all involved. It put Down six points in front, although that was pinned back to four by the break, with Brennan popping over a right-footed free and McBrearty with his fourth of the half. At the interval, Donegal trailed 2-9 to 1-7.

The second half was a different affair, The benches rolled, and the pace slowed, with the fourth official busier than the four umpires combined. Midway through the second period and, with the contest having got pretty untidy, both had only added one more point, with Kerr and McBrearty the scorers which meant a 2-11 to 1-8 advantage for Down. McGrady, just on, scored a peach of a point on 61 minutes. Mark Walsh, with another stylish point, replied for Down to restore the six-point cushion.

Tom Close and a 45 from Anthony Doherty rounded off the scoring for

the hosts and sealed Down's place in the semi-finals of the competition.

The Dr McKenna Cup was the last Senior Football trophy that Down had won back in 2008 and indeed was the first Senior Trophy we had ever won when we did so in 1944 and on the following Sunday Down faced their biggest test when Ulster Champions Derry came to town with a place in the Final at stake.

The match reports will show that Down lost the game 3-2 on penalties after the game finished in a draw Down 3-9, Derry 1-15, yet to the Down fan leaving Pairc Esler, it felt like we had won, there was a belief that we were on the right path, or for the first time in a long time we were on the One Road. For a Dr McKenna Cup tie in January there were nearly 4,000 patrons in Pairc Esler and there was an energy about Down, there was a feeling in the air even before a ball was thrown in, as Down players sought out their opponents to say welcome to Newry! On the sideline the opposing Manager was getting animated and vociferous, the Ulster Champions soon realised this was new Down, this was something that was not seen 12 months ago in the

first meeting in the 2022 National League in Owenbeg.

The first half was full of action and intensity, you could not take your eyes of the on-field duals, Pdraig Cassidy silenced the home support when he rattled the top corner of the net after a deft flick from Gareth McKinless. It was to be game on though when Pat Havern dispossessed the same Cassidy and found Liam Kerr who in turn found the returning Niall Donnelly and the Tullylish man finished to the net. Half Time came and Derry led 1-8 to 1-6 and the crowd looked forward to more in the second half.

Donnelly had a second major within 30 seconds of the restart. Barry O'Hagan this time made the incision, utilising Donagh McAleenan for a one-two that allowed Donnelly space in behind. He rattled it past Odhran Lynch. Nobody scored for the next nine minutes and then Down added a third goal. Andrew Gilmore cut along the endline and squared back into the path of Ceilum Doherty, who fired into the roof of the net.

Four down, Derry hauled themselves level within five minutes. Niall Toner got two of

them and Oisín McWilliams, who again impressed off the bench, and Ben McCarron got the others.

Chrissy McKaigue's straight red card for a hand-off into the face of Ceilum Doherty made no difference to the game's direction. In fact, Derry scored the only two points in the time they were a man down. Then Ryan McEvoy got a second booking for Down with six minutes left and they kicked the next two to draw level again. There was a softness to both frees at the death, particularly Derry's. Barry O'Hagan and Shane McGuigan pointed to send it straight to penalties after a sensible pre-match call to spare the players extra-time.

Odhrán Lynch, whose goalkeeping technique has come under scrutiny in the past year, made a brilliant one-handed save from Andrew Gilmore and then a second block from Ryan Mason. Barry O'Hagan made it three misses from three for Down, but they survived right until the final penalty, stroked home confidently by Conor Doherty.

Derry won but perhaps the glory was shared for after a bleak 2022, Down fans could on this occasion take honour in defeat and look forward to the start of the League, for they knew as they headed out of Pairc Esler, that they had rattled the Ulster Champions.

On the last Saturday of January Down made the first of two trips this year to the famous ground of Semple stadium to meet Tipperary in a game where two points would be crucial if we were to shape to get out of Division Three. Down Supporters travelled in numbers, and they certainly outnumbered the home support, it is a credit to the Down Supporters Club for the work that they do facilitating travel to games wherever the Red and Black is worn.

Down went about their task with clinical composure until an element of disarray took hold with Niall McParland's 40th-minute red card. But Conor Francis' goal gave them the cushion they needed in front of 1,013 spectators at Semple Stadium.

Down defended in numbers, denying Tipperary so much as a shot from play in the first half, as the Premier's high ball tactic failed to make any inroads before their bench began to make an impact. When Down attacked, they went for the jugular. Eamon Brown took a simple scorable free from the 21m line short, seeking a goal, while Barry O'Hagan was reluctant to kick another at the target from 35 metres out in front of the posts. In the end, he hurriedly booted it wide. It was a rare blip in those opening stages.

Pat Havern showed superb movement floating around the attacking zone and kicked their opening two points, the first from a mark, followed by a fine Odhrán Murdock score. Seán O'Connor had four scoreable frees but only pointed one, on 15 minutes, before being taken off at half-time. Their other two first-half placed balls from distance were taken by Jack Kennedy, scoring a free in the 31st minute.

Down made their winning move at the start of the second quarter, firing 1-03 in the space of six minutes. After slotting over two points, Eamon Brown picked out Havern with a brilliant reverse pass that wrongfooted the Tipp cover. The full-forward made no mistake when in on goal.

When Havern added a 22nd-minute point, it was Down's last of the half. O'Hagan was black-carded for a late tackle on Teddy Doyle and the visitors set about killing the clock, restricting Tipperary's efforts to two frees in that 10-minute period.

Kennedy's effort left it 1-06 to 0-02 at half-time.

McParland was sent off for his second yellow card, after a high tackle, and Tipp supporters started to sense an opportunity as Mikey O'Shea brought the gap back to five. The teams were trading frees before Mark Russell, just on a sub, kicked two huge points with his first two touches to twice narrow the deficit to four. Each time, however, Down substitute Andrew Gilmore kicked the next point. Tipp appeared to have given away their chance when keeper Michael O'Reilly got caught under Gilmore's high delivery and Francis tapped into an empty net. 2-10 to 1-09 after 61 minutes.

But Tipp hit back three minutes later when Doyle capitalised on a loose ball to finish to the net. Donough Leahy, another sub, added the next two points, either side of Gilmore cracking the Tipp crossbar with a vicious shot, to leave it a two-point game entering six minutes of stoppage time. Havern won and pointed a free to settle Down nerves, but they felt shakier when a goal chance fell to O'Brien from a 45. He was surrounded by red jerseys, though, and his shot snuffed out, as the final whistle sounded.

The journey home is a long one but with the new road structure and two points in the bag, the journey seemed to be shorter than it was on the way down, we were up and running in 2023.

Antrim were to be the visitors to Pairc Esler the following weekend and Conor Lavery knew that there would be an expectation from the home followers that this would be a game we would win, whilst he also knew that to have any hope of promotion, we needed to win our three home games for starters. This was an exciting evening in Pairc Esler 39 scores in total and a one-point win for Down and if we are



being honest this was a victory against the odds.

In a frenzied finish, Pat Havern and Andrew Gilmore held their nerve in front of a noisy crowd to point the winning scores after substitute Conor Poland scrambled home a goal in the 69th minute to level. Truth be told, Andy McEntee's side deserved something from the game and looked to have done enough for their first points of the campaign with replacement Dominic McEnhill scoring three second half points off the bench.

Antrim started well and both Ruairí McCann's found the range and a long-distance effort from centre-back Joseph Finnegan had the Saffron's deservedly two points ahead. Niall Kane returned to the team for the first time this season to slot over a 45', but Down were still chugging along. Another change from last Saturday night saw Andrew Gilmore rewarded for a good showing off the bench in Tipperary and the St John's clubman curled over a nice point and the sides were soon level.

After Down notched three scores in a row, McCann was left alone at the edge of the square, and the big full forward duly side-stepped Kane to tap home. It was no more than they deserved. This Down era, so far, has been defined by a willingness to go for goals. Liam Kerr went for the jugular earlier in the half, but it was Gilmore that finished off another quick hand passing move as Laverty's Down looked to take off.

Antrim were quick to reply though and having struck two points in the half already, Conor Stewart's effort looked over, but it clipped the post and came back down to McCann. With his eyes on the support runners, the Aghagallon man deceived the Down defenders and goalkeeper Kane to walk in his second goal to an empty net.

In the run into half time, Mourne midfielder Odhran Murdock fired over a brace to settle his side after they lost key attacker Barry O'Hagan to a cruciate injury. That marred the end of what was, a lively first half, that saw Antrim go in 2-08 to 1-09 in front. The Crowd had certainly had their hearts warmed by a first half where both teams decided in old fashioned terms to just go for it and there was plenty to talk about at Half Time, not least the performance of Antrim Goalkeeper Michael Byrne.

Down drew level with the first two scores of the second half but the Saffrons were not to be outdone and went back three in front, from that point on, the sides went point for point with Antrim all the while ahead by the goal or sometimes four points in front only for it all to become undone in the closing minutes. The home support were rapturous in their applause for the fighting spirit of this Down team, in a few short months since we had played Clare in a near empty Pairc Esler, the ground was now rocking ton the sound of the Down supporters. For Antrim it was a bitter pill for they were on the night equal to if not better than Down.

With Brewster Park closed, Fermanagh were playing all of their home games in Ederney, and the tight confines of the ground were suited for the home side, the facilities are a credit to the Club, and we were made most welcome, even if the result was to bring us our first defeat of the League. Two weeks earlier we had pick pocketed Antrim with a goal at the death to take the points and now in Ederney, Sean Quigley did the same to us in the 73rd Minute, to quell a second half comeback that looked like securing the points for us.

Fermanagh had controlled long periods of the first half, with Down for some reason reluctant to shoot

from distance and trying to walk the ball through a resolute defence. At half time the home side led 0-10 to 0-4 and there was some serious words to be spoken in the Down dressing room, the second half was to be a big test of character for this Down side.

This team though has a capacity to try and engineer goals and were soon back in the game with goals from a penalty by Odhran Murdock and another palmed effort by Pierce Laverty. Both sides were now just playing an open game, mistakes were being made and Fermanagh hit back with a goal from sub-Conor McGee, with the clock ticking Down got what looked to be the winning breakthrough when Conor Francis ghosted in for a goal, quickly followed by a Shay Millar point to put us two ahead.

Then in the 73rd minute substitute Sean Quigley stole in on a dropping ball to get a flick to it and send the ball to the net and make promotion now for Down a difficult task, every game from here on would have to be won. Westmeath would be up next in Newry and that would be a big test against a team who were going to be playing in the All-Ireland series in the summer.

Down came from seven points behind in the second half against Westmeath to edge an enthralling Division 3 encounter at Páirc Elser in Newry.

Seven unanswered scores either side of the interval looked to have done the trick for the travelling Lake county only for Ceilum Doherty's late brace and Andrew Gilmore's insurance score in the finish to win it for Down. Despite the early lead, Down were guilty of wasting possession in the opening exchanges, inside duo of Pat Havern and Gilmore did land a point a piece but the hosts continued to rain down a host of high balls into the

Westmeath parallelogram with little or no effect.

With that Westmeath looked to lively Conor McCormack and Senan Baker to support John Heslin who opened the scoring for Dessie Dolan's side. The duo were effective from open play as well and on the scoresheet.

As the half progressed the shot selection on both sides dwindled. With scores and chances at a premium, Heslin stood up to give the Lake county the lead along with two immaculate free's at the tail-end of the first half. The hosts lost Eamon Brown to a black card and Dessie Dolan's side made hay with three points in that period to deservedly lead 0-8 to 0-3 at the break.

With the lead in tow, Heslin in particular was keeping Down at arm's length throughout the half with three second period points.

An Odhran Murdoch penalty with fifteen minutes remaining began the comeback and Havern soon levelled with his third free before Doherty's heroics that look to keep Mourne promotion hopes alive. Once again, the home support had played a big part in the Down win, the sound in the stand reached new levels when the penalty was scored and when John Heslin missed a free into the Canal goals, it was greeted as if it were a score for the home side. After the defeat in Ederney this was an all-important win, for the league was so tight that a defeat here could easily have nudged you to a relegation battle.

Kingspan Breffni Park has not been the happiest of hunting grounds for Down in recent years and yet on the back of the victory over Westmeath we travelled with an optimism to meet table toppers Cavan.

Cavan sprinted clear in the end to

cement their place at the summit of Division 3 with a convincing display at Kingspan Breffni. Down exploded from the blocks with Liam Kerr putting Miceal Rooney in for a goal. The hosts failed to score from play in the opening half-hour but by half-time Cian Madden had steered Cavan to level terms, 0-5 to 1-2.

Cavan restarted the better with a string of points, things just got better and better for the blues and two minutes after his introduction, talisman Gearóid McKiernan's first touch of the ball saw him call a fabulous mark (53) and, in a jiffy, Cavan were 0-11 to 1-5 in front. Though lacking power and punch up front, Down hung in there and with 15 minutes left trailed by just two points but Paddy Lynch's goal in added-on time proved to be the nail in the visitor's coffin.

With two defeats now in the Promotion battle, Down were now going to be dependent on other teams losing games if we were to get out of Division Three and with only two rounds of the league left that was looking like an impossible task given the fixtures left to play.

With an Under 20 competition starting and promotion a distant possibility, Conor Lavery made some changes for the home tie v Longford as he sought to get the team back to winning ways.

Longford's eight-year term in Division 3 ended at Páirc Esler in Newry with the hosts pulling away in the finish. Liam Kerr put the off-colour visitors out of their misery with one round to go with a late 67th minute penalty.

Despite needing a draw or a win from the game and Down unable to go up or down the table, Longford never got into the contest. Joe Hagan's pull down on Kerr for the match-deciding penalty saw the O'Byrne cup champions finish with

14 men.

Down overcame a serious injury to their midfielder Mark Walsh and a lengthy delay for his treatment to finish with a flurry. The game was only minutes old when Mark picked up a nasty leg injury and I must commend here the medical team led by our team Doctor, Dermot Maguire, our physios Noel and James along with St Johns Ambulance for the good work that they undertook. Indeed, it showed the importance of having a full medical team in place for all of our games.

Pat Havern was excellent on the night, and he landed three crucial second half points at full forward after excelling around the middle of the field in the first half. The sides were level six times in the first half and a symptom of the inertia.

Dessie Reynolds did flick home a goal that looked to spark the survival tilt but Down relentlessly pushed on thanks to man of the match Liam Kerr. The second half looked to be following the same script until Conor Lavery switched Havern inside. That created the space for Kerr to run through, get pulled down and Down duly took over.

Paddy Christie's men mustered a tame fightback with a Dylan Farrell free and a late Daire O'Brien shot that was taken off the line by Finn McElroy but could not stop relegation.

Travelling to Tullamore for the last game of the League, Down knew that Offaly had a chance of promotion if they were to beat us and other results went their way, it had been a tough league for Offaly with the sudden death of their manager Liam Kearns and they had showed great composure and character to be still involved at this stage of the competition.



Down turned on the style in the second half to emphatically end Offaly's promotion bid in O'Connor Park, while out of promotion contention, Down were clearly not in the mood for handing out favours as well as laying down a marker for the championship.

We outscored Offaly by 1-9 to 0-3 in the second half for a very convincing win and played some quality attacking football in this period. While Fermanagh's win over Cavan would have denied Offaly promotion in any event, their second-half collapse was surprising as their energy levels dipped completely.

Behind by 0-9 to 0-6 at half time after playing into the wind, Offaly were very much in the hunt. The sides had been level on five occasions before Down, with the Kilcoo contingent playing very well, scored four in a row to lead by four coming up to half time. An injury-time Bernard Allen point, that could have been a goal, stemmed the tide for Offaly.

Down upped the ante all over the field in the second half and Offaly

found that they had no answers. Three points still separated the sides – 0-10 to 0-7 – after 44 minutes but an excellent Liam Kerr goal put Down in the driving seat. They went for the jugular ruthlessly, firing over six unanswered points in a relentless spell of pressure. Offaly were a beaten docket and Down won pulling up from here, the bench was emptied, and we looked forward now to the visit of Donegal in the Ulster Championship on April 23rd.

When Donegal came to Pairc Esler in the Dr McKenna Cup in January, Paddy Carr was the team manager and now as they prepared to come back in April, Aidan O'Rourke who had previously been at James McCartan in Down was now the man in charge. Even though Donegal had been relegated in the League, they still had been playing football two divisions above us and were still fancied to come out of Newry with a win.

Down stormed to an Ulster SFC win over Donegal at Pairc Esler, the Division Three side adding further pain to a side in turmoil following relegation from Division One and

the departure of their manager. Goals from Liam Kerr and Pat Havern completed Donegal's misery in the Marshes as they limped out of the provincial title race with more days of uncertainty looming in the weeks ahead as they await the identity of their round-robin opponents.

Daniel Guinness, Danny Magill, and Ryan Johnston were the men who led this Down tour de force with sparkling performances, injecting a level of energy that few of their opponents could match.

In front of a Newry crowd of 9,139, Donegal were handed the perfect start by a misunderstanding between Down defenders Anthony Doherty and Niall McParland, allowing Jason McGee to collect Michael Langan's delivery and skip through to angle his shot past goalkeeper Niall Kane with less than three minutes on the clock.

But the Mourne men regrouped to establish a fortified resistance as they protected the scoring zone and frustrated their opponents as they pressed with the wind in their backs. This was a Down team now with backbone and character who



were no longer prepared to be cannon fodder on the conceding of an early score.

The loss of Michael Langan to injury after just 15 minutes was a blow to the managerless Tir Chonail's attacking resources, but they moved three ahead in the 20th minute when Caolan Ward split the posts. Down's early scores came from Havern and Ryan Johnston, but they gave little indication of any genuine attacking threat until Liam Kerr's magical intervention in the 21st minute.

Ryan McEvoy won Niall Kane's kick-out, and the ball appeared entangled under the feet of Eugene Branagan out on the right wing, but Kerr darted in with a clever pick-up to head for goal and drill his shot past Shaun Patton for the levelling goal. Pat Havern's second free nudged them in front for the first time, but they almost conceded a second goal as half-time approached. Stephen McMenamin's crunching tackle broke up a Down attack to send Donegal sweeping forward in numbers, and it was Conor O'Donnell who got on the end of the move to fire in a shot that was superbly saved by Niall Kane.

Daire O Baoill's second score had the sides level again, and they were deadlocked at 1-4 each at the break, 'keeper Shaun Patton converting a '45, but missing two others at the end of a first half that had offered little in terms of excitement beyond Kerr's inspired contribution. Both sides had goal attempts early in the second half, with Daniel Guinness seeing his effort blocked by Donegal defender Ward, before Caolan McColgan fired in a shot at the other end, this time Danny Magill getting in the vital block. Down's pace caused panic as they ran in numbers at the Donegal defence, and a sweeping move gave them a second goal in the 46th minute.

Ceilum Doherty and Shane Annett combined to send Ryan Johnston cutting in on goal, and illegally halted by Brendan McCole, with Pat Havern tucking the penalty to the bottom corner of the net. Donegal responded with a string of points from Conor O'Donnell, Ciaran Thompson, and O Baoil, but with Daniel Guinness and Danny Magill taking the challenge fearlessly to their opponents, Conor Lavery's side bounced back again to hit the target through Pat Havern, Danny Magill, and Andrew Gilmore.

Guinness charged through to put three points between the sides late on, and Donegal lacked the cutting edge and the accuracy to dig themselves out of a deepening crisis.

And they were caught on the breakaway as Conor Poland and Gilmore wrapped it up in stoppage time. Down were up and running and playing without our Under 20 players ahead of the Ulster Final, we had shown that Conor Lavery was turning our fortunes around, we were heading to Clones and a meeting with those old rivals Armagh.

Armagh in 2023 are further down the road than we are, they have more big game experience than us, are more street wise than we are, and they are physically stronger than we are, in reality we are in Year One and they are in Year 6 or 7. It was then a disappointing day in Clones, a wet old day too, after a week promising people who wanted into the limited covered stand in St Tiernachs Park, that it would not rain, the signs were not good for Down, especially too when you are sitting in traffic that is going nowhere and the clock is ticking – sure we love to get to Clones.



Coming into this championship season, Armagh hadn't won back-to-back games in Ulster since they claimed their last provincial title in 2008 but they have now won three on the spin to secure a final clash with Derry.

They had plenty in hand here against Down to follow their impressive wins over Antrim and Cavan. This wasn't a classic by any sense in front of 22,520 in Clones but Armagh left no doubt.

The game ended as a contest when Armagh grabbed their third goal 12 minutes into the second half. Ciaran Mackin looked to get the last touch as, not for the first time in the game, a high dropping ball caused havoc for Down. From there, Armagh poured on the misery with Rian O'Neill adding a fourth goal. Down's shooting went awry. They have made progress under Conor Laverty, but this was a lesson hard learned.

Armagh would have the better of the early exchanges and open up a 0-3 to 0-1 lead through Aidan Forker, Jason Duffy, and a Rory Grugan free. Down had actually opened the scoring with Pat Havern on placed ball duty but for much of the first

half they struggled in front of goal. They'd amass five first half wides, see two more efforts drop into Ethan Rafferty's hands and not register a score from play until the 31st minute.

By that stage, Armagh had struck for two goals which came in a three-minute period. The Orchard men had already hit the bar through Jason Duffy when Andrew Murnin got on the end of a dropping Shane McPartlan delivery to bat to the net.

If Armagh midfielder McPartlan was attempting to score a point in that instance, then there was no doubt as to his next involvement. Down responded to that goal with another Havern free but McPartlan saw the Down defence open up. He powered through a couple of tackles before lashing a left footed effort to the net to put his side 2-3 to 0-3 up on 26 minutes.

Down were wobbling but responded well and registered their first from play through Ryan Johnston effort. Conor Laverty's men kicked three of the last four points of the half to go in trailing by 2-4 to 0-6 at the interval.

Down needed the fast start to the

second half but Armagh grabbed the first two points before Mackin's goal put them nine up and in the Ulster final on May 14. Down head for the Tailteann Cup. The Scoreboard read Armagh 4-10 Down 0-12, fourteen scores to twelve as we used talk about before stats men took us to the world of turnovers and quarter backs! and I suppose it came back to that adage that goals win games. This was something that would come back to haunts us again on July 15th in a Tailteann Cup Final.

The Tailteann Cup saw us in a group with Tipperary, Waterford and Meath, an expectation there that we would progress out of that group and have the potential to perhaps get back to Croke Park. The first game of the Competition saw us at home to Waterford, a game that I watched thanks to Perform Sports from my hospital bed and a game that Down won without being convincing. It is often hard to perform to that high level when everyone expects you to win comfortably and to be fair to Waterford, they did ask some questions of Down.

On paper it should have been an easy match-up for Down on home turf against Waterford who are

second from bottom in the lowest league tier. Nonetheless, Down came good in the second half and ran out comfortable 2-14 to 1-06 winners in the end.

Team Management rang the changes since Down's 4-10 to 0-12 defeat to Armagh in the Ulster Championship semi-final two weeks ago. The manager had said he was releasing his players to their clubs, and he stuck to his guns. The Down changes included championship debut starts for Conor Fitzpatrick, Finn McElroy, and Ross Carr. It took an age for this match to heat up and even when it did after the opening Waterford goal on 19 minutes, it remained tepid at best.

Before that there were tit-for-tat points between Jason Curry for Waterford and Pat Havern for Down - all four from the dead ball. The latter opened the scoring with a mark in the first minute and the Saval man kept his scoring boots on with two other terrific first half points from play. Conor Murray burst forward for the opening goal for the visitors, leaving Down defenders in his wake, before slamming into the net.

Five minutes later Down responded in kind, when a well-worked team move ended with Eugene Branagan delivering to Eamon Brown in front of the Waterford goal and he drilled home. That gave Down a 1-03 to 1-02 lead and they pulled away after that finishing the half 1-06 to 1-02 in front.

A plethora of wides in the first 10 minutes of the second half made for difficult watching before traded points got the scoreboard moving again. A superb mark scooped out of the sky by Ceilum Doherty led to a point for Down from sub Donach McAleenan before Odhran Murdock went on a solo run and finished to the net on 50 minutes. Michel Curry was denied a goal at the other end

with a clearance off the line, but despite Down being reduced to 14 men when Murdock was black carded on 60 minutes the points kept accumulating and the game finished 2-14 to 1-06.

The next game saw us make our second trip of the year to Thurles and we were on the double bill with Limerick and Tipperary in the Munster Hurling Championship and with nearly a full house for the second half of our game, this was a good platform for the Team to get some exposure.

This time there was a resounding victory for Down, achieved without really having to get out of second gear, Down did what they had to do in Semple Stadium on Sunday, with a comfortable victory over Tipperary that guarantees them a place in the next round and the potential to top the group.

Wides at both ends heralded a pedestrian first half with the six minutes first-half stoppage time reflecting a stop-start encounter where neither side showed any great flair. There were moments of beauty, one such saw Down's Ryan McEvoy deliver an inch-perfect cross for Pat Havern, who picked it up perfectly at the far side of the square, but the Saval player finished wide of the posts. That was at the end of the first 35 minutes, when Down led 0-8 to 0-2. Five of those scores came from frees, four scored by Havern.

Tipperary led 0-02 to 0-01 after 10 minutes with Sean O'Connor and Luke Kennedy pointing. That was as good as it got for the home side however as they were held to that until 39 minutes when Kennedy scored their third point. Traded scores in stoppage time between Ceilum Doherty and Kennedy from a free gave Down an 0-9 to 0-4 half-time lead.

Tipperary's day was just about summed up early in the second half when they missed a penalty and Down scored a maximum. The Mourne men led 0-11 to 0-05 on 40 minutes when O'Connor was through for goal and was pulled down. Referee Thomas Murphy awarded a penalty that Kevin Fahey blazed wide. Three minutes later Shealan Johnston picked up a pass at the other end and calmly picked his spot and rolled the ball into the net.

Down continued to rack up the points and led 1-16 to 0-6 on 58 minutes when classy Burren player Odhran Murdock added a second goal. The clock wound Down with the finishing score reading 2-18 to 0-6, the trip to Tipp well worth the effort.

The Final group game saw us travel to Parnell Park for a meeting with our old foes Meath, the winner of this game would go through to the Quarter Final and have a home tie, where the loser would take the scenic route and have a home preliminary Quarter Final.

The difference in tactics was evident from the start, with Down playing a passing game resulting in two turnovers in the first two minutes while Meath were more direct resulting in the opening score fired over the bar by Jack O'Connor in the third. Still there was just a point between the sides at the half-time whistle, with a converted penalty contributing to Meath's narrow lead while Down scored five of their six points from dead balls.

Niall Kane was back in nets for Down but there was nothing he could do to prevent Jordan Morris firing low into the net from the penalty spot in the tenth minute when the same player was pulled back, having got the ball away to Ronan Jones, who hit the target after the whistle had blown. Down

had led 0-03 to 0-01 at that stage, with all three scores from frees but the Royal County kept their noses in front and led by three points when Down almost had a goal of their own on 25 minutes. Kane hit a superb '45 to level the game at the end of the half but Matthew Costello replied with a free accompanied by a fist-pump to make it 1-04 to 0-06 at the short whistle.

Daniel Guinness levelled after the break but despite there being barely a flutter of a breeze in Parnell Park Down had 17 wides in total to Meath's 10. On 43 minutes Down went two points in front as the ball passed through Eugene Branagan to Guinness who was fouled, referee Fergal Kelly played the advantage however and Odhran Murdock hit the net.

The sides were level again 1-08 each on 55 minutes when Daithi McGowan, who was only on as a sub scored from a well-taken '45. It was all square again as the six minutes stoppage time was announced and a frantic finish ensued, with both sides desperate for a winning score. It was Meath who found two in the end after Cathal Hickey was denied a goal by Kane. As in the second minute of stoppage time McGowan and Donal Lenihan converted frees to give Colm O'Rourke's men victory. There were lessons to be learned after this defeat and this young Down team and management would take stock, for as people left Parnell Park on that Saturday afternoon, they did talk of how these two teams could meet again later in the competition.

The Home Preliminary Quarter Final was to be against Longford and for this game Down welcomed back Rory Mason into the panel, and the Loughinisland man contributed three points to the Down total, as we went on to win 1-20 to 1-12. Down have made it into the final

eight of the Tailteann Cup with a surging second half win over Longford at Páirc Esler in Newry.

We were looking for a reaction to the defeat by Meath and the reaction came as the wide count dramatically dropped with Down fighting back a three-point half-time deficit to win by eight in the finish.

Danny Magill's 45th minute goal drew the sides level and with a quarter final place in sight the hosts never looked like losing. All the shooting practice during the week paid off as they rattled over the last six points of the game in the eleven-point turnaround Darragh Doherty and the pacey Keelin McGann were electric on the counter as Down coughed up numerous possession's down the centre of Longford's defence.

Veteran centre back Mickey Quinn intercepted and assisted Longford through that bright period as they led 0-07 to 0-04 with less than a half hour played. Things only got better for Paddy Christie's side when Joe Hagan's partially blocked effort spun in off the post to make Niall Kane scoff with disbelief. Kane atoned with two one on one saves from Hagan and Patrick Fox and his clubmate Eugene Branagan responded with a point along with captain Pat Havern and Andrew Gilmore to trail 1-08 to 0-08 at the turn. Darren Gallagher walloped over a sideline, but Longford were beginning to unravel. Down emptied the bench and Magill shone along with fellow subs Ross Carr and Rory Mason. Longford finished with 13 men as replacement Daire O'Brien and Aaron Farrell were black carded as their disappointing season ended.

The Quarter Final draw saw Down face their second trip of the year to Kingspan Breffni Park. When the sides met at the same venue in last year's Tailteann Cup, Cavan won by nine points and the Breffni men

franked that form with a seven-point victory in round five of the National League this year.

But there was no doubting who the better team were here as a fired-up Down out-foxed a Cavan side who were flat on the day and never led in the match. From play, Conor Lavery's side registered 1-11 to Cavan's 0-08 and carved out several other goal chances, with Niall Kane's fine save from Oisín Brady in the first half putting a stop to Cavan's only real sniff of a green flag.

With a fairly strong wind at their backs, Down edged the exchanges in the first half and took a 0-09 to 0-07 lead in with them at the break.

Havern opened the scoring with a close-range free before Cavan levelled with a Brady mark. Havern had a similar effort at the other end after fielding spectacularly and although Brady converted another free, after a mark was brought up, Down reeled off three in succession via the outstanding trio of Rory Mason, Liam Kerr, and Havern.

Cavan full-back Pádraig Faulkner stopped the bleeding. Ryan Johnston waltzed through unhindered for Down's sixth point but a 40-metre Brady mark and a close-range free after the referee spotted a foul off the ball made it a one-point game again. Pat Havern and Gearoid McKiernan traded frees but Down were looking more threatening in possession and put together a lovely move which ended with Kerr blazing over when bearing down on goal.

A 46-metre free from Mason was followed by that Kane save after a well-worked Cavan move and a trademark curled effort from the left wing from Oisín Kiernan saw Mickey Graham's side go in trailing by two. With the wind at their backs in the second half, there were reasons for optimism in the blue

corner and by the 43rd-minute mark, they had drawn level, Faulkner again stepping up for the first point and punching a hole in the defence and laying off to Brandon Boylan for the equaliser.

Danny Magill and Brady (free) exchanged white flags, but the crucial spell arrived thereafter as Down landed four of the next five points, Havern (free), Kerr, Mason, and Patrick McCarthy the scorers, with Cavan's top scorer Brady providing their sole reply with a terrific effort from the wing. Cavan gained some confidence when they pinched a Down kick-out and Cian Madden scored from the corner and, with the home crowd finally coming to life, they pressed up. Another eye-catching Brady point left the minimum between them again but Down replied, Guinness feeding Kerr to snipe another.

Tiarnan Madden landed an exceptional point for Cavan but Down finished strongest. Shealan Johnston found Havern in an ocean of space, and he laid off for Danny Magill, who planted his finish in the bottom corner with 68 minutes on the watch. Brady (free) pulled one back, but Cavan never looked like getting the goal they needed, and Down sub-Shane Annett picked off another point on the break as they ran out five-point winners. Down were heading to Croke Park in search of a first win there since we beat Kildare in the All-Ireland Semi Final of 2010.

Laois were to be our opponents in what turned out to be a Croke Park goal fest and the reality is that this game was over after just 17 minutes. Four goals in each half comfortably sealed Down's passage to the Tailteann Cup final against a disappointing Laois side in Croke Park. The first four goals came in the opening 17 minutes and Billy Sheehan's side were visibly stunned with that early onslaught.

Down gripped the game and duly enjoyed the cat-and-mouse affair from that point onwards. Tactically astute, and full of confidence, Down's lines of running sharpened with every passing minute. It only took Kerr 51 seconds to blaze the trail for the Down men. And with that punishing strike, Laois were never able to get a foothold in the game.

Mourne captain Pat Havern quickly added a neat point and well-taken goal. A low drive past Killian Roche typified Down's no-nonsense approach. As the clouds darkened and thunder cracked, Kerr fortuitously added a second. Shealan Johnston turned as soon as he took his wayward effort for a point. The off target shot hit the post and Kerr reacted quickest, kept his composure, and slotted it home.

Three minutes later Danny Magill all but wrapped the tie up. With the lopsided scoreline at 4-02 to 0-01, there would be no way back for the Leinster men. A Mark Barry point broke the momentum somewhat with a mark but between bad execution and sloppy play Laois could not sustain any pressure to make inroads into the semi-final. Paul Kingston was denied a glorious goal chance just before the half-time whistle but Down netminder Niall Kane was in no mood to hand Laois a lifeline as it remained an ominous 4-10 to 0-04 at the interval.

The second-half response came from Kerr. The Burren man wrapped up his hat-trick minutes after the restart. Barry (two) and Eoin Lowry then responded for Laois with a sustained line of attack but Down were merciless.

Odhrán Murdock apologetically drilled home the sixth, Rory Mason got in on the act with a neat finish but just when substitute Kevin Swayne found the net for Laois,

Danny Magill scorched home his second in the very next play. That summed up the humour of both sides. Barry did score a consolation penalty but Down were already planning a final date with Meath on 15 July.

Down had come to Croke Park and got an emphatic win, my only fear on leaving the stadium was that we might need one of those eight goals in two weeks' time to get over Meath in a Final. Down and Meath are two counties who could be very much deemed to be similar in fortunes and history, two counties where there has always been even contests. When Meath and Down met in National League Finals or All Ireland Finals there was never much between the two teams and now, we were set to meet again in Croke Park on a bill that would include an All-Ireland Semi Final between Monaghan and Dublin. That was the stage where these two proud counties really wanted to be and the Tailteann Cup Final whilst our level in 2023, was really seen as a means to an end.

The Down supporters were looking forward now to a second trip to Croke Park and the County had come alive again with colour as the community got behind Conor Lavery and the team. Over 600 people had attended a fundraising breakfast the week before the final and there was an opportunity to harness the goodwill and to look to the future with a major project like Ballykinlar in mind. For Down to ultimately be successful, we need the environment in our Clubs to be right and we need the physical infrastructure of pitches and gyms to be in place, hopefully 2024 will see the first sods turned in Ballykinlar.

The Tailteann Cup Final wasn't pretty but then finals are there for winning and Down will be left to rue a number of goal chances that they





left behind them and a general profligacy in front of the sticks. We would rue the missed chances on a day when fortune and the uprights would play a key part in the Meath win.

Down started much the brighter of the two, their eagerness to get the game going reflected in a four points to one lead through the bones of a first quarter where Meath were still trying to fit the key into the ignition. The one score claimed by the Leinster side in that same period was a free from Matthew Costello that was awarded for an off-the-ball foul on the same man. It was the one time in that spell where they got anywhere near the goals.

Their second score was a complete freak, Jack Flynn sending a point attempt high off a post and the ball dropping off the knee of Ronan Jones and into the Down net. Suddenly, Meath were level having offered next to nothing.

Down didn't handle it well. The goal certainly rattled the composure of this young team, and we spent the middle chunk of the half struggling to get out of their own half as the opposition turned the screw from kick-outs and Meath did enough to go a point ahead. The two teams had racked up 17 wides or attempts that came up short by the break, a fair few of them balls that spluttered harmlessly over the line, and Down should have made far more of a positive ending to the opening period.

Down spurned two golden opportunities with Ryan Johnston firing a shot low off Sean Brennan's legs and Liam Kerr clearing the crossbar when one-on-one with the Meath keeper. It left things level at the break, 0-6 to 1-3 and we waited for the game to take off.

If the game 'opened up' after that

then it was a small enough mercy but there was a consistency in the pattern with Down again starting the stronger and Meath eventually finding their feet as the half grew legs.

Four unanswered points inside ten minutes put O'Rourke's side in the driving seat and, while they stretched the lead to three points more than once, there was never the sense that this one was funnelling down any particular route.

That uncertainty was bottled in one 60-second snapshot which saw Shealan Johnston's shot blocked by a Meath defender at one end and then Matthew Costello's fisted pass across the Down goal fly just out of reach of the onrushing Conor Gray.

If there was one main difference between them in this spell, then it was the improved shooting on the Meath side. Jack O'Connor came off the bench to nail two screamers - and an injury-time goal - and Jack Flynn caught fire with four points from play.

Down did have a wonderful chance to wipe out the difference when there was a goal between them but Andrew Gilmore's shot from just a couple of yards out was blocked by another green jersey with a handful of minutes to go.

Meath kept their noses in front from there, O'Connor providing the cherry on top with a goal from the last kick of the game.

**This was a disappointing end to the Campaign, a journey that had lifted the tide of Down Football and which once again brought us back to Croke Park on two occasions in 2023. There was optimism and there is a belief now that we are on a journey and in the course of that journey there will be bumps on the road and it is how we deal with the**

**bumps that will define our destiny. The facts show that since 2003, twenty years ago the Down Senior Footballers have won only one Final that they competed in and that was the Dr McKenna Cup Final in 2008, in the meantime we have lost an All-Ireland Final, three Ulster Finals, four Divisional League Finals and a Tailteann Cup Final.**

**Twenty years of losing Finals is too long for Down, in 2024 when have to commit to winning the National Football League Division Three Final, in Croke Park. That will be the biggest marker that we can put down in the year ahead, for winning will then hopefully become a habit and then you start to dine at the table as opposed to living off the crumbs of the table.**

The shoots of progress are seen most of all in the performances of the County Under 20 Footballers, who for the second year in three delivered an Ulster title as the Danny Murphy Cup returned to Down.

There were not too many who gave Down a chance travelling to Healy Park to meet the All-Ireland Champions Tyrone in the Ulster Under 20 Quarter Final, but the few Down people who were in Burren weeks earlier at the Leo Murphy Cup match would have seen that Down were quietly improving and that Tyrone were in their sights.

The Red Hands fielded with almost half of last year's triumphant team, but were outplayed by an adventurous, confident Down team that defended superbly and struck for goals at crucial stages. The Mourne defensive strategy was key to this shock result, with the Red Hand danger-men stifled, with Patrick McCarthy holding ace attacker Ruairi Canavan scoreless from play.

Down Centre-back Rodgers drove

through for the lead point, but they were level at the end of the opening quarter, with Ronan Cassidy on target at the other end. Both sides had goal chances early in the second quarter. First Gavin Potter crossed for Miller to punch against the crossbar, then Jason Morgan got on the end of a Hardy pass to bring a fine save from Conor McAneney.

But in the 18th minute, Down hit the net, and it was Oisín Savage who gave McAneney no chance with a crisply struck finish. And they added a second goal three minutes before the break, Tiarnan Ryan and Rodgers heavily involved in the move that ended with Jason Morgan striking low to the net for a 2-4 to 0-4 interval lead.

Ruairi Canavan, frustrated in the opening half by the tight-marking McCarthy, moved to full-forward and almost created a goal for Gavin Potter, who had to settle for a point. Canavan pulled back a couple of points from frees but was denied goals by a Finn Murdock intercept and a superb block by McCarthy.

Tyrone pressed in numbers, getting to within four points with a Conor Cush '45, but were vulnerable on the counterattack, with Rodgers picking off his second score of the evening, and goalkeeper Oisín Treacy converting a brilliant free from close to the sideline. It was Down's night and Eoin McElholm's late goal was only a minor consolation to the hosts.

The reward was to be a home Semi Final v Monaghan, a repeat of our Final of two years ago and with an enthusiastic home support behind the team Pairc Esler was going to be no easy hunting ground for the visitors. Down Corner forward Oisín Savage will have given his Monaghan opponents nightmares for years to come as the home side reached this year's Eirgrid Ulster Under 20 final. Despite the wind

advantage the visitors had no answer to the Loughinisland man as he was rampant in the decisive opening half against the elements.

The 20th minute goal, Savage half volleyed home will also live long in the memory. Funnily enough the in-form forward volleyed over a point moments earlier. A sign of things to come and his sky-high confidence. With 14 on his back, Stephen Mooney is one for the future for the Farney men, his placed efforts out of his hands were judged to perfection and importantly kept Paul Curran's side in faint touching distance trailing 1-10 to 0-5 at the interval.

Odhran Murdock's aerial dominance was also a standout along with early first half substitute Jamie Doran finished out the game with four points. Doran came in for captain Ryan Magill and manager Conor Lavery will have a headache to configure for the final. Down eased off upon the resumption with umpteen replacements with a look ahead to the final against Derry.

The County was on a high when we headed to the Athletic Grounds for the Ulster Final against Derry, just three days earlier without our Under 20 players, we had overcome Donegal in the SFC and now the next generation were aiming to put down a marker.

This was an impressive Down display as they dominated the second half, with Derry held scoreless for the last twenty minutes of the game, whilst Down registered 2-5 with no reply. The first half had been a cagey affair, and at the break Derry led by two points and in truth there was a look of control about their performance.

Conor Lavery had a definite impact on his charges at Half Time and even though the first ten minutes of the half were still even with Derry

retaining their two-point lead, the final twenty minutes belonged to Down. Oisín Savage showed maturity beyond his years as he kicked six second half frees, some from the most difficult of angles. Derry had run out of scores and when Odhran Murdock drifted in on the edge of the square to field a high pass and managed to crash the ball home with his weaker right foot. There was only going now to be one winner, the Red and Black were counter attacking with flair and style and substitute Jamie Doran added a second goal.

For the second time in three years Down were Ulster Under 20 Football Champions and it was a delighted Burren man Ryan Magill who accepted the Cup named after his own Clubman the late great Danny Murphy. Seeds were being sown and now we were hoping that they will be coming to fruition, for winning is a lovely feeling.

Parnell Park was the venue for the All-Ireland Semi Final v Kildare, and you know in all the times that we have gone to the Doneycarney venue, I just wonder does it suit Down as a venue and the way we like to play, perhaps the jury is out after two defeats in 2023.

Last year's finalists Kildare came back to defeat Down in a breathless Parnell Park encounter to reach the Eirgrid U-20 All-Ireland final. Jack McKeivitt came up from half back to win the contest with the game's last kick. It was cruel on Down but to be fair to the Kildare man it was a brave choice and a superb score, fitting of winning any game.

Shane Farrell gave the Leinster champions the lead for the first time in the 52nd minute as they powered back from six down to reach this season's decider. Down midfielder Odhrán Murdock whipped over the first score of the game and then majestically caught the ball in the

middle of the field to begin the move for the semi-final's first goal. Jason Morgan's eighth-minute goal supplied the confidence for Down to control the contest. A long injury delay to Kildare midfielder Fionn Cooke, however, broke the Mourne momentum. There is no doubt that the injury had a big impact, for prior to that there was only one team who were in charge, the substitute for Kildare also made an impact and in fact they looked like a stronger team.

Cooke's direct replacement, Seán Hanafin, pointed straight away to spark three unanswered scores. So, after an uncomfortable start, Brian Flanagan's renewed side only trailed 1-4 to 0-4 at the break.

Down quickly settled after the break with an ice cool Savage free, but Kildare would not stay down. Oisín O'Sullivan made it a one-point game after squeezing a shot past Oisín Tracey at the near post, when it looked as if the ball was drifting wide and despite Jason Morgan scoring another Down goal, McKevitt's heroic effort will see Kildare face Sligo in the All-Ireland Final.

The Under 20s put a smile on people's faces with their displays and a lot of people were disappointed that the Campaign should have ended at the Semi Final stage. We do though hope that there will be players here who we witnessed in 2023 or maybe who didn't make a Match Day squad, who will have an impact in the Red and Black in times to come.

The County Minor Footballers and their Management Team had a tough year in 2023, in the province of Ulster there were four outstanding teams and the fact that two of that four would go on to contest both the Provincial and the All-Ireland Finals was testimony to that fact. That Down would meet those two teams in both the League

and the Championship meant this was always going to be a tough year for our County Minor Footballers.

If we look at a simple fact for starters, Derry and Monaghan have two teams and three teams respectively competing in the MacRory Cup, the A competition in Schools Football. For years Monaghan were represented solely by St McCartan's, now they are joined by Carrickmacross and Castleblaney, good work has been undertaken in Monaghan at Schools and Development Level, we have two schools competing in the MacRory Cup and in their case the participants are split between Down and Armagh.

When we look at our Academy Squads and our Minor Squad, we have to look inwardly at the work happening in our Clubs and in our Schools and the role that Down GAA is playing in both these areas. In 2024 all of our teams will compete in the County Minor Football Championship, they will all start at the same level, there will be no cherry picking of where we would like to play, to give us the chance to win something and self-proclaim ourselves as the "Minor Champions".

We have too also supported our second level schools to allow them to participate at the highest level, to do that we may have to change the direction of our schools coaching programme and move from Primary to Second Level as the possible best use of our time and resources. That is incorporated in our Strategic Plan, but to make it happen will need more personnel and more staff and in 2024 that may be the way we will have to go. Where there is a will, we can always find the way and if I may at this stage acknowledge the work of our County Hurling Manager Ronan Sheehan who has voluntarily been active in six second level schools since September, coaching

and in some cases introducing hurling to the pupils. We need to follow such a path in football terms and that may mean a joint programme in terms of personnel with our Club.

Benny Coulter certainly got a tough baptism as County Minor Football Manager, he had a decent Minor League campaign but come the Championship, the facts state that we were the only team in Ulster who failed to reach the Quarter Finals. The Ulster Championship began for Down with a trip to Clones to face Monaghan, it was to be a chastening experience, for having drawn with the same opponents in the Minor League, Down were now on the end of a 3-17 to 1-10 defeat, on a day when the heads dropped very early.

Derry were our next opponents in the Ulster Minor Championship and Down having been heavily defeated in the League encounter, set up with that recent encounter in their minds, trying to contain and blockade everyone behind the ball. That plan was almost scuppered immediately when Derry won an early penalty.

Oak Leaf centre-back James Sargent came up from the back to take the spot-kick and struck it with so much venom it smashed off the crossbar and rebounded over the bar. Boyle and Doherty soon got up and running, though, and Derry led by nine, 0-10 to 0-1, at the short whistle.

Upon the resumption, Damian McErlain's side did not relent. Eamon Young added a goal, and with substitutes pushing for places, the lively Ger Dillon got in on the second half, scoring three points. Down provided some gloss on the scoreline with some late efforts from Rian Magorrian's second and replacement Barra McEvoy with a free at the death.



It was like a step back in time on 23rd April in Pairc Esler with the Minor game Down v Donegal acting as the curtain raiser for the Senior Tie, alas this was a game too that from a Down point of view was over before it really even started. Donegal dominated from the outset, and it was a long hour for Down's players and management as they were on the end of a 3-18 to 0-7 scoreline and as the crowd grew in anticipation of the Senior Game, some were shocked by the state of Down Minor Football.

It would not get any better in the final group game v Fermanagh in Enniskillen, a first half black card saw the heads drop noticeably and Fermanagh seized the moment, going on to win 4-8 to 1-10. Down had chances but by this stage, you could see the team had been drained of any belief and boys just really wanted it all to be over and to get back to their Clubs.

It certainly was a low point for Down Minor Football and there is no doubt that a lot of work needs to be done, signs are though encouraging, a trip back in time to a model based on the old Barony leagues has seen 150 young men trial for a place on the 2024 County Minor Panel. Benny Coulter is determined that 2024 will be different and with new structures for County Under 17 Competitions, we will hope that there will be an improvement for Down in the season ahead.

The Down Ladies Footballers crowned a great season with victory in the All-Ireland Junior Final, it was a special occasion for the girls and great reward for the effort that they had committed to during the season. It was good to see Mark Poland and Kevin McKernan share their knowledge as part of the Management Team and as always good to see the Red and Black adorn Croke Park.

The Down County Hurlers continue to punch above their weight and to defy the odds by retaining their Division Two A status and their place in the Joe McDonagh Cup, operating from a small base of players but displaying great heart and desire, they gave us good moments in 2023. The hurlers had a busy pre-season as they competed in both the McGurk Cup and the Kehoe Cup, indeed the support of Leinster Council to Down in allowing us to participate in competitions is key to the future development of Down Hurling. The Kehoe Cup pitted Down with Meath, Kildare and Wicklow and allowed Team Management to get a good look at players pre-season, the McGurk Cup changed in format this year and Down exited at the Quarter Final stage with a one-point defeat to hosts QUB.

It would be a nice challenge for Down to get their name onto the Kehoe Cup in 2024, to add some more silverware and to get us into a good place for the League campaign which will see us head to play Laois in the first game on February 4th.

The Division 2A campaign began with the visit of Offaly to McKenna Park, it was a day when the red mist descended and Down ended up playing the most of the second half with 13 men and yet were annoyed coming off that they did not take something from the game.

Offaly led by three at the interval, with Jason Sampson controlling play from centre-back. Killian Sampson and Oisín Kelly consistently drove at Down while Eoghan Cahill's accuracy was crucial to the victory. Paul Sheehan's accuracy from placed balls kept Down in touch and with both goal minders in great form, neither side could find the net, Down needed a goal, and it was never coming, and Offaly managed to keep no less than three points between the teams.

Next up was a visit to Hawkfield and with Down hit by suspensions and injuries this was going to be a big ask against a team who have been rapidly improving in recent years. Down hit the ground running and after thirty minutes we led by five points 0-11 to 0-6 and it was heartening to see players like Finn Turpin and Tom McGrattan step up to the mark with scores. Just before half time though the good work was undone as Cathal McCabe took advantage of some hesitancy in the Down defence to get in for a goal and now going in at Half Time, we led by just two points.

The game was even in the second half with the scores level for periods, before Paul Sheehan put Down three up in the 64th Minute, we looked set for victory, but the lily whites grabbed the last four scores as momentum shifted. Down had a goal chance right at the end but Paddy McKenna was not to be beaten and a free out for Kildare lifted the siege. There was disappointment amongst players and management for this had been a huge effort by Down and now the focus after two games changed to trying to secure our Division 2A status, such are the fine margins in the division.

Down were back on the road for the next game, a visit to Dr Cullen Park in Carlow and with Stephen Keith not travelling, with a new baby on the way that weekend it was a senior debut for Pierce Smyth of Portaferry in goals.

Carlow full-forward Paddy Boland scored four goals from open play as Tom Mullally's men recorded their first NHL Division 2A while consigning northern visitors Down to their third straight league defeat, before a meagre attendance at Netwatch Cullen Park.

Paul Sheehan pointed a 2nd minute Down free, but it was the only time

the Mourne County led as Carlow hit the front on four minutes when Boland struck for his first goal, after Down 'keeper had made a superb save to deny him a certain goal seconds earlier.

Carlow took control of the game with the accuracy of Kavanagh from frees, another Boland goal and four great points out of play from right half forward giving the home county a handsome half-time lead of 2-12 to 0-8. In truth Down were flat, this was a poor display and we never really got up with the tempo of the game.

The scores continued to flow in the second half as Mullally's side built an unassailable lead, with Boland finding the Down net in the 56th and 58th minutes, putting the Barrowsiders in completely in control.

Paul Sheehan, the Ballycran clubman and his side's best player, was accurate from placed balls, ending up with 0-8 while second half substitute Stuart Martin provided a late scoring cameo of 1-1 which put more respectability on the scoreboard. But overall Ronan Sheehan's side was outclassed. Carlow midfielder James Doyle stormed into the game late on, recording a total of 1-2 from play overall.

It was a long journey home and the whole focus now was on the visit of Derry to McKenna Park and the need to at least get a draw in that game in order for us to stay in the Division.

ON D-Day for Down and Derry, it was the Ards men who left McKenna Park with the satisfaction of Division 2A safety almost secured after salvaging a dramatic late draw on Sunday. Head-to-head results now redundant heading into the final weekend of the League, it appears likely that scoring

difference will decide which of these Ulster rivals stays where they are, and which drops through the trapdoor into Division 2B.

Courtesy of Pearse Og McCrickard's equalising free at the death, the odds are stacked in Down's favour going into the final weekend of the League. They are 19 points better off than Derry, who face a trip to Carlow - still in the relegation mix themselves - while the Ards men travel to Tralee to take on a Kerry side with little but pride at stake, Saturday's defeat to Kildare killing off any lingering promotion hopes in the Kingdom.

Therefore, as well as hoping Kerry beat Down, Derry must get a result of some kind at Netwatch Cullen Park to pull off a great escape. In reality, though, this was their golden opportunity - and they came so close to grasping it.

Trailing by five at half-time, the Oak Leaf's used the significant wind at their backs to chip away at the Down lead. Cormac O'Doherty was magnificent around the middle, showing all the experience years on the road with Slaughtneil brings, and it was a typically unerring free from the Emmet's maestro that drew Derry level with less than 10 to play.

They weren't done yet either. As edginess spread across the stand in Ballycran, John Mullan punched the air in celebration after first putting Derry ahead in the 63rd minute, and then again two minutes into the minimum three added on by referee Sean Stack.

With a dogged performance built on the most solid of defensive foundations, it looked as though the two points - and survival - would be heading up the M3.

But when Sean Cassidy was blown for throwing the sliotar in the dying

seconds, Down were afforded one last shot at saving their skins. McCrickard steadied himself once the commotion and protests died down, the sound of held breath deafening as eerie silence descended.

Down boss Ronan Sheehan turned the other way and looked at the ground, his side's fate in the Liatroim man's hands now. From 50-odd metres, with what was the last puck of the game, he made no mistake to ensure a share of the spoils that sat much easier with one than the other.

Down were caught early on, conceding a penalty three minutes in when John McManus dragged down the pacy Cormac Gough, with O'Doherty converting.

But, despite having McManus sin-binned for 10 minutes, the Ards men assumed control, with Marc Fisher influential and the livewire Tim Prenter finding form as Down moved into a 0-9 to 1-1 lead by the quarter hour mark.

It could and should have been more, with eight first half wides and balls dropped short stopping their supremacy being reflected on the scoreboard and offering more than a glimmer of hope in the Derry changing room.

The Oak Leaf's dug in and, after heavy defeats to Kerry, Offaly, and Kildare, served up their best performance of the season, slowly but surely wrestling away control as the Down forwards struggled to make any headway.

Then, with the gap narrowed to two by the 55th minute, free-taker Paul Sheehan uncharacteristically sent one wide from in front of the posts. It was another indication of how the pendulum had swung.



Daithi Sands, just home from America last week, came on and injected a bit of urgency, while Liam Savage and sub-Stuart Martin helped Down regain a foothold around the middle after John Mullan edged Derry in front with the finishing line in sight.

Still the Ards men clung on in the dying embers of a game that was for so long anybody's, in the end nobody's - McCrickard's last act leaving Derry with it all to do in the final game.

The Draw came as a huge relief and the natives knew that Down would be most likely safe by virtue of that late point, Derry and Down is always a tough battle, never much between the teams as the always seem to manage to each get under the others skin and it ensures a tight contest.

The final game of the League was a trip to Austin Stack Park in Tralee and for yours truly an early morning flight to Farranfore, a novel experience. A late flurry of second-half scores from Kerry's top marksman Shane Conway and a brilliantly taken goal from substitute Jordan Conway in the 64th minute saw Stephen Molumphy's men snatch victory from the jaws of

defeat against a Down side who had wanted a first league win before they embark on another Joe McDonagh campaign.

It was a wet and windy in the Austin Stack Park, but two Kerry players stood out, Mikey Boyle in defence and the mercurial Shane Conway who is back to his very best as he weaved his magic particularly in the second half. Kerry started brightly and were 0-3 to 0-0 in front inside the opening seven minutes thanks to two Shane Conway points and sublime Fionán Mackessy point from play, but the latter was then injured and replaced by Cillian Trant.

But Down who probably deserved a draw hit a purple patch over the next ten minutes when they went on a 0-8 to 0-1 run with points from Daithí Sands, Pearse Óg McCrickard (2), Paul Sheehan (2), Chris Egan and Tom Mc Grattan as Kerry's wide count mounted to eight by half time. A late Paul Sheehan point saw Down retire 0-12 to 0-9 at the interval and Kerry needed a big second half.

It was the bench that propelled Kerry into a position where they could go on and win as Dan Goggin (0-3), Jordan Conway (1-2) and

Philip Lucid with a 72nd minute winner from Philip Lucid contributed big time. Down had led by as much as five (1-18 to 0-16) in the 52nd minute thanks to a superb goal from Tom Mc Grattan who was finding his feet now in the Down forward line and contributed 1-3 to Down's total.

But Shane Conway continued to close the gap from frees and play and at back Mikey Boyle was soaring into the air to cut out dangerous Down attacks. Then in the 62nd minute Michael Leane set up Jordan Conway for the crucial goal and the same player levelled the contest at 1-18 apiece in 65th minute.

Paul Sheehan restored Down's one point advantage with a point from play, but Dan Goggin levelled in the 70th minute before Philip Lucid fired over the winner from distance in added time.

Kerry didn't need the win, but they now travel to Tullamore on Saturday next to face Offaly in the league semi-final and will be hoping to improve on 22 missed chances in this win, while Down remain in the division thanks to a superior points difference over relegated Derry.



In the year when you have only two home games, retaining your Division 2A status is always going to be tough for a County like Down and it is when you take all factors into account a great achievement. I do not want to engage in the debate around some counties not competing in the Allianz Hurling League under direction other than to say I firmly believe that all Counties should play in both the Football and the Hurling Leagues. We in Down want to do our bit to promote hurling and to develop hurling and to do so sensibly and with sustainability whilst at the same time in the knowledge that we are primarily a football county. It is a long time since I attended a meeting in Portlaoise in relation to funding for Tier Two Counties and structures for Tier Two Counties, I believe that this has to be revisited nationally to allow us develop hurling whilst also maintaining and sustaining the progress of our County Teams.

The importance of Down playing their games in McKenna Park in Ballycran cannot be underestimated, this is about more than just trying to win games, this is about pumping blood through the veins of those promoting and sustaining hurling in the heartland of the Peninsula. I previously would have advocated games being played in Pairc Esler and I also have listened to the phone calls from Counties who do not wish to come to the Peninsula or who just cannot understand why they drive past Pairc Esler and its magnificent facilities to perhaps get a boat to go to another ground.

Playing our games in McKenna Park is more to do with the social fabric of hurling in our County than it is about winning games, it is about recognising the good work in keeping our games alive in our County and how much it means to the people of the Peninsula to have

Kerry, Offaly, Carlow, and their like visit them. It is a recognition that we are an All Island and beyond body, it is a recognition of the values that the people of the North defended in dark days, when such venues were being destroyed by those who did not want our games to exist. It is a mission statement, that the GAA values all of its people and the work that they do no matter which part of our island or which part of the globe you belong to. You have to understand how much it means to the people of Ballycran and of the Peninsula, to host a national League Game or a McDonagh Cup game at their Ground, and to those who have visited, is there better hospitality anywhere in Ireland than that provided by Brenda and her team in Ballycran.

We in Down GAA along with the Club are committed to improving matters at the Ground, it will be a work in progress, but we do so in the belief that this is the best venue and amongst the best people, to play our hurling fixtures. To those who complain, I say embrace the journey for it is after all part of what we are and what we do.

Just two weeks after meeting in the League in Tralee, Down and Kerry would meet again, this time in Ballycran in the first round of the Joe McDonagh Cup in an encounter that strangely for both teams, threatened to spill over at a time, both on and off the field.

The Munster outfit - managed by former Waterford hurler, Stephen Molumphy - looked like a team seeking to secure glory this term having fallen at the vital point on previous occasions.

Down were exceedingly wayward early on, and Kerry immediately seized the opportunity to take control of the encounter. Shane Conway exploded into the match with three quick points in a row.

Conway's third was set up by Colin Walsh and Conway's first free was due to Walsh also, who was causing the hosts all sorts of problems from deep. Kerry were rampant now and Down's wide tally was mounting. Marauding midfielder Eoin Ross followed up the play and blew past Stephen Keith from Close range.

Pearse Óg McCrickard finally raised a white flag after some double-digit misses, but a lot of the Ulster sides woes would be down to Kerry's sweeper Fionan MacKessy. On top of his dominance the Shinty International drove forward and registered two booming scores.

In stark contrast Down were resorted to change tactics, Ronan Sheehan frustrated and annoyed at his team's performance, decided to go short with the puck outs and it worked to some degree. McCrickard landed two fine scores wide on the sideline in front of the away dug out.

Despite McCrickard's best efforts, Kerry captain Dooley won a ball out in front to smack over the bar to finish off a satisfying half for the Kingdom as they led 1-9 to 0-6 at the interval.

Pearse Óg lulled all in attendance that there would be a Mourne revival when clipped over the first score of the second half with a free. Kerry simply took over and overpowered their hosts with eight of their own. Kerry's shot selection was crystal clear and Shane Conway's confidence saw him curl over a sideline cut while defenders Cillian Trant and Darragh Shanahan also getting their names on the scoresheet with ease.

Down needed McCrickard again to get going and the unusually quiet Daithí Sands got his first point before crashing an effort the crossbar. That wasn't Down's last dealings with the Ballycran metal

work. Substitute Ruairí McCrickard then hit the post with a goal at his mercy, but he was fouled, and his resultant penalty was superbly saved by John B O'Halloran. That summed up Down's day. Ruairí McCrickard did find the net, but it was too little too late as impressive Kerry replacements Niall Mulcahy and Dan Goggin combined came off the bench to hit five points between them as the Munster men travelled home worthy winners. It was a day when Down missed too many chances and made too many wrong calls and it was looking as if survival in the Joe McDonagh would be another battle.

Without setting the world on fire and truly clicking into top gear, Offaly coasted to a predictably comfortable win over Down in Round Three of the Joe McDonagh Cup in Tullamore on Saturday. With three wins out of three, this may not have been anywhere near their best performance, but it was as good as it needed to be, Down struggled but battled hard without ever the conviction that they could win. They set up defensively and made life difficult for Offaly. They were still in the game when they trailed by just two points, 0-16 to 1-11 with 44 minutes gone but in reality, a shock was never on the cards.

Offaly started well, establishing early control. They led by 0-6 to 0-1 and 0-7 to 0-2 after 13 and 15 minutes. Down played their best hurling in the next ten minutes as they tore into Offaly. Jordan Doran raced through for a 24th minute goal as Down scored 1-3 on the trot to take a 1-5 to 0-7 lead after 26 minutes. It didn't take long for normality to restore. Offaly injected some real urgency and got four in a row to take a 0-11 to 1-5 lead. By half time, the gap was four, 0-14 to 1-7 and Down needed something extraordinary to happen.

They did dig in for a good while, getting four of the first six points in the second half to bring the gap back to two. Once again, Offaly found another gear when they needed to. They scored 1-3 in a row with Eoghan Cahill netting an excellent 55th minute goal to put them 1-19 to 1-11 ahead.

They didn't fully put them away but with Pearse Og McCrickard missing some scoreable frees for Down, the closest they could get was five. Offaly finally found fifth gear late on with six outstanding points in a row, three of them from the lethal Cahill and Oisín McManus's injury time free was too little, too late for the losers.

The Scoreline was tough on Down, but it also once again indicated a failing that Down had throughout the League and now the Joe McDonagh and that is that we were not taking our chances and we were not scoring goals. We were managing to score points well during the league but the goals for tally was disappointing and as we look to 2024 this is an area; we need to improve for a goal in hurling can give a team some lift as we were to find out in our next game v Carlow.

We have had many great battle with Carlow in Ballycran in recent years and there has never been much between the teams in McKenna Park, indeed when you score 28 points as Down did you expect to be there or thereabouts, except when your opponent's crash six goals past you. With one round to go in the Joe McDonagh Cup, Carlow have put their All-Ireland hurling championship faith in their own hands next weekend against Offaly with a facile win over Down. At the other end of the table, the Mourne men themselves also have a shootout to prepare for as they will face off against Kildare to try and save themselves from the drop to Christy Ring.

Carlow were masterful at times while Down, although lacking confidence, were denied by some wonderful goalkeeping by Brian Tracey. Conor Kehoe showed Tom Mullally's sides intent with a goal in the opening three minutes. Chris Nolan zipped about and helped himself to two first-half goals while Martin Kavanagh pushed the game beyond Down with some expertly taken frees from distance.

Despite Tracey's heroic's, Pearse Óg McCrickard kept things honest with placed efforts, but Kavanagh found the net along with Chris Nolan's second to give Carlow a healthy 4-14 to 0-11 half-time lead. Things went from bad to worse for Down when reliable goalkeeper Stephen Keith dropped Jon Nolan's speculative effort for a point into his own net upon the resumption.

Frustrations bubbled over for Ronan Sheehan's side further when his midfielder Jordan Doran was given his marching orders after a rash second yellow. If there was any doubt about Carlow's fifth goal, their sixth was a thing of beauty. James Doyle cut in and sealed the already one-sided contest with some fine stick work.

Our season was set to be defined by a trip once again to Hawkfield in Kildare, it was simple, the winner will stay in the Joe McDonagh, the loser will drop to the Christy Ring Cup, a big prize at stake.

Cometh the hour, cometh the man and with the free taking responsibility now placed on his shoulders, Pearse Óg McCrickard scored a brilliant 15 points as Down defeated Kildare in Hawkfield to preserve their status in the McDonagh Cup next year, while sending their hosts plummeting through the trapdoor and down to Christy Ring level.



There was no trophy presented at the end of the game, but this very much had the feel of a final with both sides battling for their lives. Down just carried that extra edge with McCrickard in outstanding form, nine points from placed balls and six from play in his total, and the return of the two Sands, Daithi and Eoghan, also having a big impact for the Ulster side.

Down hit the ground running early on and raced into an 0-4 to 0-1 lead. By the time that had turned into a 0-9 to 0-3 lead in the 18th minute, it was clear who was having the upper hand. A 22nd minute goal by Declan Flaherty brought Kildare back into the game but McCrickard answered back with two points and Marc Fisher added another. Kildare replied with a spell of three successive points to bring the gap back to three again, but it was Down who scored the last three points of the half in a pivotal spell to leave them 0-15 to 1-6 heading to the dressing rooms.

Kildare needed a quick start to the second half and scored the first two points after the restart through David Qualter, but those scores were quickly wiped out by three Down points, including another two by McCrickard. The excellent

McCrickard scored again in the 48th minute to make it 0-20 to 1-10 as Down threatened to run away with the game, but Kildare were handed a lifeline when James Burke was fouled inside the square and goalkeeper Paddy McKenna converted the penalty.

Cian Shanahan added a point to leave three between the teams but once more, Down had the answers and when three points were followed by Eoghan Sands goal in the 64th minute, after brilliant approach play by Tim Prenter, the game was as good as up. Kildare did get the consolation of a second penalty in injury time by McKenna, but that barely raised a cheer from the home support and a season that promised so much for Kildare through a spectacular league season has ultimately ended in a crushing Championship relegation.

For Down, they made sure of another season of McDonagh Cup hurling and the County Secretary confined to his hospital bed was beaming as he followed the game from a distance. At the end of the day, we had achieved what we hoped to achieve and cemented our status in both competitions. Down hurling cannot afford to be playing without its full available deck and in

2023, Injuries, Travel, Work and Suspensions all took a toll on the panel and if we step back and are objective, we have to say Job Well Done, to all involved.

The Under 20 Hurlers had scaled great heights in 2022, in winning the Richie McElligott Cup for the first time and now the stage was set to go one step further and either qualify for the Leinster Championship or retain the All-Ireland B Trophy. The Ulster Under 20 Hurling Cup sees Down, Antrim, Derry, and Donegal, play round robin and then the top two teams meet in the Final with the winner going on to play in the Leinster Championship.

Sean Young's charges began their campaign away to Donegal and began with a good win 4-26 to 0-6, a bit like our Seniors these were the last goals that we would score in Ulster, something that was again to contribute to our failings. Antrim were the visitors next to Portaferry and this was a game that could have gone any way as it ebbed and flowed. Down failed to take their goal chances and Antrim had two points to spare at the end 1-17 to 0-18.

Derry were up next in Owenbeg and a win or a draw would get us into the Final v Antrim in a night time fixture and in a game that Down looked like they were going to get a victory, the glory drifted from us as Derry pointed a free with the last puck of the game to win by the narrowest of margins, 1-19 to 0-21.

There was nothing between these three teams in Ulster and perhaps the Leinster Council might see assist us by offering two places within their own Championship Fixture to Ulster. I believe that this would certainly improve standards and help us develop the game further. Another alternative that could be explored would be a Joe McDonagh Competition at Under 20, a similar in the Christy Ring and further down the line with the Meagher or Rackard competitions. Play the games parallel with your respective Senior Competitions.

Defeat in Ulster meant that we would turn our attentions to retaining the Richie McElligott Cup, Wicklow were our opponents in the Quarter Finals and in Darver we were too strong for the Leinster Men winning by 3-26 to 1-12. The Semi Final saw us pitted against last year's beaten finalists Roscommon and again we made the journey to Darver. Down were playing within themselves in the first half and looked to be in control even at the half way stage of the second half. Then for some unknown reason, Roscommon started to dominate, the hoovered-up break ball and they took the game to Down, drawing level and then going ahead before stretching to a winning margin of 3-17 to 0-20. Again, it was the old adage in relation to Down Hurling – Goals win Games and, in this case, once again Down failed to find the net and Roscommon scored three majors.

The reign as All Ireland Champions was over and the title was won by

Derry, that same team who had got the better of us with the last puck of the ball in the Ulster Cup Competition.

Down Minor Hurlers had a new Manager in Tipperary native Nigel O'Brien and there was good enthusiasm in the group for the challenges ahead. The Ulster Minor Cup saw us again do battle with Antrim, Derry and Donegal and this time with wins over Derry and Donegal, we managed to progress to the final of the Competition and another meeting with Antrim at Dunsilly.

For forty minutes of this game in Dunsilly, I thought that the Down players had put in a heroic effort and were much in the game, we sometimes forget now that Inter County Minor is Under 17 now and our expectations remain the same as when they used to be 18-year-olds. Down battled very hard and made life difficult for Antrim, the difference in the two teams emerged though as the physically stronger Antrim boys showed their strength and pace to dominate proceedings. Antrim would win on a scoreline of 6-13 to 1-13 but in honesty this was a scoreline that flattered.

Down GAA have engaged the team at BIA to work with our Academy Squads and our Minor Squads in Football and Hurling and now we need three things to help make a difference, we need Player Buy In, we need Parental Buy In, and we need Club Buy In. We are covering the investment, picking up the bills, what we need from the other three parties is your time and commitment to make the project work. This will only be to the betterment of the player and if we all benefit in some respect from that then it is a win for everyone. The programme from BIA, will take account also of the educational needs of the player and I do

encourage everyone to engage and help make that difference.

The Minor Hurlers began with a trip to Trim where they ran Meath to two points on a day when with a wee bit more street cred, they could have been surprising winners. Meath staged a remarkable second half comeback to defeat Down in this Leinster Minor Hurling Championship Tier 2 round 2 clash played in breezy conditions at Loman's Park Trim. With five minutes gone in the second half the Royals were ten points in arrears.

The visitors dominated much of the opening half and inspired by full forward Cathal Coleman, and playing with the wind, went to the dressing room at half time 2-8 to 0-6 in front. Coleman accounted for 2-5 of Down's opening half total. The home side, who lost out to Westmeath in round 1, got hard to get going in the first 30. Captain Kyle Ennis kept his side in touch with four points. A brace from impressive half forward Malachy Fisher completed Meath's first half tally.

Whatever words manager Ger O'Neill had with his troops at the break certainly worked as Meath came out a totally different team. Despite the fact that Down got the opening two scores of the second half the Royals totally dominated the remainder of the game.

Ennis got the ball rolling with his team's first goal and when Fisher scrambled home Meath's second major on the 15th minute the lead was down to two points. Three pointed free from Ennis had the game all tied up with five minutes remaining but Coleman from a free put the visitors back in front with time running out. Meath got the last three scores though and ran out winners with two points to spare – Final Score **Meath 2-15 Down 2-13.**



Westmeath were up next, but they were to prove too strong for Down winning on a scoreline of 3-14 to 0-9 and the season ended without us competing in the Peadar O Liathain Cup.

I believe that it is vital that we keep our ties with Leinster open and we should always aspire to compete in the Leinster Championship after we have filled our obligations in Ulster. We want to pit ourselves not against the Wexford's, Kilkenny's, or Dublin's at this stage but certainly against the Meath, Kildare's Carlows and Wicklow's to see how we are progressing.

To all who represented Down at Inter County Level in 2023, I say thank you, I hope that your experience was a good one, I hope that you went back to your Club, and your family, a better player, a better athlete and most important of all a better person. I hope that we in Down GAA looked after you, that we provided the best environment we could for you to perform at your very best. I hope that you have now a sense of the culture required to be a County player and the commitment that you need to give and also that you have a sense of the enjoyment that can be gained too by being part of a successful Inter County Team.

To each and every member of our County Team Managements, I also say thank you for the work that you do in ensuring that our teams are fully prepared and ready for any challenge presented. We are lucky to have people of the calibre that we have working with our teams, there is quality in each and every set up and so it should be for we in Down want only to be the best that we can be.

**We look forward to 2024, let us hope that this will be the year when silverware will be delivered**

**and where for Down teams and their supporters winning becomes a great habit again. When we dine again at the top table and can take our place once again with the best in Ireland, it will take time but wouldn't 2024 be a good year to back playing in the All-Ireland Series in Football and in either a Joe McDonagh or Division 2a Final.**

**If we were being really lucky, wouldn't it be good to be competing for back-to-back Under 20 titles and wouldn't it be nice to be once again to the fore in Minor Football in Ulster. In hurling we could aspire to playing in the Leinster Under 20 Championship and winning an Ulster Minor Hurling Cup. Before you say anything! I will answer – Yes, I do believe in Santa Claus, and I do believe in the Red and Black.**

#### **CLUB COMPETITIONS**

**I believe that we have good quality Club Competitions in Down, we plan well, and we structure well, and we must always strive to be better, inside, and outside of the County. When one looks at the number of games that we offer annually, you see that Gaelic Games are the number one sport of choice within our County. The major problem is that we need to create another day in the week to cater fully for all of the demand on pitches and players, and I don't think the man above has that on his Agenda.**

We in Down GAA offer activity in football and hurling from the youngest right through to the Lads and Dads or Social Hurling initiatives, this is something that we can be very proud of. We have also planned successfully to manage the transition back to the even Age Grades Under 12-14-16 and Minor, this will be the programme we will follow in 2024. This will provide us

with challenges and task us with managing the workload on the player, there will be the tendency to say well sure aren't they only young fellas, or decry that they are well fit for it, but the challenge for us will be to say the words No and Stop.

In Down in 2024 an 18-year-old could be playing Minor Football and Hurling for his club, he could be playing Adult Football and Hurling for his Club, he could be playing one of both for his County and he could also be doing similar for his School. That is a lot of activity and to me that is where the Club has to take responsibility and when the Club and its Officers have to be brave and think of the player. The Club has in the first instance a duty of care to the young player and in that duty of care they have a duty of responsibility to his family. **The player and his workload, cannot be managed on the whim of each individual Team Manager and the short-term gains that might be made or how good a win for that particular Club Team will look on their Managers CV. The player and his workload can only be managed by good communication between all the stakeholders, the Club Committee, the Club Manager, the School, the County, the Parents and most importantly the Player.**

If we want our players to play with their Club for years rather than months then the leadership in a Club must show leadership, they have to be able to say **No** and they have to be able to say **Stop**. Too often we allow Team Managers to take over and it no longer is the Club Minor Team it becomes John Joes Minor Team and the next thing we know too is that there is a go Fund Me Page on the go as the Team now need gear etc for that Championship Final and John Joe is the only man looking after them.

**The simple message is that players play for Clubs, they don't play for**

**Individual Managers and if the Club really wants to guarantee that the player is with them for his playing career and that it is career as opposed to a flirtation then they have to look after him. They have to fully implement the duty of care for the player and make the big decisions even if that means that some team manager may be left with an incomplete CV.**

In Down we take great pride in the facilities developed by our Club and indeed we now see the reality that one Club pitch is no longer in any way adequate, two pitches are needed by all of our Clubs and in some cases, it is three or four pitches, and it is wonderful to see such expansion on the Club front. With the mooted of Integration to come, facilities are going to be at the centre of ensuring that Integration works, indeed not just facilities but the whole concept of Infrastructure and personnel. To meet that demand across Gaelic Football, Hurling, Camogie and Ladies Football I believe that we will need to have a split season within the split season, if that were to make sense.

**By this I mean that the Inter County Men's Season in Football and Hurling will have to be run parallel with the Ladies and Camogie Club Seasons, i.e., at the first six months of the year, The Ladies and Camogie Inter County Season will then have to run then parallel with the Football and Hurling Club Season. We don't have the Pitches, Facilities, Referees, and other assets to have everything continue to run as it does now, we are all going to the same well of resources and slowly but surely it is running dry.**

The Club Season of 2022 ended in the days after County Convention when Kilcoo lost their Ulster and All Ireland Titles when beaten by Watty Grahams Glen Maghera in the Ulster Club Final on December 15th in the

Athletic Grounds. It was a titanic and sensationally entertaining game in Armagh's Athletic Grounds and Glen were worthy winners. They kept Kilcoo at arm's length throughout with some stunning performances from Derry's Conor Glass and Ethan Doherty.

A point separated the teams at the break in what was a thrilling opening half with Glen in front. The Derry champions came storming out and were rampant in front of the posts with five unanswered points in the opening ten minutes. They went direct and the Magpies took time to get adjusted and the brilliant Glen exploited the gaps or shot from distance. Glen were worthy champions and will be hard to stop, while Kilcoo bow out with their pride intact.

On the Hurling front in 2022 there was though good news, as Liatroim **Fontenoys** became the first Down side to win the AIB Ulster Intermediate Hurling Championship title by beating Armagh side Middletown by 2-20 to 0-20 in a pulsating decider at Corrigan Park.

The Fontenoys led by 1-11 to 0-9 at half-time with Conor McCrickard's goal underpinning their first-half advantage and when PJ Davidson pounced for the team's second goal after the break, the Down men were firmly the driving seat. Middletown refused to give up the chase however and battled right the way to the end, with Dean Gaffney's free-striking ability and the efforts of Nathan Curry, Cahal Carvill and Ryan Gaffney keeping them in touch, but they couldn't overturn those Liatroim majors.

Liatroim captain Pearse Og McCrickard inflicted most of the damage on Middletown by scoring 12 points from frees and play, while Ruairi McCrickard was a rock in defence which helped shut out the opposition and close out the game efficiently.

Toreen of Mayo were up next for Liatroim but on a bitter cold day in Kingspan Breffni Park, the Mayo men had too much for Liatroim and the Fontenoys journey came to an end. It had been a good experience for the Club and for a Club who espouse all that is good in the promotion of our Codes they had represented the County well.

The Leagues in Down in 2023 were very competitive, the Ten Team Leagues in Divisions One to Three were what we had been trying to achieve for a number of years and it has to be said that they provided close outcomes right up to the final games in most cases. In Division Four we tried something different and again it was something that worked with the split too of 4A and 4B.

In Division One Carryduff were crowned Champions and indication perhaps of future demographics and where the strength of the GAA in Down may lie in years to come. Loughinisland put up a great challenge to Carryduff with the destiny of the title lying between them both right up to the penultimate game. At the bottom of the League Longstone and Bryansford made the drop to Division Two and for both Clubs the challenge now to have the structures in place to make a quick return to the top tier.

Ballyholland and Castlewellan will come back up out of Division Two and at the bottom of two Drumgath and Glenn dropped to Division Three. Division Three in 2022 was extremely competitive and again it was a case of going down to the last game of the league where An Ríocht and St Johns both gained promotion. In Division Four St John Bosco and Aughlisnafin gained promotion whilst Ardglass were winners of Division 4B.

On the hurling front, Liatroim continued their progress by winning the Walter Moreland Cup as Division One winners with Ballycran taking the Division Two title. With the details released already for the Competitions for 2024, I believe that we will once again have very competitive Leagues in the season ahead and there will be close battles at the top and at the bottom across all Divisions.

The Football Championships began after the Leagues had been completed and the question on everyone's lips after the draws were made, was, would anyone be able to stop Kilcoo? It would be the League Champions Carryduff who would have the first opportunity to test the defending champions in Round One on a Monday Night in Newry, but they would discover that Kilcoo were not intending to give up their title easily. Burren won the local derby over Warrenpoint whilst also in round one Downpatrick earned the local bragging rights with a point to spare over Saul. On the Sunday it was feisty in Burren as Glenn defied their relegation and beat the 2022 Intermediate Champions Saval, whilst Longstone won on penalties against Castlewellan. Mayobridge appeared to put down a marker with a big win over Bryansford and Clonduff were too strong for Bredagh.

The Winners pot for Round Two was containing the usual suspects whilst in the losers pot, Bryansford were destined once more to be fighting for survival as they lost to CPN on penalties. Saval were still shell shocked from the events of Sunday when they were well beaten by Ballyholland and there were convincing wins for Burren and Kilcoo to secure their places in the Quarter Finals.

In Round Three Ballyholland, Mayobridge, RGU and Carryduff made it through to the last eight, as

we said bye bye to two of last year's semi-finalists Warrenpoint and Loughinisland. In the relegation play offs there were wins for Bredagh and Saul with Bryansford now set to meet Saval with a place in the 2024 Senior Football Championship at stake.

The Quarter Finals paired Kilcoo and Carryduff together again and there was a good crowd in Thomas Russell Park on the Sunday afternoon, with the men from the City hoping that this time they could get the better of the Champions. Kilcoo were rattled in the first half as Carryduff swept forward but they had appeared to have left their scoring boots behind them and then just before half time they were reduced to 14 men. So instead of potentially going in at the break with a seven- or eight-point lead, Carryduff went in two points up and down to 14 men. You soon learn you can't do that against Kilcoo and in the second half, Kilcoo kept their heads while all around them lost theirs. Clonduff and Burren earned their places in the Semi Finals and on the Monday night in Kilcoo we had a throw back in time to what Championship used really be about. Glenn relegated to Division Three rallied the troops and took the game to Mayobridge, before having seven point to spare and reach the Quarterfinals. It was great to witness the scenes at the final whistle as the Glenn supporters waited to applaud their Team back up the Pathway in Kilcoo, it was hard to imagine anyone at home in Glenn on that Monday Night.

The semi-Final draw made in Kilcoo that night saw Burren to meet Glenn and Kilcoo to meet Clonduff, the County Treasurer was smiling he was guaranteed a good final. Burren v Glenn was on the Friday night in Newry and the people of Glenn were out in force to support their team, neutrals were thinking that the dream might continue and that

we could have a shock on the cards. It was not to be however as Burren pulled away in the second half and deserved their place in the Final. The second Semi Final between Kilcoo and Clonduff was much anticipated in 2022, it had taken penalties to separate the teams, and this was the chance now for the "Yella's" to gain revenge. Kilcoo though are made of stern stuff, and they dominated the game, finishing up with 11 points to spare as the game descended into ugly scenes that have no place in our games.

The scene was set for the Final that people were looking forward to and the records show that Kilcoo retained their title in a game that never managed to reach the heights of expectation. For Kilcoo it represented an 11th title in 12 years, and it was the culmination of a remarkable journey for some of those players who were there back in 2009 and now 14 years later were still to the fore.

It was a final which saw Burren made a bright start before last year's All-Ireland champions seized control. Liam Kerr and Darra Mussen fired over to give Burren an early lead before the Magpies clicked into gear to reel off six points without reply.

Shealan Johnston, keeper Niall Kane, Aaron Morgan, Ryan Johnston, Aaron Brannigan and Eugene Brannigan were on target for Kilcoo before a Mussen point halted their charge. Kilcoo forward Paul Devlin split the posts twice to leave Karl Lacey's side in control at the interval, but they had a let-off just after the restart.

Donal O'Hare was presented with a goal chance, but he opted to pass across the Kilcoo goal, only to send the ball out of play. Kerr reduced the gap to four before Kilcoo hit the opening goal on 39 minutes with Shealan Johnston's strike hitting the





posts and falling to Rooney, who rifled low and hard into the net.

Burren fought back with scores from Kerr and Ronan McGrath, and they were denied a goal when Kane made an excellent save to keep out Danny Magill's shot. The impressive Odhran Murdock added another Burren point, but they never threatened a comeback as Kilcoo responded with Kane and Rooney slipping over points.

Murdock and McGrath sent over Burren points, but they were sandwiched by a double from Devlin, who finished the match in style. Brian Higgins awarded Kilcoo a penalty in added time for a foul on Ryan Johnston and Devlin stepped up to strike the ball into the top corner of the net. Kilcoo were Champions of Down again.

The Parador Lodge Intermediate Championship first round began with a penalty shoot-out in Mayobridge as with the light fading badly St Johns overcame Annaclone, Rostrevor, Liatroim and An Ríocht all showed that they meant business with big wins in Round One.

There were a few upsets in Round Two, with Newry Shamrocks making it through to the Quarter Finals leaving Rostrevor to find a back door route, An Ríocht and Liatroim were showing themselves to be form teams, while Teconnaught last year's Junior Champions cemented their place in the Intermediate for 2024.

After Round Three the relegation lines have also been drawn with Aughlisnafin, St Pauls, Atticall and Clann na Banna in the fight for retention of their Championship status. Rostrevor found their form again and progressed to the Quarter Finals, where they would also be joined by Annaclone, St Johns and Darragh Cross in one half of the draw.

It was like an old-fashioned shoot out in the first half of the opening Quarter Finals as Rostrevor and An Ríocht just went for it and went for Goals in particular, there were 8 goals, and 19 points scored that night and I recall that there were 14 minutes gone before Paul Faloon blew a free. Rostrevor though would score six of the eight goals and make their way to the Semi Final. In the semi-finals, they would be joined by, Liatroim, St Johns and Annaclone. In the first of the semi-finals on a night that as they you say, you would not put the cat out, Rostrevor came from behind to defeat St Johns when the bravery of both teams was to be commended.

In contrast 24 hours later, the sun was shining as Liatroim overcame Annaclone in what was a cagey encounter and now all roads led to Pairc Esler for the meeting of last year's beaten finalists and last year's intermediate hurling champions, who were looking to create their own bit of history. There was to be heartbreak for the Reds for the second year in a row, as Liatroim produced a second half burst that took them home, even surviving a penalty to Rostrevor in injury time. So, a bit of history was made as Liatroim won back-to-back Intermediate Championships in different codes and now would represent Down in Ulster.

The Parador Lodge Junior Football Championship was keenly contested, and I have to say I think the concept of a Final on a Friday night in Newry as part of a weekend of Football Finals works well. Drumaness and Ardglass brought a good turnout to Pairc Esler, there was colour, there was passion and a most entertaining final where both teams played entertaining football. Little separated the teams and at the end Drumaness proved that goals win games as the won on a scoreline of 3-8 to 1-11.

In winning the Championship

Drumaness played more games than anyone else and in the chosen format, they were at one stage, one game from exiting the Championship, when they had to win a do or die battle with Bright. In the Quarter Final their initial game with Dromara was abandoned when a spectator took ill and I would like to pay tribute to the Match Officials, the Dundrum Club and the personnel who came to the aid of the person and ensured that the best care and attention was on hand allowing then for the patients transfer to hospital. Thank you to all involved for your actions on the night.

The Semi Finals had seen Ardglass get past East Belfast by the narrowest of margins whilst Drumaness had been too strong for Kilclief who up to this stage had been a team in form. In 2024 the format for the Junior Championship will change and hopefully that will once again give us a competitive Competition and I look forward to a showcase Final again in Pairc Esler on a Friday Night in October.

Burren were winners in the Premier Reserve and Reserve Championship Finals and great to see former County Senior Manager James McCartan play a key role in the Management Team for the Burren Reserves.

The County Minor Football Final between Kilcoo and Mayobridge was one of the best games of the year, a great attitude displayed by both teams, good football, some great scores and on this occasion Mayobridge just did enough to come out on top. The bonus is that with the Age Grades moving to Under 18 for 2024, we might well see these two teams do battle again and that would be something to look forward to.

**Portaferry retained the Down Senior Hurling Championship with a four-point win over neighbours Ballycran at Pairc Esler.**

Deadlocked at 0-16 apiece as the clock turned red, Gerard McGrattan's men found an extra gear in the dying minutes to rattle over four unanswered points. The reigning champions started on the front foot and raced into a 0-4 to 0-1 lead by the 8th minute.

Ballycran soon found their feet and at the break the St Joseph's held a slender one-point lead, 0-8 to 0-7. But led by Player of the Match Barry Trainor, Portaferry regained the initiative to re-establish a three-point lead by the 41st minute. Ballycran refused to throw in the towel however, and when Stuart Martin pointed on 59 minutes, it set up a grandstand finish, before Portaferry's storming end to the game wrapped up another successful championship campaign.

Portaferry wasted no time in settling into proceedings as points from Matthew Conlon, Tom McGrattan and Daithi Sands helped the holders race into an early 0-3 to 0-1 lead. While Portaferry were making the most of their opportunities, Ballycran were having an off day at the other end and by 10 minutes, they had already registered four wides.

After Ben Arthurs saw his goal bound shot go narrowly wide of Pearce Smyth's goal, Stuart Martin and Phelim Savage equally shared four points as Ballycran led at the break, 0-8 to 0-7. Stuart Martin and Barry Trainor exchanged points in the opening minutes of the second half, before Portaferry once again took control of the scoreboard.

It was 0-12 to 0-9 by the 41st minute, and it almost got better for the Ports, but McGrattan could only look on in disappointment as his goal bound shot flashed wide of Stephen Keith's net.

Ballycran weren't going to lie down without a fight, and efforts from

Conor Woods and Sheehan cut the gap to the bare minimum with time almost up. When Martin levelled matters in the 60th minute, all the signs were pointing to a Ballycran victory, but scores from Daithi Sands, McGrattan, Tom Murray and Eoghan Sands claimed a dramatic win for Portaferry in injury-time. It was an emotional day in Newry and the camaraderie of hurling folk was most noticeable in the support shown to the Egan family on the day. Christopher Egan lined out for his Club only two days after the funeral of his beloved mum Dawn and after putting in a huge shift for his Club the Crowd and both sets of subs rose to applaud Chrissy as he left the field with ten minutes to go. To Chrissy and to his Dad Mark and the entire Egan family the Gaels of Down showed in that moment the esteem in which you are held and how we are all a family in Down GAA and in time of sadness and loss we all stand together.

This year we had six teams participate in the Senior Hurling Championship and I think that at present that is our maximum, and in 2024, Carryduff will have the opportunity to pit their wits against the others, this can only be good for hurling in Down. Liatroim showed in 2023 what can be achieved with commitment and determination for even the most ardent Ballycran person would admit that the Fontenoy's were only minutes away from a place in the Senior Final and there would have been no arguments.

I have to be honest though and say that we in Down are currently only competitive enough to have two hurling Championships and that is no disrespect to any of the Clubs, but when you look at our performances at Junior level in the Province, we are weak. If we are to retain three Championships, then we have to be open to new formats and structures and we have to be

brave and see the holistic picture and not just short-term glory.

The Intermediate Championship was won by Bredagh who gained the bragging rights with a win over Carryduff, it was a second final defeat in a row for Carryduff, but at least this year they will have the consolation of promotion to the Senior Stage. Bredagh were driven to success by the strength of their County players like Niall McFarland and the experience gained by tough games at Senior level. The Intermediate Final shared the stage in Pairc Esler with the Ireland v Scotland shinty International, this was a good occasion and indeed nice for Pairc Esler to be once again chosen as the venue for the Shinty.

The Junior Hurling Final was postponed on the Friday night as the weather took a turn for the worse and I was glad that Irial Ó Ceallaigh formerly of TG4 weather and now secretary of East Belfast, and I were on the same page that the forecast for Friday night was not good. On the Sunday afternoon East Belfast and Kilclief contested the Junior Final and what a huge statement it was to have East Belfast our newest Club contest their first Adult Final against one of our oldest hurling clubs. Up to half time East Belfast were matching Kilclief in all areas, but the miles on the legs counted in the second half and the men of Ben Dearg pulled away in the second half to take the Cup home to the banks of Killard.

Bredagh retained the Minor Hurling title an indication of good work being done at this level in South Belfast and the challenge now is to transfer this to Adult level, to sustain and maintain.

CCC deserve immense credit for the number of games that they provide in any given season, and they also deserve credit that the competitions offered are meaningful and serve a



purpose. Games happen when they are supposed to happen and that is the key to the success of any games programme, for there is nothing more frustrating for players and families to suddenly discover that a fixture is not now happening. Our Programme for 2024 has already been presented to the Clubs with the start dates and the end dates for all of our competitions, we are the envy of Clubs in other Counties, and we need to just say to our CCC well done.

The Leagues in Down need no further alteration, no appetite was shown for a straight knock out Championship, so we are now at the stage where we need to in football terms leave well enough alone. I am pleased too that all Clubs will participate in the Minor and Under 16 Championship for starters and after two games they will all then find their own level, that will be

positive for all Clubs concerned. **In terms of Minor Football Championship in particular we have to go back in time, sometimes decades to find the names of some of our premier Clubs and towns engraved on the trophy, and then we wonder why our County Minor performances are not what we believe they should be.**

The promotion of our games will continue to be key and Down GAA TV as a brand continues to grow, there are huge opportunities here to promote our Clubs and our County, with more games and more preview shows. If for example the Computer were to generate a mouth-watering tie in the first game of the Down Division One of 2024 on April 5th, would it not be an idea to play it on the Thursday or the Saturday and show it live on Down GAA TV.

**Our Finals weekend have gone down well I believe, not just do we have the Adult Finals weekend at Pairc Esler, but we also have Underage Finals at particular age groups happen across the weekend also. Now we have to see what can we do better, I found myself asking how can we do our Minor Football and Hurling Finals better, in 2024 is there room for a Double Bill in Pairc Esler?**

We need more people involved and we need our youth, we need the Social Media experts of a particular generation, and we need to give them wings- look how Charlies Bar in Enniskillen has become a worldwide sensation – just because someone give someone their head and let them think outside the box. We have those young people amongst our ranks and think the job they too could do promoting our games, let us give them wings.



**Let us look forward now to the Club Season of 2024 with one simple message to allow our teams to open the shoulders and play, to allow them to express themselves and to show us that the style and flair associated with Gaelic football and hurling in Down will not be stymied by the needs of a Managers CV.**

### STRATEGIC PLAN

Ag Bogadh Ar Aghaidh Le Chéile – Moving Forward together, that is the cover of our Strategic Plan Booklet launched in the St Patricks Centre on the 10th of October and in the words of our Chairman “this strategy presents ambitious but realistic goals”.

It is a well-designed plan in a colourful and well-designed booklet, now the hard part we must deliver on the plan for the next three years. We must make it happen, we have to make a difference, since the 10th of

October we have admired the work of the steering group and said to ourselves isn't this a nice book. In some places it will already be consigned to the shelf, in some it will already need dusted, now the challenge is let us make it work, let us make the plan become reality.

In January County Committee, and the Clubs of Down need to hit the ground running on the Strategic Plan, we need to see what we can deliver in 2024 and we need to see what we can initiate in 2024 that might take longer to come to fruition. The task will not be an easy one, there will be things that we all will take out of the plan, things that we believe will make a difference, we now need to coordinate the wish list, set the target dates, put the teams in place to deliver and meet the dates. We need then too to have the Teams in place to monitor and evaluate the progress, to have a good reporting structure between the various teams.

**I have often said the strength of Down GAA is not in its infrastructure but in its people, we have the people in Down who can make this a working document, we need their help to make it a work in progress. So, I hope that when you are asked to assist in the implementation of the plan that you will be a willing conscript! we need your skill set and we need it for a specific purpose.**

I think of the Plan, and I think of things that I would like to see happen, I want to see the Down Youth Board back up and running, I want to go even further and have a representative of the Youth Board on our Management Committee. The late Tony Williamson was the first County Chairman that I directly served under as a member of the County Executive, I was still at School, and I was the Youth Board Delegate to County Executive. I want to assure you all it was in Tony's second term as Chairman!

**Would it happen today most likely not but at a time when the GAA is very gender conscious in the composition of its committees, should we not in Down also be Youth conscious, the capacity exists in the Official Guide to allow Counties add two people to their Management Committee who may bring a particular skill set. In a year when we lose two members with the dissolution of the Divisional Committees would it not be the year to start by adding a Youth Board Delegate and one other with a particular skill set.**

Annually in my report I have bemoaned the demise of the GAA in Newry, and I must make exception here in the case of Ballyholland, but within the Town, whilst good work is happening, we are under achieving and I am fearful for even the status of Down GAA in Newry. The demographics of the now city, mean that large parts of new housing developments will be designated as being in County Armagh, in the past Down were always able to be represented by players from areas like Dromalane, Barcroft and the Camlough Road areas, we are in danger of losing those areas now.

Having said that we will welcome GAA Congress to Newry in February next year and we will be delighted to see Jarlath Burns installed as Uachtarán Cumann Luthchleas Gael, for that weekend we will cede part our town to the Gaels of Armagh in an ecumenical gesture!

**My earnest hope is that following on from the Strategic Plan we will appoint a GAA Officer specifically for Newry, who will work with the Clubs, Schools, and Communities, to promote our games, maybe too that person will be able to stoke the embers of Mitchels before too much time elapses and the fire goes out.**

On the matter of our Urban centres, I borrow a quote from Paul O'Brien earlier this year when, speaking about the GAA in Cork City he wrote "Considering the history of Glen Rovers and their illustrious past players, the fact they've been relegated, a thought might now be spared for the clubs that are dying amidst a gentrification of Gaelic Games and the continued decline of GAA in the Urban centres". Think about it.

At this time of year when we all believe in Santa Claus and the good in people, I hope that the Strategic Plan will see us commence work on our goal of the delivery of the project in Ballykinlar. 2024 must be the year when work commences and with the County Office relocating to Ballykinlar in the first two months of the year, we will have a presence on Site.

So, when the call comes, to assist in the delivery of the Strategic Plan, please step up to the mark, we owe it not to ourselves but to the generations who will come behind us to deliver the Plan. We are only ever the custodians in our Clubs and in our County, we must be the people who take the County to a new level and who deliver on what we preach.

I want to take this opportunity to place on record my own personal thanks to Brian Doran who chaired the process and the team who delivered to us the Strategic Plan, to Patrick, Roisin, Nicky, Mark, John, Shane, Meadhbh and Liam, thank you for an excellent piece of work, the challenge now is ours.

#### **REFEREES**

**Paul Faloon is the best Referee in Down, he is recognised Provincially and Nationally as the best referee in Down, we in Down GAA are proud of that fact and I hope that in 2024, Paul Faloon will referee**

**League and Championship games in every ground in our County and beyond. Indeed, I go further and say every referee should be able to referee in any ground in Down and they should be able to be accompanied by their families if they so wish. Friday night football or hurling should be an opportunity for everyone to attend a game without fear of any recrimination.**

We need more referees, to cover our basic fixture programme and with out involving our sister codes, we need at least three referees per Club, it is totally unacceptable that a Club should not have a referee.

**Those who are quick to criticise or pontificate about a Referee are often those who don't have a referee or don't have a referee who could officiate at the standard that their team plays. By that I mean that it is not acceptable for a Club to maybe provide a number of Referees and none of them capable to officiate at a Senior League Fixture, if you are playing at a level then your Club referee must be at that level also. If you have more than one team at Adult Level, then you must have more than one Adult Referee, it can no longer continue to be box ticking or tokenism, we have to get serious about Refereeing.**

I want to pay tribute to those who do officiate at our games, for they do make things happen, by their presence and commitment, they ensure more than anyone else that our games are played, that our fixture programme is met. It is not at times an easy task, but I commend how our referees fill their roles and with a decorum that sometimes needs patience and much lip biting.

We do need to raise standards at all levels of refereeing, and I think too that here the County has a responsibility, we need to ensure in



the first instance that our referees are physically fit. We set a Fitness Test Pre-Season and Pre-Championship, and we turn up at the venue and we expect good scores from our Referees and then we scratch our heads when we see the scores and we have to lower our expectations.

**In 2024, I suggest that Down GAA treat the preparation of Referees for the season ahead with more action, we should appoint two people to conduct a Pre-Season Fitness programme for Referees. We appoint people to train our Football and Hurling Teams, I am saying now that it is the time now to appoint people to look after the collective fitness of our referees, by organising sessions for them and ensuring that come March April, our referees are fit and ready to officiate at our games. The training would continue throughout the season and the programme would increase as we prepared for Championship. It has to happen in the first week of January if we are to be serious.**

The Age Profile of our Referees also needs to be addressed and we need to recruit more young referees and in particular we need to recruit more Hurling Referees. How we do this will present a challenge, but we need to be creative, and we need to incentivise our young people to get

involved. Reality too mis that a young person officiating over the weekend at Go Games could potentially be better off than they would be by working a shift at one of big retail outlets. This is something that Referees Administration need to hit the ground running with in 2024.

I want here to commend and place on record my thanks to Brian Higgins, Colm Gribben, Mark Turley, and Neil Cousins who officiated at the County Senior Football Final. These four men took responsibility and delivered a County Final on a day when in honesty the game was in doubt an hour before throw in. Brian and his team stepped up to the mark, they knew how many people would be affected if the game had not gone ahead, they had their views on the scenario that had developed but they knew that there was a bigger picture that had to be considered. We in Down GAA owe Brian a huge debit of gratitude and Down GAA are lucky to have men of his stature along with Colm, Mark, and Neil, and not forgetting the team of umpires in our ranks.

### **BALLYKINLAR PROJECT**

In my report of 12 months ago, I had expressed the hope that we could be on site in 2023 and commencing work, my hope was based on a successful application for funding to

the Levelling Up Fund. The optimism did not materialise as we were not successful in obtaining funding from Levelling Up and one was left to wonder were we the victims of political decisions.

**We have though used the time to prepare for additional funding opportunities and to make presentations on the project to the National Infrastructure and Finance bodies, we have also received visits from interested groupings who may also be key to the overall development of the project.**

At present we have a Funding application with the Peace Plus Programme with a decision expected in March 2024, this is an innovative application as we are partnered in the submission by Cooperation Ireland and the County Down Rural Community Network. There is the recognition of the significance of a lease between the GAA and the MOD, something that when first mooted in 1994 was a firm no no, in 2024 we want that agreement to be a work in progress as sods are turned in Ballykinlar.

We also are awaiting news from NMDDC in relation to our application for funding for the Multi Sports Dome at Ballykinlar and we would hope that early 2024 would also bring us good news on that

front. All of these things allied to support from the GAA at central level will allow us to be on site in the year ahead, the levels of funding and the success of the bids will determine whether we are able to complete the project as one or we are engaged in a phased approach.

If Down GAA were to be selfish, we would have to say we need to start our pitch development in 2024, for this year ahead we will once again be at the goodwill of Clubs, Schools, Universities as to where we can train and prepare our teams. We cannot engage in any predetermined planning as to where our teams might be based, and this makes life difficult for players and team managements alike. It also creates an increase in costs of travel and food as well as pitch hire costs.

We will in the next few months move our County Office from Castlewellan to the former playgroup building in Ballykinlar, this move will give us more space and allow us to hold meetings and Coach Education Programmes on site. This will also allow us to say that the bigger project is on course and that the first move will be that Down GAA Administration will have a new home come January 2024.

There are exciting times ahead and I want to acknowledge the work of the Project Board under the chairmanship of Feargal McCormack, people have given of their time voluntarily and have opened doors for us in many quarters all with the sole objective of providing a first-class facility for Down GAA and the Community of County Down. Together we can make this happen.

## **FINANCE**

At County Convention, County Treasurer Diarmuid Cahill will deliver a healthy state of affairs financially for Down GAA and in a time when costs are rising and

income is not as plentiful, this is down to good financial management by Diarmuid and his Finance Team. Demands are now greater on the time of a County Treasurer and Diarmuid is after all managing finances of a business generating in excess of £1m per year.

For many years people talked about the “great hole” of County Board debt, now the myth is destroyed as the Accounts are available on the Down GAA Website and we have good governance in place. The Croke Park loan which once sat in excess of €2m will exist no longer come 2025, that in itself is a huge success story.

In 2024 it is hoped to complete the sale of St Patricks Park to Bryansford, and this money must be reinvested in the Ballykinlar project, for the County will be selling an asset and it needs to reinvest in another asset, that is good practice.

**The Challenge now on the finance front will be income generation on a par with what has been happening in other Counties who share the same ambitions as us. Club Down needs to be reenergised as a major source of funding within the County and we also need it to dovetail with a commercial entity who can attract business support. With this in mind I would be suggesting that we need to establish a Red and Black Business Forum which would give us strategic access to the business community across the County and beyond.**

Increased income generation is needed to allow us to develop Ballykinlar in the way that we wish to see it come to fruition, there will be opportunities on site for Individual and business contributions, but this all needs to be coordinated and managed. To coordinate that activity and to develop Club Down and a Business

Forum, Down GAA will in the coming years, hopefully on the back of successful funding applications, have to appoint a Commercial Manager, to take us to the next levels of income generation.

The Clubs Draw once again in 2023 performed excellently with great returns for our Clubs €661,152.00 generated for our Clubs and only two Clubs actually gained no contribution for themselves or made no contribution for the County. In the year ahead with a concerted effort across all of our Clubs we could increase that figure generated for our Clubs, wouldn't it be a wonderful achievement if we could get to the scenario where the return to Clubs reached £1m. What a difference that would make to the lives of our members and all by just selling extra £120.00 a year Tickets.

James and Mary McGrath have done outstanding work as the Club Draw Coordinators and have decided now to step down from the role, they have given outstanding service and commitment to the Draw from its inception. They put their house, their time, and their energy at our disposal to make the draw work and we and the Clubs owe them a great debt of gratitude. The success of the Draw has been in the management of the Draw and the integrity of the Draw, both of those were delivered by Mary and James and I can only say thank you for the work they did.

I also think that the Finance team should also be congratulated on the management of our Gates, we have attracted new personnel to assist at our gates and they also ensured that anyone who wished to attend any of our games across the County, could do so without precondition- Common Sense is Good Sense.

**The Admission Prices to our Championship Games were also kept at an affordable level, conscious that people were going**





**to be out week on week and that here in the North of Ireland we have to have a social conscience in particular in relation to the hardships that people may well be facing, we are not as affluent as our counterparts in the 26 Counties.**

Down GAA are very privileged to have very supportive Team Sponsors in EOS.

Daniel and Brendan Strain are not just great sponsors but they are committed Down people who only want success for the teams who wear the Red and Black.

The caliber of the sponsors that we have associated with Down GAA show that we have a brand that people are happy to associate with. We have competition sponsors and Associate Sponsors and each one of them are more than a sponsor, they are friends and supporters of Down GAA.

### **ONE COUNTY- ONE PEOPLE**

I did aspire that in 2023 that we would reach out to communities to have them attend our games in Pairc Esler, unfortunately the environment in the North of Ireland post Brexit has meant that it has been difficult to put that out reach into practice. I do though firmly believe that it is something we should not give up on and maybe we just need to take a different approach. I am of the belief that the County of Down has the potential to unite us more than divide us and that Gaelic games are no threat to anyone, the onus is on us to reach out to the many communities who make up our society.

The plans for the Project at Ballykinlar and the work of Cooperation Ireland and groups like the County Down Rural Community Network, the Young Farmers will help us to broaden the outlook of Down GAA and encourage greater community engagement. We have traditionally looked towards the Unionist community and the state school sector to try and foster good relations, in the Autumn term Down GAA was engaged in a coaching programme in Wellington College. We would welcome the opportunity to showcase our games in all schools throughout the County, to share coaching programmes and to make our own contribution to the growth of a more inclusive society.

We also have to acknowledge that there are also migrant communities that have come to settle in our County, for example in Newry there is now a vibrant Indian Community, Cricket is now a regular event in the Meadow Playing Fields at Jennings Park, we need to reach out to those communities too. They are our neighbours, our work colleagues and neither of us should have anything to fear.

We in Down GAA in 2024 have four home Allianz Football League Games and three home Allianz Hurling League Games, let us commit now to having a group from another community at each of those games and let us make it a welcoming environment. The prize could be great, and it is something that we must strive to achieve, a County For all and a Sport for all.

**I say feel the fear and do it anyway, for our people are our greatest**

**strength and if we can attract more people then we only will grow stronger.**

### **SCÓR AND IRISH CULTURE**

The death of Anthony Williamson brought great sadness to the Scór community not just in Down but throughout Ireland, for Tony had been the man responsible for the birth of the Cultural dimension of our great association and we in Down were very proud of his role in such.

This year Scór was still struggling with the post covid era and the change in the timings for Competitions, this caused some disruption and perhaps played some part in the facts that participation numbers were down. There is though a bigger picture that we need to look at and that is how we continue to have a role for Cultural activities within our Association. We are now over 50 years old in terms of Scór and we need to see how we can guarantee survival for the next fifty years if we are being ambitious and if we are being pragmatic how do we guarantee survival for the next five years.

We need to promote and market Scór much better, we need to move with the times, and we need to be open to change. We talk of the Integration of all the codes, and I wonder do we need a conversation about the Integration of Scór, for Scór to survive it needs to be fully integrated into the world of the GAA. It needs its own place in the GAA Calendar, it doesn't need its own rule book, it needs to be integrated into the Official Guide in the form of rules and codes. Scór

perhaps too needs a new format, a new set of disciplines, a defined programme and in the integration process to ask the question do we need as much regulation.

To me Scór has a place in the GAA family, but I think that in the next two years we have to redefine that place in the Calendar, or we risk losing the concept altogether, participation levels have to grow and we in Office in the GAA have to encourage that growth. This year I acted as Question Master in the County Final of the Quiz, and I have to say I thoroughly enjoyed the occasion; this is one area where we could develop further, I believe. Every Club in the County have the capacity to participate in a Quiz and remember we would be going back to the roots of Scór if we chose to focus on the Quiz to be the catalyst for a new beginning. Surely this is something to think about.

Our Language is something again that sets us apart and we would love to be able to converse more in our native tongue, for some of us O level Irish is a long time ago, so I believe that we as a County need to take an initiative in 2024 to focus on our use of Irish. We send people to the Gaeltacht annually and that is laudable but is that the height of our contribution to the language, does it tick the box and nothing more? that cannot be enough.

We can improve on our usage, we must encourage others, do not deride people for their efforts, the fluent speakers have a duty to encourage others, to support their efforts and to assist where possible in our Clubs and in our administration with the use of Irish. To do this we cannot work in isolation as the Strategic Plan says we must work with outside bodies like Foras na Gaelige and Conradh na Gaelige to promote our language.

The new development planned for Ballykinlar will be a hub for sporting activities we hope but it must also seize the opportunity to be a hub for Cultural activities, for Language Classes and promotion and for Scór, we are not just the biggest sporting organisation on our Island, we are the biggest sporting and cultural organisation too.

### **THE GAA WHO WE ARE.**

On Saturday December 2nd I joined with Michael McArdle fellow Down man and PRO of Ulster GAA on a day trip to London and to St Marys Cemetery in Kensal Green to honour one of the founders of the GAA, John McKay on the centenary of his death. John McKay was born in County Down and this is something we are very proud of, that we in Down had a man present at the founding of the GAA in Hayes Hotel in Thurles in 1884.

John at that time was living in Cork and was a journalist with the Examiner and had a big interest in Athletics. His life journey would take him from the County of his birth to Cork, to Belfast, to Dublin and then to London where he would die on December 2nd, 1923, his life experience would take him into contact with many of the main players in Irish life at this time. The historian Donal McAnallen has done outstanding work tracing the life of John McKay and building his family tree, we are indebted to Donal for his work and his knowledge of John and his family, there is a great story to be told.

On that Saturday in London, we gathered to pay our respects and you get a real sense of what the GAA means to people outside of Ireland, people of a generation who left our land in different times and perhaps different circumstances, but who never forgot their roots. They never forgot because when they went to London, they

immersed themselves in their work and in the GAA, through the GAA they met wives and girlfriends and in turn they built their own community and the cycle continued as their children met and married other second generation Irish.

The people of London GAA have always been good friends to Down, when our hurlers visited Ruislip in recent years, they only but want to be of assistance and they want to talk of men of their generation, men like O'Neill, McCartan, and Doherty and on that Cold Saturday morning in Kensal Green cemetery there is pride in your heart when you scan the gathering, and you see a man in a Down tie. That man was Milo Crummy a native of Drumgath who in 1973 was a member of the first ever Bord na nÓg elected in the County at the Youth Convention held on the 14th of March. Fifty years on, Milo, based in London for many decades, was continuing the link as a proud Down man gathering to honour one of our own, John McKay, a founding member of the GAA, the torch continues to be passed on and we in Down are proud of our role in passing on the torch. We are all only the inheritors of a great tradition and only ever the custodians.

**Would it not be a great opportunity to enshrine the memory of John McKay to have Down GAA twin with London GAA, to twin in terms of Academy Squads and the possibility of exchange visits, to twin in terms of Club Development and Administration, to twin in terms of work exchange programmes. I believe that this is something that could be practically explored and something that would keep the link alive, 100 years after the death of John McKay.**



## LOST LIVES

Included in our Convention Booklet is our list of deceased members, and it is a simple but nice way to acknowledge those that we have lost in the previous twelve months, to the families of the loved ones it means a lot, that their loved one and his or her links to the GAA are not forgotten. The people we think of here have often touched our lives in the simplest of ways and were perhaps part of our GAA Journey, the maybe took us to our first match, gave us our first football or hurl, or maybe just said you played well even when we were beaten by 20 points.

For in the GAA, it is the little things that matter and the little things that count, the small touches that cost nothing but are worth their weight in gold. We remember those no longer with us and we remember their loved ones and we say to them thank you, for sharing your loved one with us and making us a better organisation for their presence.

Days before Convention of 2022, we bid farewell to Liam McGreevy, a former County Coaching Officer, County Youth Officer, and Coaching Tutor. Liam was also the manager of the Down Under 16 Team that would have played in the North- East League in the 1980s. Liam was Head of PE in St Colman's Ballynahinch and a very proud Glasdrumman man. He had a passion and flair for Coaching and made a positive impact on the careers of many who would go on to represent Down at the highest level. Liam had a love too for the Irish Language but above all he made a difference to the lives that he touched and we in Down GAA are a better place today for having had men like Liam McGreevy in our ranks. The McGreevy family would also suffer in 2023 with the loss of Liam's brother Dermot a man who had a great love of his County and who was involved too with his adopted Club, Bredagh.

The new year was only two days old when we learned of the death of Gerry Mullan our former Ulster Council Delegate. A member of the Ballycran Club, Gerry was a man passionate about all things Irish with Hurling, Camogie and Culture amongst his great loves, he had a great memory recall and was a man who gave outstanding service to his Club, his County, and his Province.

Gerry first came to prominence as a member of the County Hurling Board in the mid-fifties and served as a County Team selector from 1962 through to 1979 and then in 1988 Gerry was elected as an Ulster Council Delegate where along with his good friend Fintan Mussen he would represent Down at provincial level until 2009, twenty-one years of unbroken service. Gerry also had a great passion for Refereeing, he was an Inter County Referee himself and was prominent within Down in efforts over many years to recruit more referees. Gerry was a methodical thinker, a man who when he spoke others listened, and he represented the Down Clubs at Ulster and ensured that the Clubs were always aware of opportunities for grant funding from the Provincial body. He had too a great love for Scór and the promotion of our culture and language.

Gerry was key to the revival of Camogie in Down in the 1960s and was a proud Team selector on the All-Ireland Junior Winning Team of 1968, he also served as Chairperson of the Camogie Board from 1964 to 1970 and was always available to help Clubs trying to start Camogie or in cases too trying to reignite the flame, Gerry gave selflessly of his time throughout Down and Ulster to ensure that Camogie continued to grow. In the GAA we look to people who are givers and there is no doubt Gerry Mullan was such a person in the cause of the GAA, when you think too that he was often away from home from early morning until

after midnight on many occasions, he epitomised the volunteer ethos of our great organisation.

With all of his County and Provincial commitments, Gerry's first love was still for Ballycran, it was here that he had first developed the love for our game, He would win Senior and Junior County Championships as a player, but it was to be as a Team Mentor and Club Officer that Gerry would really shine for his Club, he was to the fore when McKenna Park was opened in June 1966. Gerry filled many roles for the Club, he was a committee member, who always had a solution to a problem, he meticulously kept records and was always willing to show support to Office holders at Club and County, to offer that quiet word of encouragement that meant a lot to someone finding their way. We in Down GAA were very proud to have had Gerry in our midst for many years, he was a decent man and a good Gael, it was an honour for many of us to have served with Gerry and Down GAA, St Joseph's Ballycran and Down Camogie are better for having had the involvement of Gerry Mullan over many years, for he made a difference to the lives of many and often it went unnoticed.

Pat Joe Travers was a man who was there for Kilcoo in the less fashionable days, he was a Team Manager and committee man and in later years he was a great supporter, nearly always the first man in Pairc Esler and in spite of poor health, football and following Kilcoo and Down gave him a great boost.

Clonduff dancers got to an All-Ireland Scór Final this year in the memory of the late Sean Hillen a man who had a passionate interest in Irish Dancing and who had nurtured that love amongst the people of Clonduff and beyond.

When Burren became the first Club to have floodlights back in 1975, it



was their then Club President Mons. Arthur Byrne who had the honour of switching on the lights as Down played Armagh, the Monsignor passed away this year also.

Michael McCartan of Liatroim Fontenoy's was a former Club Chairperson and an avid historian, a man who also served as the secretary of the Down centenary committee back in 1984, a man taken too soon from us. A few short weeks later too we would learn of the death of Michael's much loved daughter Maeve.

Monica McEvoy was the wife of Drumaness Chairman Damian, and her loss was a sad blow for the family and the Drumaness Club, a championship win later in the year gave Damian a smile again after a tough time.

In March of 2023 we lost one of the most iconic figures in Down GAA over many decades when Dr Martin Walsh passed away. Martin was a man who gave outstanding service to Down over many decades, he was a man who made a difference to the lives of many in his professional life and in the sporting world where he used his expertise to the benefit of Club, School, and County players not just in Down but throughout the Country.

Martin was a trusted confidant to many players who sought his advice and guidance, he helped prolong the playing careers of many and he was for us in Down GAA a man that we were very proud to say was one of our own. For over six decades where Red and Black was worn, Martin Walsh was there, advising, guiding, treating and most importantly, in his own gentle manner, caring for those that he came into contact with. He was a gentleman and a man who was innovative in the world of Sports Medicine in Ireland, and he will always have a special niche in the history of Down GAA.

Martin's involvement in Gaelic Games came first when he went to St Colmans College as a Boarder in 1941, a native of Banbridge there was no GAA activity in his home town at that time. Inspired by Fr McGovern and former County player Dr Jim Fitzsimmons, the young student excelled at Gaelic Football and with a strength in athletics, he progressed to captain St Colmans to a first Mac Rory Cup Final in 1945, where they alas, lost to St Pats Armagh for whom the late great Iggy Jones would score 3-5 on that day. Later that year Martin would star alongside Iggy Jones on the Ulster Colleges Team in the Inter PRO series of 1945 and 46.

Martin was left full forward on the Down Junior Team beaten by Kerry in the All-Ireland Junior Final of 1949 and would make his Senior Championship debut for Down in 1952 when Down went under to Cavan in a game played in St Patricks Park and remarkably whilst studying at QUB, Martin had in fact played in seven Sigerson Cup competitions.

Having qualified as a Doctor, Martin came to practice in Newcastle and with a great interest in Sports Medicine, he soon came to the attention of the late Maurice Hayes and soon was persuaded to join the Team Management in 1959. It is a remarkable fact that with every Down Football Team that won an All-Ireland Title bar 1946 when he was still at school, Martin Walsh played a key role either as a selector or as a Team Doctor, with the Senior Team in 1960, 61, 68, 91 and 94, with the Under 21 Team of 1979 and with the Minor Winning Teams of 1977, 87, 99 and 2005. Martin was a constant presence, a support for Players, Team Management, County Board and in many cases for parents and family members.

Martin sought no limelight; he rarely spoke in public of his work or even in dressing rooms, his work was done quietly. In 2005 as the Minor

Footballers took on Galway in an All-Ireland Quarter Final in Carrick on Shannon and the backs were to the wall at half time, Martin asked Team Management if he could say a few words, those few words were delivered calmly and yet with determination and a belief in a group of young men in the Red and Black.

History shows Down went on to win the game and to win the All-Ireland. Martin Walsh had spoken, and people had listened, he had the great capacity to transcend generations and to be that trusted friend to Down players from the 1950s right through to the recent years.

We in Down were so lucky to have Dr Martin Walsh in our ranks, he gave of his time without question and with the great support of his late beloved wife Roisin and his family and we think here too of his son Peter who died so suddenly and who too had worn the Red and Black of Down. For Dr Walsh reward was seeing Down, St Colmans College, QUB or Bryansford triumph, he sought no fame nor glory and in 2009 we in Down GAA acknowledged his outstanding contribution and inducted Martin into the Down GAA Hall of Fame.

Martin was also a man of great faith and had a wonderful singing voice and we recall also when Martin sang at the GAA Congress Mass in Newcastle in 2010 and many were moved by his rendition of Panis Angelicus. It was a very special moment on a weekend where the world of the GAA acknowledged the Down history makers of 1960 and 61. Today Down GAA is a poorer place with the loss of a Dr Martin Walsh and yet we were privileged to have had him amongst our ranks, to have shared many great times with him and just to have known the man and all that he was, for Martin was truly a man who made a difference to the lives of so many.

In May time Bridie Harper widow of the late Hugh John, passed away, over the years callers to the Harper House on GAA business would have got to know Bridie, a gentle and lovely lady, who made everyone welcome and played her part in ensuring that Clubs were catered for with the provision of hurls and helmets and a range of equipment.

Eamonn Hogan was a man taken from us much too soon, formerly the Secretary of RGU, was a man for whom no task was too much, Eamonn always gave his best and took great pride in the progress the Club were making on and off the Field. Indeed, the RGU would also lose another former Club Secretary Terry Curran, grandfather of Conor, later in the year.

Hubert Shannon was an Antrim man who came to settle in Warrenpoint and who was a past Club Chairperson and County Board Rep, a man who was active in his club up until his sad passing.

Marty Lynch joined us in Pairc Esler for the Down v Donegal game on April 23rd, having been diagnosed with Motor Neurones Marty wanted to see his beloved Down play in the Ulster Championship and it was great for to have him at the game and to see him meet and greet many of those he had played with for Club and County. Indeed, the victory over Donegal will have been all the sweeter for Marty as he had been a member of the Down team beaten by Donegal in the 1985 Ulster Championship. Marty fought a courageous fight against motor neurone disease, and it was a sad time when this young man was taken from us in the month of May, just a few short weeks after his visit to Pairc Esler.

Marty grew up as one of the outstanding players on a golden generation of Mitchels underage teams, ironically defeated for the

first and only occasion by Newry shamrocks in the county minor final of 1981. Marty would go on to Captain Down to win the Ulster Under 21 title in Centenary year indeed when the game was going against Down 'it was their inspirational captain Martin Lynch at Centre half back who drove his team forward'.

Cork would win in the All-Ireland semi-final but Marty Lynch, would also make his senior debut in the Ulster championship of 1984 and play Senior Championship again in 1985.

Marty gave his heart and soul to every game that he played either for Newry Mitchels or in later time for St John Bosco. For Marty, every game had to be played with intensity, passion, and a desire to win. A man taken too soon from us, he wore his heart on his sleeve as a proud Down man.

In the week of the County Finals, the peninsula was saddened to wake to the news that Daw Egan wife of Ballycran Chairman Mark and mother of Club and County hurler Chrissy had passed away after a short illness. The bravery shown by Chris in playing in the County Hurling Final just a few days after the funeral, was testimony to the standing of Chris, his dad Mark, and the Egan family, they were all in our hearts on that day in Pairc Esler on what must have been an emotional journey for them all.

On the weekend of the football finals, we had also laid to rest, Brian McLaughlin of Burren a former Club and County player, Arthur Ruddy a former Referee and County Minor Football selector and Liam McCartan now domiciled in Canada and brother of our former County Chairman Dan.

Bishop Tony Farquhar had a great interest in Sport, and we were proud to lay claim to him as a Down man, in

the eighties and nineties he had travelled to Down games with our former great Team Manager Sean Smith. Together with Bishop Walsh, he had welcomed the Down All Ireland winning teams to the Diocese of Down and Connor and was a man who genuinely cared about people.

Pat Hollywood acted as Auditor to Down GAA for the period from the 1960's through to the nineties in a voluntary capacity, indeed the only terms for the Audit was Two All-Ireland Tickets. Pat meticulously prepared the accounts for the Annual Convention; he offered a commentary too on how the County needed to plan for days which would not always be so good and offered solid financial advice to ensure that Down GAA was able to continue to meet its obligations. Even back then the late Pat, cautioned about the expenditure on County Teams.

There was heartbreak for the Ballela Cub with the death in a road accident of Cathal McCrory from Dromore, Cathal was a former underage hurler with Ballela and brother to Ballela Senior Camog Niamh Mc Crory and previous Senior Hurlers Declan and Ronan.

From an Administration point of view, we lost two great men in the month of November with the passing of Anthony Williamson and Sean McCashin.

Anthony Williamson was credited nationally as being the man along with Derry Gowan of Cork who devised a structure for what was described as " An All-Ireland Inter-Club winter social activity". Asked by the then Uachtaran Seamas Uí Riain to devise such a structure, Anthony and Derry worked long hours to produce a programme in 1969 which would become known as Scór Seachto.

The concept had been born in the parish of Ballela when the Rostrevor Club visited one evening for a Quiz

followed by a cup of Tea, great craic, and a sing song, out of that grew Scór a facet of our Association that has given pleasure to many over the past 54 years. Anthony was conscious that we needed something more beyond playing our games, he wanted to develop the GAA socially and he wanted to give an outlet to those who wanted to be an active part of the GAA even if their playing days were over or in some cases might never have started.

He had that vision and in creating that vision he was very much hands on, for back in 1967 when the South Down Committee had initiated a Quiz competition, Anthony was on the three-man organising committee with Barney Carr and Father Davies and on the night of the Final between Rostrevor and Warrenpoint, Anthony was the Timekeeper, Barney the Question Master, and Fr Davies the Score Keeper.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Scór, Anthony was recognised, Provincially and Nationally for his outstanding contribution, that contribution had made a difference to the lives of many, the GAA through the creation of Scór, was inclusive and playing a key part in the protection of Irish Culture and Heritage. Anthony Williamson brought energy, passion, and determination to the development of Scór, and it is testimony to his good work that Scór is still vibrant within the GAA Community today.

Having served as a member of the South Down Committee and having held office in his own Club, Anthony followed his fellow Rostrevor man the late George Tinnelly, when in 1974 he became County Chairman for the first time defeating the late Harry McEvoy in a close contest.

Anthony would serve three years as County Chairman and during that time he would oversee the delegation of administrative affairs

within the County to a number of subcommittees, into being came, Activities, Development and Grounds and Finance committees all with clearly defined terms of reference, it would take time for the structures to come to fruition, but Anthony Williamson as County Chairperson had sown the seeds.

In 1976 he had the great honour of presenting the Frank O'Hare Cup to his beloved Rostrevor when they overcame Warrenpoint in the Senior Championship Final and on that day in St Patricks Park, there was no prouder man than Anthony Williamson.

1980 would see Anthony return as County Chairperson taking over from Benny Crawford and in the spring of 1980, Anthony as County Chairperson would welcome delegates to GAA Congress in Newcastle, when he would also have the double honour of welcoming his fellow county man Paddy McFlynn as incoming GAA President.

In welcoming the delegates to County Down, Anthony Williamson stated his wish to demonstrate that from the heart of St Patrick's Country we could say with conviction and sincerity that the GAA wished to serve all of the people of our Island, this was so true of Anthony Williamson, for he sought only to serve, to give of his best at all times, for his Club Rostrevor, his County, his Community and to try where he could to make a difference to the lives of those he encountered.

Anthony would only serve the one year as County Chairperson in his second term, in that one year he continued to be a fair and honest County Chairperson, he ensured that voices were heard and that all carried equal weight, he had tough decisions to make, but he never shirked from making those tough calls, only ever governed by the question was it right for Down.



We in Down GAA were privileged to have Anthony Williamson as one of our own, he was a man who espoused the volunteer ethos of the GAA, he sought only for the betterment of others, and he did make a difference in the lives of others through his work in the GAA.

Just weeks previous we had bid farewell to another Rostrevor man, Liam Austin Senior, a man who also gave good service to Club and County, he managed Rostrevor to the first County Senior Title in 1976 and was a man who was in the background with County Teams in the 1970s and 80s.

Kenny Bailie was a man who gave good service to his Club Bryansford and to Down over many years. As a player he won two Ulster Club and six County Championship medals with Bryansford and played an active role in Club Activities over the years. Kenny was a member of the County Finance Committee for many years and was one of the loyal team of Gate men for both the late Billy Byrne and Hugh John Harper, in 1999 Kenny was a valued member of Gerry Dougherty's backroom team as Down Minors won the All-Ireland Title. He was a very proud man too when his son Gareth was a member of the All-Ireland winning squad of 1994.

It was in the early hours of Sunday 12th November that the news broke that Seán McCashin was dead, it sent shockwaves through the County with the news that Big Sean was gone.

Sean was our Ulster Council Delegate, PRO of the East Down Committee, he was a Referee, and he was the assistant secretary of the

Down County Committee of the LGFA. Most Important though he was husband to Annette and a much-loved father, grandfather, and brother. To his wife and family, we offer our deepest and heartfelt sympathy.

Seán McCashin was one of those people who just wanted to serve the GAA to the very best of his abilities, for him Ballykinlar and Down were his outlet in life and he wanted only to be involved, no task was ever too small for Seán, and once asked to take on any role or responsibility, you could be sure that Sean would deliver. We are lucky that there are people who only want to give their all for our Association and Sean McCashin was one such person, he gave of his time willingly to any task and in doing so he helped make a difference for those whom he encountered.

Seán's first love was Ballykinlar, and it was here where he continued the family link with the GAA, as a player and as an administrator, as a Team Selector when the Club won the Junior Championship in 1995 and as a Scór competitor when to ensure participation by the Club he featured in a two-person novelty act with his good friend James Magennis. Serving his Club in nearly every role possible, Sean strove to ensure that in dark days the Club would still remain in existence, he genuinely cared, and it was his hope too that in the not-too-distant future the Club would once again field in its own right.

Having served as an Administrator with his Club, it was only natural that Seán would then gravitate towards the East Down Committee, and it was

his proud achievement that he held every post possible on the East Down Committee, he was currently the PRO of the Committee, having in the past held every Officership, including Runaí for many years before the five-year rule was introduced. As the time of the Divisional Committees comes now to an end, Seán McCashin was to the fore in recent weeks ensuring that the Clubs received a dividend back from the East Down Committee. Sean McCashin was the man most identified with East Down, he championed the cause of East Down and its feeder Clubs and he worked tirelessly to ensure the betterment of Gaelic Games across the East of the County.

At County level, Sean represented East Down on County Committee and also served as County Youth Officer for a period, before becoming Down delegate to Ulster Council alongside Seán Rooney, indeed on Friday evening past Sean was acting as a member of an Ulster Hearings Committee, hearing a case online and sharing with the committee his many years of experience, and at all times wanting to ensure fairness. Sean served too on County Sub Committees and was always willing to assist at events, always willing to assist with a presentation or to take on any role that needed to be filled. You see Seán McCashin was one of those people who made things happen, in the past week he gave of his time to assist the pupils of St Patricks Grammar School in their organisation of the Year 8 Blitz, by being available to Referee, Seán recruited other referees to help him, and the Blitz was a great success, for when Seán asked you to do



something it was impossible to say no.

Seán had taken up refereeing in recent years and he was really enjoying the role, he enjoyed the craic with players and mentors, and at Underage games he loved the opportunity to encourage young players and for him as a referee, he was only the facilitator to let two teams play football, he would have gone at short notice to a venue, even when it might not have suited, because he did not want to disappoint thirty young boys or girls who might not get a game if no referee was there.

Seán McCashin loved Down GAA and its teams, he followed the footballers and the hurlers, and he was one of the first people you would meet at a venue anywhere in Ireland, he had also filled the role of driver for County Minor Squads and always ensuring that the young players in his care were dropped back to the door and witing to be sure that they got in the door. Seán had a word for everyone and in terms of Integration, he was ahead of his time, for he held roles on the two County Boards, his Ulster Council role on County Committee as well as being the Assistant Secretary of the Ladies County Committee, for in truth Sean just want to serve, he loved the GAA and all its facets, and he just simply wanted to be involved.

We in Down GAA, will miss him, we were lucky to have had him in our ranks and we know that he made a difference to many in the simple things that he did, for Seán McCashin it was never about the plaudits, it was about doing the wee things and doing them right, helping someone on the way and having the craic with people that he met in the world that he loved, the world of the GAA. We say thank you for Sean McCashin and the role that he played within our Association; we are the better for having had him amongst us. This

evening we will miss Seán at Convention, nearly always the first man here and never afraid to propose or second a Report, it's the wee things as we often say that we will miss about someone.

## REFLECTION

The 23rd of April is a day in my life that I will never forget, for the past two years or more a person has launched a campaign against me on the then twitter, now X, over the time it contained a lot of personal derogatory comments about me and by inference my family. In the week of the Ulster Championship Tie v Donegal, the unknown person had said on Twitter that an airplane would fly over Pairc Esler on the day of the game with a banner directed at me.

I did not believe that someone would do this and yet at 2.00pm on Sunday 23rd of April when I heard the sound of a plane approaching, I alone out of an attendance of over 9,000 people, standing there on the sideline as secretary of our great county knew what was coming. For my family in the stand watching this unfold was a horrible experience, they did not deserve this, the references to my late father and grandfather were particularly hurtful. This was to me a sinister act, to pay to fly a plane from Blackpool Airfield, to attach a banner at a landing strip outside of Killeel and then disrupt a sporting event by the volume of noise, all organised by a person I honestly do not know, I just cannot fathom it.

I just want here to say thank you to all of those people who came to my support on the day, the footballers of Down, the Officers of Down and all at Pairc Esler who stood with me on that day. To the Clubs of Down, the Counties and the GAA Family who all offered their support it meant so much to me and my family and we can only offer our thanks, to those who sent messages and what's apps

again I can only say thank you. Thankfully the GAA has many good people, who outweigh those who only ever seek to criticise.

I believe that the next six years of the decade can be momentous for Down GAA on and off the field, a great opportunity exists for us to build something and to really take us back to the top of tree. We have a road map in a Strategic Plan, we have a project in the potential that exists in Ballykinlar, and we have teams in place in Football and Hurling to take us to the next level. This is potentially a great time to be involved in Down GAA, in the next six years I expect our organisation to grow, I expect that we will have more people employed and deployed throughout the County working at developing our games.

In that time too we will deliver on our plans for Ballykinlar, we will have a centre to call our own, a centre available to our players to be the best that they can be and yet something much more, a centre that reflects a new Ireland, where we can all build a shared future.

On the field the famine at Senior Level will end, the structures are there, and the environment is being created, the Red and Black will be to the fore again and all of this in football and hurling will happen before the end of the decade.

To be involved in Down GAA in that period from 2024 to 2030 will be an exciting time, but only if we make it so, we all need now to build the unstoppable will to make it happen. We cannot sit back and leave it to the next person, we have to all play a part, this year the performances of our Senior Football Team has given us a taste of what can and might be if we build that unstoppable force. Our Hurlers with the proposed restructuring of the Allianz Leagues have an opportunity to prove once again their worth and take their

place at the top table, to welcome Liam McCarthy Cup teams to McKenna Park.

Look at the good that we do in our Clubs and tell me that we cannot transfer this to County level, the good work being undertaken in our Clubs will bring energy to our County ambitions, positive energy will drive us on, negativity will destroy the dream. The facilities in our Clubs are a credit to the work happening at grassroots day and daily, look what is happening at Carryduff and Burren with diggers on site, look what has happened at Teconnaught, look at the plans on display at Loughinisland, and tell me that there aren't exciting times ahead for Down GAA. Our Clubs are full of ambition, they are no longer able to cater with just one pitch, now our games have grown that we all now need up to four pitches a week to cater for our members, the forecast is that Ballykinlar will by 2030 need an extension! to cater for the County needs and won't that be a great position for us to be in.

**To promote what we do we need to really develop our community and business profiles, by 2030 we hope that Cooperation Ireland and the County Down Rural Community Network will have delivered programmes to the whole community and the Ballykinlar will be a vibrant base for growth and development in society. We need to improve our profile and to seek out a placement student annually in the area of creative imaging and social media, this will allow us to reach out to a greater number of people and it will also assist us in developing our links not just with communities but with business.**

**Our business profile needs developed in the next six-year period if we are to achieve what we want to achieve, and I refer back to the need here to establish a Business Forum.**

At present our Sponsorship is largely based in a 15-mile radius of Newry, we need to broaden the base and the creation of a Business Forum can be the vehicle and the catalyst to broaden that base. If we do the ground work first then, in my opinion, we can look in the future about appointing a Commercial Manager to sustain the work and to help it grow further. We also need to look at some of these roles as maybe being best suited to a part time role, where perhaps a retired person could bring the valuable commodities of experience and contacts to the role, sometimes we dismiss the grey heads too soon.

**I think too that it is important that we look at the welfare of all of our people, in the Association we focus on player welfare, and we focus on Respect for Referees, I have no issue with either, but the time is now when we need to look at the welfare of our volunteers. By volunteers I mean that everyone who takes on any role within our Association needs to be aware that someone is there for them too, the challenges now are great, the expectation is ever increasing, the demands are sometimes insatiable.**

**There has to be in my mind a support network, nationally, provincially and at County level, where volunteers feel there is someone there that cares, someone who will say to them "Tell me", and who listens. The welfare of all of our people is important, there can be no tiers of welfare, the player, the referee, the Club Officer, they will all need at times to talk, and they all deserve to be listened to and their voices heard. I hope that in 2024 we will move to have at all levels Welfare Officer to support the people who do every task possible but who sometimes just need a listening ear.**

We in Down have had lots to be proud of in 2023, individual awards

in the Under 20 Football Championship for Oisín Savage of Loughinisland and then we had four players make the Tailteann Cup Team of the Year, Pierce Laverty, Danny Magill, Odhrán Murdock, and Liam Kerr who were joined on the night by Pearse Óg McCrickard who was named on the Joe McDonagh Cup Team of the Year. It is great to see Down players pick up awards for it means that your teams are once again in the spotlight, your players are being noticed and recognised as the best amongst their peers. These are Down footballers and hurlers but first and foremost they are Club players, from Loughinisland, from Saul, from Burren and from Liatroim and to those mentors and coaches in those Clubs, you played a vital role in their development, and we thank you for your commitment and dedication.

Once again, a McNamee Award came to Down and congratulations to our PRO Paula and her team who won the Award for the best County Final Programme in 2022, we in Down have a proud history of winning McNamee Awards, indeed some of us had black hair when one was won for the Best Yearbook!

Our programmes are excellent, and we take great pride in the compilation of the publication, we like also to make the programme a collectors piece and always inclusive of gems that capture the interest of our patrons. Well done to Paula and the team and at £3.00 the Programmes are excellent value. In an era when people are moving totally to the digital world, I hope that the Down PR and Communications committee will continue to produce hard copies of quality programmes.

**In our Strategic Plan we have plans to develop our links with our Schools, already stronger links are being established with the FE colleges throughout the County and**



**this new initiative has the potential to benefit Clubs, County and College, this will be a partnership that can we hope to deliver real change. There is great work being done in our Schools, Primary and Second Level and our Coaches, Benny, Liam, Ambrose, and Mark, are not just employees, they go beyond to deliver excellent programmes in our Schools. I said in a previous report that our target had to be to make Gaelic Games the number one sport of choice in our Schools, to make that happen we have to invest, and we have to invest in people to allow us to achieve that goal.**

We can wax lyrically about the days when our Schools were winning Ulster and All Ireland titles and think back too to days when from that our County Teams were winning Provincials and All Irelands, in the interim, we have lost a generation of people who drove Gaelic Games in those Schools, Ray, Pete, Val, Gerry, Pat (RIP), PJ, Paul, Des (RIP), Barney, Liam, Hugh, to name but a few. We have a new generation of staff now in schools, they are enthusiastic, and they are doing great work, but it is different times now and they need our support.

Ronan Sheehan is giving of his time to promote Hurling in the Newry Schools and real progress is being made, could Conor Laverty do similar in a football sense? we need more people in the second level schools and would the input of these two men, County Team Managers, after all, not be a good starting point for Down GAA providing real practical support in the second level schools. It has to be worth a try.

This year the GAA addressed staffing issues and the coaching budget for Counties, this has been a welcome move and we in Down will hopefully see the benefits in the coming years. Our Staff have now better terms and conditions and a work programme

that will evolve to meet the needs of the County we hope, and Conor and the Team are looking forward to the challenges ahead. Conor and I man the Office here since March 2020 and I have to say he does a lot of unseen work for Down GAA, as the son of Eamon it is after all in the genes and now with a Coaching Plan and a Strategic Plan in place, Conor can really strive to make a difference in the Games Department.

This year at Convention we see some changes in personnel and alas one of those has been forced upon us with the passing of Seán McCashin, creating a vacancy at Ulster Council. I have paid tribute to Seán earlier in my report, rightly so and when you think of his last hours on this earth, he was engaged in GAA work, at an Ulster Hearing, Refereeing a match and then no doubt on the phone or planning a fixture programme, Seán just being Seán.

Karl Oakes is stepping down as Coaching Officer and he leaves us in a much better place, Karl has inputted into the Strategic Plan to set out a vision for the betterment of our games in football and hurling. The real benefits of the work that Karl has put in to developing a Coaching Plan will only really be felt as we develop and deliver on the Strategic Plan and as our participation levels increase across the County and people get back to enjoying Gaelic Games.

I first was involved in administration with Donal McNally in the days of the youth board when we were both still at School, Donal has decided to step down as Irish and Cultural Officer an area where he kept Scór to the fore through the difficult times during and after Covid and I thank Donal for his good work. Not alone was Donal our County Irish and Culture Officer but he also gave of his time as Club Secretary of Glenn, a man totally committed to the GAA.

PJ Quinn steps away from Coiste Banisti now at Convention as the Divisional Committees cease to exist and I thank PJ for his work as South Down Chair and his contribution in assisting at matches and events.

I hope that the above three men will not be lost to us altogether in the years to come.

The Officers of Down GAA continue to work tirelessly for the County, our Chairman John Devaney is a great support to me personally and a man who is focused on delivering on and off the field for Down. The initiation of and development of the Strategic Plan has been coordinated by John, he knows that if Down are to be successful in the next three years, then we need to have a plan and we need to have a working document. John enters his final year as Cathaoirleach, and I know that he will want to deliver on the year one aspects of the Plan, and he will most certainly want to ensure we are on site in Ballykinlar and with work ongoing. Down GAA is in good hands with John at the helm and we look forward to good progress on and off the field this year.

Down GAA are very lucky to have Diarmuid Cahill as our County Treasurer, the County finances are managed well, and we have to remember the size of the task for a volunteer when you think of the fact that we are a business with turnover in excess of £1m. Diarmuid has overseen good governance in the management of the finances and with development going to hopefully start in Ballykinlar, Diarmuid will need good support to allow him to financially manage a building project also. We need to put in place good structures to support Diarmuid, to allow him to fulfil the role in the way that he has done so to date, again I go back to previous comments when I say maybe some of the now retired grey headed generation might be willing to come onboard. Could you



give a morning or an afternoon a week to assist Diarmuid in his role? you would be supporting Down GAA, and you would be making a difference. I personally thank Diarmuid for all of his support in the past twelve months, it is greatly appreciated.

Diarmuid, John and Maureen have all been a good support to the Clubs of Down, they have each been there for Clubs when needed and they have also been there for other Officers as the need arose. There is a good team at the helm I like to think. There is good communication and respect between us all and a common goal to make Down great again.

CCC under Maureen O'Higgins and Ryan Kelly, together with Liam Quinn, deliver a first-class fixture programme for Down. At the end of 2023 all of the fixtures have been planned out for 2024, the dates will be put on the calendar next week, but for now everyone knows when they are going to have games. That is a good initiative by CCC and is the envy of other Counties, indeed the Down Fixture Programme could become a template for other counties. Maureen and Ryan will be there also to support the members of a Development CCC should the vote at Convention be passed. I thank them both for the efforts this year.

To the other members of County Executive and County Committee, I say thank you for your support in the past twelve months, you all work hard to try and ensure that Down GAA is to the fore in every area of interest and most importantly, you deliver- Thank you.

Fergus Cooper as County Children's Officer and Gary Doherty as Health and Well Being Officer do great work most of it unseen but all of it to the betterment of Down GAA. We in Down are very privileged to have someone like Fergus, with his breadth of knowledge and expertise

as our County Childrens Officer. This year Fergus delivered very important workshops for Children's Officers and ensured also that all of our Clubs were fully compliant with the Association Requirements. I urge all Clubs to ensure that they work directly with Fergus on any issue that could arise, you will get the best advice and guidance possible, and you will also get comfort in the knowledge that you have acted in the best possible interests of everyone. Safeguarding our young people is one facet of our Association that we cannot neglect in any way, they are our greatest assets, and we have a duty of care to each and every person who comes our way.

James and Mary McGrath have decided to step away as Club Draw Coordinators and these will be big shoes to fill, from the inception of the Draw, James and Mary have looked after everything to do with the draw. They took on that responsibility and when they did, you knew it was in safe hands, every ticket was meticulously checked and recorded, and every payment as logged. They put their lives on hold in the weeks/months around the Draw, they opened their home, day, and night to allow tickets to be dropped off. We will miss James and Mary and the work that they did, their work also ensured that Clubs were able to generate good income for themselves and allow projects at Clubs to happen, as a county and on behalf of our Clubs, we say thank you, James, and Mary both have made a difference to the world of Down GAA. I hope that we won't lose that level of expertise permanently, for James also was a great help to Diarmuid on the Finance Team, we cannot begrudge or deny you the break, but please let it only be temporary.

Our Team of Match day volunteers are great people, they brave the elements, they listen to the sad stories, they enjoy the craic and right

across the County, they are our gate personnel. They are a Down Team in their own right and they work so well together, their age span crosses decades, yet it never seems to matter, they are part of the Down GAA family and to them I say Thank you for all of your good work.

Pairc Esler is a Team in its own right and again it's a good place to be on Match Day and it has good people who make Match Day, be it the bright attire of John Cookson in selling the Half Time Draw Tickets, or Irelands youngest scanners, Siofra and Fionn, they all want to play a part. Aileen Smith is getting busier up the stairs and has a great word for everyone as she looks after the hospitality before matches and at half time. For Aileen, that is a labour of love, baking during the week, soup making in advance and being there hours before to be ready and to put a smile on peoples faces with a welcome Tea or Coffee. Thank you, Aileen.

In the Control Room at Pairc Esler on match day, is a hub of activity, announcements have to be made, CCTV has to be monitored, scoreboard operated, stewards organised and deployed and there is a great team of people at the helm. Led by Danny Baxenden as Event Controller, we also have Plunkett McConville on the PA, Ciaran Cranny as the deputy event controller and Child Support Officer, we also have the willing help of the McConville and Cranny families. We are though still very lucky to have with us on Match Day, Mickey Keenan who as Danny will concede is the real boss, a man with great pride in the ground that has transitioned from the Marshes – to Pairc an lúr – to Pairc Esler.

To everyone at Provincial Level and National Level in Armagh and Croke Park, I thank you for your ongoing support, we in the GAA are lucky to have quality people work for us,

people who care and are always there to offer help, people for whom the time of the day or the day of the week are secondary.

To all in Down who serve the GAA in any way, I thank you all for the good work that you do, serving your Club or your county or in many cases both. We are after all only the custodians of a great tradition, we are only following in the footsteps of people who did the same for us, but we continue to do it in the hope that others will follow us, to you all I say Thank you.

The Team at home are the people who support me every step of the way, this year Down GAA went head-to-head with Ardglass Golf Club as Teresa carried out the role of Lady Captain and it was a great honour for Teresa and on many occasions both organisations intertwined successfully. Indeed, on the 24th of May 2024, Down GAA will host a Golf Classic in Ardglass, and I know that Teresa will assist in any way possible to make the day a success.

Teresa, John, and Fiona have been there for me on every occasion this year and I have really appreciated

their support at all times. John continues to promote Football and hurling in his School Aquinas Grammar School and now he has even gone back into his generational roots coaching an Aquinas Hurling Team to a Casement Cup Final- I have though tried to assure Ronan Sheehan that his job is safe!

Fiona teaches in Scoil an Droichead in Belfast and is involved in Gaelic Games in the city, even if it is the Antrim side as a member of that great team of Gaelic Speakers Laochra Loch Lí.

2024 will be a big year for Fiona when on 13th of July she marries Ronan, one night off security duties and an Armagh man gets past me! now I need Down to get a place in the All-Ireland Series in 2024 for in the fixture calendar, the Tailteann Cup Final is fixed for 13th July, but the All-Ireland Semi Final is on 14th July!

No pressure on Conor and the Team.

So that is me, those are my thoughts on Down GAA, I hope a record of our year past, I hope a few things that might rise interest in you for the

future and I hope I give you optimism for 2024 and beyond.

The Ulster Championship campaign will begin on Saturday 13th of April when we host Antrim in Newry, thirty years will have passed since DJ Kane lifted the Anglo Celt Cup in Clones, would it not be a good year to end the famine.

Let's put our shoulders to the wheel, lets reaffirm our commitment to the values and ethos of our great association, let us turn the sod in Ballykinlar, let us start the delivery of the Strategic Plan, let us enjoy success for our County on the playing fields and let 2024 be the year when we say Down are back.

Each and every one of us has a part to play in our future and remember we are both the inheritors of a great tradition and the custodians of the present; the challenge is for us all to play our part in making the future great for Down and the family that is Down GAA.

Bealach an Dúin: Ag Obair le Chéile

**Seán Óg Mac an tSaoir  
Runaí Coiste Chontae an Dúin**



# TUARASCÁIL AN CHOISTE CEANNAIS NA GCOMORTAISÍ

Coiste Cheannais na gComortaisí an Dúin have responsibility for the organisation and management of fixtures and competitions, dealing with referees' reports, the initiation of disciplinary action and the processing of transfers and sanctions.

In 2023, there was 2 full meetings face to face and eighteen Microsoft teams meeting of the Competitions Control Committee.

The membership of the CCC is Máirín O hUiginn (Cathaoirleach), Rían Ó Ceallaigh (Rúnaí), Antaine de Burdun (An Chloch Fhada), Micheál Ó Ruairc (An Ríocht), Breandán de Rís (Cummann Pheadair Noafa), Pádraig Mac Colgán (Eanach Chluana), Seán Ó Ruanaidh (Droichead mhaigh Eo), Liam Ó Cuinn (An Bhréadach), Conchúr Mac Uait (Baile Mhic Ghalgail), Seán Óg MacAntSaoir (Mistelligh an lúr) agus Damian Marsden (Naomh Mícheál's).

The Competitions Regulations were adapted by Coiste an Contae at the meeting of 13th April 2023. The Championship and Competition Regulations were adapted by Coiste an Contae at the meeting on the 10th of August 2023.

## COMÓRTAIS/ COMPETITIONS

The All County 2023 season fixtures calendar had been planned and finalised by mid-February. CCC structured the four Senior Football Leagues with promotion and relegation, Premier Reserve and Reserve League competitions, four League divisions at both U15 and U17 football. All the League competitions would be completed, then Championship/Knockout competitions would commence at both Adult and underage levels.

The Leagues being completed before we commence Championships, is still working very well. The Senior, Intermediate and Junior Football Championships commenced 24th August and conclude on 15th October.

The coverage again provided by Down GAA TV allowed Down Gaels, both at home and abroad, the opportunity to witness all the excitement, passion, thrills, spills, and skills of are club Championships in 2023.

CCC organised two All County Premier Reserve Competitions which were played on Saturday evenings at 5pm. This time slot proved difficult at times and towards the end the league we had lot games not played, just was knock on effect from clubs request for 2 rounds of fixtures, an area we need to look at for 2024.

The Three Reserve Leagues were played on Sunday and there was a better participation in these games from 2022, the smaller leagues seemed to work well. Once these competitions were completed, CCC then organised the Premier Reserve and Reserve Football Championships, the Felix Darby Cup didn't get played this season due to the overlap of championships.

The Fr Davies Shield was played after the reserve championship was concluded, a timeframe for both competitions has already been set for 2024.

The underage All County football competitions continue to grow and thankfully there are a high volume of teams entering. We had competitive underage competitions in 2023, the 4 divisions catered for all clubs competing at different levels.

We had 4 divisions at both U15 and U17 football, Division 1 & 2 at 15 aside and Division 3 & 4 at 13 aside give clubs the opportunity to develop players and with less one-sided games, this enables clubs to complete the full fixture programme with competitive games.

CCC used the final League tables, to grade, and then planned competitions at Championship, Cup, Shield and Plate level on a League/ Knockout basis, which provided all clubs with a further of 4 or 5 games in the underage football knock out competitions.

U13 competitions were run very successfully by Divisional committees, under the guidance of CCC, the knockout competition (Mourne Cup) was run by CCC with 9 teams taking part, and this was an excellent competition with some real competitive games. CCC organised competition at U19 level prior to the start of Adult Leagues, as done in previous years.

The need to review when it would be best to fit this competition in the busy calendar is still an issue but when do we fit it in is the question... CCC also have organised U20 competitions which started in mid-October, and these will conclude in December.

In hurling, Liam Quinn and Connor Watson deserve a lot of the credit for their work on CCC in running the hurling competitions. We had two divisions in Senior Hurling Leagues in 2023. The Senior, Intermediate and Junior Hurling Championships were organised on a League/ Knockout format and concluded on 22nd October.

Underage hurling competitions were organised at U13, U15 and U17.



A breakdown of all games played was as follows:

All County Football	1528
All County Hurling	451
East Down Football	299
South Down Football	522
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,800</b>

The overall number of games that were forfeited or unfulfilled this season, accounts for 146 7% of all games on 2023.

A special thanks to all clubs who made their facilities available for games during the year and to the sponsors of our competitions.

Congratulations to clubs who achieved success at All-County league and/or championship across the two codes.

The full list of winners of All County competitions for 2023 is as follows:

Football Championships	Winners
Senior Football	Kilcoo
Intermediate Football	Liatroim
Junior Football	Drumaness
Premier Reserve	Burren 2nds
Reserve	Burren 3rds
U20 A (Patrick Dinsmore Cup)	Burren or Rostrevor
U20 B (Joe Donnan Cup)	Clonduff or Lough-inisland
Minor Championship	Mayobridge
Minor Cup	Drumgath
Minor Shield	Darragh Cross
U15 Championship	Carryduff
U15 Cup	CPN Warrenpoint
U15 Shield	Dromara
U15 Plate	Dundrum
U13 Mourne Cup	Carryduff
U15 Feile Peile na nOg Div 1 Cup	Carryduff
U15 Feile Peile na nOg Div 2 Cup	Clonduff
U15 Feile Peile na nOg Div 3 Cup	Drumgath

Hurling Championships	Winners
Senior Hurling	Portaferry
Intermediate Hurling	Bredagh
Junior Hurling	Kilclief
Betsy Gray Cup	N/P
Betsy Gray Shield	Portaferry
U20 Hurling Championship	N/P
Minor Hurling Championship	Bredagh
Minor Hurling Shield	Carryduff
U15 Hurling Championship	Castlewellan
U15 Hurling Shield	St Patrick's
U13 Hurling Championship	Liatroim
U13 Hurling Shield	Carryduff
U15 Feile na nGael Div 1	Castlewellan
U15 Feile na nGael Div 2	Ballycran
U15 Feile na nGael Div 3	St Patrick's

Football Leagues	Winners
ACFL Division 1	Carryduff
ACFL Division 2	Ballyholland
ACFL Division 3	St John's
ACFL Division 4A	St John Bosco
ACFL Division 4B	Ardlass
Felix Darby Cup (PRFL)	N/P
Premier Reserve Football League Div 1	Burren 2nds
Premier Reserve Football League Div 2	Ballyholland 2nds
Fr. Davies Cup (RFL)	Clann na Banna 2nds
Reserve Football League Div 1	Burren 3rds
Reserve Football League Div 2	Saval 2nds
Reserve Football League Div 3	St John's 2nds
U19 League Division 1	Burren
U19 League Division 2	Castlewellan
Minor League Division 1	Mayobridge
Minor League Division 2	Liatroim
Minor League Division 3	Atticall
Minor League Division 4	Bredagh B
U15 League Division 1	Burren
U15 League Division 2	Clonduff
U15 League Division 3	Drumgath
U15 League Division 4	Carryduff B

Hurling Leagues	Winners
Division 1	Liatroim
Division 2	Ballycran
Minor Hurling League Div 1	Ballygalget
Minor Hurling League Div 2	O'Rahilly's
U15 Hurling League Div 1	Castlwellan
U15 Hurling League Div 2	St Patrick's
U13 Hurling League Div 1	Ballygalget
U13 Hurling League Div 2	Croabh Rua

## AISTRITHE/TRANSFERS

All transfer applications submitted to CCC for consideration in advance of the 31st of March deadline.

There were 61 transfer applications made in 2023, 57 granted & 4 not granted. From the applications that were not granted, 1 of those decisions was appealed to County Hearings Committee – appeal was unsuccessful.

In my first year it has been a great learning experience and has given me the insight to see how things work in the finer detail and how we can adjust along with the clubs to keep improving.

I would like to thank Máirín O hUiginn (Cathaoirleach) and all the members of the Coiste Cheannais na gComortaisí an Dúin for all their help and assistance.

To all the clubs officials that have helped and assisted me in the duties this role, I would also like to say thank you. Also, a big thank you to Sean Og for his help and

support all in 2023.

Finally, it's still with a heavy heart I write this. The sad and sudden passing of my friend and colleague Sean McCashin just left the GAA world in shock. Sean was the only reason I got the opportunity to get into the administration within the GAA, he talked me into (some may say begged) to join the East Down Committee. I have never looked back since near 10 years ago, enjoying the GAA more and more each season. I am lucky to be involved. The tribute penned by Sean Og covers everything Sean gave to the GAA and never looked anything back, he was just a GAA man and everything that is so good within our association.

Again, my sincere condolences to Annette, Richard, and the entire family circle as they come to terms with his passing, he will never be forgotten.

Is mise le meas  
Rían Ó Ceallaigh  
(Rúnaí)



## REFEREES ADMINISTRATION REPORT

2023 has been a particularly busy year for referee's administration 2376 fixtures in football 488 in hurling which were covered by an active group of 67 referees in football and 21 in hurling, I would like to acknowledge the commitment and dedication shown by our referees in getting these games covered. I would appeal to all our clubs to actively seek out volunteers to take up the role of refereeing because we will in the not too distant future be facing a situation where we can't get our games covered.

We have 12 clubs who don't have an active referee at adult or juvenile level, we have clubs who play in all codes and don't supply referees for some of these codes yet they all expect their games to be covered, this is unsustainable, county committee must address this issue with immediate effect, sanctions are in place in a lot of counties against clubs who don't have referees we must look at this option urgently.

This year we trained 6 new referees and I thank them for volunteering for the role it is the job of referee's administration to ensure that these

volunteers are helped and supported as their careers develop and try to ensure that they aren't lost to us due to a bad experience in their early games, we need to instil in our players and supporters a respect for our officials which in recent times is becoming a major problem in retaining referees.

The GAA nationally and in Ulster has developed a referee pathway for our referees to follow should they wish to advance their careers to the provincial and national arenas and I would hope that we have young referees who will advance to these levels in the coming years.

I wish to place on record my thanks to our referee's administration committee namely Donal Mc Cormick (Chairman) Seamus Ryan, Colliie Quinn, Francie Mc Grath for their work in appointments which involves a lot of meetings on a very regular basis during the height of the season also Liam Quinn who along with Conor Watson looks after all our hurling appointments, we as a group are meticulous in ensuring that all games are covered in as fair a way as

we can to both our referees and all our clubs.

Thanks to Brendan Rice for his work in tutoring our new recruits and for his work nationally as a tutor and advisor and Con Reynolds and Cathal O Flynn both national advisors thank you both.

I would like to thank Eamon Fitzsimmons for his work as a provincial and national advisor and has stood down this year, we wish him well and hope that he continues to offer his invaluable experience to us here in Down.

Thanks to our referees we hope you enjoy a well earned rest over the next while, get the batteries charged for the new season which is just around the corner.

We lost a great friend recently in Sean Mc Cashin, RIP Sean on behalf of us all.

Is mise  
**Sean O Ruanaidh**  
**Referees Administrator**



# HURLING OFFICERS REPORT

## FIXTURES

During the season CCC organised 451 hurling matches for adults and juveniles and 28 blitzes for the youngest age groups. Matches for adults and u13/u15/u17 were all covered by referees. Matches at the u7.5 to u11.5 blitzes were refereed by club coaches. All leagues were finished before the July break with championships starting after the break. All championships now include a league element ensuring that players get games through to September at least.

In 2023 CCC dealt with 50 hurling disciplinary cases, up slightly from 47 in 2022.

## COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIPS

The three adult County Finals were hosted at Pairc Esler over the weekend of 21st/22nd October.

The Intermediate Final took place on the Saturday after the Ireland v Scotland Shinty/Hurling International and Bredagh beat near neighbours Carryduff by 13 points.

In the Junior Final our youngest club, East Belfast, met one of our oldest, Kilclief, in what was the East Belfast club's first ever County Final. In the end the experience of Kilclief got them over the line and they won by 9 points.

For the sixth year in a row Ballycran faced Portaferry in the Senior final and as usual it was a very close game. A late surge from holders Portaferry won them the game and they went on to meet Cushendall in the Ulster SHC semi-final. Leading by 3 late into added time they were unfortunate to concede a goal and lost out to the Antrim champions in extra time.

In the Ulster IHC, Bredagh lost by a point to Antrim champions Creggan Kickhams while in the JHC Kilclief were beaten by Swatragh (Derry).

The new structure for our hurling championships is an improvement on the systems we had previously but I still think it can be further improved to make the Senior Championship more competitive and improve standards at Junior level.

At juvenile level all 3 championships were again won by non Ards clubs. Bredagh retained the Minor championship, Castlewellan won the u15s and Liatroim won the u13 cup.

## COUNTY TEAMS

With a number of senior players retiring or unavailable this season was always going to be about consolidation for the senior county team. They avoided relegation from a very competitive National Hurling League Division 2A and won their final Joe McDonagh Cup match away to Kildare to remain in this competition next year. A good outcome in the circumstances.

The u20s lost to Roscommon in the Richie McElligot Cup semi-final while the Minors were beaten by Meath and Westmeath in the Leinster MHC tier 2. The management teams for senior, u20 and minor have all been re-appointed and are preparing for the new inter county season.

## ULSTER HURLING DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

I attended all four of the Ulster HDC meetings arranged during the year. The main issues discussed were inter County fixtures, County Academy Squads, Celtic Challenge and the Tain league competition.

## SCHOOLS

Coaching continues in the local schools with competitions organised by Ulster Colleges GAA. It is particularly encouraging to note the return of hurling to St Louis, Kilkeel, St Mark's, Warrenpoint and St Joseph's Newry.

## FEILE NA GAEL

The County Feile Na Gael u15 hurling festival was held on 15th April. The event was hosted once again by Portaferry who welcomed 10 other clubs to the Ards peninsula. As usual the Portaferry committee and volunteers did a fantastic job ensuring everything ran to schedule. The competitions finished up early in the afternoon and it turned out to be an historic day for the Castlewellan club who won Feile for the first time and went on to represent Down at the National event.

## HURLING IN THE MOURNE AREA

Coaching has been taking place at An Riocht since the end of 2022 with good interest from boys across the Mourne clubs. After a primary schools naming competition, it was agreed to form an amalgamation called Clann Mhun to provide hurling for boys from An Riocht, Atticall, Ballymatin, Glasdrumman and Longstone.

The team made its first appearance at a blitz at Dunavil on 6th May and travelled to blitzes throughout the County during the season.

### **HURLING REFEREES**

There is a severe shortage of hurling referees within the county and if clubs cannot provide potential referees to be trained during the closed season, we will not be able to provide the extensive programme of fixtures players have enjoyed over the past few years.

Bad behavior towards referees remains a serious problem, not just in Down hurling but throughout the Association. Without referees we cannot play our National game and at a time when we are unable to recruit sufficient referees treating those we have badly, will not encourage new referees to join the ranks. I expect CCC to continue to punish those reported for misconduct towards referees.

### **THANKS**

Can I express my thanks to Maureen O'Higgins, Ryan Kelly, Conor Watson and the other members of Down CCC for their help and support during the season.

Thanks also to our County Secretary, Sean Og McAteer, for his wise advice and guidance throughout the year. Can I also thank the hurling referees, club secretaries and all of the host clubs without whom we could not deliver our program of games.

**Liam O'Coinn/Liam Quinn**  
**Hurling Officer**  
**Down GAA**



# CHILDREN'S OFFICERS REPORT

Safeguarding children within the GAA is the number one priority for all of us in the county, and not just the officers of our clubs. They say it takes a village to educate a child and likewise, safeguarding requires every one of us to be vigilant and to play our part.

As the threat from Covid has receded our games have got back to a new normal with a full calendar of games and competitions and excellent work being done with our Go Games at club level. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that many children still struggle with the adverse impact Covid had on their education and social development. I'm indebted to the many GAA volunteers and those within our schools who have provided emotional wellbeing support to these young people.

## **SAFEGUARDING TRAINING**

On the training front I am grateful to Development Manager Conor O'Toole and fellow tutor Seamus Ennis, who between them have delivered all of our face to face safeguarding workshops. We continue to strike a balance offering the option of online SG1 training and/or face to face. I'm delighted to see the demand for face to face sessions rising almost to pre-pandemic levels.

In 2023 to date we have delivered;

- Face to Face Safeguarding 1 training: 50 courses
- Face to Face Safeguarding 2: 2 courses
- Face to Face Safeguarding 3: 1 course
- Face to Face Safeguarding Seminars: 1
- Anti – Bullying Workshops: 2
- Virtual Online Safeguarding 1: 8 courses

Seamus Ennis is now an approved tutor for all 3 safeguarding courses.

## **APRIL 2023 SAFEGUARDING: MANAGING RISK CONFERENCE**

In April, ahead of the GAA bi-annual Risk Assessment Survey, we held a Safeguarding Managing Risk half day conference in St John's GAA. The conference was open to all Designated Liaison Persons and Children's Officers and just over 60 people were in attendance. I'm grateful to all who attended and to our speakers including: John Devaney; Seamus Ennis; Maeve McNeill and Jennifer Turtle.

Jennifer is an experienced social worker and provided advice and background on what happens when a DLP makes a statutory referral via the Gateway social work team. We would ask that all clubs would inform and consult with the Ulster Safeguarding Manager Bernie Fox, who can best guide them on statutory referrals whether to the PSNI or the Gateway team. The feedback from the conference was very good and there is an appetite for further such opportunities to bring together the club Children's Officers and DLPs for development and discussions in addition to safeguarding training. Copies of speakers slides were circulated after the event to all clubs. In consultation with club officers we will look at some topics for the next conference.

## **GAA RISK ASSESSMENT SURVEY**

This time round almost all clubs in Down completed the online bi-annual GAA Risk Assessment Survey on time. I only had one or two clubs to chase up for late filing. The survey gives us a snapshot of safeguarding compliance and risk and affords the GAA the opportunity to analyse and to determine the degree to which safeguarding education is working and where changes may be needed. Additionally, the GAA is extending the existing capabilities of Foireann in this jurisdiction to enable appropriate administrators in clubs to view records on Access NI certification and safeguarding and coaching course records. We hope that this will become available in early 2024.

## **DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS**

All clubs will have to deal with complaints relating to children's welfare at some time. The most common parental complaint is around children's playing time and I'm aware that many Children's Officers find this especially challenging. In November I attended the National County Children's Officers safeguarding conference in Portlaoise. We were made aware that there are a number of revisions to the Code of Behaviour that are coming and specifically in this regard the Code of Behaviour now refers to each child being entitled to "meaningful playing time." The guidance provided indicates that coming on for 5 minutes at the end of a game does not constitute meaningful playing time. Another area where policy and guidelines are being revised is in relation to social media. This is welcome news as I know several clubs this year have sought advice around issues in relation to the use/misuse of social media, to mobile phones, photography and videography.

As the County Children's Officer I am frequently contacted by club CO's seeking advice in handling a complaint and often these are resolved satisfactorily at club level. However, I do get referrals and complaints where clubs have failed to conclude an investigation appropriately and in a timely fashion. Many of these I am still able to conclude informally through guidance and mediation. However, it never ceases to amaze me when clubs dig their heels in claiming they have dealt with a complaint appropriately, only for me to find at an early stage that this is not the case and a child member's needs are not met.

Can I remind everyone that we are charged with delivering in "the best interests of the child" and not the club, regardless of the personalities involved.

A number of cases were referred on by me to the County Determining Committee and subsequently were dealt with under rule by the CCCC. By their very nature as referrals where a club has failed to act appropriately, they can take time to investigate and ultimately action. I can think of at least two cases in the last 12 months where this was the case with parents and children left wondering what is happening.

Separately, I would like to commend a number of clubs, their Children's Officers and DLPs who had significant child welfare issues to deal with but handled them appropriately. When the advice received from Bernie Fox Ulster Safeguarding Manager was to refer to the authorities the DLPs acted quickly and responsibly.

When referrals are made clubs may not hear back what the outcome of such a referral is. Nevertheless, they can be reassured that the club has fulfilled its statutory duty and acted in the best interest of the child or children. Last year I reported that a new directive requires all

clubs and counties to inform the GAA National Safeguarding Officer, Michelle Harte, even before investigation where there is the potential for a child assault case resulting from an underage game. A couple of such referrals have had to be made in the last year. I repeat the guidance which is that should an adult lay so much as a hand on a child from an opposing team during or after a game then they leave themselves open to being charged with assault.

### **SPECIAL THANKS**

I'd like to record my thanks to all Children's Officers in the county for their sterling work and continued vigilance. It is not an easy role to fulfil and every year brings fresh challenges as we seek to educate and develop new volunteers, mentors, coaches, officials, committees, parents, guardians and young people. I'd like to thank the Investigations and Determining Committees led by Seamus Ennis and Sean Rooney.

The Determining Committee ratified this year is Seamus Ennis (GAA), Anthony Crozier (LGFA) and Patricia Hollywood (Camogie).

The Safeguarding Hearings Committee is Sean Rooney (GAA), Stephen Magorrian (LGFA) and Deirdre McGrath (Camogie).

I would especially like to thank Seamus Ennis and Conor O'Toole for their heavy lifting when it comes to training. And finally, thanks to Bernie Fox, Kayleen Iwasaki and Michelle Harte at Ulster and National level for their patient support and advice to me across the year.

**Fergus Cooper**  
**Down County Children's**  
**Officer**[officerensofficer.down@gaa.ie](mailto:officerensofficer.down@gaa.ie)



# DOWN GAA COACHING & GAMES REPORT

Coaching & Games Report to County Convention 2023

There have been many structural changes within the GAA at national level, relating to staffing, resourcing, and funding, the benefits of which will hopefully begin to become evident across 2024.

## DOWN GAA STRATEGIC PLAN (COACHING AND GAMES)

On Tuesday 10th September, Down GAA launched its new 3-year Strategic Plan in the St Patrick's Heritage Centre, in Downpatrick.

The strategy document prioritises 5 key areas, with Coaching and Games Development being recognised as one of these.

Our long-term goal within Coaching and Games is to create a high-quality coaching and games system that leads to sustained improvements in playing standards across schools, clubs and county, whilst driving participation.

Within the Coaching and Games Framework, our focus over the next 3 years, leading into 2026, will be;

1. Coaching and Games Infrastructure
2. Participation – Clubs, Schools, and Competitions
3. Talent Coaching & Player Pathway
4. Staffing and Resourcing

The timing of the launch of the new strategy document dovetails nicely with the completion of an ongoing HR review process which the GAA has been carrying out since 2019.

In recent months the Association, at national level, has brought about significant changes in the employment structures that exist at all levels within the GAA.

The knock-on effect of this will be an increased provision of Coaching and Games Funding being released to the County in 2024, which will greatly aid our ability to work towards achieving our strategic goals over the next 36 months.

The county recognises the need for significant investment in Coaching and Games, through increased provisions of staffing and resources over the incoming years. We would hope to see the first stage of this commencing in early 2024.

## DOWN GAA PRIMARY SCHOOLS COACHING PROGRAMME:

Our newly titled Participation Officers, Ambrose Rogers, Benny Coulter, Liam Hardy and Mark Poland continue to promote our games on a daily basis across the primary school sector of County Down. We are fortunate as a County to have such experienced and esteemed staff members on our side.

Supported by Danny Toner and Liam Eoin Campbell from Ulster GAA, we have been supporting more than 50 primary schools and over 5000 children, across 2023.

We have welcomed a number of new and old schools into our programme in the past 12 months – but we will always welcome more.

I would encourage our local clubs to engage with their feeder primary schools and enquire if they are availing of the coaching support that we offer.

We need to ensure that Gaelic Games remain the number one sport of choice in our primary and post primary schools at all times.

## DOWN GAA TALENT ACADEMY SQUADS:

2023 was a positive year for our talent Academy Squads. All our Academy teams had a full and thorough programme of activities, both from and competitive games and preparation perspective.

Down GAA was delighted to team up with BÍA, a Belfast based Strength and Conditioning organisation who are now well embedded as our official Athletic Development Partners, across the large majority of Academy and representative teams.

The physical preparation of our teams has been previously identified as an area for concern, and so the addition of this level support will no doubt reap huge rewards for us as a County.

BÍA have already made significant inroads in terms of the testing, profiling, and programming of our players across the past 12 months. They have access to state-of-the-art technologies to ensure that all our players are being properly assessed and managed for maximal athletic output. The off field work they have carried out over the past 12 months has really complimented the efforts of our squad coaches who, as always gave their all for Down GAA.



In 2023, Down GAA fielded in the following Talent Academy Squads:

- U15 Hurling
- U15 Football (2 squads)
- U16 Hurling
- U16 Football

The addition of a new u16 Hurling Squad in 2023 served to highlight the positive improvements taking place with our Academy Squad framework.

We have many great people involved with our Squads at present times;

#### **U15 HURLING MANAGEMENT TEAM:**

- Danny Toner
- Brian McAlinden
- Joe Dorrian
- Joe Cosgrave

#### **U15 FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT TEAM:**

- Ambrose Rogers
- Karl Oakes
- Conor Deegan
- Tiarnan Devlin
- Kieran Convie
- Kevin McClorey

#### **U16 HURLING MANAGEMENT:**

- Nigel O'Brien
- Graham Clarke
- Terry Connolly
- Ryan Harrison
- Nicholas Dunne
- Danny Toner

#### **U16 FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT:**

- Joe Tunney
- John Morgan
- Conor Fitzpatrick
- Mark Poland

The undoubted onfield highlight of the 2023 Talent Academy campaign was our u15 Footballers winning the All-Ireland u15 Brian McLernon title, defeating Tyrone in an enthralling final on August 12th, in Derrylaughan, Co. Tyrone.



Congratulations to all involved with this success. Hopefully this bodes well for our u17 Footballers chances in the coming seasons.

Our u16 Footballers also progressed to the Shield Final of the Buncrana Cup, only to lose narrowly to hosts, Donegal, on August 12th, in Buncrana GAC. We enjoyed a great Easter Camp in St Patrick's GS Downpatrick for all members of the 2023 Down u15 and u16 Football Squads.

This was followed by a super 2-day camp for u15 and u16 Hurlers in RGU Downpatrick in the first week of August, in preparation for their final competitive outings of the season.

Work for the 2024 Talent Academy season is already well underway with 2 x u14 Football camps being held in the Abbey CBS Newry and St Patrick's GS Downpatrick over the Halloween holidays as part of the initial trialling process for the 2024 u15 Football Squad.

We would like to place on record our huge gratitude to all of the coaches and mentors listed above for their unwavering commitment to the Down GAA cause over the past 12 months. These are people who willingly volunteer their time in a bid to drive the Talent Academy Programme forward within our County.

### **2023 CAMP ACTIVITY:**

The Kellogg's GAA Cúl Camps have been an integral part of the Summer Programme in Down, for many, many years now.

Back in our pre-covid peak, the camps were attended by more than 6,000 children annually, with nearly all of our 48 clubs hosting a camp, at some point across the 8 weeks of Summer.

The Covid Lockdown brought about a tightening of legislation around adult:child ratios and the number of kids permitted to attend a camp on a single pitch. These changes have dictated that we go about delivering the Kellogg's Cúl Camp programme in a different way in recent years.

The club-based model that we have adopted over the past 2 summers, like everything, has its pros and cons. We understand that it places an extra pressure on clubs to secure staffing for their camp, however it also provides a stream of young, qualified coaches that the club can in turn utilise on a longer term within their own coaching teams. Alternatively, it provides each club with an opportunity to offer at least 1 week of employment to its membership base across the week of camp.

### **DOWN COUNTY GAA ANNUAL CONVENTION 2023**

The change in structure has caused us to lose some clubs from the programme in recent years. Some clubs have chosen to run camps internally, whilst others have welcomed outside agencies into their club grounds to run camps on their behalf. We would love to see all of our clubs engage with the national camp programme in 2024. We will be reviewing our method of delivery to see what small teaks or changes, if any, may be possible that might attract some of those clubs to make a return.

I would strongly encourage those clubs who have opted out in recent times to reach out and initiate conversation around a possible return to the programme in 2024. We in Down GAA will do all we can to try and support, help and make possible. The 8-week camp programme is the highlight of the Coaching and Games calendar for many parents, children and coaches alike. It is the one programme that unites the association entirely across all 32 counties and beyond.

We would like to offer a heartfelt thank you to the clubs who have continued to support and engage with the programme over summer 2023. Any programme that engages with over 3500 kids is a worthwhile one, and one that we most take great pride from.

Plans for the 2024 camp programme will commence early in the new year. We look forward to working closely with you all again, and hopefully see a return from some other clubs as well.

### **2023 COACH EDUCATION PROGRAMME:**

In 2023, Down GAA has facilitated the delivery of the following coach education courses & workshops:

- Face to Face GAA Safeguarding 1 Courses: 50
- Face to Face GAA Safeguarding 2 Courses: 2
- Face to Face Safeguarding 3 Courses: 1
- Face to Face Safeguarding Seminars: 1
- Virtual Online Safeguarding 1 Courses: 8
- Introduction To Coaching Gaelic Games FOOTBALL: 15
- Introduction To Coaching Gaelic Games HURLING: 3
- Level 1 GAA Coaching Awards: 3
- Specialised Coaching Workshops: 12
- Coach The Coaches Sessions: 6

The past 12 months have been extremely busy from a Coach Education viewpoint. The backlog created by the covid lockdown led a huge need for the delivery of not only coaching courses, but in particular Safeguarding workshops.



Across the course of 2023, to date, we have delivered 50 face to face SG1 workshops and 9 virtual SG1 workshops, in a county that has only 48 clubs. We must commend the efforts in particular, of our Club Children's Officers who relentlessly ensure that all of their coaches meet basic minimum requirements before they are involved on the training field with children. We have been required to deliver multiple courses in some clubs over the past 12 months as new and returning volunteers assume positions of responsibility in their clubs.

We would like to say a special word of thanks to Seamus Ennis from Ballycran, for his assistance with the delivery of the Safeguarding 1 and 2 workshops.

The demand for Safeguarding 1 training that we as a county have encountered over the past 12 months has surpassed anything we have ever experienced before. It would not have been possible for us to meet this demand had it not been for Seamus' willingness to deliver, often at short notice, across the length and breadth of our County.

Seamus is held in highest regard by Ulster GAA and has been drafted in on several occasions to deliver both Safeguarding 1 and Safeguarding 2 training in other Ulster Counties. Additionally, we would like to thank our Coach Education Tutors, Ryan McShane, Pierce Caherty, Danny Toner, Oisin MacManus and Eamonn Blaney for their assistance with the delivery of courses over the past 12 months.

We are delighted that Ambrose Rogers has also now qualified as Coach Ireland Coach Developer (Tutor) and will be assisting with the delivery of our Coach Education Courses moving forward. We are encouraged by the recent demand from our clubs to host Award 1 Courses internally.

It is imperative that our clubs continue to raise the standards of their coaches on an ongoing basis. Coupled with our formal Coach Education Awards, much of the early part of 2023 focused on the delivery of a number of informal specialised coaching workshops and clinics, including;

- Innovative Methods of Coaching Basic Nursery Principles
- GAA Sprint Mechanics & Speed Development Workshop
- Fitness Testing the Club Player
- Down GAA Performance Coaching Programme (3 sessions)
- Down GAA Goalkeeping Workshop (2 sessions)
- Introduction to Performance Analysis

There is huge demand within our County for learning opportunities. It is our hope to engage with all our clubs before the end of 2023 to gather an insight into what kind of support our clubs would like to avail off across the incoming year.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

A note of thanks must be directed towards our 4 Participation Officers, Liam Hardy, Benny Coulter, Ambrose Rogers and Mark Poland, who continue to act as fantastic ambassadors for the GAA in Down.

Their work is tiring and requires them to be available on evenings and weekends, promoting our games in schools and clubs around the County. We thank them for their ongoing efforts and it doesn't go unnoticed.

Thank You to the all the school principals and teachers who work so closely with our staff across the Academic year.

Thank You to our volunteer club secretaries, coaches, mentors, managers, Children's Officers, Coaching Officers and Cul Camp Coordinators who assist the full time staff at all times in the delivery of programmes of work at all times throughout the year.

Thank You to our Talent Academy coaches, players and their parents and guardians who give their all representing Down, with distinction across the course of the year. We hope that you have enjoyed this experience and that it has ignited a desire within you all to continue your journey with Down GAA, from the juvenile ranks through to Senior level.

Thank You to the senior officers of Down GAA who often don't get the recognition their efforts deserve. It is reassuring to know that we have your support always, making our jobs possible.

On a day-to-day basis, our County Secretary, Sean Óg McAteer works closely with the coaching department offering much needed advice, support and guidance. He is never unreachable at any time, day or night.

As enjoyable, busy and fruitful as 2023 has been, it draws to a close on a sombre note, following the untimely passing of our friend Sean McCashin. Sean has worked hand in hand with the Coaching & Games Department in a variety of roles over the years from his time as long serving County Youth Officer to his more recent venture into the world of refereeing.

Sean was gentleman and a true GAA man. He will be sorely missed by us all.

**Karl Oakes (County Coaching Officer) & Conor O'Toole (County Games Development Manager)**

## HEALTH AND WELL BEING

The Irish Life GAA Healthy Club programme proudly supported by Irish Life and Healthy Ireland, has grown from a small pilot in 2013 involving just 16 clubs to engaging 450 clubs in 2023. The Healthy Club project aims to help GAA clubs explore how they support the holistic health of their members and the communities they serve. GAA clubs already contribute to the health and wellbeing of their members by providing opportunities to develop their physical, social, emotional, and psychological health.

The project aims to help GAA clubs identify what they are already doing well, identify areas where they can or would like to improve, and empower them to ensure that everyone who engages with their club benefits from the experience in a health-enhancing way, be they players, officers, coaches, parents, supporters, or members of their local community.

The Healthy Club model, which is based on best national and international practice, also aims to embed a healthy philosophy in a club while integrating health into the day-to-day club activities in a sustainable way. It also aims to place the local GAA club at the heart of the community, making it a beacon for health in the locale. Several of the Clubs within the county have been linking in with Community and voluntary groups to provide workshops, concentrating on anxiety, depression and other mental health issues.

Clubs are supporting all of their members in different ways, by listening to what their members are asking for and supplying. One of the biggest and most successful workshops has been the dementia workshop, which has been delivered by Roisin Coulter from Ballygalget GAC and Alzheimer's UK. Dementia

is an issue which impacts across all of our communities. There are over 20,000 people with dementia in Northern Ireland. People with dementia here are more likely to get a diagnosis than anywhere else in the UK, but there is still a huge amount to do to improve the care and support they get and to create dementia friendly communities.

Sometimes people need just a little support to go about their daily lives. The Dementia Friendly Communities programme challenges stigma and misconceptions about dementia, increases awareness and understanding in the community and improves access to community facilities for people with dementia.

Community and Voluntary Groups such as Suicide Down to Zero, provide SAFETALK and Assist training, TAMHI (Tackling of Mental Health Issues) provide training and support for young people. The Well in Atticall is a community wellness hub, which provides a range of services to support mental health and emotional wellbeing in the Kilkeel area. The highly skilled team can support during a crisis to individuals or organisations, meeting immediate, short and long term needs as required.

Healthy Clubs and Healthy club officers aim to support our clubs and as a club we support the local community as our clubs are a safe place and the centre of our community. Healthy Clubs are the future for all clubs in Down and going into 2024 the Healthy Club Committee will be developing the Whole Club approach to ensure we, as a community maintain, the health and wellbeing of our members.

Clubs are invited to submit expressions of interest to join the Irish Life GAA Healthy Club programme. The next phase of the

programme will see new clubs commence their journey in March 2024.

The Healthy Club journey takes 18 months to complete and requires clubs to appoint a Healthy Club officer and project team. Clubs follow a seven-step process to become a healthy club. Clubs must document their progress on an online Healthy Clubs Portal and when verified, they will gain recognition as a Foundation Level Healthy Club. Clubs have the option to maintain Foundation level healthy status or proceed to Silver and/or Gold based on their club capacity and willingness. Clubs are required to submit reports every 18 months- 2 years to maintain their status.

To apply to join the Irish Life GAA Healthy clubs programme, clubs must fill out an expression of interest form at <https://healthyclubs.gaa.ie/>.

Clubs will be then required to complete the subsequent application form, which requires club secretary sign off. Applications will close on January 5th; therefore, all applications must be complete and submitted by this date.

The Healthy Clubs Application Timeline is as follows.

1. Application Phase: 18th November 2023- 5th January 2024
2. Club Notification: Week Commencing 15th January 2024
3. Healthy Club Officer Training (online): 21st February 2024
4. Orientation Day for New Clubs: Sat March 9th in Croke Park at 10am – 2.30pm

**Go Raibh Maith Agat  
Gearoid O Dochartaigh**

# OIFIGEACH CAIDRIMH PHOIBLÍ REPORT FROM PUBLIC RELATIONS, COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

2023 season started with win for our Senior Footballers in the Dr McKenna Cup with a trip to Monaghan and our hurlers returned to action in the same month with McGurk Cup trip to Dub to take on the hosts QUB.

The compact calendar for both football and hurling in the next few months ensured our PR team had an intense period of activity. It was great too to be able to meet in person, whilst still having the benefits of being able to have Zoom or Teams meetings where necessary.

For us as Down people being part of the media team on level 7 in Croke park on Tailteann Cup Final day was a highlight for several of our committee members, it was a great privilege, and it was nice that people could avail of that experience.

Our media night held in Paric Esler prior to the final was a great success and meeting and working with National and Provincial Media, not forgetting our own locals, was a great experience both in Newry and Croke Park.

A highlight this season was undoubtedly our open evening held in Paric Esler ahead of the Tailteann Cup Final. An evening that saw hundreds of Down fans arrive in Newry to meet and greet the Men in Red and Black. There was great excitement for many of our young boys and girls, who might have left for home soaked from the terrible rain but delighted that they got to train with our Senior Footballers.

We look forward to what 2024 will bring for our footballers and Hurlers on the field.

## CLUB PRO WORKSHOPS

At the beginning of the year, one of the committee's main aims was to streamline the coverage of our county championships across all levels to ensure consistency.

Having spoken to clubs and their PR committees and building on previous meetings, we held an in-person workshop in the lead up to the county championships.

Working closely with Club PROs during Championship season was also a major focus for us as a committee highlighting the importance of twitter in reaching a diverse audience with live scores and updates and also building up momentum ahead of club matches.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Following on from the club championship workshops, the use of Twitter or as it is now X was the main focus for coverage due to its ability to reach a vast number of people quickly. Facebook and Instagram were used for more detailed information and graphics, ably coordinated by Richie Reynolds.

With almost 42,000 followers on X, it was agreed that Aisling McGivern would continue to operate the updating system on the network, which involved three groups – senior, intermediate, and junior (for hurling and football) with a club representative in each group who would provide score updates at 15 mins, half time, 45 mins and full time, this would then be re-tweeted on our county twitter. At semi-final and final stages, the matches were covered live on X, this task was coordinated by Dermot Donnelly who did an excellent job. This aspect of

the 2023 championship coverage proved to be a very important and successful tool in the updating of scores and this would not have been possible without the input of our clubs in each of the groups.

There was an endless amount of work which went on in the background with a weekly twitter rota being sent to our PR committee covering all football and hurling matches, from Junior right through to Senior, with some weekends seeing upwards on 20 matches needing covered.

Everyone loves a photo and the Fan zone pics proving to be a big hit on Facebook and this year we introduced this also at half time of our live games streamed on Down GAA TV, special thanks goes to all those who provided fantastic photos with thousands of Gaels at matches being captured and viewed by a wider audience. A special thanks to our two new additional photographers.

My sincere thanks to the fantastic PR team consisting of Aisling McGivern, Richie Reynolds, Dermot Donnelly, Peter McGrath Jnr, Laura McCaul, Oliva McConaghy Seamus Boyd, Paul Rooney, Christopher Morgan, who work tirelessly behind the scenes and make my job much easier.

## DOWNGAA.TV

September 2021 saw the launch of Down GAA. TV, something which we are immensely proud of. This platform enabled us to service the Gaels of our county and further afield. DownGAA.TV offered a live and delayed coverage of many matches and in our third year we were able to successfully cover over 45 games.



We were delighted to be able to stream the Down Senior Camogie final in conjunction with Down Camogie board.

As with everything, there are learning curves, improvements and customer feedback which has enabled us to continue to improve our service and one of our main aims for 2024 is to continue to further develop this service.

Behind the scenes, a professional team of hard working, skilled and knowledgeable people worked tirelessly to ensure that everything from the microphones to the live commentary and streaming were as high quality as possible.

We had an excellent team of very reliable commentators, co-ordinated by Paul Doran Football and Conor Watson Hurling, who were always willing to go the extra mile to enhance coverage. GAA Championship time can be a serious business, but they also put a smile on every match with some very memorable one-liners. Enthusiasm

is infectious and the success of our commentary team has encouraged others to take the microphone next year.

Thanks to all the team: Gary Savage, Graham Clarke, Karol Keating, Ronan Sheehan, Eamon Mulvenna, Ryan Doyle, Ciaran Brannigan, Patsy Russell, Desi Kennedy, Pete McGrath, John Fegan, Mark McCartan, Francis Rogan, Bernard Brannigan, Ciaran McCartan, Mark Doran, Paul McGrath and two new additional members Caoimhe Sloan and Meghan Doherty.

The hardworking duo of Richie Reynolds and Diarmuid Cahill spent many hours and late nights making sure we had a clear and consistent message over all our media channels and ensured that our TV, social media and live promotional graphics, interviews and footage were top quality.

DownGAA.TV are grateful for the support and expertise of our streaming partners at Wiistream; special thanks to Pa Magee, Mike

Price, & Fionn Herilly. I also extend our thanks to Dara McCoy and his team at DMC Media, Danny Turley, and his team at Performa sports for all their work in delivering a great production. DownGAA.TV provided a fantastic service to many who were unable to join us, and we look forward to reaching out to an even bigger audience in 2024.

Our youth volunteer teams, were a welcome addition to our team in updating the score board and aiding the commentators, media in the Press box and assisting in the sales of half-time draw tickets and programmes.

## PROGRAMMES

From the beginning of Championship, programmes were produced for all our games and up to semi-final stages these were all available online. In early rounds of championship this is an enormous task, Club secretaries and PRO assistances have proved vital in achieving this task.

Full coloured programmes were produced for finals and available at our grounds. Thanks to everyone who helped in these productions.

This year members of our committee Dermot Donnelly, Peter McGrath, Ryan Doyle, and I visited clubs ahead of championship finals, where photos and live footage were gained to help further promote clubs' achievements. Getting to meet and have a chat proved a valuable exercise in getting to know all our captains/players/managers before County Final Day.

The highlight of our year came when news broke that we had won the 2022 McNamee award for best County final Programme 2022.

Massive thanks to all involved in this fantastic production which was chosen as the best in Ireland. It was a very proud moment for me as County PRO to accept this award from Uathrathrán CLG Larry McCarthy on behalf of Down GAA.

## RECRUITMENT

We need more people to assist with all aspects of PR in the County and we particularly appeal to the young and the retired, you may have a skill set that would be of help to us, you may just have enthusiasm to get

involved, you may be an amateur photographer or videographer.

Whatever that you think you can offer we would welcome your help, please contact [pro.down@gaa.ie](mailto:pro.down@gaa.ie), for the new season is only weeks away and you could be on our team.

## CONCLUSION

Finally, it was wonderful to see the comradery shown by so many in all areas of our work. I for one hold the office of County PRO, however I soon learned that this is a job which I can never say is a lonely one!

I am privileged to have met, worked with, and formed working relationships with so many good people from such varying fields and want to place my sincere thanks to all our clubs for their assistance in providing me with team information and helping out PR team in their new championship coverage.

The work going on within our clubs and specifically from club PRO's and PR committees is second to none, I have learnt a lot from clubs and was delighted that we were able to use some of our clubs as best practice in recent workshops.

The local newspapers have always been a source of great coverage for us, and we are lucky to have such

dedicated and proactive sports reporters and photographers, sincere thanks for all the coverage in our local and national papers.

Some of the photos captured this year have been outstanding, as they say a picture speaks a thousand words and I have no doubt some of these action shots will form the basis of many a Christmas present and adorn the wall of many houses for years to come.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to my team of fellow officers who are always only a text or phone call away, sometimes 24 hours a day! I have been privileged to be part of such a professional, hardworking, and dedicated team of Gaels who have the red and black county at the heart of all they do.

I cannot forget my team at home, who all come to my help at varying times and without whose support I would be unable to carry out my role in the way that I do.

The GAA is a great big family, and I am very lucky that my own family are part of that wider unit, they are all proud GAA people and they too have made many friends through my involvement and that is very special to me.

**Paula Magee**  
**PRO**







## An Coiste Pleanála Agus Forbartha Fisiciúla / Planning & Physical Development

As we began to put the Covid Pandemic behind us 2023 allowed clubs to concentrate on a full uninhibited return to football with less focus on Club Planning and development. However, for some clubs it was an opportunity to carry out development that had been planned for during the pandemic and the reward for hours spent completing grant applications to their local Council and other funders.

This year clubs such as Teconnaught and Darragh Cross saw the completion of play parks within their grounds in partnership with Newry Mourne and Down District Council. These have provided fantastic facilities for club members and the local community. Having visited both grounds on a number of occasions this year I have witnessed at first hand how popular they are before and during games with families attending matches. Other clubs have been busy to, fantastic additional training facilities have been completed at RGU Downpatrick and Drumgath. Dromara have successfully completed their community gym and ball wall and had an official opening in August to show case their excellent facilities. These facilities at our grounds in Down don't happen by chance, they are the result of the vision of club volunteers seeking grants and funding from wherever to improve their facilities and provide their members with facilities that they can be proud of.

I congratulate all our clubs who continue to develop their facilities.

### CLUB BORROWING

As always, I remind clubs that there is a strict process to follow in terms of borrowing, early engagement from clubs is vital to allow you to achieve the necessary permission to borrow money for projects in a timely manner. It may be necessary for clubs to meet in person with Ulster GAA Development Committee prior to an application being passed to National Finance for approval. Where possible we will endeavour to bring forward clubs to Ulster as quickly as possible. To the clubs who have been through the process this year I thank you for your co-operation and due diligence in the preparation of your application and associated supporting papers.

Clubs wishing to borrow between £10,500 and £52,500 will require County Committee approval. If a club wishes to borrow between £52,500 and £105,500 they will require Provincial Council approval. Over £105,500 requires Central Council approval. It should be noted that these figures are based on total cumulative borrowings.

### DEED OF TRUST

Again, coupled with this I would encourage all clubs to ensure that their Deed of Trust is up to date. I acknowledge that ensuring the Deed of Trust is up to date can be a sensitive matter following the passing of a club trustee, however we need to ensure that our clubs are properly vested as per Chapter 5 of the Official Guide.

### CLUB GRANTS

In Autumn 2022 Ulster GAA opened a call for grants to clubs, 23 of our clubs in Down submitted applications and were successful. In total Down clubs were awarded € 169,406 as follows:

Club Name	Level Status
Aghaderg GAC & Ballyvarley HC	€402
Áit Tí Chathail	€13,990
Annaclone GAC	€4,854
Ballymartin GAC	€3,893
Clann na Banna CLG	€1,529
Dromara GFC	€5,000
Eoghan Rua Cill Chua	€15,000
Glenn John Martins	€22,891
Kilclief Ben Dearg GAC	€14,984
Longstone GAC	€23,829
Loughinisland GAC	€5,667
Mayobridge GAC	€6,398
Naomh Eoin Bosco CLG	€4,000
Russell Gaelic Union	€3,160
Saint Paul's GAC	€765
Saval GAC	€1,700
St Johns Drumnaquoile GAC	€574
St Josephs Ballycran GAC	€18,003
St Michael's GAC	€464
St Patrick's GAC, Saul	€6,341
St Peter's GAC Warrenpoint	€3,889
St. Colmans GAC Drumaness	€4,639
Teconnaught GAC	€7,434

A recent call for grant applications closed on the 03rd Nov, 23 applications have been received from Down clubs, hopefully we can draw down significant monies for our clubs this year as testament to the hard work going on in our clubs.



**CLUB PLANNING, CLUB COMPAS AND CLUB MAITH**

2023 has again saw some of our clubs continue to work and enhance through the Club Planning process. I congratulate the clubs who have actively done so and would encourage those Clubs who are in the planning process internally with a view to engaging in the Club Planning process to come forward as there is a wealth of experience and knowledge within the County with people only too willing to offer support. I continue to work with Fionntan O’Dowd to have facilitators appointed to our clubs when requested.

A highlight of this season was an invitation alongside our County Chairman John Devaney and County Secretary Sean og to attend the launch of Clann Na Banna’s 5 year Development Plan in St Patrick’s High School Banbridge. This innovative document sets out a clear roadmap that will guide the club towards achieving their goal and aspirations as a club. Well done to all involved.

2023 has saw the phasing out of the Club Maith process and the move for clubs to engage with the Club Compas programme. The Club Compás is a self-assessment tool that your Club can use to access how well you are performing based on the standards set by the Gaelic Games Associations. Upon completion of the assessment, your Club will receive a report that scores your performance and gives direction on what could be done to move to the next level.

Croke Park has recently confirmed that the following clubs in Down have engaged with Club Compás as follows: -

Over the closed season I encourage all other clubs to

**Club Name**

Rostrevor	Kilclief
St Colman’s Drumaness	Kilcoo
Ballykinlar	Glassdrumman
Ballycran	St Paul’s
Mayobridge	Ardglass
St Michaels	Teconnaught
Clonduff	

engage with club Compas in order to gauge where you are as a club.

I would like to thank our club planning facilitators within the County for giving freely of their time to assist our clubs in Down.

If interested in starting out on the Club planning process, Clubs are encouraged to review the Expression of Interest Form and contact myself ad County Planning and Training Officer to discuss availability of facilitators.

The form is available at [learning.gaa.ie/clubplanning](https://learning.gaa.ie/clubplanning)



## TRAINING

This season we were able to provide face to face training within the County. On the 17th May we held a Leading, Managing and Governing your club workshop facilitated by Gerard Bradley, this was a very informative workshop and was well attended by our clubs.

Senior County officers provided valuable training for senior club officers and again these workshops were well attended.

Club Leadership Development Programme (CLDP) continues to provide online training for club officers and the attendance records indicate that these have been well attended by officers from our clubs. If your club officers have not signed up to the online workshops I would encourage you to promote these within your clubs.

I would also direct clubs to the GAA learning Portal at GAA.ie, there are some valuable resources and learning on this website <https://learning.gaa.ie>.

## DOWN GAA STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 – 2026

A last year's convention we were pleased to report on the progress of the Down GAA Strategic Plan, County Chairman John Devaney had established a working group to create a strategic plan for the period 2023-2026 and work was well under way in its preparation.

The hard work of the group was realised on the 10th of October when along with special guest GAA president Larry McCarthy we launched the Down GAA Strategic Plan 2023-2026 with the key theme Moving Forward Together.

## DOWN COUNTY GAA ANNUAL CONVENTION 2023

## CONCLUSION

I thank my fellow County Officers, and the Clubs in Down for their cooperation and support. It would be remiss of me in concluding not to pay respect to our friend and colleague who sadly passed away this week. Sean McCashin was a great support to me in this role, making himself available to meet clubs with myself to advise on applications that were to be made to Ulster GAA and National Finance. Sean sat on the Ulster GAA Development Committee and without fail supported the applications from clubs in Down, so thank you Sean, you will be sorely missed.

I would also like express my continued thanks and gratitude to Paul Sanders and Fionntan O'Dowd from Ulster GAA for their help and support through the year to both me and the clubs we were engaged with. Also, I thank Jack McCarney from Croke Park for his help and support.

Like all I look forward to 2024 with renewed optimism and look forward to once again engaging with and supporting our clubs.

**Patrick Savage**  
**Planning and Training Officer**



# TAILTEANN CUP FINAL 2023 THE BIG BREAKFAST



# TUARASCÁIL GAEILGE AGUS CULTÚIR

## SCÓR NA N'ÓG 2023

Participation in Scór na n'Óg has remained high resulting in the need for three South Down semi finals, in Mayobridge, Hilltown and Glasdrumman, while Ardglass hosted the East Down final and Saval the South Down final.

The County final was scheduled to be in St Malachy's Castlewellan, but treacherous lying snow meant that the final was likely to have been postponed until the committee received the generous offer of St Mark's Warrenpoint. The Down Culture and Language committee would like to put on record the fantastic cooperation of the school, the competitors, clubs, adjudicators and stewards which ensured that the competition could be rearranged at such short notice.

Congratulations to our Down champions: Mayobridge (Ceili and Set Dancing), Aoife Grant (Glasdrumman – Solo Singing), Beibhinn Watson (Ballycran – Recitation), Warrenpoint (Ballad Group), Liatroim (Novelty Act), Burren (Instrumental Music).

Clonduff hosted 19 teams in the Down Scór na n'Óg quiz which was won by Aghaderg/Ballyvarley. Question master, James Magennis, must be commended on the quality of the questions asked.

In the Ulster Scór na n'Óg final in Monaghan, none of our competitors; Aghaderg (Quiz), Aoife Grant (Glasdrumman, Solo Singing), Liatroim (Novelty Act), Burren (Instrumental) and Mayobridge (Set Dancers) collected the elusive Ulster title. The Down Irish and Cultural committee would like to put on record the fantastic effort of the clubs and mentors; thanks to their efforts 125 young acts from 29 clubs participated in Scór na n'Óg.

## DOWN SCÓR SINSÍR 2023

Once again, the timing of the competition in September resulted in reduced entries with all entries competing in the final of Down Scór Sinsir in Mayobridge Community Centre. Despite the compact timeframe for running the event, those in attendance were treated to a high standard of entertainment.

The host club had a successful night, winning County titles in both Ceili Dancing and Solo Singing (Eimear Magee) as well as the Peter Keenan Cup for best overall club. Clonduff had success with Eileen McCusker in Recitation and there was a poignant moment when their Set Dancers were announced winners as the group had only reformed in tribute to Sean Hillen RIP under whom most of the team had won All Ireland titles in the 1990's.

A talented Ballyholland won the Instrumental Group and Atticall the Novelty Act in a drama that took a different approach to the Dublin Kerry rivalry. Glenn won the Ballad Group and also collected the Moya McCormick Cup. Drumaness hosted a great quiz competition with twelve teams participating.

Thanks to question master, Seán Óg McAteer. Down winners, Bredagh also went on to win the Ulster title. Mayobridge (Ceili), Glenn (Ballad) and Clonduff (Sets) also qualified for the Ulster final with the Clonduff dancers winning the Ulster title. Unfortunately there was to be no Ulster success in Killarney.

## SCÓR 2024

With the difficulties of organising Scór Sinsir in the autumn, the decision has been made to revert the Scór competitions to their traditional calendar dates.

Therefore in 2024 Scór Sinsir will commence in February and Scór na n'Óg will commence in September. Scór will be organised in an all county basis with regional qualifying rounds. I would ask clubs to start planning in early January to ensure that participation will match the pre - Covid levels.

## AMHRAN NA BHFIANN

We continue to provide anthem singers within the county for club championship games and county games (across all codes). While training has been organised in 2022 and 2023, there needs to be more cooperation between the committee, trainers, singers and their clubs to ensure a higher percentage of participants complete their training and get the opportunity to sing our anthem at club and hopefully county games.

Thanks to the small group of singers (and often their parents) who give of their time freely to sing at our games, often balancing this with part-time work, studies and their own games. Additional training will be offered in next year.

## TEANGA GAEILGE

Coiste Cultuir agus Teanga, with the guidance of Niamh McElduff and Tricia Ní Chearra (CLG Uladh) assist clubs in the promotion of Irish language and Fhondúireacht Sheosaimh Mhic Dhonncha (Joe McDonagh Foundation).

Thanks to Darran Rooney (Mayobridge), the Down Irish

## County Down 2023 Scór na nÓg Results

Competition	South Down Winners South Down Final Friday 3 <sup>rd</sup> March 2023 Saval GAA Community Centre	South Down Runners Up	East Down Winners East Down Final Friday 25 <sup>th</sup> February 2022 St Nicholas' School Ardglass	East Down Runners Up	County Winners County Final St Malachy's High School Castlewellingan Friday 4 <sup>th</sup> March 2022
Ceili Dancing	Droichead Mhaigh Eo (Mayobridge)	Baile Chólmáin (Ballyholiland)	Caisleán Uíghbhlín (Castlewellingan)	Naomh Eoin (St John's)	Droichead Mhaigh Eo (Mayobridge)
Solo Singing	Baile Mhairtín (Ballymartin) Aileen Gorman	An Ghilás Dromaíon (Glasdrumman) Aoife Grant	Dún Phadraig (Downpatrick) Emma Deegan	Chris Darrach (Darragh Cross) Faith Lundy	An Ghilás Dromaíon Aoife Grant
Recitation	Droichead Mhaigh Eo (Mayobridge) Patrick Garvey	Cumann Chluain Daimh (Clonduff) Sinead McPolin	Baile Crann (Ballycran) Beibhinn Watson	Caisleán Uíghbhlín (Castlewellingan) Lily McMurray	Baile Crann Beibhinn Watson
Ballad Group	Cumann Peadar Naofa H (CPN Warrenpoint Hurling)	Cumann Peadar Naofa L (CPN Warrenpoint LGFA)	Liatroim (Leitrim)	Baile Mhic Uilleagóid (Ballygalget)	Cumann Peadar Naofa H (CPN Hurling)
Novelty Act	Cumann Chluain Daimh (Clonduff)	Droichead Mhaigh Eo (Mayobridge)	Liatroim (Leitrim)		Liatroim (Leitrim)
Inst Music	An Boireann (Burren)	Cumann Chluain Daimh (Clonduff)	Naomh Pól (St Paul's)	Liatroim (Leitrim)	An Boireann (Burren)
Set Dancing	Droichead Mhaigh Eo (Mayobridge)				Droichead Mhaigh Eo (Mayobridge)
Quiz	Achada Dearg (Aghaderg)	Baile Chólmáin (Ballyholiland)	Liatroim (Liatroim)	Loch an Oislean (Loughinisland)	Achada Dearg (Aghaderg)

Ballymartin awarded Cathal Sands Cup for best effort in Scór na nÓg 2023; Ulster Semi Final involving Down, Armagh, Fermanagh, Monaghan, Derry in St Ronan's Parish Hall on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

## County Down 2023 Scór Sinsir Results

Competition	South Down Winners	South Down Runners Up	East Down Winners	East Down Runners Up	County Winners* Saturday 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2023 Mayobridge
Ceili Dancing					Droichead Mhaigh Eo (Mayobridge)
Solo Singing					Droichead Mhaigh Eo Eimear Magee
Recitation					Eileen McCusker (Cumann Chluain Daimh)
Inst Music					Baile Chólmáin (Ballyholiland)
Novelty Act					Ait Ti Chatal (Atticall)
Ballad Group					An Ghleann (Glenn)
Set Dancing					Cumann Chluain Daimh (Clonduff)
Quiz					Bredagh (Bredagh)

County Final Only – No Divisional Champions

Moya McCormack Cup – Spirit of Scór = An Ghleann

Peter Keenan Memorial Cup - Overall South Down Scór Club of the Year = Mayobridge

In Ulster Semi Finals in Killeavey, Co Armagh, An Ghleann (Ballad Group) and Cumann Chluain Daimh (Set Dancers) qualified for Ulster Final in St Enda's Omagh Co Tyrone

Cumann Chluain Daimh and Bredagh won Ulster titles and qualified for All Ireland Finals in Killarney on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Bredagh, Burren, Clonduff and Mayobridge will take part in Ulster Irish Language Quiz in Armagh on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Language Officer who represents Down on Coiste Gailge Uladh.

Arís i mbliana, bhí clubanna ó Chontae An Dúin iontach gníomhach ag cur ár dteanga dúchais chun cinn. Roimh an Nollaig anuraidh bhí ócáid mhór do Ghaeil An Dúin i bPáirc an Chrócaigh nuair a bhronnadh na boinn de chuid Fondúireacht Sheosaimh Mhic Dhonncha. Bhí cuid mhaith clubanna ó Contae An Dúin i láthair ar an oíche mhór seo.

Bronnadh Bonn Cré-Umha ar Oirthear Bhéal Feirste agus bronnadh Boinn Airgid ar Ard Ghlais; Cumann Eoghan Rua, Cill Cua agus Cumann Naomh Pádraig, Droichead Mhaigh Eo. Ach ba iad Toigh Chonnachta laoch na hoíche seo, nuair a thug siad an Bonn Óir leo. Ba iad Toigh Chonnachta an chéad chlub ó Chontae An Dúin gur éirigh leo an

éacht seo a bhaint amach. Comhghairdeas leo!

I mí Feabhra thug dhá chlub ó Chontae An Dúin, An Bhréadach agus Droichead Mhaigh Eo, aghaidh ar Pháirc an Chrócaigh don bhabhta ceannais den Tráth na gCeist Gaeilge de chuid an Chumann Lúthchleas Gael. D'éirigh go geal le fir na Bréadaí agus tháinig siad sa tríú áit.

I mí na Bealtaine, chuaigh aos óg an Chontae faoi scrúdú ag iarraidh Scolaíreachtaí Ghaeltachta a fháil. Bhí ard-chaighdeán arís ó na páistí agus ba doiligh tomhais a dhéanamh eatarthu. Bhronn muid scolaíreachtaí ar luach £5000 ar na páistí sin. Is rud iontach dearfach don Ghaeilge an méid suime a bhí ag na páistí inár dteanga dúchais.

I mí Mheán an Fhómhair, ghlac muid páirt i bhfeachtas de chuid CLG Uladh

ag iarraidh stadas na Gaeilge a ardú le linn aimsir na craoibhe. Rinneadh agallaimh le daoine ó bheagnach gach club a bhí ag glacadh páirte sna cluichí leath-ceannais peile. Tá cuid mhór Gaeilgeoirí againn ar fud fad an chontae!

Once again this year, clubs from County Down were very active in promoting our native language. Just before Christmas last year, there was a historic night for the Gaels of County Down when the awards for the Joe McDonagh Foundation were presented in Croke Park. Several clubs from the county were present at this special evening. East Belfast were presented with a Bronze award, whilst Ardglass, Kilcoo and Mayobridge were presented with Silver Awards. However, the stars of the night were Teconnaught, who were successful in achieving the Gold award.

Teconnaught are the first club in County Down to achieve this special recognition. Congratulations to them all!

In February, once again two clubs from Down, Bredagh and Mayobridge, were in Croke Park for the All-Ireland Final of the GAA's Irish Language Quiz. The men from Bredagh excelled once again and were placed third in the quiz.

In May, the young people of County Down tried to win Scholarships to the Gaeltacht. Once again there was an extremely high standard from the children and it was very difficult to judge between them. Down GAA present scholarships worth over £5000 in total to the successful candidates (22 x £200 and 14 x £100 scholarships). It is a very positive thing for Irish to see the enthusiasm and interest that the children had in our native tongue.

In September, we took part in a campaign organised by Ulster GAA to promote Irish during the Club championships. Interviews were held with nearly all the clubs who were taking part in the semi-finals of the football championship. We are very fortunate to have so many Gaeilgeoirí throughout the county!

## THANKS

I would like to thank my fellow members: Anita Brannigan, Kevin Brennan, Eoghan Ó Conrai, Ruth Curran, Gerard Keenan, Ciara Pickering and PJ Quinn for their support. Also all those who promote our language and culture in our clubs, county and beyond.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to extend condolences to all our Gaels who lost family members or friends in the past year.

Ar dheis lámh Dé go raimh a n-anamnacha uasal.

Donal McNally

**GIVE  
RESPECT  
GET  
RESPECT**  
Our games. Our choice.





**WE ALL BELONG HERE  
IN THIS PLACE. AT THIS TIME**

**WE BELONG NOT BECAUSE OF WHO WE ARE OR WHERE WE COME FROM**

**BEING HERE MEANS BELONGING**

**BELONGING MEANS KNOWING YOU'RE PART OF A COMMUNITY**

**A COMMUNITY THAT HAS A PLACE FOR ALL**

**WHERE POTENTIAL IS NURTURED**

**WHERE INDIVIDUALS BECOME TEAMS**

**WHO HONOUR THE LEGACY OF THOSE WHO WENT BEFORE**

**AND STRIVE TO BUILD A LEGACY OF THEIR OWN**

**SOME OF US PLAY**

**SOME OF US USED TO PLAY. SOME OF US NEVER PLAYED**

**WE ALL BELONG**

**BELONGING MEANS HAVING A VOICE**

**MEANS BEING ABLE TO SAY WHAT YOU THINK IS RIGHT**

**BEING LISTENED TO**

**BELONGING MEANS RESPECTING EACH OTHER**

**MEANS BEING THERE FOR EACH OTHER**

**ON THE PITCH. OFF THE PITCH**

**BELONGING MEANS ROLLING OUR SLEEVES UP AND DOING WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE**

**WE ALL BELONG WHETHER IT'S OUR FIRST DAY OR OUR HUNDREDTH YEAR**

**WE ALL BELONG HERE BECAUSE THIS PLACE BELONGS TO US ALL**

**OUR GAA**

**WHERE WE ALL BELONG**

## AMENDMENT TO COUNTY BYELAWS:

### 1. INTRODUCE NEW BYELAW 4.1 TO READ AS FOLLOWS

County Development Competitions Control Committee: Coiste Cheannais na gComórtaisí Forbartha

- 4.1 It shall be responsible for all arrangements for and control of any matters arising from Games up to and including Minor grade (U18) under the jurisdiction of the County Committee, including disciplinary matters other than those functions reserved to the County Hearings Committee. It shall process and make recommendations to the County Committee on the Grading of Clubs.
- 4.2 It shall investigate and process matters relating to the Enforcement of Rules relating to games and competitions up to and including Minor grade (U18), including hearing Objections and Counter-Objections.
- 4.3 Membership  
The membership of the Development Competitions Control Committee shall consist of a maximum of twelve named persons who shall be decided upon and appointed by the County Committee and shall include at least three members from East Down, at least three members from South Down, a representative of Primary Schools, a representative of Post Primary Schools and a representative from Coaching and Games Committee.
- 4.4 The County Games Manager shall act as an ex-officio (non-voting) Servicing Officer for the Committee.
- 4.5 All members of the Development Competitions Control Committee shall have voting rights except the County Games Manager.
- 4.6 The quorum for meetings of the Competitions Control Committee shall be three (3) members.

Coiste Chontae An Dúin

### 2. REMOVE BYELAW 20

Divisional Committees.

Coiste Chontae An Dúin

### 3. AMEND BYELAW 1.2 (COUNTY COMMITTEE) TO READ AS FOLLOWS

All the affairs of the Association within the County shall be governed and controlled by the County Committee in accordance with Rule 3.19 T.O. 2021 and these Bye-Laws. It shall consist of the following members.

- i) Officers - Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Assistant-Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant-Treasurer, Planning and Training Officer, Coaching Officer, Officer for the Irish Language and Culture, Public Relations Officer, Hurling Officer and Children's Officer.
- ii) Central Council Representative.
- iii) Provincial Council Representatives (2).
- iv) **Chairperson of the Development Competitions Control Committee.**
- v) Named Representatives of the Clubs (one Representative per club).
- vi) A named Representative of each of the following Committees: County Handball, County Primary Schools, County Post-Primary Schools.
- vii) County Referees' Administrator.
- viii) County Safety and Facilities Officer.

Coiste Chontae An Dúin

**4. AMEND BYELAW 2.1 TO READ AS FOLLOWS**

Membership

The County Management Committee shall consist of the following members:

Officers: Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Assistant-Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer, Planning and Training Officer, Coaching Officer, Officer for the Irish Language and Culture, Public Relations Officer, Hurling Officer, Central Council Representative, Provincial Council Representatives (2), **Chairperson of the Development Competitions Control Committee.**

**Coiste Chontae An Dúin**

**5. AMEND BYELAW 21.1(1) TO READ AS FOLLOWS**

Any player wishing to transfer from one Club to another within the County shall make application between January 1st and March 31st inclusive.

Transfers outside of this window may be considered for approval if:

- i) The player has not taken part in any competitive match with a club for a period of twenty-four months, and
- (ii) Both clubs agree to the transfer.

**Oirthear Bhéal Feirste**

## **MOTIONS FOR GAA CONGRESS 2024:**

**6. AMEND RULE 7.5(e) TREORAÍ OIFIGIUIL:**

(e) There shall be no Appeal:

(2) Outside the County, against a decision of a County Committee or, as appropriate in Rule, of one of its Sub-Committees with regard to:

- i) Transfers within a County,
- ii) Grading of Clubs and Players,
- iii) Arrangements for the date and venue of a Game (provided that required notice is given),
- iv) Appointments of Referees,
- v) The Administration and Control of County Teams, and
- vi) A decision of a County Hearings Committee in relation to Disciplinary Action initiated by the Executive Committee of a Club

**TO READ AS FOLLOWS:**

(e) There shall be no Appeal:

(2) Against a decision of a County Committee or, as appropriate in Rule, of one of its Sub-Committees with regard to:

- i) Grading of Clubs and Players,
- ii) Arrangements for the date and venue of a Game (provided that required notice is given),
- iii) Appointments of Referees,
- iv) The Administration and Control of County Teams, and
- v) A decision of a County Hearings Committee in relation to Disciplinary Action initiated by the Executive Committee of a Club

**Coiste Chontae an Dúin**

## **OTHER MOTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **Referees:**

7. Any club which does not have an active referee at adult level shall be liable for the match expenses incurred at all adult games under the auspices of Coiste Chontae an Dúin by that club (both home and away).

**Ath Bhriain**

8. Any club which does not have an active referee at juvenile level shall be liable for the match expenses at all juvenile games under the auspices of Coiste Chontae an Dúin by that club (both home and away).

**Ath Bhriain**

9. It shall be mandatory for all referees in Down who referee in-house senior/intermediate/junior club games/challenge games to inform Coiste Chontae an Dúin at the end of each month, reporting their previous month's activities (outside of regular fixtures already published on the Down GAA website). Coiste Chontae an Dúin should make this actively available on the website.

**Caisleán Uidhilín**

## **PROPOSED AMENDMENTS OF COMPETITION AND CHAMPIONSHIP REGULATIONS (Referred to County Committee in 2024)**

### **Substitutions for Underage Competitions:**

All underage leagues to have unlimited substitutions.

**Ceathrú Aodha Dhuibh**

### **Admission Prices for Leagues:**

Admission fee for all league matches to be increased from £4.00 to £5.00.

**Ath Bhriain**

### **Top 13/23 List:**

A player who has played in either the Senior or Intermediate Championship should not be eligible to play in these competitions, even if they are outside the club's Top 13/23 list.  
(REASON: These lists are open to unfair manipulation by club.)

**Cluain Daimh**

### **Premier Reserve League:**

Reduce the requirements for a Top 13 list to a Top 10 list.

Remove the penalty for clubs unable to field.

(REASON: Top 13 is a serious burden on smaller clubs and will ensure more clubs are able to field on Saturdays.)

**Droim gCath**

## REFERRED TO COISTE CHEANNAIS NA GCOMORTAISÍ

Senior Hurling Championship semi-finals to be played at neutral venues.

Liatroim

## REFERRED TO COISTE OILIÚNA AGUS FORBAIRT NA GCLUICHÍ / COISTE CHONTAE

Where a club fields two or more teams at Developmental Level (ie U14 and below), there should be freedom of movement between those teams to give all players the opportunity of playing/ developing at the higher level. (REASON: It is wrong to 'brand' youngsters as being in the 'A' team, 'B' team or indeed 'C' team. Children can be stigmatised for the rest of their days as a 'B/C' team player and never have the chance to play in the top team. At U14 level, this is the first experience of competitive games. Having just moved from non-competitive U12 level it is vital that youngsters be introduced to this without a 'badge' placed on their ability. Afford every child an equal opportunity to develop into the best player he possibly can be.)

Cluain Daimh

Down GAA provide full coaching and games support to the new amalgamated Trinity High School in Downpatrick to support a strong Gaelic Games ethos in the new school.

Ard Ghlais

## REFERRED TO COISTE NA REITEOIRÍ

Neutral Referees (i.e., from outside the County) to be appointed to Senior Hurling Championship semi-finals. (REASON: in the interests of fairness and equality to all teams involved)

Liatroim

Since official referees were removed from u11.5 fixtures, there has been a marked increase in negative behaviours on the field of play and from the sidelines. Ardglass GAC propose Down GAA provide official referees at all u11.5/12 games for the 2024 season.

Ard Ghlais

## 2023/2024 NOMINATIONS

### CATHAOIRLEACH

- Seán Ó Duibheannaigh John Devaney Bredach

### LEAS CATHAOIRLEACH

- Máirín Ó hUiginn Maureen O'Higgins Liatroim

### CISTEOIR

- Diarmuid Ó Cathail Diarmuid Cahill An Ríocht

### LEAS CISTEOIR

- Mícheál Ó Ruairc Michael O'Rourke An Ríocht

### LEAS RÚNAÍ

- Rian Ó Ceallaigh Ryan Kelly Ard Ghlaís

### OIFIGEACH FORBARTHA

- Pádraig Sabhaois Patrick Savage Tí Chonnachta

### OIFIGEACH OILIUNA

- Pádraig Mac Mac Giolla Deacair Paddy Hardy Caisleán Uidhilín

### OIFIGEACH IOMÁNAÍOCHTA

- Liam O Coinn Liam Quinn Bredach

### OIFIGEACH GAELIGE AGUS CULTUIR

- Ciara Pickering Ciara Pickering Caisleán Uidhilín

### OIFIGEACH CHAIDREAMH POIBLI

- Póilín Mhig Aoidh Paula Magee Droichead Mhaigh Eo

### TEACHTA COMHAIRLE ULADH (2 to be elected)

- Sean O Ruainaidh Sean Rooney Droichead Mhaigh Eo
- Breandán Mac Giolla Phádraig Brendan Fitzpatrick Ath Bhriain
- Marcas Ó Dughail Mark Doyle Liatroim

### TEACHTA ARD COMHAIRLE

- Conchúr Mac Uait Conor Watson Baile Mhic Uileagoid



# CUMANN LÚTHCHLEAS GAEL

## COISTE CHONTAE AN DÚIN



### *An Dún*

Tonight at the Convention we take a minute in prayer to pray for all the deceased within the last twelve months and pray for them and their families:

Aileen Hanna	Cissie Kelly	Hugh Rooney
Ailish Woods	Dan Lennon	Hugh Russell
Aíne Mandy	David Mackin	Jacinta Fitzpatrick
Alex Mc Mullan	Dawn Egan	James Malone
Ambrose Denvir	Declan O'Hare	James McParland
Ann Fitzpatrick	Derek McGrath	James Millar
Ann Morgan	Dermot McShane	James Sawey
Ann Ryan	Dessie Hughes	Janette Kinsella
Ann Sloan	Dessie Kelly	Jim McCrum
Anne O'Donoghue	Dinny McPolin	Jim McKeever
Anne Walsh	DJ McConville	Jimmy Ryan
Annette Murphy	Donna Murphy	Joanne Larkin
Annie Rice	Dr Martin Walsh	Joe Cunningham
Anthony Williamson	Eamon Hogan	Joe Lavery
Arthur Ruddy	Eamon McCann	Joe Laydon
Barbara Shields	Eileen McPeake	John Craxton
Barney Sloan	Eilish O'Hare	John Curran
Ben Fearon	Eilish Toman	John McAleenan
Bernadette Matthews	Ena McAleavey	John McAlinden
Bernie Breen	Eugene Caldwell	John McArdle
Bishop Anthony Farquhar	Eugene Carville	John McMullan
Bradley Gilman	Fiona Gilchrist	John Milligan
Brendan McAvoy	Franchea Blackman	John Mullan
Brendan Russell	Francis Burns	John Quinn
Brian Crawford	Freda McGivern	John Starkey
Brian Killen	Gabrielle O'Rourke	John Trainor
Brian McLoughlin	George Anderson	Joseph Doran
Brian Quinn	George Bradley	Josephine Higgins
Bridie Fitzpatrick	Geraldine McVeigh	Josie Fay
Bridie Harper	Gerard McQuillan	Kathleen Kelly
Bridie Nugent	Gerard Steele	Kenny Bailie
Cathal McCrory	Gerry Mullan	Kevin Carvill
Charles Digney	Grania Johnston	Kevin Venney
Cherline Flynn	Hubert Shannon	Larry Toman
Christopher Crawford	Hugh Byrne	Liam Austin Snr
Christopher Helm	Hugh O'Hare	Liam Curran



Liam Farrell	Paddy Murphy	Terry Curran
Liam McCartan	Paddy Simpson	Terry Devlin
Liam McGreevy	Pat Holywood	Terry Swail
Lorraine Grant	Pat Joe Travers	Theresa Fitzpatrick
Louis Rice	Patricia Hamilton	Thomas McGreevey
Madge Rodgers	Patricia Holman	Thomas Prior
Maeve McCartan	Patricia McCashin	Tom Toman
Margaret Drain	Patricia Quinn	Tommy Goodman
Margaret Lennon	Patsy Heaney	Tommy John McKay
Margaret Mulhall	Patsy Higgins	Tommy White
Mark McEvoy	Patsy McGivern	Tony Campbell
Martha Curran	Patsy Poland	Tracy Smyth
Martha Fitzsimons	Paul Carr	Vanessa Dillon
Martin McGrath	Paul McLoughlin	Vincent Brennan
Martin Quinn	Peter Brennan	Willie Ferguson
Marty Lynch	Peter Cox	Willie Rice
Mary Breen	Peter Devlin	
Mary Coulter	Peter McGinn	
Mary Dalzell	Peter Strain	
Mary Feeney	PJ Morgan	
Mary Margaret McEvoy	Rachel Morgan	
Mary McAlinden	Raymond Burke	
Mary McConville	Renee Scott	
Mary McKay	Rev Deacon Brendan McAllister	
Mary McKibben	Richard McMahan	
Mary McNally	Roisin Ward	
Mary Rose Duffy	Rosalee Brannigan	
Mary Turley	Rosaleen Rogan	
Maura Phillips	Rosemary Cunningham	
Maureen Clancy	Seamus McNulty	
Michael Carlin	Seamus Rooney	
Michael Gracey	Sean Cunningham	
Michael McCartan	Sean Hillen	
Mick Roe	Sean Keenan	
Mickey Mullan	Sean MacGabhann	
Monica McEvoy	Sean McCashin	
Monsignor Arthur Byrne	Sean McKeivitt	
Nadine Loy	Sean Mulholland	
Natasha McMullan	Sheila Lowry	
Norma Cunningham	Sheila McEvoy	
Oliver Hughes	Shirley McManus	
Oliver Sloan	Stephen Rooney	
Paddy Casement	Tanya Dunne	
Paddy Dixon	Teenie Wilson	
Paddy Madine	Teresa Bennett	
Paddy Magone	Teresa Cunningham	

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*An Dún*



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