

Q1: Describe your earliest GAA memory and how you became involved in the GAA?

Playing underage football for local club.

Attending the 1957 All Ireland Final with my father and uncle.

I also recall being in our local field on a frosty january day watching locals lifting sods of earth from high spots in the field and rolling them into the furrows. I was only a kid driving the roller.

Q2: Did your family have a tradition or history of GAA involvement?

My dad played with a number of local clubs in the area before the establishment of our local Parish club. He was a trustee on behalf of the parish for the playing field as well on the very early committees.

Q3: Did your relatives discuss their GAA experiences with you? What were they?

Whilst my father had won a number of Senior Club Medals ,what we heard of his exploits were from outside sources. He did have many discussions with past members of teams about previous exploits and recalled many a match result that went their way and why.

Q4: Tell me how GAA affected your family life?

I would look forward to going to matches especially to semi finals and finals to cheer the local team when transport was available. A hand injury cut short my own playing of football but as soon as my son began to play I became a keen follower. With another similar parent we took charge of the underage teams for about five years.

Q5: Tell me what it was like to support your club/county when you were young and down through the years (travelling to games, prices of tickets, food, grounds visited, clothes worn, match-day traditions, local celebrations and traditions).

As we lived within an hour of Dublin going to Croke Park was not a big deal. From the early 80's our local club who operated at Senior grade were in the relegation zone in the league but still in the Championship so it was vital for us to succeed. We won our first Senior Championship in 1983 to great great celebration throughout the Parish. Our winning of the same Cup in Centenary Year was quite a precious capture. It gave a great to the GAA in the schools when the Cup was displayed.

Q6: If you had to choose just one game from all you've experienced, which would you choose? Why?

Although quite young being at the All Ireland Final with Louth playing in Croke Park in 57.

On the Cusack stand and trying to get a view (everyone standing of course). I was awe struck when Kevin Beehan's sideline kick was punched to the net. All the crowd pushed forward and I was left to wonder why I had so much space until I realised they had got the winning score. I remember coming home and all the flags took on a new meaning. Even a neighbour had cut the top off a high tree to fly the Louth flag.

Q7: What impact has the GAA had on your life?

Being involved with those underage teams gives great satisfaction as well as keeping a record of all their matches. Training or coaching was'nt as sophisticated back in those days but it was great to work with a great group of like minded parents who always got their kids to the match venues. It was always important to give all eligible players a run for at least a few minutes if at all possible. Some of the less likely candidates turned out to be the best footballers in later years

Q8: What place and role does your club have in your community?

The local club has always been the single biggest organisation in our parish. It brought everyone together with a common purpose. Although most of its members would be involved in other organisations in the parish, the club have often been called upon to help arrange certain projects like cleaning the local cemetery when local efforts failed. Its diverse membership encompassed a wide variety of talent from any area and as such were always more adaptable to the voluntary effort.

Q9: What role did the GAA play as part of your school and/or college life?

Back in my Primary school days football was only played in the schoolyard and rural schools were not organised as it is today. It was much better in the secondary school system. Here in the Christian Brothers everyone had their afternoon on the playing field whether you liked it or not. The better players got picked on the School teams.

Q10 Who do you most admire in the GAA and why

Sean Kelly was for me the best President in my time to lead the organisation. He managed to break down the No change attitude that dominated the GAA for so long. In a small country like ours we needed to be seen to integrate with other sports and not to oppose them. He managed this to his credit and won the admiration of a very wider audience in doing so.

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Q11: In your experience what have been the biggest changes in the GAA?

Taking the competitive element out of underage football was to me a great idea. Kids just want to play and are not really able to cope with the trauma of loosing . They will have put in as much effort as the winners and should'nt have to deal with such disappointments. It could turn them away from games.

In the adult sphere I think there has been too much meddling with the rules. The game has got very fast and diverse with much of the basic principles we all grew up with no longer a big part of the modern game. The facilities have got better at most clubs and with the introduction of lights the season is now extended and more easy to arrange fixtures to suit work schedules. I don't think the GAA should go down the professional route apart from legimate expensive.

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Q12: Have changes in your community affected your club and how?

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In many rural areas the Celtic tiger increased the population in dramatic fashion. This put great pressure on clubs to cope with increasing numbers. We had just a single playing field close to the only village in the parish. We just had't enough space so we had to buy and develop a new Greenfield site on the edge of the parish. Twenty seven acres purchased, six sold for development and the remaining site developed into three full size pitches ,two with lights and two all weather pitches with dressing rooms. The need was genuine as were the people who spearheaded the whole development so we got the support of the area both financial and great committment from the local community. As with all projects of this magnitude there were a few protractors who could not grasp the big picture but they soon seen the idea come to fruition. To see up to three hundred young kids as well as adults of both sexes use the facilities is a credit to those who just simply got the job done.

Q13: Do you think the role of women in the GAA has changed over the years and how?

They have been the unsung hero's for a long time letting their men out to participate.

With better facilities they now feel able to come with their kids to training and games as they take a walk around our dedicated fifteen hundred meter walking track. We would like to have more facilities to let them have a coffee and a chat as is the case in some more developed clubs. The younger girls and teenagers are now a separate entity in their own right and most clubs have their own Ladies teams.

Q14: Describe the role of the churches and clergy in your club and how it has changed over the years?

Our club has had a very good experience with clergy especially in its early years. A Curate from a northern parish came to our area and happened to be a very good footballer. He was inspirational in the early development of our club and togged out for many years. Parish Priests were generally older when they came but never interfered with the club . They usually complimented those involved as there were always some teachers and in well organised clubs and they were looked up to by most of the younger people. I think as clerics nowadays they have very little input into the Gaa but a good well run club in their parish can only be an asset.

Q15: Was there a connection between politics and the GAA for you, if so what?

No connection nor should their be. Our club liked to operate with as little interference as possible from outside . We did have the support of local council who liked the idea of development of sports in the area (possibly for their own benefit)

Q16: What have been the main disappointments you have had with the GAA?

Sometimes it feels that some of the smaller clubs don't always get the extra support they need in times of difficulty. Clubs with small numbers need to be accomodated with more favourable fixtures especially where there are numbers of students making up their numbers not to have too many mid weeeek fixtures during college terms. It seems sometrimes that County boards will favour the larger generally Senior clubs who seem to have more sway in this regard.

Q17: Did the GAA shape your own identity in any way?

It has been a life long interest and following a team as well as being involved in the development phase of a club can be very rewarding. It's great to share an interest with local people and gives one a great degree of satisfaction just to be recognised as being part of your club. That my wife was also a keen follower of the games and other activities in the club meant we had a shared interest in where we went. Each week we could plan where we went and it was great for the whole family. It also meant we could satisfy the interest of both our elderly parents who had a great love for the game.

Q18: What role has Irish language and culture had in your club and on your personal involvement with the GAA?

Our club has been fortunate to have been kept participants in Scor for so many years. I watched with pride to see all members of my family take part in such a variety of cultural activities on behalf of our local club. We have represented club, County and Province in such activities with great pride. I feel the cultural side of the GAA helped many clubs keep its members and gave them a sense of pride in the heritage of our national games and cultures.

Q19: How important are rivalries within the GAA and what are yours?

There was always rivalry between ourselves and the neighbouring parish team. It always led to quite tense games but never to anything outside the rules. Along side this we were joined with them quite successfully for many years at underage as neither had the numbers to field separately. The same could be said of our neighbouring much larger County. They even went as far as sending us maps of how to get to Croke Park. I think we will always have this and it adds to the satisfaction or disappointment depending on the result.

Q20: Comment on the role of volunteers within the GAA?

Where would it be without them ?. In this country we have the Do'r and those that only talk about doing it . I doubt the organisation could function if it had to pay for all the services that are provided at clubs. The volunteer has kept a friendly face to the clubs, but unfortunately it seems to be the same handful who work like Superbunnys in every club . There should be a culture where by no one can hold any position for more than a specified time . On the plus side there is great satisfaction in doing this type of voluntary work and it has kept many a person exercised both in mind and body sometimes for longer than was intended. This attitude should be sold better by the organisation at National level.

Q21: Describe your experience with teams as a player, manager, committee member or supporter.

When I had an input into the juvenile sector we had the respect of the children but more importantly of their parents. We were quite strict on age limits etc and even lost competitions as a result of not 'bending the rules ' as other teams were prone to do. As PRO you gain respect by balanced reporting of matches and get cooperation from other clubs for doing so. I find it is important to respect each player for his efforts and encourage them to become team players rather than criticise when it's not going so well. The success of any manager whether in the committee room or on the field is to delegate each one a task and to learn to make it easier with teamwork

Q22: Describe your experiences, if any, with the GAA outside Ireland.

None

Q23: Describe how media coverage of GAA in your lifetime has changed.

As a pro for nearly thirty years it has become so much easier to get reports out to the general public . The advent of Local Radio has seen everyone kept up to date with numerous bullitens daily. Email has made it easier to get reports to local newspapers and of course the Websites in each county are now quite good. But just as good news travels fast so can adverse comments so it is important that reports are factual and are not interpituted the wrong way for any other motives. The TV coverage of TG4 is also bringing coverage of so many more games both current and from days gone by that it is complimenting the mainstream channels to great effect. It is a far cry from the groups gathering around the Radio of days gone by.

Q24: What in your opinion are the biggest challenges facing the GAA in the future?

Commercialism where big companies want to exploit our organisation mainly for their own benefit. We have something unique in that we have organised groups of people in every parish or main population centres in the country and in general operate outside of politics and religion over the thirty two counties. We need to be aware of any attempts to abuse our situation other than for the distinct good of the association. We are a voluntary group and should never lose sight of that. At club level we need to get more of the younger 35-45 year olds involved in the running of the local clubs and onto County Boards. This group are more in touch with what is going on with teenagers and families and with better education and training are more in tune with new ideas and methods . They will also be more into newer technology to help lead our association into the new age. This era is also about all Sports and we need to make it interesting to keep our fair share of the young people involved in our clubs.

Q25: What does the GAA mean to you?

The Gaa has always had a special place in my life be it actual games to attend or the other cultural aspect outside of the playing field. We continue to help with keeping older records available for periodic publications that are undertaken in clubs from time to time. The memories I have of past celebrations and of course the various turning points in games that 'got away' will always be recalled at numerous functions.

In the future we hope the legacy and facilities we provided for our generation will continued to be improved and used as a stepping stone for our grand children to use well into the future.

Q26: Do you have any pictures, documents, video etc. that you could share with us? Please provide a brief description.

Do you know any songs or poems about the GAA in your local area that you can send us or write in here?

Can you think of anyone else in your locality or in your family circle who we should contact for this project? Who are they and why?

Q27: Is there anything else you would like to say about the GAA?

It has been a great asset to the wellbeing of so many people in our parish over many years . It has always been there through 'tigers and recessions' and a great place to spend time at very little expense. We have been fortunate to have enjoyed the experience.

Q28: How did you hear about this project?

Given this Questionnaire as a project by a young Secondary School student and delighted to put my humble experiences down on paper. In doing so I again relived the memories.

I hereby assign the copyright of the answers above to the GAA Oral History Project on the understanding that the content will not be used in a derogatory manner. I understand that I am giving the GAA Oral History Project the right to use and make available to the public the content of this questionnaire.

Signed: Michael Mooney 15-10-2010, _____ Date: _____

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