

Tuarascail Bhliantúil 2007

A chairde,

At the end of an eventful year it is important to reflect on the days that excited us and to record those that caused difficulties. It is a very healthy process provided that it is undertaken from the perspective of learning from the past to plot our way to the future. The pride of place this year must go to Dún na nGall for winning their first National League Football title. It was well deserved after a consistent performance. Our Inter Provincial football team also attained success by achieving a record equalling twenty eighth title on the return of the event to Croke Park. In the Club Championship, Crossmaglen Rangers won an exhilarating championship after an exciting All Ireland Final that went all the way to a replay. On a floodlit night in Croke Park a success by a team from Tyrone was inspirational and was the perfect response to those who would extinguish dispersed rural communities by the operation of the rural Planning Policy Statement 14. This was achieved in the All Ireland Junior Club Football final when Greencastle did what seemed impossible. It was a night that will live for as long as our Association treasures the achievements of our clubs. It was also a night that Eoghan Rua from Coleraine came agonisingly close to making it a clean sweep of club titles for Ulster football.

Tyrone won the Ulster Football Championship after another exciting contest that witnessed many highly competitive games but apart from the champions it was the resurgence of the Ulster finalists Monaghan that created the newness that all Championships require. Antrim won the Hurling Championship after some excellent contests but the return of Armagh to this championship with an outstanding performance against Derry also was noteworthy as was their performance in reaching the final of the Nicky Rackard Cup were despite a gallant effort they lost out to Roscommon.

There were many other signs that football continues to thrive at all levels and with the Tyrone vocational team winning the All Ireland Vocational Schools Title now represented by the awarding of the Paul McGirr Cup which holds so much respectful memories for Tyrone and the GAA in Ulster. When this is allied to the success of Omagh CBS in winning the Hogan Cup it demonstrates that talent of the highest calibre is still being produced. Virginia Vocational School retained their All Ireland Under 18 Vocational Schools title while St. Columban's High school, Kilkeel won the Under 16 Vocational Schools title. At third level Queens University won the Sigerson Cup by defeating near neighbours and rivals Ulster University Jordanstown after extra time in a competition hosted by Queens University, who had earlier won the Ryan Cup.

The resumption of our new devolved Government in the North of Ireland has provided new challenges to us and the interaction with the new Administration, the Irish Government and the Departments in both jurisdictions has been taxing but we have responded to the demands and have advanced our case to all of the relevant authorities. The process of consultation also requires vigilance and responses and we have continued to provide these and appropriate information as deemed necessary. The function of our

outworking of Beir Bua Nua has saw several advancements in the area of facilities provision, Strategic Infrastructure plans and games development in the new Schools Coaches Programme in conjunction with the Department of Education in the north. It has been a most demanding year that has led to the introduction of new Sub Committee structures, an expanding fixtures programme, mostly from Clubs and the outworking of arrangements of policies determined by the Association.

Finance

The finances of the Comhairle Uladh were again consistent with the level of support for our games programme but dispersible income remains heavily dependant on the returns from the senior football championship. The total income amounted to €7,675,763 inclusive of all grants. Our gate income, €2,044,492, represented 27% of this compared to 35% of the total income in 2006. In 2007 our grant income, €3,375,690, represents 44% of our total in comparison to 38% in 2006. The expenditure amounted to €4,605,394. In addition, the investment in Grounds and Infrastructure amounted €3,982,382. There was an operating deficit on the years working equating to €424,137 which was met from our accumulated funds. The continuation of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure funding has enabled us to progress our floodlighting project to the current position where eight of our Main County Grounds have modern floodlighting systems that are extensively used for County, Club and Educational competitions. The DCAL funding has also enabled us to support a large games development programme while at the same time assisted us in strengthening the administration and governance side of the Associations affairs. The grants from Ard Comhairle have also assisted in these objectives but these reserves are finite and the future is unclear at this time. We have worked diligently to assist all of our constituent units and we shall endeavour to meet the challenges that lie ahead. The costs of running our games programme are also evident but it needs to be stated that we have not increased our admission charges in line with the rest of the Association and that we have maintained all of our existing programmes to date, but this position cannot be maintained into the future.

The income has not improved based on previous year's returns but the expenditure has also been curtailed that has in general, allowed all of our work to be taken forward without a dramatic impact on our Council's liquidity. The amount of monies disbursed under the Club Development Programme and the Games Development Projects are also substantially increased. The outworking of our Strategic Plan within the proposed timescales now has substantially been achieved and we, in the coming year, must map a way forward for the Association in Ulster.

Comhairle Uladh are indebted to the extended team of workers who give generously of their time to ensure the smooth running of the complete games programme. It is a matter of regret and concern that one of our finest voluntary workers, Declan O'Neill, was intercepted and robbed while working for us on a championship day. The level of planning and violence used was something that caused shock waves throughout the whole Association, apart altogether from the loss of income. We are also well served by our Cisteoir, Mairtin Mac Aibhne who has given a tremendous amount of his time in pursuance of the work of Comhairle Uladh and for which we are deeply indebted. We

welcome Michelle McAleer as Business Manager who has succeeded Catherine Corrigan into this vital area of our operation. During the past year we have attained the level of Accreditation that it is envisaged will be achieved by thirty percent of Governing Bodies by 2017, in the North of Ireland. This is due to the very effective work of both Catherine and Michelle. Catherine Corrigan moved to the industrial side of her qualifications in mid year and we are deeply indebted to her for all of her work on creating structures that were required from a governance and effectiveness point of view. She was a good team player and the Ulster Council are the better for her involvement. Michelle has brought similar characteristics to her position and her diligence and work ethic will serve our Council well into the future.

The Football Championship

Once again, the Ulster Senior Football Championship proved to be an extremely competitive competition. The championship began on the 13th May when Cavan and Down served up a thrilling preliminary round clash at Kingspan Breffni Park. A late Down surge including Ronan Murtagh's equalising point set up a replay at the rejuvenated Pairc Esler, one week later. Second time around, Down made no mistake with a strong team performance as they collected a four point victory on a scoreline of 0-15 to 0-11. On the same day, in St Tiernach's Park, Clones, Tyrone just saw off the Fermanagh challenge in a 0-13 to 1-09 victory, despite a tremendous goal from Fermanagh midfielder Mark Murphy. One week later, in MacCumhaill Park, Ballybofey, Donegal ended Armagh's hopes of four in a row. A late goal from a hopeful Brendan Devenney shot enabled Donegal to prevail as one point winners and thus, secure a place in the semi finals. The last quarter final was scheduled for 3rd June, but due to incessant rain, this match was postponed until Sunday 10th June. Derry saw off a resilient Antrim with the help of a Mark Lynch goal, to clinch a 1-13 to 0-10 win at Casement Park. On the same day, Monaghan and Down served up a tremendous encounter at Pairc Esler. Monaghan finished the stronger and a two goal salvo from Ciaran Hanratty secured their semi final place as they saw off the Down challenge, 2-15 to 1-15. In the first semi final, on June 17th, Tyrone faced the newly crowned National Football League champions, Donegal in St Tiernach's Park, Clones. Tyrone produced a tremendous team performance, on a day where team captain Brian Dooher was simply outstanding, to run out 2-15 to 1-07 winners. On June 24th, Monaghan and Derry met in the other semi final, played at Casement Park. A steady team performance from Monaghan, combined with seven points from Thomas Freeman secured a first Ulster Final place since 1988 for the Farney men.

The Ulster Final between Monaghan and Tyrone returned to Clones for the first time since 2003 and it turned out to be a tremendous occasion. It was played in front of over 30,000 people in St Tiernach's Park and we were treated to a fantastic game of football between two exceptionally well prepared teams. After an early surge by the Red Hand county including a great Philip Jordan goal, Monaghan moved Vinny Corey from full back to full forward to stage a dramatic comeback. However, a strong midfield performance from Sean Cavanagh saw Tyrone emerge victorious by 1-15 to 1-13 as Tyrone collected their 11th Ulster Senior Football Championship title.

All-Ireland Football Championship

The All-Ireland Football Championship for Ulster representatives began with the involvement of Donegal, Down and Cavan on July 7th. Donegal produced a battling performance to overcome Leitrim in extra time on a scoreline of 1-16 to 1-14 after extra time in Carrick on Shannon. On the same day, Down's challenge for honours ended in Pairc Esler as Meath emerged victorious by 1-10 to 0-08. Cavan made the journey to Castlebar to take on the previous year's All Ireland finalists. Despite scoring three goals, Cavan were defeated by 1-19 to 3-07. The following day, three Ulster counties were involved in a double header at St Tiernach's Park, Clones. Fermanagh defeated Wexford in a solid team display by 1-12 to 1-08, while Armagh and Derry came face to face in the second game. Derry showed tremendous nerve and composure as a late Colin Devlin point secured a one point victory and ended Armagh's hopes for 2007. The day before the Ulster Final, on July 14th, there were again three Ulster counties in action in the All Ireland Qualifiers. Derry produced a fine team display and goals from Colin Devlin and Enda Muldoon secured an emphatic win over Mayo by 2-13 to 1-06 at Celtic Park. Meanwhile, Donegal's resurgence continued as they travelled to Mullingar to take on Westmeath. Brendan Devenney's goal proved crucial as Donegal emerged victorious on a scoreline of 1-13 to 1-08. On the same day, Fermanagh's interest in the All Ireland series ended disappointingly with a two point defeat to Meath at Navan.

Derry faced Laois on July 28th in Kingspan Breffni Park, Cavan. A Paul Murphy goal allied to seven points from Paddy Bradley helped Derry to a 1-18 to 2-11 victory in a great game of football. On the same evening in a packed Healy Park, Omagh, Monaghan and Donegal clashed for a place in the All Ireland quarter finals. Monaghan were in exceptional form as Vinny Corey and Thomas Freeman terrorised the Donegal defence to run out 2-12 to 1-07 winners, and secure an All Ireland Quarter Final place.

In the All Ireland Quarter Finals, Tyrone were drawn against Meath on August 4th at Croke Park. Injuries to key players and missed chances conspired against Tyrone on the day and their All Ireland ambitions ended on a 1-13 to 2-08 scoreline. On August 11th, Derry faced Dublin in a packed Croke Park in their pursuit of All Ireland success. Despite a valiant effort, allied to some fine scoretaking, Derry succumbed to a 0-18 to 0-15 defeat. That defeat left Monaghan as the only remaining Ulster county as they took on reigning All Ireland champions, Kerry on Sunday August 12th. Like Derry, Monaghan were involved in an enthralling encounter, but similarly, they lost out agonisingly as Kerry prevailed by 1-12 to 1-11 on their way to collecting their second All Ireland Senior Football title in a row. In the All Ireland Semi Finals, Kerry defeated Dublin while Cork saw off Meath. In the All Ireland Final, an all Munster affair saw Kerry emerge victorious in a one sided All Ireland Football Final.

While Ulster had no representatives in the All Ireland Semi Finals for the second year in a row, Tyrone, Derry and Monaghan all lost out in narrow circumstances and these counties will no doubt, be looking forward to 2008 with renewed hope. Donegal's first ever National Football League title deserves special mention as Neil Gallagher became the first Donegal man to collect the League title on behalf of his county. Donegal will hopefully build on this tremendous success as they can also look ahead to 2008 with

confidence. Additionally, Antrim senior footballers returned to Croke Park for the first time since 1989, as they proudly took their place in the Tommy Murphy Cup final. Unfortunately, a last minute goal in extra time saw Wicklow take the title, but Antrim can take heart from their performances in this competition.

Minor Football Championship

The 2007 Ulster Minor Football Championship provided a series of quality games during the summer. Down defeated Cavan in the preliminary round by two points at Kingspan Breffni Park. Monaghan then defeated Down in a bizarre quarter final at Crossmaglen, on a scoreline of 1-06 to 2-01. Tyrone, looked impressive, as they defeated Fermanagh in their quarter final clash by 2-12 to 1-06. Armagh and Donegal clashed in Ballybofey with the Orchard county collecting an excellent 2-09 to 0-11 victory to claim a semi final spot. In the last quarter final, Derry recorded an emphatic 1-10 to 0-03 win over Antrim at a rain sodden Casement Park. At this stage, many people were predicting a Derry and Tyrone final, and that's exactly what materialised. In their respective semi finals, Tyrone defeated Armagh by ten points while Derry held Monaghan to a single point, in their 12 point victory. In the eagerly anticipated final, Tyrone emerged victorious in a tight affair on a scoreline of 0-10 to 1-06 to collect their 20th Ulster Minor Football title. However, Tyrone's All Ireland ambitions were quickly ended as Kerry defeated them in the All Ireland Quarter Final. Contrastingly, Derry recovered from the Ulster Final defeat to mount a serious challenge on the All Ireland. In their quarter final, Derry produced a stirring second half performance to defeat Cork by a single point. In the semi final, Derry seemed set for a comprehensive victory until a late Laois comeback sealed a 2-12 to 1-15 draw. In the replay, four goals from Derry secured a place in the All Ireland Minor Final as they comprehensively defeated Laois by 4-07 to 1-11. Derry faced Galway in the All Ireland Minor Final and looked set for victory entering the final minutes. However, true to Derry's season, there was a late twist and to devastating effect, a late Galway goal condemned Derry to a heartbreaking one point defeat. Derry can be extremely proud of their 2007 performances and they can look forward to these young players making the transition up through the ranks in their county colours in the near future.

Under 21 Football Championship

This Championship was played over a period of five weeks which no doubt assisted with the availability of players during a window of opportunity for the counties. In the preliminary round, Tyrone defeated Donegal in Omagh. On St Patrick's Day, Monaghan defeated neighbours Cavan at St Tiernach's Park, Clones. In the remaining quarter finals, Fermanagh defeated Down after extra time in an excellent game of football, Derry defeated Antrim by three points while Armagh ended Tyrone's ambitions at Lurgan on a 1-08 to 0-09 scoreline. Monaghan produced a strong performance to defeat Fermanagh at Lisnaskea to claim a final place. In the other semi final, Armagh defeated Derry 0-11 to 0-08 at Celtic Park. In the Ulster Final, Armagh gave a fine attacking display to run out winners on a 1-16 to 1-09 scoreline to claim their third Ulster U21 football title. In the All-Ireland semi final, Armagh were extremely unlucky as they were defeated by a single point by Cork at Portlaoise.

Club Football Championship

Since the last Comhairle Uladh Convention, Ulster Senior Football Club champions Crossmaglen Rangers collected a remarkable fourth All Ireland Club title, by defeating Dr Crokes of Kerry after a replay. Congratulations to the club for this fantastic achievement. Greencastle of Tyrone made history as they collected the All Ireland Junior title at Croke Park, as they also defeated a Kerry side in the form of Duagh by 0-13 to 0-12 to spark wild celebrations for the Tyrone club. Congratulations again to all associated with the club in this wonderful achievement. Eoghan Rua, Coleraine capped a remarkable year by reaching the All Ireland Intermediate Final and were extremely unfortunate to be defeated by a single point by Ardfert.

In 2007, the Ulster Senior Club Football Championship once again proved to be a very high quality and exciting competition. In the Preliminary Round, Cavan Gaels narrowly defeated St Eunan's, Letterkenny. In the quarter finals, Glenullin defeated Newtownbutler, reigning champions Crossmaglen saw off Clontibret by a single point, St Galls defeated Cavan Gaels by five points, while Tyrone champions Dromore overcame Down champions Mayobridge after a replay, to secure their place in the semi finals. St Galls went on to defeat Derry champions, Glenullin while Crossmaglen edged out Dromore in the other enthralling semi final. This game received rave reviews and it was a fantastic game of championship football. In the Ulster Senior Club Final at Pairc Esler, the reigning champions retained the Seamus McFerran Cup as they deservedly defeated St Galls by 1-09 to 1-06, to collect their sixth Ulster Club title. At the time of going to print, Crossmaglen had overcome their All Ireland quarter final tie, by defeating Tir Chonaill Gaels by 0-10 to 0-06 and now progress to another All Ireland semi final. In the intermediate grade, Monaghan champions, Tyholland easily defeated Downpatrick in the Preliminary Round. In the quarter finals, Newbridge beat Whitecross at Celtic Park, Ballinagh defeated Tyholland, Dunloy edged out Kinawley while Donegal champions, Fanad Gaels progressed after beating Killyman after a replay. In the semi finals, Antrim champions, Dunloy defeated Newbridge by six points while Ballinagh saw off Fanad Gaels by the same margin. In the Intermediate Final at Healy Park, Omagh, the Cavan champions, Ballinagh captured the Patrick McCully cup as they recorded a 2-11 to 2-03 win over Dunloy.

In the Junior Club Championship, Derry champions, Lissan defeated Collegeland of Armagh in the Preliminary Round. In the quarter finals, Cavan champions, Killeshandra, Monaghan winners, Aghnamullan, Naomh Mhuire, Lower Rosses and Rock of Tyrone prevailed. In the semi finals, Aghnamullan defeated Naomh Mhuire, Lower Rosses by 1-9 to 0-05, while Rock defeated Killeshandra by four points. In the Ulster Final at St Tiernach's Park, Tyrone champions, Rock collected the Paul Kerr Cup on a scoreline of 2-08 to 2-06. The final was a great advertisement for junior football in Ulster and Rock, at the time of going to print continued their All Ireland journey with a tremendous win in the All Ireland semi final against Clan na Gael of Meath, to progress to an All Ireland Final at Croke Park.

At school level, Ulster were to the fore in 2007. In the Colleges sector, Omagh CBS collected their first ever Hogan Cup title as they gave a tremendous team performance in the final at Croke Park. Remarkably, Ulster collected a clean sweep of the Vocational Schools football titles. St. Columban's, Kilkeel won the All Ireland U16 football, Virginia College won the All Ireland U18 football, for the second year in a row, while Tyrone won

the Paul Mc Girr All Ireland Inter County football title. This new trophy, presented for the first time was commissioned and presented by Paul Mc Girr's parents after the All Ireland Final in Clones, and fittingly, it was presented to Tyrone. Well done to all involved in these tremendous achievements at All Ireland level.

Inter Provincial Championships

In the Interprovincial series in 2007, both semi finals were played at the newly refurbished Mac Cumhaill Park, Ballybofey under the floodlights. In the hurling game, Ulster battled bravely and despite scoring four goals, lost out to Connacht by 1-28 to 4-13. In the football, despite getting off to a terrible start, Ulster finished strongly to emerge 1-15 to 2-09 winners. The Inter Provincial finals were played at Croke Park with a Thomas Freeman goal and a great performance from Stevie McDonnell ensuring that Ulster collected their 28th Inter Provincial football title, by defeating Munster by 1-12 to 1-08. Well done to Brian McEniff, Art McRory and Tony Scullion and all the players for this wonderful achievement. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Brian McEniff for his dedicated service as Provincial football team manager over many years and to wish him well on his retirement which he announced after the final in Croke Park. Special mention also to Down referee Declan Magee, who took charge of the Inter Provincial Hurling Final on the same night at Croke Park.

Dr. McKenna Cup

The Gaelic Life Dr McKenna Cup was the signal of the start of the 2008 campaign. The IT, Marketing and Public Relations sub committee launched a marketing campaign for the Dr McKenna Cup which greatly added to the competition. Malachi Cush, Scór entertainment and the foreign national exhibition game at the Down v Donegal game were particular highlights. Certain games were also identified to roll out the No Foul Language initiative and adults and children were given the NFL wristbands at these games. This year's competition was again sponsored by Gaelic Life for the second year in a row and we are indebted to them for their continued support. TG4 again provided coverage of a number of games in the competition, including the final, for which we are also grateful. The 9 county sides were again joined by the three universities, namely Queens University, University of Ulster, Jordanstown and St Mary's College. At this stage, I would like to express my appreciation to all teams for their immense co-operation in ensuring that this competition was finished within the designated timescale despite issues such as team holidays, exams and adverse weather conditions.

In the group stages, there were notable victories for Queens University over Monaghan, UUJ over Tyrone and Down over Donegal. Derry were the only team to win all three group games where they then advanced to the semi final to take on Fermanagh for the second time in the competition. In fact, the semi finals produced the two best games of the competition where Down defeated Cavan 1-16 to 2-12 in an absorbing encounter played under the floodlights in Pairc Esler on a Tuesday night. The following night, those patrons who attended the second semi final were also treated to a good game of football as Derry edged out Fermanagh 2-12 to 1-10 at Healy Park, Omagh. The groundsmen and other associated personnel at these grounds must be thanked for their

efforts during the Gaelic Life Dr McKenna Cup, as we had been experiencing continued rainfall, and still these pitches were playable, and made available.

In the final at Casement Park, Down produced their best performance of the campaign to see off the previously unbeaten Derry side, by 1-12 to 1-06. This final was attended by over 5,000 people, was played under floodlights and screened live on television which demonstrated continued evidence, if ever it was needed, to show the strength of our games in the province of Ulster.

Senior Hurling Championship

In the Senior Hurling Championship Armagh made a welcome return and pushed Derry all the way in an enthralling quarter final tie. The result of this game was in the balance right up to the final whistle when a pointed free won the day for Derry who were relieved to qualify for the semi final stages. On the same day, Antrim won through to the Ulster final with a comfortable 11 point victory over London. The following week produced a terrific semi final as Derry and Down played out an exciting draw. However, the replay didn't live up to expectations as Down ran out easy winners on a 5-16 to 1-15 scoreline. The scene was set for the final as Down and Antrim were set to renew their rivalry in a repeat of the 2006 Semi Final. While Down were determined to perform well a dominant Antrim performance resulted in a facile victory with a 26 point winning margin.

All Ireland Hurling Championship

Antrim competed in a 'round robin' group with Clare, Galway and Laois in the All Ireland Qualifiers. Clare visited Casement in the first round and outplayed Antrim to win with 9 points to spare. In Round 2 Antrim hopes were raised as the Saffrons had a convincing 10 point victory over Laois. This left Antrim needing a win against Galway in Round 3 to secure a Quarter Final spot. Alas the trip to Galway saw Antrim sink to a 2-31 to 1-9 defeat and thus ended Ulster's involvement in the 2007 Senior Hurling Championship.

Down were drawn in Group A and Derry in Group B of the Christy Ring Cup. Down under performed winning only one game and failed to qualify for the Semi Final stages of the competition. Derry won two games in their Group against London and Wicklow but also failed to win through to the Semi Finals.

In the Nicky Rackard Cup, Ulster teams performed well with Armagh, Donegal, Monaghan and Tyrone winning through the group stages to qualify for the Quarter Finals. Armagh and Donegal then progressed but were drawn against each other in the Semi Final, where Armagh were victorious before falling to Roscommon in a thrilling final.

Under 21 Hurling Championship

Antrim, Derry and Down competed in the Ulster Under 21 Championship. Games were played on a round robin basis before Antrim and Derry won through to the final. In an enthralling final, a talented young Derry team that showed great character on the day persevered over an experienced Antrim team to deservedly win the title in Casement Park. This was an important milestone in the development of hurling both in Derry, and in the province. Derry then played against new Leinster Champions, Dublin in the All Ireland Semi Final. Despite a spirited performance Derry were unable to overcome the Dubliners and exited the competition.

Minor Hurling Championship

The Ulster Minor Championship involved Antrim, Armagh, Derry and Down. Derry and Armagh played in a quarter final with the winners, Derry, going through to play Down in the Semi Final. In the Semi Final, a slick Down team eased past Derry to qualify for the final against Antrim who had received a bye through to the final stage of the competition. Down were unlucky in the final going down by 3 points despite leading for most of the game. Antrim as Ulster Champions returned to the bad old days when they were totally outplayed in the All Ireland Quarter Final by Kilkenny.

All Ireland Club Championships

In the All Ireland Club Hurling Championship Ruairi Og's from Cushendall were drawn against Loughrea from Galway and despite a spirited performance they were beaten on a 0-9 to 1-11 scoreline.

In the Intermediate Championship Ulster Champions Gort na Mona from Antrim were beaten in the semi final by Killymordaly from Galway. Clooney Gaels also from Antrim won through to the All Ireland Junior Club Final before going down to Danesfort from Kilkenny on a 2-16 to 2-8 scoreline, played at Croke Park.

Ulster Hurling Leagues

The Ulster Hurling League, now in its second year, has grown to include 65 teams in 5 divisions. Once again the league proved to be a great success. However, there still remains an apathy towards the league from some Counties and clubs within the Province. The winners in each Division were: Division 1 – Dunloy, Aontroim; Division 2 – Slaughtneil, Doire; Division 3 – Setanta, Dun na nGall; Division 4 – St Enda's, Aontroim and Division 5 – Four Masters, Dun na nGall.

The Ulster Minor Club Hurling League was once again organised and involved 20 teams in two Divisions. Lisbellaw were successful in winning Division 2 and at the time of going to press the Division 1 competition is at the Semi Final stage but due to poor weather conditions it has been impossible to access pitches to get this competition completed.

Coiste Iomána once again organised a highly successful Feile Uladh, which was hosted by Mc Quillan's GAC who celebrated their Centenary Year during 2007. This annual event is the high point for many clubs throughout Ulster and will hopefully remain as a vital part of the Hurling calendar in Ulster. Our thanks are due the Mc Quillan's club who were excellent hosts for Feile Uladh 2007.

The Ulster Minor Hurling league was also a success and provided our county sides with an opportunity to, in some cases, play inter county competition, and in other cases to further develop players who would not otherwise get the opportunity to play on county squads. Antrim won the Division One League and the Down Academy were the Division Two Winners.

The Under 21 Shield and Under 16 A and B Championships are organised by Coiste Iomána and provide an opportunity for many players to compete in intercounty competition. The competitions were efficiently organised and produced the following winners: Under 21 Shield – Armagh, Under 16 A – Antrim; Under 16 B –Armagh.

Games Activity

There has been a significant increase in the games programme undertaken by the Ulster council that had successful hurling leagues across all the Counties. The provision in hurling is most noteworthy and the involvement of balanced competition due to the application of promotion and relegation should see these competitions flourish in both numbers and standards. The provision of a Football Club League has been extremely successful where Glenullin collected the 2007 title, by defeating Latton in the final. However, this competition meets some of the demands but also appears to be timed at a period that does not engender enthusiasm in all clubs to be involved. Ultimately, a decision must be made as to its future but the response from participating Clubs would on the whole be very positive about the newness of competition and the more respectful approach emanating from new contests and interactions. It also has helped, significantly, in the development of referees and in assessing the development of this vital aspect of our Association's affairs.

The Club Fixture Report that went before the recent Special Congress tried to deal with a myriad of matters impacting on the playing of Club Competitions. Some Rule changes were made but it really is a change of attitude that is required as adherence to fixtures means a planned approach for everyone involved that delivers an acceptable games programme for everyone. However, should the games programme continue to be problematic then the function of this Council will be to find out why and to take effective action. The importance of our Inter County programme and the pursuit of success should not obstruct the need to provide an adequate games programme for everyone who plays our games. There is much talk of burnout and it is real danger to our most talented players but the damage is being done not in playing the games, but the merciless demand of conflicting training regimes. Players do need protected but until we have a training passport and one coach in charge of the players best interests, then burnout will continue to occur and it shall reduce enjoyment and involvement of our best young players. It is a challenge that has to be tackled but to achieve it must we must properly identify the real problem which is overtraining and avoid perceptions that it relates to playing too many games

Hurling Development

There continues to be considerable progress on the Hurling Development front with thanks to the work of members of Coiste Iomána. The level of support offered by Comhairle Uladh continues at a high level and we are indebted to the staff working within each County. Work over the past year has concentrated on increasing participation as coaching has continued within the Primary and Post Primary School network throughout the Province. Hurling has been coached directly to 30,382 primary school children and 3,935 post primary school children. The expansion of Hurling continues through the provision of links between clubs and local schools. Coiste Iomána

has also continued to support our colleges, vocational schools and third level colleges through the supply of hurling equipment.

Coach development has been an important element of the Hurling development programme and throughout the past year our Counties have delivered 16 Foundation Coaching courses, 7 Level 1 courses and 26 coach development courses across a range of topics including; Coaching Hurling to Beginners, Striking for Scores and Goalkeeping Skills. The game has been developed at a local level through a total of 146 primary school and 112 club Go Games blitz competitions. At a regional level a total of 42 regional blitzes have been organised. Coiste Iomana has continued to support this work through the awarding of equipment to new Hurling units. Since the commencement of this project in 2006, Comhairle Uladh has provided hurleys, helmets and sliothars to a total of 75 Schools and 36 Clubs (111 units), the clubs have been set up either as new stand alone Hurling clubs or as Hurling sections within existing Football Clubs. Hurling Development Managers continue to back up this investment with programmes aimed at ensuring the expansion of Hurling through the provision of links between clubs and local schools. Coiste Iomána has also continued to support our colleges, vocational schools and third level colleges through the supply of hurling equipment.

A programme of Go Games was delivered at half time in all Championship games and involved children from all the counties participating in the Senior Hurling Championship programme. This was a very successful venture, which saw us change from a fifteen-a-side game, where some children were not getting a touch of the sliothar to two nine-a-side games with all children being involved in the games and all getting plenty of opportunities to be part of the team. This initiative will be further developed in the coming year as all Ulster Counties will be involved in the Senior Hurling Championship. Hurling was also developed over the summer months through the Cúl Camps organised in each of our Counties. Most Counties organised joint camps that included Gaelic Football and Hurling. In total 14,491 children participated in Hurling development initiatives at Cúl Camps in 2007.

Work with development squads continued and a new resource, online support, has been developed to assist coaches and counties with the planning process for their squads. All Counties participated in an Under 16 Competition in May. This competition was organised to replace the annual Youth Games project that had been originally developed by Sport Northern Ireland. The tournament was played in two sections with Antrim, Armagh, Derry, Down and Westmeath playing in Section One and Monaghan, Fermanagh, Cavan, Tyrone, Donegal and London competing in Section Two. The events were very successful and for the record Antrim won Section One and Fermanagh were undefeated in winning Section Two.

Coiste Iomána continues to do sterling work in the development of Hurling at all levels in Ulster. It is well served by the members of the Coiste, who are representative of the Hurling fraternity throughout Ulster. It is important that County Committees are involved in the two way process of information so that all are enabled to go forward in a more cohesive unit. The Coiste is led by Aogán Ó Fearghail who has shown tremendous

interest and leadership qualities throughout the past year. He is ably assisted by Jimmy Darragh and Frankie Quinn in dealing with the various issues that arise.

Referees

The constant involvement of refereeing in every part of the administration of our games and disciplinary process gives clear indication to all associated with our games programme that we are assessed by how well we control our games. The consistent negativity deriving for the Association and indeed the referees themselves is mitigating the elevation of the standing of the referee and the playing rules themselves. The level of misunderstanding of the concept as to what constitutes fair play needs to be challenged. Fair play should be self evident. The other side of the equation also needs to be challenged and there is the perception that if you get away with it then it is alright. This is sometimes aided by referees opting out and the past year has demonstrated that all referees must consistently apply all of the Rules in all of games all of the time. The recommendation of the SRC Report asked for a constant monitoring body to be established to ensure that our concept of fair play would be vibrant and relevant to our Association at all times and this needs to be established as a priority. I believe that we need to categorise our fouls into clear sections that are unambiguous and can not be misinterpreted by any section of those associated with our games. The issue of appointments also needs to be examined as there is little point in getting referees to the necessary standards if they do not get the appointments to match. This is particularly so in hurling where Ulster referees have received little encouragement in recent years.

During the year a number of our referees officiated at major games. All of them performed very well and represented their counties and Ulster with distinction. The lack of encouragement emanating from hurling appointments is disappointing but we have highly motivated referees that they give generously of the time in ensuring the deliverance of our games programme. I would congratulate all who refereed senior finals and particularly, Pdraig Hughes for the National League Division Two Final and Declan Magee who refereed the Inter Provincial Hurling Championship Final. The only sad element in this was the demeaning comments made by the manager of the Connaught Hurling team and to which this Council correctly challenged. Michael Hughes and Brian Crowe refereed the Leinster and Connaught finals respectively while Michael Hughes also had the distinction of officiating at the Bahrain Irish Festival Games in November.

Our Referees Committee continues to work diligently under the leadership of Liam Nelis, as Chairman, Brian Armitage and the members of the Committee, This body is there to support the referee and the development of the referee. There was a Conference for Referees along with County Based training conducted by Ryan Mellon. They have been innovative and supportive in their work with our referees. We all need to see the referee as the embodiment of our respect for our games, Rules and Association and not to allow the development of a blame culture where we must attribute failure to someone else and on too many occasions that appears to be the referee. We are indebted to our referees for their time, commitment and involvement in the delivery of our games programme. We also record our thanks and appreciation to the Referees Committee for its excellent work in delivering a progressive approach to the whole concept of refereeing. We also

acknowledge the continued work of the County Referees Administrators, Assessors and Tutors to whom we are also indebted and who continue to do outstanding work for our Association.

Education

The single biggest event in Education for us was the introduction of the School Coaches Programme. For the first time our games have been afforded inclusion inside curriculum time. This is to be welcomed and there is no doubt that the development of physical literacy and focusing on children's health will reap huge dividends for the benefit of society as a whole. It is important to recognise that we were able to be involved due to having the programmes that meet the requirements and while the grant from the Department of Education is substantial in allowing this programme to happen, it must be borne in mind that this requires a substantial input of time and resources from our own provision. We acknowledge the commitment of the Minister, her staff and the Schools involved in taking this development forward. There are still some areas that require a more positive approach but it has been most positively advanced by our Council and particularly Eugene Young, Terence McWilliams and Jimmy Darragh. The appointment process was huge and we are grateful for those involved as we are to the training regime that put a fine group of young enthusiastic men and women into the programme fully equipped to deliver the objectives required.

The excellent work of Cumann na mBunscol as the body who oversees our primary schools needs the support necessary to continue the development of the concept of Gaelic Culture, Games and Pastimes. It is vital work that they do and we hope that the work undertaken by our various programmes will continue to expand all aspects of our Associations affairs within the existing and the new schools. The need to preserve the local community aspect of the Primary Schools is important for the betterment of all our communities as is the need to avoid evaluating everything in simple economics. The process of changing the existing schools network and transporting more pupils to larger schools will be seriously detrimental to the required social cohesion.

The advent of an overarching group to work with the Vocational Schools Committee and Colleges Council has not substantially reduced the work of either body. They are making significant strides in promoting our games and the number of active schools continues to grow. The level and quality of the games are a credit to the efforts of the schools in participating in our games. The need to have all those attending second level schools being afforded the opportunity to being improved as athletes within curricular time is a problem, as is the serious competition by other sports for our best young talent. We need the strengthening of all aspects of our work at second level so that schools don't feel isolated in the work that they do for us and for which we are truly grateful.

The work at Third Level Colleges and Universities continues to be developed. Given the numbers that attend Third Level we need to work with all standards as this group will always be central to the future wellbeing of our Clubs. A great deal of progress has been made and we are investing heavily in the development of all our games to ensure that Third Level is central to our future developments. The decision to introduce a Scholarship programme by our Association is a further indication of our commitment and

we are indebted to T. O Dalaigh, B. Mac Gadhra and Eugene Young for the immense amount of work that they undertook to deliver this scheme.

Grounds

The unprecedented investment in Grounds and Infrastructure has witnessed tremendous outcomes in the development of our County Ground, Club Grounds, Centres of Excellence and the Floodlighting Projects. It has seen the completion of work at Healy Park for which the Association in Tyrone are to be complimented. The forward planning and delivery of this headline project reflects very positively on the GAA and the Tyrone County Committee. The work at Brewster Park and Pairc Esler has transformed these grounds and both Fermanagh and Down County Committees are to be congratulated on what they have achieved. Plans are underway for the redevelopment of the Athletic Grounds and Celtic Park and these developments will enhance the overall provision of stadia in Ulster. Furthermore, it will prove the value of strategic planning and the need to develop stadia that meet the genuine requirements of each of our County Committees.

At Club level our units continue to build confidently for the future and the work of our Club Development and Physical Planning Committee have ensured that all projects are well planned, resourced and delivered. It continually amazes me the continuous endeavours of our Clubs. The support for these projects from lottery is acknowledged but the upshot of the 2012 Olympics will see a dearth of funds for projects taken forward by our Clubs and entirely disproves the statement of the British Prime Minister that the 2012 Olympics would lift all sport. In our case, it has left facilities support from the Sports Council devoid of funds. We could stand still and moan the loss or we can continue to plan and develop while at the same time bringing pressure to bear on our elected representatives to address this scandalous removal for grassroots sport. Our clubs deserve our support in what they are doing and against the pressure on funding. We have invested significant amounts in club facilities. We are grateful to Ard Comhairle for the increased support for our investments.

The recent National Infrastructure Programme has advanced the case for shared usage of facilities. It is within the context of this programme, that strategic partnerships with Schools, District Councils and Regional developments managed by County Committees must be advanced. We cannot, as an organisation, ignore the need for facilities but in a time of fiscal constraints we must utilise resources for the best strategic outcomes. The potential of synthetic (3G) playing surfaces could allow for substantially increased usage but the cost factor is prohibitive. We must work to ensure that facilities deficit that exists is addressed by Government so that we utilise more of our energies in developing our games and participation. We acknowledge the work of our Parks and Safety Committee who deal with the County projects and ancillary matters including training and legal requirements. The work of the Club Planning and Physical Development Committee are doing tremendous work and we are grateful to Dan McCartan as Cathaoirleach, Ryan Feeney as Runai and the members for their expertise and time in this very worthwhile aspect of our developments.

The erection of Floodlighting at the Main County Grounds has been substantially achieved and by Convention eight of our Counties will have a full system operational and by the next Convention it is hoped that when Clones is added to the list that all of our Counties can utilise the benefits of such a system. The work of Stephen McGeehan and Liam Nelis in supporting the major projects has been outstanding and the delivery of our floodlighting project ahead of time and within budget is a testimony to their due diligence.

The proposed Multi Sport Stadium at the Maze/Long Kesh site has slowly moved forward. It is now the subject of full economic appraisal and the outcome of this is awaited. It is now substantially behind time and the delivery was linked to strategic provision of stadia. A decision needs to be made as to the future of the proposed Stadium and the establishment of a timescale should it be moved to the next stage of the Master Plan. The future delivery of the Stadium is back in the hands of Government since the Association has now committed, in principle to the use of the facility should it ever come to fruition.

Provincial Council

In the past year, there has been a significant change to the administration of the disciplinary process. The introduction of the Competition Control Committee has increased the demands on this body to initiate action in every disciplinary action and allied to the increased demands on the administration on the fixture programme emanating from the cross county Club competitions have ensured that the work requires greater commitment of time both of members of the Committee and the servicing required by the elaborate notification system when added to the maintenance of the fixtures and associated matters have created new challenges for the Competition Control Committee. The introduction of the new Hearings Committee had also been very challenging. The role in the determination on disciplinary cases allied to the hearing of appeals has created a very substantial workload. It was envisaged that the new arrangements would see a greater acceptance of disciplinary actions but it appears that the challenge to suspensions and other penalties are still pursued with vigour. The question now needs to be addressed in relation to the application of the disciplinary role as it appears that we have introduced a very convoluted process that has not improved the acceptance of the resultant penalties. We are approaching overload on process, at a time when the application of our disciplinary code is being examined in the context of several key incidents that effectively no penalty was applied. The confidence for the new system was high but the failures of the current arrangements from referees to the DRA are there to be seen. We are indebted to the members of both Committees, particularly Sean Mac Taidgh and Eamann Mac Mathuna who have acted as Chairman and Secretary of the Hearing Committee and who have given a tremendous amount of time and knowledge to the outworking of this important process. The tremendous amount of work provided by Stephen Donnelly and Geraldine McKavanagh to the CCC and Hearings also needs to be acknowledged as their contribution has been beyond the call of duty.

The Council is fortunate in relation to the planning, management and delivery of our extensive games programmes that we have such committed and hardworking personnel in

the areas of event control, safety officers, stewards, gatemen, doctors, medical personnel and helpers especially during our championship season. We are deeply indebted to these individuals and we thank them for their unstinting support of the Council.

The outworking of our Strategic Plan from 2006 to 2011, has now been added to by establishment of County Strategies. There will be a complete set by the end of 2008 and the importance of these is that they are a prerequisite for the appointment of full time county Secretaries to which all our counties have applied. The recent decisions of the Special Congress will add to the workload of the Council and have created several new challenges in relation to the timescales of competitions and I hope that we meet these challenges without undermining the status of our main championships. The ongoing work at our main County Grounds has been something of tremendous pride for the Association as a whole.

The role of our Council has become relevant in the new devolved arrangements and we have interacted with several ministers and departments along with southern ministers and County Councils. The support for our work by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Department of Education are welcome endorsement of the scope of the work and involvement that we bring to building social cohesion in both jurisdictions with a strong advocacy for the respect of our culture and heritage in any evolving vision for a shared future. The hosting of a very successful Club Development Conference in October was one of several special events that indicated that we are confident of our Associations present and have extrapolated a vision of a future based on a vibrant Country proud of its heritage and its games.

The Council's strong opposition to the Planning Policy Statement (PPS14) in the North, which has the unequivocal backing of all units of the Association in the country continued during the year. The Provincial Council and senior staff raised the issue in all of the meetings with Ministers North and South, and also attended a number of specific meetings with interested stakeholders, who like the GAA, wish to have the draconian policy removed forthwith and replaced with something that is palatable for rural communities. The GAA's insistence and high profile criticism of the policy has greatly assisted the overall case of people in rural areas of the North who have lobbied for the removal of PPS14. It now appears that the Ministerial Committee being lead by the Minister for the Environment, Arlene Foster have taken into consideration many of the issues brought forward by us and that the 'emerging findings paper' from this body, which will be published in a few weeks will make provision for the development of sustainable rural communities and will recognise the role that groups such as GAA clubs have in rural areas. If this is the case, we believe that a credible alternative can be developed after proper consultation that should enable our clubs to flourish in rural areas based on a sensible and balanced planning control system that is responsive to the democratic will of the people. We as an Association will accept nothing less.

During 2007, a very worrying government policy was drafted and put out to a consultation. The strangest and most obstructive consultation that we have been involved in then took place in relation to the Security Industry Act (SIA). The terms of this act will

have a very negative impact on the operation and safe management of GAA events, should it as proposed, be brought in to legal application in the North of Ireland, as it applies in Britain. The legislation proposes to certify 'stewards' who operate at events where they interact with the general public and could have serious consequences for our operations in this regard. The Act must not be allowed to negatively impact upon voluntary associations such as the GAA. We have discussed this matter with politicians and officials to date and certain assurances have been given in relation to Club stewards. The issue as impacting on county committees and ourselves is still very unclear and a meeting is planned within a few weeks with the responsible Northern Ireland Office Minister who has ultimate control of its function within the North. Our Association has pursued the issues to have exempt volunteer stewards working as defined in the Safe sports Grounds Legislation. The recent BBC programme on the operation of this Act in Britain would not inspire confidence about its application.

The outworking of our dealings with diversity has brought us several challenges. These are detailed in the Operational part of my Report. We have made it clear that our vision is the full tapestry of our culture and heritage and not the colourless, odourless, tasteless and senseless blancmange that masquerades as a shared future. With this in mind it was important that the GAA was in Washington at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in July last. A more detailed account is in the Operational Report but we demonstrated a vibrant GAA working in promotion of our games, culture, language, music and pastimes ably assisted by Liam McCarthy and Sam Maguire. In the absence of the original Cups we were grateful to Ard Comhairle, Ciarrai and Cill Chainnigh for affording us the opportunity to demonstrate the All Ireland dimension of the GAA.

I would like to put on record our appreciation to those from our Province who chaired committees or task forces. We have also established a senior staff body to take forward decisions of our Coiste Bainisti. It has been invaluable in ensuring that things get done and that we are acting collectively in all matters. I am grateful to Eugene Young, Stephen McGeehan, Michelle McAleer, Ryan Feeney, Jimmy Darragh, Terence McWilliams, Aileen Tohill and Geraldine McKavanagh for their input into planning, provision and management of the complete operations that are part of the overall work of the Council.

The Council has become involved in several areas to expand our overall inclusiveness and this has extended to ethnic minorities, special need people and working with the Youth Justice Agency. We have been innovative in these areas and they have demonstrated that we are a whole family organisation with the interests of the extended community at our centre. We are indebted to Una McKay for her work with special needs people and the games played during the senior football championship where tremendous illustrations of our whole family approach. The work of Diarmuid Marsden has also been superb. He has interacted with troubled young people and through facets of our games and coaching he has engendered an increased sense of worth to those involved and through a pilot project has worked with a local Club to bring context to community involvement.

The new Integration Sub Committee has brought direct contact from all elements of our GAA family. We are convinced that the future is a unitary one and that needs to be the vision of our Association and the other constituent Associations. We share all of the central ideals and the games are all contained in our Official Guide. We have a Congress decision for integration to take place but the actual achievement will require work on the ground at all levels if this goal is to be achieved. We acknowledge the input of all our Associations and know that much excellent work is being advanced under the Chairman, Aoghan O Fearghail. The work of Ryan Feeney and Aileen Tohill is also essential to a successful outcome.

Tomas O Dalaigh as our President has led from the front and has given enormously of his time for the benefit of the Association as a whole and particularly in Ulster. He is readily available and given his employed position his service has been exemplary. Aogan O Fearghail has also worked diligently for the Association and has been readily available to assist Comhairle Uladh on a wide range of matters with special interest to hurling and the devising of a new strategic plan. Our Treasurer, Mairtin Mac Aibhne has also given greatly of his services both as Cisteoir and at the organising and running of games for which we are indebted to him. Micheal O hOsain as our OCP, has also made a significant contribution to the work of the Council and has operated as our link with the various media operations that are very much part of the day to day workings of Comhairle Uladh. The members too contribute generously to the work of the Council on many other occasions. We are indebted to all of them for the work and commitment that they deliver to the overall benefit of the GAA.

Today we wish a fond farewell to Miceál O Grianain who has given twenty seven years of service to our Council and the Association as a whole. He was and is a most willing worker and we as a Council shall be the poorer for his departure. However, we know that outside of attendance at meetings that Miceál shall continue to work and support the Council and the GAA in Ulster. We thank you Miceál for your work and also for your continuing commitment to the Association and to our ideals. Our gratitude also must be recorded to Liam Tornoir, Chris de Brun and Micheal Mac Craith who leave our Council today and who too have been exemplary representatives of their Counties and rendered outstanding service to Comhairle Uladh. The implementation of the new rule delimiting the term of office of county board officers and provincial and central council representatives means that substantial change in the membership of administrative structures is coming. We need to examine carefully how, at Provincial Council level, we will deal with an almost entire change of membership within the next two years.

Coaching and Games Development

The scope of work undertaken in the furtherance of our Association is astounding. The work in delivery of the various programmes is a huge task but it has motivated our coaches and made games development fun for all our young. The deployment of twenty school coaches was achieved in a very short space of time. The initiative, I believe, will set a new active role for education in developing bodies as well as minds within the curriculum. We have made our presentations to Government Committees and to Departments and even our opponents have to acknowledge that we have a strategic

approach that can deliver the essential elements of all our games to enliven and enrich the involvement of everyone who participates in Gaelic games. The role and functions of our volunteer coaches at Club and County level need to be fully supported. We need to ensure qualifications that shall be mandatory by Rule and law are properly recognised so that our qualifications are accepted as at cutting edge of coaching and games development.

Initiatives undertaken with ethnic minorities, special needs, dealing with diversity and in combating anti social behaviour are all new challenges that we are dealing with and meeting the compliance of new legislative requirements are becoming more stringent. The work that we do in this critical area has set the standards for the protection of our young people that has taken us to being the single biggest organisation in training and recording all involved in working throughout our clubs, counties and schools. It would be simple to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed but we as an Association have a proud record of working with our young and educating them in the rationale and reasons for our Associations existence and work. The development of hurling and football in the counties, the universities, the regions and the integration work with Ladies GAA and Camogie are part of a process that should enable the families of the GAA to work together for the betterment of all our units.

The Coaching and Games Development Committee continues to provide leadership, direction and foresight in this critical area of our work. The work of Olibhear O Gealagain has been to the fore of everything we do. The input of our County Coaching Officers is also assisting in taking us forward in meeting the new challenges ahead. We recognise the work of Seamus McGrattan and Bernie McGlinchey in administering the work of this committee. It would also be needed to record our appreciation to Eugene Young and the Coaching team for the vibrancy that now exists in our coaching structures.

Gaeilge agus Oidhreachta

The Seamus de Faoite course in the Downings continued to set new standards in taking forward our Associations commitment to its core principles. For us to be true to ourselves we must promote, maintain and strengthen the essentials that define us and our cultural identity. In an age when internationalism is supplanting the ethnic diversity that has been and continues to be the defining culture of mankind, we owe it to the future of our people that we ensure that our games, culture and language are handed to the next generation as healthy and strong as it is possible to achieve. The Coiste also provides guidance on policy matters that arise and played a significant part in the evaluation of the Irish Language Act. It was a very sad occasion that this Act promised in the St Andrew's Agreement, was undermined by the British Government and finally reneged on by the Minister responsible. We must continue to work for the correct legislation for the rights of our Language and those who speak it to be protected as written in the Agreement.

Nollaig Mac Cumhaill has given leadership to this Committee and has worked diligently to advance the complete programme of work envisaged for this Coiste. He has had the support of the ever reliable Tomas O Cuilinn as Runai to assist with this vital work. We are very grateful to Tomas for his tremendous work for the Language and Heritage and

for his continuing enthusiasm. The Committee also provide a solid platform for getting things done and the only thing that we need is the full support of all of our Counties. We are grateful for all of the work undertaken and by having a concerted effort by all our units we can achieve so much for the future.

Culture and Scor

There is a resurgence of Scór and Scór na nOg competitions and this is to be welcomed. The introduction of the new table quiz has also generated in the social competitive side of our work a new aspect for inter Club activity. Our music, song, dance and drama have already been central to this area of operations but the prospect of more Clubs getting involved is now evolving from the myriad of opportunities that the Scór competitions have introduced. We, at all levels, need to rededicate ourselves to the completeness of our Association and see Scór as the essential part of our commitment to the aim and ideals envisaged in our original charter of a Gaelic Ireland build on community action for the greater good of our Country.

We acknowledge the work of Coiste Scór in ensuring the organising of the various events and programmes for Scór and Scór na nOg. We are grateful to those who help in the running of the competitions, the adjudicators and the host Clubs. We pay tribute to Miceál O Grianain who has been very effective in advancing the position of Scór and who has provided the leadership that has enlivened Scór. Fearghal Mac Aoidh has also been diligent in his role as Runai and we appreciate the dedication to the work required to administer all aspects of Scor.

Code of Ethics and Good Practice

The role and function of this Coiste has substantially evolved in line with legislative demands. The process is further developing and greater demands are being placed on the Council in this area. We are now required to register to carry out Pre Employment Checks (PEC) and it need to be understood that this applies to any person appointed to a position which works with young people up to and including minor age. This also applies to any person either remunerated or volunteer and is a legal requirement on all our units in the North of Ireland to comply. The operative date is April 2004 and any subsequent appointment. There are penalties applying to anyone acting contrary to the Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults. We are in the process of registering with ACCESS and will work through the necessary clearances for appointees in the most diligent manner. We should not be unduly concerned as the system will protect our units insofar as they operate within the legislation and apply good practice to all of our functions.

We have a role to play in working with the GAA in Britain and possibly with our sister organisations of Camogie and Ladies Football. There is a need to maintain and develop our database to ensure that all of those trained in child awareness are accurately recorded. The number of personnel trained to date now exceeds 12,000 and those who have been processed through PEC are already over 1200. We have built in child protection measures into our Coaching Awards programme so that whenever a Coach provides his Certificate to a unit then we are working to ensure that this also means that the person is compliant with all legal needs including the European Unions requirement that the person is

recognised as competent to carry out the function certified. This has been a serious undertaking and we should all appreciate that what has been achieved as the result of good teamwork involving our Clubs, County Committees, our own Committee and the staff.

The work that we are doing is now being advanced by Ard Comhairle. Their recent decisions on these matters are most welcome. We need a complete structure from our Clubs to Central level that has a Child Officer involved at each stage so that proper lines of communication and operation exist to each constituent unit. This was first brought before Ard Comhairle sixteen years ago and we are now confirming what was then advocated in the area of Child Protection. Catherine Corrigan acted as Child Officer prior to her departure and was a tremendous person in dealing with these matters. She has been replaced by Geraldine McKavanagh who likewise has made a very considerable input to this area. The work of the Committee also has been superb and we are indebted to Mairtin Mac Briain who has ensured that decisions are made and processes are adhered to. Geraldine McKavanagh has serviced the Committee and we are grateful for her tremendous input to this vital area of work.

Association Matters

It has been a difficult year for our Association with several sustained attacks on our remit and our integrity. These in some instances had nothing whatsoever to do with us as an organisation but we were labelled as guilty by association. The issue of fairness and unbiased reporting fell far short of acceptable standards. Having stated that the issues surrounding Darren Graham were very serious, was unacceptable and a direct challenge to the ethics of our Association and our adherence to the operating principles as enshrined in our Rules. We acknowledge the work taken forward by Fear Manach in dealing with the issues and to Nicky Brennan and Tom Daly for the leadership in taking matters forward. The greatest credit must go to Darren for resuming amidst the maelstrom of the time but the event needs to illustrate to us all that choice of words, adherence to our Rules and above all respect for people need to be at the centre of everything that we do because being a community centred organisation we are judged by our members' standings and by our attitude to society as a whole.

Two years ago, I wrote that as an organisation that we are not as united as we should be and that discontent was manifesting itself in several areas of our operations. Without doubt the single biggest challenge to the authority of our Association has been the debate over the grants to our players emanating from their award by the Irish Government. It is clear that our membership is unhappy with the current situation but we need to evaluate how we have got here. It is clear that there has been a breakdown in communications insofar that the decision of Ard Comhairle last spring seemed to get to the media coverage but the essential elements appeared not to be discussed with our Clubs. The threat of a strike by the Gaelic Players Association did little to enhance their reputation and the intemperate language used by their chief executive was inflammatory in circumstances. The ultimate outcome must arrive at a position that ensures that our amateur ethos is not compromised and that our structures deal with all aspects of our Associations' affairs and demonstrate a level of respect that that should apply to our

members, administrators and players. We are one Association and we cannot allow ourselves to become factionalised otherwise we shall become the antithesis of the terms we use to describe ourselves.

The introduction of the Disputes Resolution Authority was welcomed and there was much expectation in having an internal assessment of our Rules and disciplinary code. However, there have two matters that cause us disquiet in the interpretation that the DRA having set the extent of what may be perceived as biased is coming close to removing everyone from the disciplinary process other than from the legal profession but they too must be subject to the same scrutiny. Discipline should require acceptance of the facts rather than challenging the integrity of our members and structures to avoid the disciplinary outcome. The second element that is more serious is that we have now established a body that operates within our Rules but now can supplant the authority of Ard Comhairle in determining outcomes. Given the amount of time that we have spent defining structures and rights in Rule, it appears that respect for decisions made by the appropriate body is scant and rather than abiding by Rule we seem to avoid applying penalty. I think that indiscipline can't be tolerated and if we have a convoluted process then justice deferred is justice denied. The rights of our members are clearly defined but in competing rights situations the right of the Association is not treated as equal by the current process. We need to re examine the process so that decisions made are defensible but above all speed within a short time. The work being undertaken in the area of the playing Rules is timely and at Inter County and in Provincial Inter club Competitions I believe that a Commission should be established. Penalties should be determined but where I think we need to change is that the Commissions decisions can be challenged, but that the individual or unit going to a hearing is responsible for the process and the right to increase penalties is clearly ascribed.

We recognise the progressive leadership of Níoclás O Braonáin, Uachtaran CLG, in his work for the GAA. He has faced many difficult issues with honesty and integrity and we are the better for his efforts. He has become a welcome visitor to Ulster and we know that in democracy the right to dissent from decisions is acceptable but the person of our President needs to be treated with courtesy and respect.

The retirement of Liam O Maolmhichil from his position has come after a long commitment by him to the Association and its role in Irish society. The simple test proves that we as an organisation, are stronger and more vibrant than when Liam assumed the role in 1979. We, in Ulster, are indebted to Liam for his solid work, sound advice and courtesy to our Council in good and bad times. He has many legacies to the Association but the one that will be a lasting tribute and that is the redevelopment of Croke Park where he was the lynch pin in ensuring that the dreams were taken to reality. I would wish to thank Liam for all endeavours, his friendship and his service and may he, his wife Moira and family enjoy the life ahead and that his retirement be long, meaningful and rewarding after his twenty nine years of service to the GAA.

In the new Ard Stuirthoir, Paraic Duffy becomes the first Ulsterman to assume the title. It is a well merited appointment and his expansive knowledge of the Association at all

levels will be a huge advantage. He has travelled the road from Club to County and beyond and we are confident that he will be an effective director of our Association and we look forward to assisting in the new and emerging challenges that are ahead. We congratulate Paraic on his achievement and know that the joy of his Club and County are shared throughout Ulster and the Association.

During the recent months our Association also shared in the great joy at the Elevation of Dr. Sean Brady to the College of Cardinals which is a well merited recognition for the quiet leadership exercised by Cardinal Brady since becoming the Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. We rejoice that someone who worked previously within our administrative structures has been so honoured.

The recent decisions of the Special Congress are designed to seriously curtail the football and hurling championship as played at provincial level. The loss of almost a quarter of the available dates will impair the overall programme and will reduce the profile of the championships as a whole. It seems strange that the single biggest element of the senior championship is treated so. A year ago I wrote that we fundamentally believe that the Provincial championships must be allowed to continue but the reduction in profiling casts a serious doubt on their future. We, as an Association, must tread carefully with our prized possessions otherwise we may take our championship programme to the stage where we are only relevant for two months of the year. The build up, the marketing, television and promotion are dependant on us having a games programme that gives the Association the necessary profile that is to the advantage of all. The confused messages that Inter County competitions are responsible for Club inactivity is not accurate and has more to do with extended lead in to games and the failure of all of us to insist on the completion of the fixture schedule as determined at the start of the year.

The International dimension of the Association is served by its own Sub Committee. It is doing fine work and there is little doubt that we are moving in the right direction. It is important that we examine the Internationalising of our Association. We need to further examine our need for compliance with laws as they apply in other parts of the world and above all, we have to decide whether we want to move to a situation that would require the GAA to lose its relevance at home in the quest for an International role. We need to examine too the requirement for interaction with units abroad with some form of tournament for our games. It might be appropriate to look at the Junior Clubs at home and try to establish this as a standard level throughout the whole Association. I raise these matters as we are again in discussions with the Australian Rules Football about a new arrangement and there can be no doubt that a hybrid games does little for our games. Furthermore, the concept of our amateur Association forming some formal agreement with a professional organisation holds no benefit to us as their pursuance of our players in recent times has demonstrated. It's time to decide our international future and we are either working within our own framework or we substantially involve ourselves with a much larger body who only want us to provide an involvement so that another base from which they can draw players is open to them.

We acknowledge the retirement of Danny Lynch, who has dealt with several areas of importance for the Association and we are grateful to him for his work and his help. We have a good working relationship with all of the staff at National level and I particularly acknowledge the work of Tom Ryan, Dermot Power and Teresa Rehill and thank them for all their help and support in areas appropriate to their sphere of operation. We pay tribute to the work carried out by Central Council, its Sub-Committees and various Taskforces that take matters forward for decision. We sincerely thank the various members from Ulster who have given generously of their time in working for the Association as a whole.

I would also like to put on record the excellent contribution made by outgoing Chairmen, Secretaries and other County Board Officers in our Counties during 2007. They have worked effectively and co-operatively to ensuring the best interests of the Association are always to the fore.

The Sports NI have has worked co-operatively with our Council and our constituent units and they do their best to deal fairly with all matters. We would like thank Eamonn McCartan, Chief Executive for all his work and his consideration of the issues that arise from time to time. Professor Eric Saunders is retiring as Chairman, and we acknowledge his immense contribution to the work in relation to sport and for his understanding and supportive role in relation to our sports. We wish him well for the future. Our appreciation is also due to the various staff of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure who has worked diligently with us in dealing with the matters that arise from time to time. I would like to record our appreciation to Edgar Jardine, Ciaran Mee and Jack Palmer who have dealt with in the most courteous manner and with whom we hope to continue working into 2008 and beyond. We acknowledge the Sports Institute and the work of Roger Keenan. We look forward to the utilisation of the new facilities and hopefully the widening of the remit to provide for hurling and female involvement. I would also like to congratulate our three Vodafone Football All Stars for 2007, namely Kevin McCloy and Paddy Bradley, Doire and Tommy Freeman, Muineachan.

IT and Marketing

The establishment of a wider remit for this body has seen it take forward several initiatives aimed at creating a higher profile for our games, projects and our Association. This has been most evident in the recent Dr. McKenna Cup and the Coiste is thanked for their work. We have recently decided to review our IT systems as they are fast approaching the end of their life expectancy. The use of IT is critical to our work and Workgroup has been established to take matters forward. This Coiste will also play a part in the review as the shape of the new systems will be in line with the aims of this body.

We once again thank Micheal O hOsain, Gerard Bradley and the Committee for their vital work. We also acknowledge the work of Damian Kelly, our staff member responsible for ICT, Website and functionality of our systems.

Media

The situation of our media relations has rarely been better. However, on one occasion we considered taking a matter to the Press Relations Commission as it was hard to establish whether we were the subject of the programme or if the profile would not be the same without the liberal references to our Association. The subject matter had nothing to do with the GAA but that was not how it was portrayed. I have stated previously that criticism is not offensive to us if it is fair and merited, but guilt by association is entirely a matter of a different perspective and when an item has no relevance to our Association or the person concerned involvement with Cumann Luthchleas Gael has nothing to do with what the subject matter is about we have the right to be annoyed. We respect the right of a free press to accurately report a newsworthy story but we are not prepared to be denigrated by this type of unfair, unwarranted and improper journalism

The situation regarding television coverage has also become a matter of grave concern. The level of coverage available to all our members is seriously curtailed and at some stages in 2007 was non-existent. The position of UTV falls short of what is required from a public broadcaster and the situation will need to be monitored into the remainder of this year.

The role played by the media in general has afforded us excellent coverage and we pay tribute to the journalists, photographers, radio and television personnel for bringing out the build up to games, reporting on the events and occasions and recording for posterity our greatest moments and saddest occasions.

We compliment Micheal O hOsain for all his excellent work as our Public Relations Officer. He has worked very closely with me and has been most helpful in dealing with the media in general. I would also like to thank Stephen Donnelly for his work in this area.

Comhbhrón

The past year witnessed many great stalwarts and their extended families of the Association pass to their eternal reward and numbered among them were players, referees, administrators, supporters and extensions to the wider GAA family as a whole. The death of Johnny Wilson a great from Cavan's golden era brought sadness to all who knew this great man from Mullahoran. During the year we wished a fond farewell to Eamon Coleman who had contributed to Derry's famous All Ireland victory and later we saw the death of Fintan Tierney who had made a significant contribution into the introduction of Feile Peile na nOg. Several of our County chairmen, our football manager and members of staff had close family bereavements, as had our Iar Uachtarán Sean O Raghallaigh whose son Brian died during the past year. The sad and sudden deaths of two young Tyrone players within four days was a tragedy for all involved and we sympathise with the parents, families and Clubs of the late Packie Breen and Patrick Devlin. It was the toughest time of the past year. We sympathise with their families, friends, Counties and Clubs of all of the deceased on their loss and hope that they find comfort and peace within family and the Association

The Sacrifice of the Mass will be offered for all the deceased members of our Association in the Canal Court Hotel, on the morning of Convention at 11.00 a.m. It is hoped that all delegates can attend as a mark of respect for all our deceased members.

Conclusion

The role of Cumann Luthchleas Gael in meeting the challenges of the future must remain steadfast in our commitment to our core values. To achieve this we must have adherence to the democratic structures that allow all our members and units to contribute to the decisions that have to be made. We need respect for our leaders, our structures and above all we need to align ourselves with the good Samaritan and ask the question posed by Martin Luther King which was 'if I don't help this person what will happen to him'. The hallmark of the GAA was the totally unselfish support for the Association and we need to restore the respect for the extended family that is the Gaelic Athletic Association.

Is mise, le meas,

Donall O Murchu, Runai