

Paper to Management of Ulster Council

“Managing Talented Young Players in Ulster”

**Quinns Corner, Ballygawley
31 March 2003**

In attendance

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| John O'Reily | Ulster Council President |
| Jim McCorry | Co Armagh/NMDC |
| Declan Donnelly | Fermanagh/Development Squads |
| Ronnie Smyth | SINI |
| Mickey Harte | Tyrone Senior Manager |
| Joe Kernan | Armagh Senior Team Manager |
| Paddy Og Nugent | Armagh Secretary |
| Danny Murphy | Ulster Council Secretary |
| Ben Glancy | Co Derry Medical Officer |
| Chris McNicholl | Co Derry Physiotherapist |
| Sean Moran | Co Derry Physiotherapist |
| Catriona Scullion | Co Antrim Senior U21's Physiotherapist |
| Larry Duggan | Down Senior and Minor Ladies Manager |
| Mark Clarke | Down Senior and Minor Ladies Manager |
| John Farrell | University of Ulster Jordanstown Hurling |
| Eamonn O'Toole | Chairman Down GAA |
| James Lovett | Games Promotion Officer Cavan |
| Paul O'Hare | County Manager Antrim |
| Mickey Moran | Manager Derry |
| Brian McEniff | Donegal |
| Michael McGeehan | Donegal |
| Val Kane | Ulster Colleges |
| Phil Glasgow | SINI |
| Liam Nelis | Tyrone Chairman |
| Seamus McGrattan | Hurling |
| Art McRory | Ulster Vocational Schools |
| Ryan Feeney | Third Level Secretary |
| John Devenney | Third Level Colleges |
| Joe Jordan | Armagh Chairman |
| Eugene Young | Sports Institute Northern Ireland |
| Jarlath Byrnes | Armagh |

Introduction

Thank you for attending this important seminar. It has been placed high on the agenda at Provincial Level. Given Ulster's success at underage, serious questions must be asked as to why this abundance of talent is not evident in the senior competition. Each cog in the GAA wheel has an important part to play in nurturing talent and one area cannot operate independently from the rest. As such we need to work together in the management of our talent. To provide some feedback and something for discussion within your county I have circulated the following notes.

Overview: Issues and Comments

Speaker 1: Dr. Eugene Young, Sports Institute Northern Ireland

- ✓ Strategies are of no use unless there is implementation of ideas.
- ✓ GAA has an excellent system for developing talent.
- ✓ GAA structure however burdens young players with too much competition and too much training.
- ✓ The coach education system does not at present skill up our coaches operating at Club level.
- ✓ All Coaches must have shared values and focus on the welfare of the young player not winning a competition at his expense.
- ✓ Co-operation, communication and common sense can help avoid, burnout, overuse and player injury and exit from the GAA at an early age.

Speaker 2: Mr. Arthur MacRory, Ulster Vocational School

- ✓ Star GAA Players are being targeted by other sports.
- ✓ Players being offered paid contracts with other sports.
- ✓ Some players have up to six coaches.
- ✓ Lifestyle Management Courses are key for these young players
- ✓ GAA requires reasonable coaches and as such we need:
 - Development in Coaching.
 - Culture change with a focus on player development not wining
- ✓ Young players are playing and training too much.
- ✓ Case study presented as to the pressures on young players with no rest evident in the training and competition schedule.

Speaker 3: Mr. Val Kane, Ulster Colleges

- ✓ Colleges spend time and money in preparing their teams.
- ✓ Preparation in terms of sport and their overall education.
- ✓ Colleges make a significant contribution to the development of talent for counties.
- ✓ The focus is not only on elite but A and B teams within the schools, thus impacting on the clubs as well as counties.
- ✓ A significant number of staff make a contribution to GAA in schools
- ✓ Good players are pulled in many ways.
- ✓ Player played for his County Senior team two weeks prior to the MacRory match and hurt his hamstring.
- ✓ September to March – Colleges should be given priority for this age group.
- ✓ Communication between County and Schools is very poor.
- ✓ No consultation between counties and Schools re selection of players.
- ✓ The player must be the most important and not the Coach.
- ✓ Priorities must be set at certain times of the year depending on the competition.
- ✓ Synchronise the management to avoid cross training.
- ✓ Accept that players in school have the stress of exams.
- ✓ Need to improve communication and provide the young player with a mentor. and begin to restrict the programme they are on.

Speaker 4: Mr John Devenney, Third Level

- ✓ Too much pressure on young players in Higher Education.
- ✓ Need to balance, study, training and competition and financial commitments.
- ✓ Resources within Higher Education to benefit young players development.
- ✓ Young players first priority in an amateur sport is their education.
- ✓ Significant number of talented young players now coming through the HE system.
- ✓ Estimated 40 senior and 80 Under 21 players in the system.
- ✓ Semester examinations in January and May each year.
- ✓ Study is often squeezed in either early Morning or late evening after returning from training.
- ✓ Higher Education environment has got much worse with student fees and many having to take up part-time work to pay their way through college.
- ✓ Recognised the change in dates for competitions with McKenna Cup earlier and National Leagues – both of which hit Sigerson Preparations.
- ✓ High quality of coaches in higher education was recognised.
- ✓ The practice of Students travelling out of Belfast to Counties mid week was adding to burnout.
- ✓ Request that players are allowed to train with their colleges in the run into Sigerson.

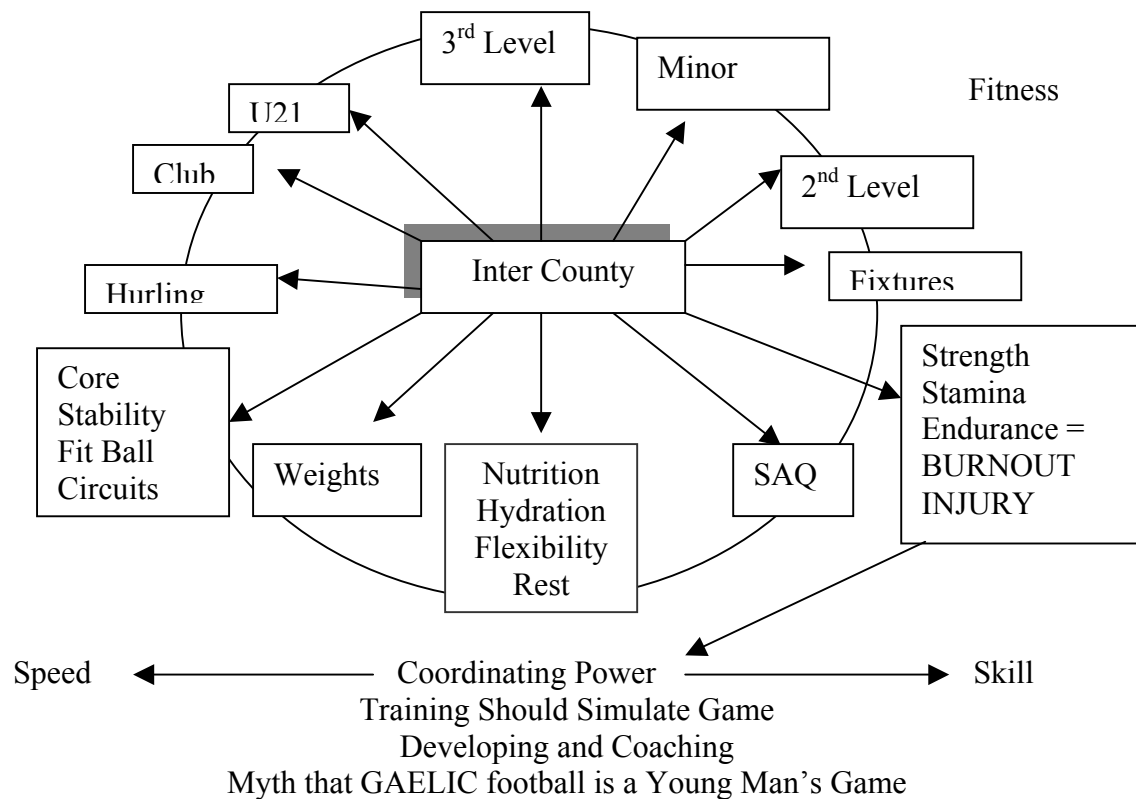
Speaker 5: Mr. Jim McCorry, Club Managers

- ✓ Identified young players in clubs having up to 4 different managers.
- ✓ Each manager may have a different style.
- ✓ Each team is in different training regimes that often clash.
- ✓ Each manager has a different personality and approach to young talent.
- ✓ Young people are now under a lot of different pressures from many sources.
- ✓ Peers, family, other sports, community, education, work are a few.
- ✓ Balance these pressures with trying to play and train for sport is difficult.
- ✓ Communication is poor between managers.
- ✓ Rest is not built into the young persons training regime.
- ✓ Each young player needs to be looked at from an individual perspective.
- ✓ Attention needs to be given to their diet and hydration needs because of the high training loads.
- ✓ Co-operation, Communication and Common Sense should prevail.

Speaker 6: Mr. Mickey Moran, County Managers

- ✓ Many young players continue to do a lot of running as part of their training programmes.
- ✓ Need to advance our thoughts on how to prepare teams and young players.
- ✓ Recognise the vast amount of commitment that a young player makes.
- ✓ Change in emphasis from Stamina, Strength, Endurance that cause burnout to SAQ, Core Stability, Weights, Fitball Circuits, Hydration and Nutrition education and Flexibility and Rest.
- ✓ Move focus to developing power, speed, skill as we are a multi sprint sport.
- ✓ Need to work together for the benefit of the individual and not for the selfish gain of winning at all costs.

- ✓ Young players should not be thrown into the Lions Dens of Senior Football but nurtured and developed over a two-year period until they are ready.
- ✓ Incidence of injuries with young players suggests that we are doing something wrong at the 15 – 18 years old stage.
- ✓ Prior to this the focus on winning is wrong, GAA should return to GAA games for fun and using this early stage to develop the basic movement skills that contribute to player development at a later stage.
- ✓ For the talented young players the training should simulate the game.
- ✓ We need to develop the coaching standards in club and county.



Speaker 7: Dr. Phil Glasgow, Physiotherapist Sports Institute Northern Ireland

- ✓ Alarm at the training and competition loads of young players in GAA.
- ✓ Worked with 18 GAA players in SINI.
- ✓ Conducted musculoskeletal screen with the players and identified key concerns:
 - Hip Flexors tight
 - Poor Flexibility
 - Poor Core Stability
 - Rounded Shoulders
 - Postural problems
- ✓ These key areas can be addressed by adapting the training regimes.
- ✓ Need to reduce the training loads and competition loads and develop core stability programmes and improve the flexibility of players.
- ✓ From an outside perspective it is evident that the physical pressure on the young players is having a medical impact on their bodies.

Speaker 8: Dr. Ben Glancy, Medical Officer, Derry County Board

- ✓ Role of the Medical Officer:
 - deal with the welfare of the player: physically, mentally and socially
 - give advice to coaches on injuries and training routines
 - deal with team issues such as drugs awareness, injury prevention, travel arrangement
- ✓ Over training can have a huge impact:
 - Training and competitive pace decrease
 - Increase in fatigue and infectious diseases
 - Decrease in maximal heart rate and immunity
 - Stress levels increase and sleep duration decreases
- ✓ Commitments of young players across many teams is too much leading to overuse, high physical demands and under performance.
- ✓ Improve players discipline on and off the pitch and empower them to be more responsible for their own fitness.

Summary of Proposed Solutions: By Individuals In The Group

- One view that U21 Championship should be scrapped another that it should be retained as it offers a step for minor into senior.
- Reduce the number of competitions that young players play in.
- Players have too many physiotherapists and need to deal with one only.
- Too much emphasis on winning at underage so change the culture.
- Prescribe Action to Counties and Clubs:
 - players play with certain teams
 - players allowed so many training sessions
 - players so many competitive games
- Need more coaching expertise in clubs
- Players need to play at their own level first and foremost
- Players in third level do not play at County until third level finished.
- Communication needs to improve between County and Third Level and Club Managers.
- Co-operation needs to improve between all parties.
- Change the mind set of all concerned, administrators, coaches and players.
- Establish a County Player Welfare Officer to look after the talented young players.
- Performance Planning for Individuals at each level to avoid too much load.
- County Managers Meet with Third Level
- County Managers Meet Club Managers
- Managers within County Structures Meets and Discuss Common Issues
- Review Foundation Courses
- Establish Guidelines for:
 - Number of Training Sessions Per week
 - Number of Competitive Fixtures Per Year

Recommendations

Based on the debate and discussion the following recommendations are made to Management of the Ulster Council for discussion and action:

1. Managing Talented Young players is placed on the Council's Agenda.
2. Managing Talented Young Players is placed on the County Agenda.
3. County's appoint a Athlete Career Education Officer (ACE):
 - a. To look after the welfare and development of talented players in their County.
 - b. To access the ACE Co-ordinator and the expertise available through the Sports Institute.
 - c. To create and implement a monitoring system within the County regarding the training and competition loads for talented young players.
4. At Provincial Level:
 - a. County Senior and Under 21 Managers, Club Managers and Third Level Managers meet formally each year.
 - b. County Minor and Development Squad Managers meet with Vocational and Colleges Coaches formally each year.
5. At County Level:
 - a. Senior County Managers meet with the Club Managers who have players on the squad and discuss training loads and competition and the expectations of the County re these players.
 - b. Minor and Development Squad Managers meet the respective Club Managers and discuss the programmes that have been set in place to develop the young player. These programmes may be transferred to Club Level.
6. Counties need to establish and County Coach Education Programme to support club coaches and enhance their skills and coaching practice.
7. Develop additional resources to support the coaching at Club Level.
8. Young Players should play for the team and competitions for which they are eligible as a priority at that stage of the year. For example
 - a. MacRory Cup first – County Minor and Under 21 next
 - b. Third Level first – County Under 21 and Senior Next
9. Hastings Cup should be reinstated at Under 20 with a proviso that only players who are not studying in higher education play. Opportunities exist to play under lights, mid week January – March. This will expand the pool of talented young players and provide those not in higher education with an important stepping stone towards senior football.
10. Third Level Competitions (Freshers 'A' and Sigerson) should be complete by early March to allow preparation for U21 Championship.

Dr Eugene Young, High Performance Director