



Comhdháil Bhliantúil 2024

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Tuairisc Bliantúil 2024

I am delighted to present my Annual Report to the Munster GAA Convention, which is my 7th such report. I will discuss our Championships, and the performance of Munster Teams in the All-Ireland series, while also discussing club fixtures, Provincial Hurling Final replays, Gaelic Football and the Munster GAA Development Plan.

Pre-Season Competitions and Allianz Leagues

2024 began with the pre-season competitions, and they provided far more drama off the field of play than on it. While the McGrath Cup was completed with Corcaigh defeating Ciarraí in the final, the hurling equivalent was abandoned after the game involving Corcaigh and Luimneach was cancelled not once, but on three occasions due to bad weather. A thick fog put paid to the first attempt to play the game in Mallow, then a frozen pitch in Rathkeale forced the second cancellation and finally an orange storm warning saw the fixture cancelled once more and the competition put in jeopardy. The Munster CCC took the decision to cancel the competition, as the time was not there to complete it in time for the start of the Allianz Leagues. The thirst of the public for this fixture was evident, with 5,000 spectators in Mallow for the first attempt to play it. Thankfully, the public would get 2 more opportunities during the year to see these teams in action, and the wait to see them go head-to-head was worth it, with 2 classic encounters being served up.

The pre-season competitions have been cancelled for 2025. The main reason for this move is player welfare and the need to shorten the playing season for our Intercounty players. However, as expected, challenge games will now fill the void as the pre-season competitions were essentially providing challenge games in advance of the League.

The Allianz Leagues certainly proved to hold a mixed bag of outcomes for Munster Counties. In hurling, An Clár gave us a taste of what was to come during 2024, when they captured the Allianz Hurling League Division 1 title, their 5th title in all and first since 2016, by defeating Cill Chainnigh in the final. It was the third year in a row that the Division 1 title has made its way to the province. However, our counties endured a generally tough time in the Allianz Football Leagues. Ciarraí, who have been the flagbearers for football in Munster for many years now, were unlucky not to qualify for the Division 1 final, finishing 3rd in the table on 10 points, while An Clár can also count themselves unlucky not to get promotion from Division 3 to Division 2. Luimneach were relegated from Division 3 to 4, meaning that Munster will have three counties in Division 4 in 2025 and one county in Division 1. There is no doubt, that the province needs more counties to be playing at a higher level in the Allianz Leagues in order to make progress in the Championship, and this will be discussed later.

Munster Hurling and Football Championships

The Munster Senior Hurling Championship began in a blaze of sunshine and drama on the weekend of April 21st. Luimneach travelled to Cusack Park to take on An Clár, while Corcaigh headed to the newly developed and impressive Walsh Park to take on Port Láirge, with both venues selling out. These games gave us a taste of what was to come, with Luimneach snatching victory from the jaws of defeat with 3



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second half goals, and Port Láirge upsetting the form book, defeating Corcaigh and unleashing a wave of emotion amongst players and supporters at the final whistle. In round 2, An Clár got their season back on track with a dramatic and narrow win over Corcaigh at a heaving Páirc Uí Chaoimh, while Luimneach continued on their winning ways by defeating Tiobraid Árann at the Gaelic Grounds.

The third round would turn out to be the most breathtaking series of games ever played in the Munster Championship. First, Port Láirge took on Tiobraid Árann at a sold-out Walsh Park. A win for Port Láirge would have put them on 4 points, and this would have given the team a crucial head-to-head advantage over Corcaigh and Tiobraid Árann, with those 2 counties almost certainly eliminated. Munster Hurling has a habit of keeping us all on the edge of our seats, and this game was no different, with Tiobraid Árann's 'late late show' snatching a draw having scored 1-1 in injury time. The result kept Corcaigh's slim hopes alive, but now victory over the all-conquering Luimneach team was required. 42,000 flocked to a sold out Páirc Uí Chaoimh on a gloriously sunny evening. The game was one of Munster Hurling's all-time classics, and an enthralled audience saw Cork pip their great rivals at the post, with a late penalty helping secure victory and a Championship lifeline. Within hours of the whistle, 20,000 tickets were sold for the Rebels' next fixture with Tiobraid Árann, and two Round four sell out fixtures saw Cork defeat Tiobraid Árann and An Clár secured a one-point victory over Port Láirge with an injury time 65. Round 5 saw Luimneach and An Clár both claim victories and qualify for the Munster Senior Hurling Final for the third year in a row. Port Láirge and Tiobraid Árann bowed out of the competition, with Corcaigh taking third place.

The Final was played at a sold out Semple Stadium, and a power cut forced a 30-minute delay to proceedings. When the game did get going, it took some time to find its feet, but Luimneach clicked in to gear and rocked on to win a record 6th Munster Senior Hurling title in a row, winning the final by 6 points. The result was a difficult one for An Clár, but it was the last time the Banner men would be beaten in 2024, as they would regroup to get a glorious journey back on the road.





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While our Senior Hurling competition was attracting huge crowds, generating great excitement and media coverage, our Senior Football competition chugged along almost under the radar. Of course, there is a big difference between the two competitions. The Senior Hurling one is central to the overall championship. Two counties exit the Senior Hurling Championship entirely when the round robin is completed. That is what gives it the proper championship feel that it has, as any defeat at any time can put paid to a team's ambitions. The same is not true of the Senior Football competition.

As already stated, with 3 counties playing division 4 football and 1 in each of the other 3 divisions, our competition faces the biggest challenge of all in that it struggles to test the old order, with Ciarraí being totally dominant since 2012, winning 11 of the 12 titles on offer. The 2024 Championship gave us signs of a Corcaigh revival in football, as they went toe to toe with Ciarraí in Killarney at the Semi-Final stage of the competition. The game, which ideally would have had a Sunday billing, was played on Saturday at 4pm as there were two hurling fixtures on the Sunday. 18,000 supporters were given a lively game, with Ciarraí coming to the fore in the second half to win by 3 points. The Final itself attracted 12,000 to Ennis, and it was a close encounter played with a lively atmosphere with the huge home crowd urging their team on. In the end, Ciarraí's ability to find a few more scores gave them a 7-point win. There was barely a celebration as the cup was lifted, in contrast to the huge excitement seen at the end of the Connacht and Ulster Championship Finals.



We know that sport is cyclical. Teams come and go. Competitions have periods of huge public interest and periods of declining interest. Munster Senior Hurling is riding the crest of a wave at the moment. The All-Ireland Champions have come from Munster for 7 years in a row and more than likely, as things stand, 2 or 3 of the main favorites for the 2025 All-Ireland Championship will be Munster teams. In contrast to this, between 2006 and 2015, only 2 Munster counties won the Liam Mac Carthy Cup. At some point, and that could sooner rather than later, Leinster teams will rise again and claim the Liam Mac Carthy Cup and



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Munster teams could well go through a barren spell. This has all happened before. The problem with Munster Football is that without Corcaigh challenging for honors at the game's top table, we are relying on all too rare upsets for variety.

At U-20 football level, a new competition structure was in place for the football competition, with the number of games increasing from 5 to 14. The purpose of the new structure is to provide players with more championship games and the competition delivered on that. Ciarraí won the competition, defeating Corcaigh in the Final. Ciarraí were also victorious in the Minor Football Championship, defeating Corcaigh in the Final and winning their second title in a row.

The old saying goes that the darkest hour is before the dawn. Following Tiobraid Árann's exit from the Senior Hurling Championship following 3 defeats and 1 draw, there was dismay expressed across the county at the state of hurling in the Premier County. However, 5 days later, Tiobraid Árann had secured both the Munster Minor and U-20 Hurling titles. The Minor win was a particularly emotional win, as Tiobraid Árann became the first winners of the John Doyle Munster Minor Hurling Championship Cup. These wins coupled with the Harty Cup title being won by Tipperary schools for 2 years in a row, surely point to a bright future for Tipperary hurling and are evidence of great work going on across the county.

2024 Munster Champions	
Senior Hurling	Luimneach
Senior Football	Ciarraí
U20 Hurling	Tiobraid Árann
U20 Football	Ciarraí
Minor Hurling	Tiobraid Árann
Minor Football	Ciarraí

Munster Teams in the All-Ireland Championships

There were mixed fortunes for our teams in the 6 main All-Ireland Intercounty Championships. In Football, there was mainly disappointment. Ciarraí were the flag bearers for Munster football, reaching the All-Ireland U-20 Final, the Minor All-Ireland Semi-Final and the All-Ireland Senior Semi Final. Unfortunately, all 3 competitions proved fruitless for Ciarraí in terms of All-Ireland titles, with the U-20's losing out to Tír Eoghain in the All-Ireland final, while the Seniors were beaten by eventual All-Ireland Champions Ard Mhacha.

Hurling was a different matter, with 2 of the 3 main titles making their way to the province. Tiobraid Árann reached both the Minor and U20 All-Ireland Finals. The U20 team put up a gallant display against Uíbh Fhailí at a packed Nowlan Park. However, the Leinster Champions proved too strong on the day, and claimed a first ever U-20 title amid huge celebrations from their large following. However, Tipperary's Minor Hurlers recorded what must surely be the most spectacular All-Ireland win at any grade, beating Cill Chainnigh in the Final at Nowlan Park, despite having 2 players sent off in the first half, and despite the game going to extra time. Somehow, the team found the resolve to keep going and cross the line as All-Ireland Champions. It was certainly a welcome win for the Premier County and a welcome boost given the disappointing year at Senior level.



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In the Senior Championship, Corcaigh, An Clár and Luimneach reached the All-Ireland Semi Finals. It was the 3rd time in 5 years that three Munster teams reached this stage of the competition. In the first Semi Final, An Clár produced a stunning second half performance to beat Cill Chainnigh and qualify for their first final since 2013. It was a particularly important win for the Banner County, given that they had fallen at the Semi Final hurdle to the same opposition in 2022 and 2023. In the other Semi Final, it was an all-Munster clash between Luimneach and Corcaigh, with Corcaigh also putting in a huge second half performance to dethrone the 4 in a row champions of Luimneach in a pulsating contest and qualify for the All-Ireland Final. The 5 in a row dream of Luimneach came to an end, but there is no doubt about it, the achievements of this team in winning 5 All-Ireland titles in 6 years along with 6 Munster Championships in a row, as well as 2 Allianz Hurling League titles will rarely, if ever, be surpassed, and this record elevates this team as one of the best teams to ever play the game. It would be foolhardy to write the team off now. There is plenty of talent in the squad to launch another title bid in 2025 and beyond.





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And so came an All-Munster Senior Hurling Final, the 5th such final in the history of the GAA and 3rd in 5 years. In a game regarded by many as one of the greatest finals of all time, if not the greatest, An Clár soared to victory, thanks in no small part to some magical moments from the long serving Tony Kelly, who scored a crucial goal using all his wizardry to pick his way through the Cork defense and hit the net. It was a game that ebbed and flowed and kept the 82,000 spectators on the edge of their seats and the 1 million TV viewers at home enthralled. After extra time, just one point separated the sides, and it was An Clár who recorded their 5th All-Ireland title. There were scenes of joy across the county, with over 35,000 people turning out in Ennis on the following day to welcome their heroes home. For Corcaigh, there was huge disappointment at being so close, yet so far from bridging a gap that will now extend to 20 years since Liam Mac Carthy resided on Leaside. However, with the talent that is there and with the underage success of recent seasons, I am sure that the hurling supporters of the county won't have long to wait for success.



Club Championships

There was disappointment for Munster Clubs in the 2023 All-Ireland Championships, which took place in January of 2024. While Naomh Caitríona, Caisleán Uí Liatháin, Lios Tuathail and Cill na Martra all reached All-Ireland Finals, all 4 were unlucky to lose out on the day.

November of 2024 saw the Munster Club Championships for 2024 begin, and as is the case each year, there was no shortage of excitement, drama and pride on display. If one ever wonders if the GAA is losing its club-based heartbeat, then the Club Championships show us that the commitment by players and communities to their local club is as strong as ever. The pride and joy on display at venues around the province when clubs win a Munster Championship is a joy to behold.



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Na Sáirséalaigh of Corcaigh caused a major upset by dethroning all conquering and 4 in a row Munster Champions Baile Mhic Gonair in a most exciting and dramatic Senior Hurling final played at Semple Stadium in Thurles. Na Sáirséalaigh become the first Cork Club to win the Senior Title since 2009. It was a very fruitful weekend for Cork Club Hurling, with Fánaithe na Ruiséalaigh and Cnocán na Biolraí annexing the Junior and Intermediate titles respectively, and it was the second time since the inception of the Junior and Intermediate Championships that all 3 titles have gone to the one county, with Corcaigh also achieving this distinction in 2005.

In football, Na Crócaigh Cill Airne of Kerry showed their class when beating Luachma Caisleán Laighnigh of Tipperary in the final. While Luachma Caisleán Laighnigh battled throughout, the ability of Na Crócaigh Cill Airne to find space and scores told in the end, and they won a very impressive 9th title in the Senior grade. The final defeat was heartbreaking for Luachma Caisleán Laighnigh, they can be very proud of their extraordinary achievement of winning both Senior Hurling and Football titles in Tipperary, the third time the club has achieved such a feat. Aibhistín de Staic Trá Lí had an all too easy win in the Intermediate final, while Cill Mhuire of Cork overcame the heartache of losing the previous two Munster finals, by beating Fíódh Ros to win the Junior title.

I would like to wish all 6 clubs representing the province all the best in the All-Ireland competitions.

2024 Munster Club Champions	
Junior Hurling	Fánaithe na Ruiséalaigh (Corcaigh)
Junior Football	Cill Mhuire (Corcaigh)
Intermediate Hurling	Cnocán na Biolraí (Corcaigh)
Intermediate Football	Aibhistín de Staic Trá Lí (Ciarraí)
Senior Hurling	Na Sáirséalaigh (Corcaigh)
Senior Football	Na Crócaigh Cill Airne (Ciarraí)



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Demographics and Facilities

Like many countries across the world, Ireland has been experiencing a major demographic change, with populations gradually moving away from rural life to urban areas. In 1960, 45% of the population lived in urban areas. That has now risen to 64%. Interestingly, because Ireland now has a far higher population than 1960, slightly more people now live in rural areas, but for many areas, the Gaelic Games playing age population has fallen significantly. Many areas of rural Ireland have seen their community vibrancy slowly slip away as declining populations and changing lifestyles mean fewer people to shop and socialize locally, with the resulting decline in many businesses that were once great community hubs. For many areas, the sole survivor of this societal change has been the GAA Club, but for many, survival itself is on a knife edge. One club I was speaking with recently told me that over a 10-year span, they have a total of 46 players. In the 1980's and 1990's they fielded teams at all grades on their own. They are now joined with a club in a similar situation in order to field teams.

Many urban clubs are having the opposite experience, with huge numbers of players joining clubs, particularly in the younger age groups. For many urban clubs, the challenge is about adequate facilities and volunteers to cater for the huge numbers. However, there are also urban clubs who are experiencing difficulty in terms of the population of young and available players in their area. In Munster, we have set up 6 urban project areas to examine the challenges facing clubs in these areas and to try and provide solutions. In one area, Limerick City, a combined team called 'Southside Gaels' has been established, and the results in terms of numbers participating have been very encouraging. It is hoped that in time, we will see the individual clubs involved become reenergized with an ability to field underage teams on their own. In one other Urban Project area, we are hopeful of identifying a suitable site for the development of playing facilities.

What is clear though, is that the GAA needs to become part of the conversation around municipal facilities in urban areas. In other words, multiport facilities built by funding from the taxpayer need to include facilities for the playing of Gaelic Games. In the past, our desire to build our own facilities was very strong, but in the modern world, this is not always practical. Land in urban areas is scarce now, so facilities need to take on multi-sport model. So good has the GAA been at providing its own facilities, that local authorities have built municipal facilities that have excluded Gaelic Games, simply because the playing areas provided in these municipal facilities is too small to cater for Gaelic Games. A notion is being peddled that the Government has put far too much money into Gaelic Games to the detriment of other sports. This is not true. Government funding over the years has been a fraction of what the GAA itself has invested in its own facilities. The current County Centers of Excellence in Munster for example, have been built with minimal Government support and have been mainly funded by the GAA. Given our past desire to own all our own grounds, we now find ourselves with an ageing Intercounty Stadium infrastructure, with significant finance needed to maintain these facilities, and a far bigger sum needed to modernize them. The cost of the proposed works at Semple Stadium has risen to €8 million, and the majority of this work is maintenance related, and won't result in improvements, apart from new seating in the Kinnane Stand and the laying of a new pitch. The Páirc Uí Chaoimh price tag of €96 million, while great value when compared to today's construction costs, has left a crippling debt of €30 million, and one thing we know for sure is that GAA games, which return 15% of the gross gate to the host county, won't go near returning enough money to maintain the ground and pay off the debt. The biggest beneficiary of this stadium is the City of Cork. We can extrapolate from recently published research, that the City benefits to the tune of around €4 million for every large event held there, and in 2025, there could well be 3 large Munster Senior Hurling Championship games, including the final. The large county grounds are going to present an



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ongoing challenge for the Association, and as I have stated in reports past, the GAA needs to embrace the municipal facility model as our own use alone can't maintain these facilities.

The Large-Scale Infrastructure Scheme has been a welcome development, and with the significant amount of funding provided, it will assist all organizations in the provision of facilities. However, multi-sport municipal facilities, which must form a key part of an overall sporting facility strategy, must include Gaelic Games and the Association must embrace this new thinking. Take the proposed Regional Sports Hub in Cavan. This facility is being built with the assistance of a €19 million grant from the Large-Scale Infrastructure Fund. The facility will cater for all sports, including Gaelic Games, and it will be of big benefit to the GAA Clubs in the area. Hopefully, County Councils in Munster will see their way to working towards developing facilities of this nature, and one thing is clear in my view, a facility is not municipal, if Gaelic Games are excluded.





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Gaelic Football

2024 was another difficult year on the great game. While its hurling sibling delivered drama and intrigue, football lagged behind, caught in a haze of criticism, centered around the game itself, and a format that failed to capture the imagination of the general public. Too many games removed the championship feel and replaced it with a level of apathy as the public waited for the real business to begin at the quarter final stage.

Groups of 4 work at county level work, because normally, 2 teams progress to the knockout stages and 1 team heads to a relegation battle, meaning that all games are meaningful. Without that trapdoor element, the public didn't engage in the same way as they did with the Super 8 format, when an average of 19,000 attended the 12 group games in 2018 and the same number in 2019. The format saw the 8 top teams in the county play each other, and saw provincial venues draw large crowds, such as the 31,000 that attended Kerry and Mayo in Killarney, and the 27,500 that attended Mayo v Donegal in Castlebar and 16,000 to Healy Park for Tyrone and Dublin. Yet, the format was seen as elitist and not catering for all counties in terms of championship games, so we landed on a format that guaranteed all counties at least 4 championship games.

A motion will go to the forthcoming congress to move to a format with less games, and more jeopardy. It will be the third major change in 8 years as the Association tries to land on a format that increases the number of games but gives a knockout championship feel to those games.

The format is the easier of Gaelic Football's 2 problems to fix. The main issue is the game itself and the modern iteration of it. Too much lateral and backwards handpassing as teams probe the opposition for an opportunity to attack, has seen the general public express frustration with the game. Constant handpassing is seen by many as a major blight on the game. Of course, there isn't much wrong with the handpass. One of the games iconic goals, that being Kevin Foley's goal in the famous Dublin Meath saga of 1991, saw 6 hand passes take place before the ball was kicked to the net. The difference is that 6 handpasses were forward and attacking in nature.

However, 2025 will bring new hope for the game as the most anticipated rules changes in many years are implemented. Jim Gavin and his Football Review Committee must receive compliments of the highest order for the way that have approached their task, with a meticulous and wide-ranging examination of how the game can be improved to deliver an attacking and open game that players and supporters alike wish to see. Gaelic Football doesn't have the luxury of waiting any longer.

The new proposed rules will, in my view, firmly hand the advantage back to the better coached attacking teams and more skillful players, who will be able to take advantage of the space created and the new scoring system to put points on the board. The current rules make it too easy for negatively coached teams to spoil the opposition by pulling every player back and engaging in a process of keeping possession and keeping the score down. The new rules, in my view, will reward the attack minded and progressive teams, and punish the defensive mind and negative teams. This is where the game needs to be.

I was disappointed to see the proposal for the 4-point goal not make it to the floor of Congress, particularly given that Central Council has the power to amend rules as the year progresses. Encouraging teams to try and score goals must surely be a good thing. However, the rules that are now in play, particularly the 2-point score, the tap and go and the banning of the back pass to the goalkeeper, will, I believe, be the game changer that is so urgently required. We all await the start of the Allianz Leagues now with a great air of



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excitement, as we know the potential that exists for this game and know that when played well, it is an exciting and engaging game to watch.

Post Primary Schools

Each year, the Post Primary Schools Committee pulls off something of a miracle, by completing 30 competitions and 700 games across both codes. This was even more challenging than ever over the last competition year, as almost 50% of games were played on artificial pitches, due to the adverse weather conditions. The sourcing of referees is a constant challenge too, with the time of day that games are played making those referees who are working unavailable or requiring available referees to take time off work. These competitions remain a key cog in the GAA wheel and are such an important part of the Post Primary School experience for so many students. While we can solve the pitch availability issue over time with more artificial pitches coming on stream, the pressure in trying to find referees for games will take time to address, and the problem could get worse before it gets better, as the Association grapples with an ageing profile of its referee cohort.

On the field of play, Nenagh CBS won the Dr. Harty Cup, taking it to Tipperary for the second year in a row, while in the Corn Uí Mhuirí, Mercy Mounthawk of Tralee won their first title, and recorded an 11th success in a row for Kerry schools. There were All-Ireland wins recorded by Scoil Pól Kilfinane (Limerick) in the Masita All-Ireland Post Primary Schools Michael Cusack Cup (Senior C Hurling) Final, and for Tarbert Comprehensive in the 2024 Masita GAA Post Primary Schools 'C' Dr. Eamonn O'Sullivan Cup Final and for St. Mary's Newport (Tipperary) in the 2024 Masita All-Ireland Post Primary Schools Niall McInerney Cup (Senior D Hurling) Final.

Games Development and USGAA

2024 was a historic year for USGAA, with a first ever entry into the All-Ireland Junior Football Championship. An initial squad of 120 players was whittled down to 26 over a number of trial games, and the team embarked on a training programme, which involved training weekends in Chicago and Philadelphia. The team, which were all US born, performed very well in the Championship, losing to London by 1 point in a very exciting tussle, which the US team could certainly have won with a small bit of luck. I have said in reports past, huge potential exists to grow Gaelic Games in the US. While still a new sport relative to the established sports there, it has a niche in that it provides a new team sport for adults, many of whom will not have played a team sport since leaving the education system. Clubs create communities within cities, and link people who wish to try a new sport together, and the number of clubs is increasing all the time. Each year, the USGAA Finals attracts over 100 teams from across the US and the number of entrants is growing each year. I certainly hope that participating in the All-Ireland Junior Series will give US born players something to aspire to, in the same way players here aspire to playing for their county.

2024 was another busy year for Coaching and Games Development, particularly as an additional 20 full-time Games Development Co-coordinators began working across the province, bringing the total number of full times Games Development Staff in Munster to over 50. The Coaching and Games Committee has a detailed report in this convention booklet, and it outlines the enormous amount of activity taking place across Munster. One highlight for me is the U-14 Super-10's competition, which is designed to give players



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more space and time on the ball and is growing in popularity. In 2024, 129 clubs participated in the hurling competition with 145 taking part in the football equivalent. The Cúl Camps continue to be as popular as ever, with 45,790 children taking part in 419 camps. County Academy Development Squads was another area of great activity, with 38 football and 41 hurling squads participating in the National Fixtures Program.

One Wall Handball Championships

I was delighted to attend the One Wall Handball World Championships in UL during August. It was the first time that the one wall was separated from the 4-wall handball competition, and the move proved to be a great success. The event was held at the University of Limerick, with 9 courts built in the main arena. Over the week of the competition, 850 players participated and a total of 1,200 games were played. Great credit must go to Dónal Ó hAodha and Munster Council Handball Representative, Micheal Ó Conchubair who did a huge amount of work bringing the Championships to Munster and in making the event the success that it was.

Refereeing

The challenges facing the Association in attracting sufficient referees to manage the games programme across the 3 Associations are as worrying as ever. I have referenced the challenge in many annual reports. I am delighted to say that Munster GAA has taken a vital step in helping to address this issue by appointing Séan Ó Riain as full-time Referee Development Manager. Séan has vast experience in the area, from his many years of refereeing at Club and Intercounty level, to his role as Secretary of the Munster Referee Administration Committee.

The new person is only the 3rd full-time staff member dedicated to refereeing in the country, and given how serious the referee availability situation is, we will need to see more full-time people in this area in the years ahead. Séan and the Referee Administration Committee will focus on expanding the Munsters GAA Academy, on organizing training for the Munster Referee Panel, and in assisting counties with the recruitment and training of new referees, male and female, at club level to assist all codes of the Gaelic Games family.

There has been a lot of discussion on the use of video refereeing in our games, especially in hurling. As we know, video refereeing is in use in Rugby and in Soccer, and while lauded in Rugby for assisting referees, it has received criticism in the game of soccer for denying teams goals for spurious reasons, such as a fraction of a player's foot being offside. The key point we need to remember is that both codes use it at a professional level only. We are used to seeing this video technology in use in the Premier League and in competitions like the European Rugby Cup, but in all cases, grounds are generally modern, and the sports involved have resources that are vastly superior to the GAA. In 2023 for example, the combined turnover of the Premier League clubs was €7 billion, a sum that would take the GAA's Central Council, the 4 Provincial Councils and the 32 County Boards combined many decades to earn. So, firstly, let us dispense with the notion that we can have the technology required and the personnel required to manage video refereeing technology in all of our grounds and for all championship and league games. We have touched the technology area with Hawkeye, and it is available only in Croke Park and Semple Stadium. Hawkeye is cost prohibitive to introduce it to all other grounds and it will be the same issue with video refereeing technology.



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Provincial Hurling Final Replays

There is an old saying, “Be careful what you wish for”. The subject of replays for Provincial Finals is back on the agenda. While there is merit in the arguments for them, as the additional 20 minutes of extra time is difficult on players and there is potential financial loss to the organizing Council, the main disadvantage of replays is the impact on the fixtures calendar. This impact is not so severe on the Football Championship, but Provincial Hurling Final replays could have a less than desired impact in that the chances of the Munster Provincial Hurling champions progressing to the All-Ireland final could be reduced if a five week wait time from the Munster Final to the All-Ireland Semi Final materializes.

For a fixtures calendar with Provincial Replays to work, a replay weekend must be set, whether it is required or not. The chances are that it would not be needed. While replays were permitted in the GAA Calendar until the new split season, Munster Hurling Final replays have been a rare occurrence. From the 100 years from 1920 to 2019, there were 11 Munster Final replays, an average of 1 every 9 or so years. There was none between 1944 and 1987. If there had been a replay in 2022 when Luimneach and An Clár were level after normal time, it would have been only the second since the turn of the century that one was required.

As already stated, if replays were to return for Provincial Hurling finals, the wait for the Munster Champions for the All-Ireland Semi Final would extend from four to five weeks. The current four-week gap is due to the two-week gap from the Provincial Final to the All-Ireland Quarter Finals and a further two-week gap to the All-Ireland Semi Finals. This four-week gap is already on the long side for a team to be waiting without a championship game. If replays were to be reintroduced, either the team that loses the Provincial Final replay would have to play in the Quarter Final the following week or a replay weekend would need to be built into the fixtures calendar to guarantee them a two week gap.

Yes, a replay ‘could’ bring an extra €1 million of income to the Provincial Council, but far more often than not, the replay weekend would lie idle and the potential financial gain once every 9 years, can hardly justify decreasing the chances of our champions progressing to the All-Ireland Final because of the 5 weeks wait.

Advantage should always follow the team that wins a Championship. Take our U- 20 Hurling Championship for example. The team that finishes top of the group qualifies for the final and this takes place two weeks after the last round of games in the round robin. The second and third placed team qualify for the semifinal, with the second placed team having home advantage, regardless of which team was at home in the group stage tie. Therefore, the advantage follows the team that finishes top, followed by the team that finishes in second place.

As I have already stated, as things stand, a four-week gap could be seen as being on the long side. Maybe a solution to address the current four-week gap is for the All-Ireland Semi Finals to follow a week after the Quarter Finals and the All-Ireland Preliminary Quarter Finals to take place the week after the Provincial Final. That would mean the team that finishes 3rd in Munster and reaches an All-Ireland Semi Final plays 3 weekends in a row, while the Provincial Final runner up has a two week break to the Quarter Final, with the Semi Final the week after. The Provincial winner has a three-week gap to the Semi Final, which is probably the perfect gap. Therefore, the most advantageous position falls to the team that wins the Provincial Championship. The position of least advantage is 3rd place because of the potential of playing 3 weeks in a row.



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Penalty Taking Competitions

While this is not a topic that will appear of major concern, there has been commentary throughout the year about removing them in cases where teams are level after extra time and replacing them with an alternative system, such as a golden score competition. In such a tight calendar, one thing is clear and that is we must have a way of separating teams that are level after extra time. We know that replay dates are too disruptive to fixture calendars. The great advantage of the penalty taking competition is that it is fair to both teams. Both have 5 shots, and more if required, and all shots take place into the same goals. Weather conditions or referee opinion play no part in these. However, by introducing a golden score or some other form of extended play, factors such as the direction of the wind, the opinion of the referee on what was a free or not, comes into play. The fact that the penalty taking competition is borrowed from soccer is no reason to dispense with it. The method of separation must be as fair as possible to both teams, and the use of the penalty taking competition is fair.

Split Season and Fixtures

2024 saw a continued debate about the split season, and in particular, the July All-Ireland Finals. I have covered the reasons as to why I am in full support of the split season in previous reports. One of the criticisms of the split season is the congestion in the intercounty competitions, especially the football championships. The congestion has far more to do with the increase in the number of games to complete the championship than the All-Ireland Finals being played in July. 64 games are required to play the Senior Football Championship, followed by another 35 to play the Tailteann Cup. That's a combined total of 99 games to complete the 2 Senior Football competitions. When these Championships were knockout competitions, the total number of games was 32. The Senior Hurling Championship takes 34 games to complete, up from 11 in the days of the knockout format.

The same proliferation has happened at club level. Almost all club championships are round robin in nature nowadays, and with good reason, as counties aim to provide more meaningful championship games for their club players. And here lies the beauty and the great difficulty of the GAA. As I have also said in the past, the GAA is unique in that the elite player also plays at grassroots level (mainly for club championship games it must be said) and in my view, this is something we must protect at all costs.

The question is, how far can we push the intercounty season into the club season, and how far can we push the training and game demands on intercounty players before we eventually force a separation of club and county? Of course, we can push the All-Ireland Finals to mid-August and this means that at least 8 counties will be in competition until late July/early August. That will inevitably lead to a later Championship start in those counties. If we go to a situation where counties have 2 calendars, one set of fixtures or when they reach an All-Ireland Semi Final and the other for when they don't, we have slipped back to the matter of uncertainty for the club players in those counties. In other words, they won't know the exact weekends they are playing until the county team exits the championship.

We track the number of adult championship games being played in Munster, and the results are impressive. From the 16 weeks from Monday July 1st to Sunday October 20th, there were 2,437 adult club championship games played across Munster, with 55% of those being hurling championship games and 45% being football championship games. This is a huge amount of activity and shows how vibrant and active the club scene is. The figures show that Munster is a dual province, where both codes are played by the majority of clubs. Senior games across both codes made up 17% of these games, the Intermediate



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grade accounted for 20%, with the remainder of 63% being from the various Junior grades. Crucially, 2,184 of these games were played in the months of July, August and September, which are the key months in terms of club fixtures.

As can be seen, every weekend available is needed by the 6 counties of Munster to play their championships, and everyone making fixtures knows that once mid-September comes, evening light makes it difficult to play games. It is true that July is filled with mostly junior grade activity, but August and September were very busy with just over 1,500 club championship games played. Therefore, these two months are crucial to playing the round robin stages of championships. Once October comes, counties need to be at knockout stages as the number of games to be played drops significantly.

My fear is that the more we push intercounty players in terms of preparation and games, and the more we push the Intercounty season into the Club season, the Association will slowly inch its way to a day when Intercounty players won't play with their clubs at all. Then we will have the fixture freedom to play the All-Ireland Finals whenever we want, and start club championship whenever suits, but we will have lost one of our greatest attractions, and that is the sight of our Intercounty stars playing championship for their clubs.

There is no immediate threat of a total separation, and in fairness, Intercounty players have long said that playing for their clubs remains so important to them. The key point in my view, is that in all discussion on fixtures, our first 3 points of principal must be that we protect the ability of the Intercounty player to play championship with his club, that the club player receives a meaningful programme of championship games, and the Intercounty player has a more sustainable programme of intercounty activity.

Munster GAA Development Plan

In January of 2024, Munster GAA launched its own Development Plan, which sets out a series of projects and targets across 4 activity areas, namely Coaching and Games Development, Finance, Facilities and People. These projects when implemented, will have a positive effect on the development of Gaelic Games across Munster.

A key project has been the creation of a Strategic Development Fund, which aims to set aside €1.2 million in funding for each of the 6 counties over the plan's timeframe. The fund is being created for the development of facilities that encourage and assist participation. This fund has been delivering results already, with Ciarraí putting their allocation towards a new floodlight maximum dimension artificial pitch at the Centre of Excellence in Currans. This facility will have a transformative effect on Gaelic Games in Kerry, particularly at Schools and Club level, as games can now take place in time of adverse weather conditions. Funding has also been made available for the Limerick Centre of Excellence in Rathkeale and they have completed the development of a new stand, gym and changing room, and are now upgrading their artificial pitch to maximum dimension GAA pitch. Clare will also be using their allocation for similar projects at their Centre of Excellence, while Waterford are committing their fund to the phase 2 redevelopment of Walsh Park, the only stadium project listed to receive funding under the Munster Development Plan.

A second key project has been the creation of Urban Project areas, with Limerick City, Clonmel, Cork City Northside and Waterford up and running. The first step in the project areas has been to commission a population and participation report. The second step is the formulation of a plan of action. I am delighted



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to see progress in these areas, particularly in Limerick City, where the newly formed Southside Gaels, is helping to address low participation rates at youth level in the City. What is particularly impressive about this project is that it has been successful in attracting players of various nationalities, many of whom are new to the GAA. Our hope is that we will achieve a participation increase in all the identified areas and deliver additional facilities in those areas that need these resources.

Munster GAA Finances

We are very fortunate in Munster to have the Senior Hurling Championship, which continues to generate huge levels of excitement and public engagement. The competition returned a gross gate of €6.795 million in 2024, which amounted to 85% of our total gate receipts. It is this level of income that allows us to fund our clubs and our counties as we do. Out of our own resources in 2024, €1.147 million was returned to the counties in field rent, and this money is vital to county boards as they try to maintain their county grounds. A further €1.13 million was paid in team expenses and our contribution to the player injury fund, while €1.149 was paid to Clubs and Counties for capital development. A significant concern is the increasing cost of hosting our games, with stewarding, ticketing and other match day costs coming to €1.833 million. In fact, the entire cost of running our games, including field rent, comes to 38% of the entire gate income of our games. Add in the team expenses we pay, and that figure rises to 47%. One thing is certain, we cannot support our units like we need to without the revenue generated from our games. The need for additional funding is ever growing, as Counties continue to invest in Centres of Excellence, while there are always new projects arising that need funding, such as the new Urban Project Areas. I want to take this opportunity to thank Roibeard Ó Riain, Seán Ó Braonáin and Liam Mac Lochlainn for their careful oversight and management of our finances.

Full Council, Sub-Committees and Workgroups

As in all years, the Council could not operate without the hard work and dedication of a number of Committees, Sub-Committees and Workgroups. In all the Council met on 6 occasions, with the Competitions Control Committee also meeting on 12 occasions. The Finance and Management Committee had a particularly busy year, meeting on 12 occasions and with a significant amount of work taking place between meetings dealing with club property and borrowing applications and all matters of expenditure. A special mention must go to the Munster Hearings Committee under the stewardship of Micheál de Búrca and Liam Ó Conchúir. This Committee met on 15 occasions during the year and did so on a number of occasions at the shortest of notice in order to facilitate hearings. The Referee Administration Committee, consisting of Micheál Ó hUadáin, Seán Ó Riain and Gearóid Ó Laighin, also deserves a special mention, as their work in the area of referee development has been of a transformative nature over the last three years. A report from each Sub Committee is contained in this convention book. For the record, a list of the members of the Council is contained in table 4, while a list of the Chairperson and Secretary of all the various sub-committees is contained in table 5.



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Position	Name
Cathaoirleach	Gearóid Ó Riain
Rúnaí/POF	Ciarán Ó Lídí
Leas-Chathaoirleach	Tadhg Ó Murchú
Cisteoir	Roi beard Ó Riain
Oifigeach Caidrimh Phoiblí	Diarmuid Ó Loinsigh
Bainisteoir Oibríochtaí	Seán Ó Braonáin
Uachtarán	Micheál de Paor
An Clár	Seán Mac Pháil agus Bearnárd Ó Catháin
Ciarraí	Traolach Ó hUallacháin agus Paidí Ó Duinnín
Corcaigh	Pól Mac Cárthaigh agus Seosamh de Bláca
Luimneach	Pádraig Ó Dábhoireann agus Seán Ó Creagáin
Port Láirge	Pádraigín Bhreathnach agus Micheál Uaidín
Tiobraid Árann	Seán Nuinseann agus Seosamh Ó Cinnéide
Coláistí Triú Leibhéil	Séamus Mac Fhíobhuí
Iarbhunscoileanna	Deaglán Mac Gearailt
Bunscoileanna	Dáithí Ó Coiléain
Liathróid Láimhe	Micheál Ó Conchúir

Table 4: Members of the Munster Council

Coiste Committee	Cathaoirleach	Rúnaí
Management & Finance Committee	Gearóid Ó Riain	Seán Ó Braonáin
Provincial Competitions Control Committee	Gearóid Ó Riain	Ciarán Ó Lídí
Provincial Hearings Committee	Micheál de Búrca	Liam Ó Conchúir
County & Club Grounds Safety Workgroup	Ciarán Mac Canna	Seán de Breit
Club & County Administration & Officer Training Workgroup	Séamus Ó Tuama	Micheál Ó Broin
Referees Administration Committee	Micheál Uaidín	Seán Ó Riain
Coaching & Games Development Committee	Tadhg Ó Murchú	Pádraig Ó Sé
Coiste Cultúrtha	Antóin Breathnach	Aedín Ní Bhriain
Grúpa Oibre Scór	Maighréad Ní Fhaoileáin	Diarmuid Ó Dubhda
PR & Marketing Committee	Diarmuid Ó Loingsigh	Éamonn Ó Donnghaile
Club Fixtures Monitoring Committee	Gearóid Ó Riain	Seán Ó Braonáin
Munster Provincial Regional Handball Committee	Micheál Ó Conchúir	Dónal Ó hAodha
Planning and Physical Development Committee	Gearóid Ó Riain	Seán Ó Braonáin
Games for All Health and Wellbeing Committee	Bernie Ní Rinn	Gearóid Mac Conmara
Audit and Risk Committee	Séamus de Brún	

Table 5: Council Sub Committees and Workgroups



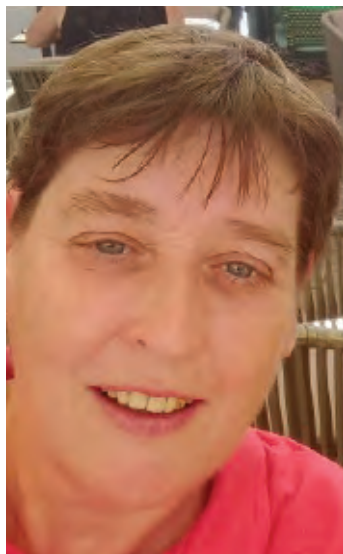
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Gearóid Ó Riain

Gearóid Ó Riain has now completed his 3-year term of office as Munster Council Chairperson. Gearóid has served the Council with great distinction, not only as Chairperson, but also as Vice Chairperson and PRO. Throughout his term as Chairperson, he showed great leadership and vision and was the main driver behind the development and launch of the Munster GAA Development Plan, which he launched in January of 2024. He also led the discussions with Croke Park on securing a greater slice of Games Development Funding, which has allowed the employment of an additional 20 full-time Games Development Coordinators in Munster. These additional staff will have a transformative effect on the development of Gaelic Games across Munster. His term also saw record finance being made available to Counties and to Clubs. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Gearóid for the enormous amount of time he has dedicated to the role, and for his advice and assistance over his term. Gearóid will remain on our Management Committee for one year as an ex-officio member and I wish him well and hope he continues to play an active role in the Association in the years ahead.

Nuala Nealon



There was great sadness across Munster GAA when news broke that Nuala Ní Nialláin had passed away in late August. Nuala was an employee of Munster GAA for 32 years and a dedicated member of our small staff team. Our deepest sympathies go to her family, and particularly to her father, Donie, who served as Rúnaí of Comhairle Na Mumhan for 27 distinguished years. In November, we formally opened our new Seomra Nuala Ní Nialláin meeting room at our Áras Mumhan offices. It is a fitting tribute to Nuala, who worked so diligently for the Council and was a friendly face to all who met her in the course of her work.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam.



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Competition Sponsors

I would like to thank our Competition Sponsors who provided valuable revenue to the Association and much needed exposure for our games, particularly in this difficult year. AIB, Allianz and Supervalu (All-Ireland Senior Football Championship), Bórd Gáis Energy, Centra and Eir (All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship), Allianz (National Leagues), Electric Ireland (All-Ireland Minor Championships), Bórd Gáis Energy (All-Ireland Under 20 Hurling Championship), Eirgrid (All-Ireland Under 20 Football Championship), John West (National Féile Competitions), Kelloggs (Cúl Camps) and AIB (All-Ireland Club Championships) and Co Op Superstores (Munster Senior Hurling League) have been great supporters of the Association.

Buíochas. Thank you

Each year, it takes a huge effort from many people to enable the Council to carry out its role. Firstly, thank you to the Officers of the Council, namely Gearóid Ó Riain, Tadhg Ó Murchú, Roibeard Ó Riain and Diarmuid Ó Loingsigh, who diligently carry out their roles and are always on hand to provide assistance and advice. The amount of time that Officers put in to attending the numerous meetings and events that take place over the year is enormous. They show a great level of dedication to carrying out their roles. Thank you too to all those who serve on our various Committees and Workgroups. Their time is greatly appreciated and their work, while often unseen, is invaluable.

I would also like to thank the six County Secretaries in the Province for their help and support over the last year. We are very fortunate in the province to have the calibre of County Secretary that we have.

Lastly, I would like to thank the staff of the Council (Eamonn Ó Donnghaile, Eoin Ó Riain, Máire Ní Mathúna, Seán Ó Braonáin, Aedín Ní Bhriain, Eva Ní Duinn, Pól Mac an Fhailghigh, Pádraig Ó Sé & Seosamh Mac Artáin) who go well beyond the call of duty in carrying out their roles. They are always on hand to run our events and games, no matter what day of the week these are on. We are lucky to have such a dedicated group of employees who have such a huge interest in the Association and the games.





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Looking Forward to 2025

Let there be no doubt about it. There is going to be a huge focus on Gaelic Football and the new rules in 2025. The game urgently needs a new image and new energy. It has been suffering from negative publicity for too long, and so there is justifiable optimism that a new and faster game can emerge from the new rules and that will encourage supporters who have fallen away from the game to come back and enjoy it once more. I hope our Senior Football Championship can spring in to life and hopefully the new rules will play a big part in this.

We are looking forward to what we hope will be another spell binding Munster Senior Hurling Championship. It is the jewel in the crown of Munster GAA, and we hope that the 2025 version can bring the usual sense of excitement and atmosphere to games in the venues of the province. One of the greatest decisions the Council has ever made was to bring Munster Senior Hurling Championship to Waterford and Ennis, and in 2025, the Championship will begin with the meeting of An Clár and Corcaigh in Cusack Park in Ennis. That will undoubtedly be a great occasion, full of colour and excitement at the sold-out Cusack Park and it is certainly an occasion to look forward to.

Work will continue on the implementation of the Munster GAA Development Plan, and I hope to make further progress in the 6 urban areas that have been given the 'special project' designation. Coaching and Games' Development will continue to be a key focus for the Council, as our new staff continue to deliver such an important service to our units across the province.

Lastly, the Council will have a new Cathaoirleach in Tadhg Ó Murchú of Brósnach in Co. Chiarraí. Tadhg has a wealth of experience in the GAA, having served as the Chairman of the Kerry County Board and Vice Chairperson of the Munster Council for the past 3 years. Tadhg also has great experience in the key area of Games Development, having served as Chairman of our Coaching and Games Committee for the past three years, and he has had a lasting and positive impact in this area, particularly with the securing of additional funding and the employment of additional staff. I would like to take this opportunity to wish Tadhg the very best for the next three years as Chairman of the Munster Council.

Ciarán Ó Lídí,

Rúnaí/Príomhoifigeach Feidhmiúcháin,

Comhairle Na Mumhan CLG.