

Introduction

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir a Chairde.

Tonight is my inaugural speech as the incoming chairperson of Munster GAA, a tremendous personal honour for myself, my family, my Club and my County.

In many ways my presence here tonight is somewhat unlikely coming from a small rural Club in Kerry which was reformed in 1975.

I stand here knowing that I owe a huge debt to all those who came before me from our Club, many of whom are here tonight and who soldiered in difficult times in promoting our club and our county.

These are the people who took us to matches etc. etc.

Mention the bad weather event – Snow – Swiss Alpine Resort slowly turned into a week of difficulty with many people without electricity and unable to leave their homes. I want to acknowledge the resilience and strength of Character of the people from my parish who again showed what Community is all about during that week.

Our Club has had many Great days but none greater than the All-Ireland Final Junior success in Croke Park on Valentine's Day in 2015 - I stood on the sideline that day alongside our manager Jimmy Keane and selectors Mike Moriarty and Mike Broderick.

As the final whistle blew that day the sound of Brosna Town, an immigrants song composed by Danny Hannon in New York city rang out over the Hogan Stand bringing tears to the eyes of grown men and women, many of whom had travelled from the four corners of this earth to see this historic victory.

That was an emotional day for everyone in our club and I've no doubt that Brosna Town will get a rendition later on tonight.

This evening, another Chapter in the history of our Club begins, and each of the people down there tonight (Past and Present officers) as well as those who have gone to their eternal reward are as much part of tonight as I am.

I also want to thank and acknowledge the Kerry Co Board for nominating me for the position and in particular Jerome Conway from Laune Rangers (Former Kerry Chairperson) & Eamon O' Sullivan from Castleisland Desmond's who encouraged me to get involved at County Board level initially and both men have been pillars of Strength and advice for me in the years since.

Like everybody else here tonight my GAA life began with my Club and will likely end with an involvement in my Club also.

Family

Family has always been important to me and tonight my wife Emer and two of our Children – Eimear and Clodagh also join us. My eldest son Cormac cannot be with us tonight as he is in college.

My Dad - Michael along with my brother's Moss, his wife Sheena, Micheál and his partner Deirdre and my sister Maria are also here.

I want to thank my family for the help, support and encouragement they have given me over the past 13 years in particular (10 years with Kerry and the last 3 years with Munster GAA), looking after kids, pick up's & drop offs whenever it was needed.

Everybody here tonight will appreciate the time and effort that goes into being a volunteer and without family support it would simply not be possible.

I want to thank my wife – Emer in particular who has always been by my side supporting in everything I'm doing and without her support and encouragement it would not be possible to fulfil this role.

Munster is a unique GAA Province in this Country, where I would like to think that everyone is rewarded for effort and ability in equal measure both on and off the field.

Cumman Luchleas Gael is far more than a sporting organisation. It is the heart and soul of every community in this Province and beyond.

The sense of place is paramount and unique to the GAA.

Our Clubs have served us well for over 140 years and have provided us with the bedrock on which every other strand of the Association is built.

In order for this to continue we need to identify the challenges that face our Clubs and deal with them head on.

Munster GAA will celebrate it's 125th Anniversary next year.

During that time there have been Six different Chairpersons from Kerry.

1903 – 1907 – Thomas F O' Sullivan who served as the Second Chairperson of the Council and who wrote and published the First ever History of the GAA in 1916. Following a Decline in GAA activity in the late 1800's he is also credited with reviving the Kerry Co. Board in 1900.

1912 – 1913 – James McDonnell

1956 – 1959 – Frank Sheehy (Listowel)

1986 - 1989 – Michael O' Connor (Killarney)

1998 – 2000 – Seán Kelly Ian Uachtarán (Kilcummin)

2010 – 2013 – Seán Walsh (Moyvane)

It is indeed a great Honour for me and something I am very aware and conscious of to follow in these persons footsteps becoming the 7th Person from Kerry to assume the Role of Cathaoirleach Comhairle na Mumhan.

Counties

Munster is a proud Province comprising of many Clubs, Rural and urban, large and small, but we are one people with a collective tradition that is unrivalled nationally.

I have seen this first hand during the last 3 years as Vice Chairperson of the Council

Our Clubs in both Hurling and Football consistently represent the province with distinction each year and winning Munster at any level is something that is very Cherished by all Clubs.

The All Ireland Hurling Title has gone to a Munster Team in 8 out of the last 10 Years and in three of those years the All-Ireland Runner's up has been a Munster County.

Football hasn't fared as well with 2 All Irelands for the Province in the last 10 years but Kerry have contested 5 of the last 10 All Ireland Finals winning 2.

This level of consistent performance is I believe unique to us in Munster and on that note I'd like to wish Sar's all the very best in tomorrow's All Ireland Senior Club hurling final.

Having been involved as Vice Chairperson for the past 3 years I have come to know many people from all Counties in the Province and the sense of collegiality and working together for the best outcome has been present at all times.

Munster Senior Hurling Championship

The Munster Senior Hurling Championship continues to take Pride of Place in the Munster and All Ireland Hurling Calendar.

As I've already said the All-Ireland Hurling Title has gone to a Munster Team in 8 out of the last 10 Years and in three of those years the All-Ireland Runner's up has been a Munster County.

Coming from a Predominantly Football County, since getting involved in Munster 3 years ago I have seen first hand what the Munster Hurling Championship means to players, Managers, coaches, Officers, supporters and public at large.

It is remarkable how it continues to capture the interest and enthusiasm of everyone, even those with only a passing interest in Gaelic Games.

I attended the Clare Senior Hurling medal presentation last Saturday night and the Guest speaker on the evening was the Legendary Ger Loughnane.

He made a very interesting point outlining when in 1997 as Clare Hurling Manager the Clare Team were at their very peak for the Munster Hurling Final and went on to win the All-Ireland Semi Final and Final at about 80% of the teams' capabilities.

No greater testament can be given to the Strength, of Munster Hurling than this and as incoming Cathaoirleach I will do my utmost to preserve, enhance and develop this Unique Championship with the help of my fellow officers and you the Counties.

Munster Senior Football Championship

Unfortunately the Munster Football Championship does not compare with the competitiveness of the Hurling Championship.

For me preserving our Province and all our games within the Province is of paramount importance and we need to look at ways of increasing the competitiveness of the Munster Football Championship.

I believe this work has now started at Coaching & Games level which I'll touch on later, but this is an area that we need to work on collectively to bring back the Old Munster Football competitiveness.

There is no silver bullet in achieving this, but I believe there are further areas we can improve upon in getting to this point.

Coaching & Games Development

For the past 3 years as Vice Chairperson of the Council my main focus has been as Chair of Coaching and Games. Working with Pat O' Shea and Joey Carton along with the 6 County Coaching Officers, the 6 County Games managers and all the GDC's gave me a deep insight into the work that goes on in Coaching & Games.

During the Course of the last year and a half Munster has eventually succeed in recruiting over 20 additional Coaching Staff with a model of approximately 1 GDC per 10 Clubs now in operation.

It has been a long and arduous journey over many years to get to this point and I want to acknowledge in particular the help and assistance that Ger, Kieran, Pat and Joey have given in achieving this.

In November 2023 we met all the GDC's in Adare and I have to say the level of Energy and enthusiasm within the room that day was palpable.

Every GDC is committed to the cause and ultimately the success of this initiative will be measured on;

- (1) Club Self Sufficiency &
- (2) Club Sustainability

The Outside Manager at both Club and County level has reached new highs with resultant Financial & other implications and an erosion of the Amateur Status of the GAA. In my opinion the organisation has become something it was never meant to become.

Within Munster Coaching and Games, we are aspiring to ensuring that every Club in our province will be Self Sufficient and Sustainable withing the next 5 years not only in Coaching but also in Administration.

If successful, the knock-on effect will see Clubs standing independently with minimum intervention and ultimately Senior Team managers and Coaches coming from within the ranks of each Respective Club Unit.

Other initiatives that have taken place in the last 12 months include a "Coaching Return on Investment" Review which is due to be published in the next 10 days and shows the enormous value placed on Coaching by Parents, Guardians and Students and a Specific Club Coaching Course which will be rolled out this year. We have a "Club Forum" organised for Saturday next 25th January at MIC in Limerick with a range of speakers and parallel workshops on Coaching, Coach Education and Club administration.

USGAA & Munster GAA

USGAA are twinned with our Province and over the last 3 years I have had the privilege to see first hand the work that goes on the Ground in the US in promoting Gaelic Games.

We are joined here tonight by the USGAA Chairperson – Paul Keane – a Westmeath native domiciled in San Jose California and Ger Dillon – Central Council Delegate from County Derry who is based in Philadelphia and like Ger I want to give them both a warm welcome.

There are over 140 Adult and Youth Clubs affiliated in USGAA covering the entire of the US from the Canadian Border to Mexico City including the Cayman Islands.

The tireless work of so many Volunteers is remarkable with many travelling on 5 – 6 Hour Flights across different time zones to play Football, Hurling and Camogie.

Munster will continue to assist USGAA in everyway possible through Coaching, Referee & Officer training and financially.

USGAA entered the First “All American born” Junior Football team in last years All Ireland Junior Championship and travelled to Abbotsdown to play London in the Semi Final.

While they narrowly missed out on an All-Ireland Final Appearance, the experience they gained was huge and we hope this will be the beginning of a longer term and consistent arrangement in the years ahead.

I wish to acknowledge in particular Pat O’ Sheas input in assisting the Team with Coaching throughout the journey.

As Cathaoirleach I look forward to closely working with all involved in USGAA and assure both Paul and Ger that every possible assistance will continue to be given from all of us here in Munster.

Football Review Committee (FRC)

The newly formed Football Review committee has attracted much commentary some negative but mainly positive.

The resounding approval of the New Football Rules at last Novembers Special Congress is testament to the quality of the individuals appointed on the Committee and in particular I wish to thank the 2 Munster Representatives – Eamon Fitzmaurice from Kerry and Colm Collins from Clare.

Both men are steeped in the Traditions of the GAA and left no stone unturned in publicising, promoting and explaining the new rules in great detail. This was the main reason that the rules passed so overwhelmingly.

The Rules will apply to both Club and County this year and while there will no doubt be teething problems the potential benefits far outweigh any such issues that will arise.

This is a Quantum leap for the GAA, and I want to acknowledge the unanimous support received from the 6 Munster Counties and USGAA in getting the Rules passed as well of the foresight of our Uachtarán – Jarlath Burns in putting the committee in place.

In Snooker paragon's it's a Shot to nothing – We have nothing to lose but everything to gain.

I would urge everyone to persist with this and remember that the FRC can recommend a change to any rule at any point during the year depending on how things unfold.

Demographics

20+ Years of Population Movement from West to East and from Rural to Urban has resulted in a complete Population imbalance.

We now have a rapidly declining Rural Population and a rapidly expanding Urban Population with a lack of penetration in many Urban areas due to lack of facilities and volunteers.

There appears to be a Participation drop off in certain Age Groups and many NGB's are not resourced to deal with the Issues.

Following a motion brought to Annual Congress two years ago every County now has a dedicated "Demographic Officer".

I feel this is an Area that the Provincial Council can become more Proactive in, and I hope to appoint a dedicated "Demographics Committee" with a Provincial Demographics Officer to Co-Ordinate and assist the 6 Munster Demographics' officers in dealing with the issues and planning for the future.

There is also I believe an opportunity to engage with Local Authorities and other Semi State bodies in working collectively to provide additional Supports be that land or other resources.

This work has already been Started by Ger with the Urban Project initiative as part of the Munster GAA Development Plan and Clonmel is a case in point where this is beginning to be trialled and rolled out.

Failing to deal with this existential issue will seriously jeopardise the future of the GAA Nationally.

As an Association we can only do so much but it incumbent on all of us here tonight to recognise the issue and take whatever measures we can to address it.

Facilities & Finance & Grants

Finance

Finance is central to the smooth operation of the Council.

I wish to thank and acknowledge the work that both Bob Ryan as Treasurer and Liam McLoughlin are doing in this area. As we have seen tonight, our accounts are in a healthy state enabling the Council to Distribute substantial sums to the Counties.

Like all Units of the Association Munster GAA have both operational finance requirements and currently have a high capital expenditure requirement as part of our commitment to each County over the next number of years (€1.2m per County) as part of the County Strategic Development Fund.

The income generated from the Munster Hurling Championship in the main facilitates this.

The Council also paid out over €1.3m to the Clubs of the Province in 2024 for a range of Capital Projects with the new Grant focus being on increasing participation. Pitch Construction, Lighting and Clubhouses / Gyms will now get priority. Both Kerry and Limerick have been approved their allocation for the Construction of new Artificial Pitches and the remaining 4 Counties will follow suit over the next number of years.

We also need to be conscious and supportive of Integration with our Sister Organisations in the LGFA and Camogie. The upgrading of existing facilities as well as providing new facilities will be required and Munster GAA will continue to commit to providing everything reasonably expected to the Six Counties in ensuring this objective is achieved.

I have always been of the belief that a more sustainable Funding Model needs to be developed for all our Units and in accordance with Aontas 2026 – The GAA's Strategic Plan I hope to further develop a model that is sustainable for the future.

Inter County Team Expenses continue to rise as has been widely reported on over the last number of years, but little change appears to be taking place. I think the concept of Self Sufficiency and Self Sustainability previously mentioned in Coaching and games is at least a Start in addressing the issue.

The Paradox for all our Counties is to ensure our teams are given every opportunity to be the best they can while being financially prudent at the same time.

Stadia

Munster has the largest number of aging Stadiums than any other Province.

There is no easy answer or solution to the upgrading these Stadiums other than in my opinion dealing directly with Central government in an effort to collaborate with them and develop the concept of “Municipal Stadiums” has to be looked at.

Gaelic Games alone simply cannot sustain the costs associated with either the Capital Expenditure required or indeed the continued maintenance costs involved.

This model works well in Europe and is something that I believe should be explored further.

Municipal Facilities

Kieran, in his annual report mentioned that “The GAA needs to become part of the conversation around municipal facilities in urban areas. In other words, multisport facilities built by funding from the taxpayer need to include facilities for the playing of Gaelic Games.

Like our Stadia, I believe in many instances that this is the most prudent and cost-effective model and needs to be explored further.

We as an Association need to be proactive in exploring these possibilities and over the course of my term as Munster Chairman, I would like to form a dedicated Group of people to explore such possibilities and ensure the GAA is included in all such facilities.

Retention of our Counties Best Talent

There has been much talk over the past year about the AFL and their scouts' poaching players with Kerry as a County particularly affected.

Other Counties have also lost promising young players not only to the AFL but to Soccer and Rugby also.

It is the absolute right of every player to avail of any opportunity to play professional, but I have been consistent in my view that as an organisation the GAA can never compete with professional sport – it is simply not possible.

What we can do is endeavour to create as attractive an environment as possible here at home and convey to our players the benefits of remaining in Ireland while also assisting them with educational opportunities, career advice and enhanced employment prospects.

Munster GAA has over the years developed very close links with all the third level Institutions in the Province and using this as a foundation I would like to form a Committee at Provincial level where the province can become even more relevant to Counties in developing an "Off the Field" Pathway for players through education, employment and career progression.

Every individual will ultimately decide what's best for them but for us as an amateur organisation we have an opportunity to ensure that any players considering a move are given the benefit of choosing an attractive alternative in remaining at home.

GAA GO & What the GAA Give Back

GAAGO has come in for some serious public criticism over the last number of years with Representatives of our organisation appearing before the Oireachtas Media Committee over a public backlash about matches being shown exclusively on the pay-per-view app GAAGo rather than on RTÉ.

We all need to remember the very Challenging days of Covid where Streaming of our games developed in every County and in many Clubs enabling people to watch our games who would otherwise not be able to view them.

It needs to be reiterated that “the expectation that every single game should be on television is just not realistic”. The Split Season has compounded the situation meaning that it simply not possible for the GAA to Show every game on terrestrial Television.

I believe that the GAA got an unfair wrap for this and many people I have met at matches would be quite happy to pay an annual subscription to see our games.

The difficulty with the current system is user friendliness’, the lack of Internet coverage in many areas of the country and long held traditions that almost every game should be shown on Terrestrial TV.

A National Media Rights Advisory group has now been created charged with exploring all options in developing the Streaming Service and ensuring that as many matches as possible can be shown.

The Provincial Council can I believe work with Clubs and Counties in further exploring and developing a sustainable model which is fair and reasonable to everyone.

A bugbear of mine is the constant rhetoric from some quarters that the GAA is Cash Rich with endless financial resources.

As you can see from the Slide on the Screen which I took a photo of at last year’s Congress in Newry, the GAA gives back 87 Cent out of every Euro collected to Coaching, Clubs and Counties.

When compared to any major Charity the figure returned to our Clubs and Counties is exceptionally high, a fact which unfortunately appears to be lost on many people.

I would appeal to everyone here tonight to ensure that as much Airtime as possible is given to the fact that the GAA redistributes 87 Cent out of every Euro to Clubs and Counties in various formats.

Executive – Old and New

Over the last 3 years I have worked closely with Ger Ryan, Bob Ryan, Dermot Lynch, Kieran Leddy and John Brennan as a Management Committee committed to ensuring the Council runs as efficiently as possible.

I want to thank and acknowledge each and every one of them for their genuine efforts in ensuring all Counties are treated equally and impartially.

I'd also like to acknowledge our PRO - Weeshie Lynch who received the 2024 Gaelic Players PRO of the Year Award

I also want to thank all the respective Committee Chairs, Secretaries and members who have worked tirelessly over the last 3 years in their respective committees.

We are fortunate to have such a committed Staff in Aras Mumhan who go over and above what is reasonably expected, and I'd like to take the opportunity to thank them all individually and collectively.

Tonight we bid farewell to Ger Ryan who has served the Council as PRO, Vice Chairperson and Chairperson for almost 10 years.

It is an emotional night for Ger and his family as a hugely significant chapter in their lives come to a close.

Ger has made a huge contribution over this time but in particular his contribution over the past three years as Chairman of Munster CLG has been incredible.

For me the following Achievements deserve particular mention;

- Gers help and assistance in obtaining the Additional Coaches so badly in Munster over the last 3 years.
- The Munster GAA Strategic Plan launched
- The Urban Initiative
- Setting up the Referees Academy
- Setting up the Audit and Risk committee
- Advancing the Partnership arrangements with LGFA and Camogie

To Ger, his wife Maria, children - Dearbhla and Orlaith I would like to extend a special thanks both on a personal level and on behalf of everyone here tonight wish them all the very best in the future.

Ger will continue to sit on the Munster GAA executive this year and will take up the Role of Chairperson of Semple Stadium Thurles where he will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Conclusion

Finally & to conclude I wish to sincerely thank everyone for all their good wishes over the past number of weeks.

It is a great honour, and I have genuinely found the experience a very humbling one.

Our Association is the Strongest and most dynamic Sporting and Cultural Organisation in the World and something we all possibly don't give enough Credit to.

So to finish up on that note I'd like to quote a few lines from a great friend and mentor of mine – Gerald McKenna from Ballyduff – He served for many years as Kerry County Board Chairman, Central Council Delegate and was President of Kerry GAA up to his passing in 2022.

Having stepped back from his Role in Central Council in 2010, he said

"If you asked me back in 1976, I probably would have told you the GAA would have been in a worse state. The GAA has faced a lot of competition from other codes which has been a good thing as it has made the GAA stronger."

"I'm still amazed at the amount of effort that is going into the GAA at all levels around the country."

Our Association faces many Challenges as it did in the past, but I'm convinced it's Strength will continue to endure and overcome all these Challenges.

On that note, I'll conclude by saying I will work tirelessly, to represent you, the Counties, the Clubs, and the people of our Province to the very best of my ability.

Ní Neart go cur le Chéile,

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir