

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

Memory: Being brought by father to a local farmer's house where there was a rare radio (Phillips-wet+dry battery) to hear the broadcast of the Dublin/Waterford All-Ireland 1948 H. final
Involvement: Everyone was in varying degrees - like the church, it was there - no decision needed

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

No - father took a casual interest; I imagine more to facilitate social contact than any intrinsic interest.

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

Small farmers whose discussions were dominated by the prices of livestock at the local fairs and rarely mentioned GAA affairs unless they sold or bought with a well-known hurling or footballing family

Q4: Tell me how GAA affected your family life?

Personally I wasn't a great player - too timid for one thing - at least until I did my Leaving Cert. years in Dungarvan CBS when I developed into a useful full-forward in Harty Cup (Munster Colleges' Hurling) teams of 1956/57. The crowning 'glory' was beating the mighty Mount Sion in 1957.

Father and mother supported my involvement in a passive, parental way, probably thinking "it will keep him out of trouble."

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).

In my adolescent years there was no club in mine or adjoining parishes but we spent endless hours, especially on Sunday, hurling in any convenient field with our school pals. The jackets would be placed as goalposts and two captains - who would double as joint referees - nominated. So because of the lack of local clubs and the lack of transport beyond the odd bicycle, following the Waterford senior hurlers in the championship was the pinnacle of the year. All too often they didn't get beyond the first round that, cynically, it became known as the 'annual outing.'

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

The Munster Hurling Final
of 1961 between Cork and Tipperary
in Limerick,
— because it was the culmination
of the ancient rivalry, played out
in blood and guts that day in
a ferocity that I don't believe
has been seen since (maybe, speaking
with colder blood, just as well!)
See Appendix 2 for "July Sixty One"

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

It's just part of my life like
my family, my church, my Trade
union etc. We miss it during the
off season.

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

As a septuarian not as much as it once did, personally, but I'm fully aware of its service to the community - putting out 40-plus Teams a week, which later leads to such life-long bonding, including many marriages. The presence of an Irish cultural dynamo in our community is also high in my rating.

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

In primary in my area the male principals in the adjoining parishes where there were rarely any clubs tried sporadically to promote our games against the odds ("Johnny is wanted to pick the spuds!")
In my Intercert (now Junior) years in Mount Mellera, Co. Waterford, only Gaelic games were played - but there were no outside games.
Leaving Cert: Our exclusively GAA games important

Q10: Who do you admire most in the GAA and why?

Perhaps Waterford's Pádraig Ó Fainín (Paddy Fanning), who as a lifelong staunch supporter of Rule 27, ~~prohibiting~~ ^{prohibiting} GAA members playing foreign games, going to foreign dances etc., presided over and generously accepted the decision of 1971 Congress to abolish the Ban.

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

I thought I must have had too many pre-match drinks as I entered Sempie Stadium in the early 1980s for a Munster Hurling Final — only to see two choppers landing and three helicopters already parked in the surrounds of the sacred Turf.

Nothing succeeds like success!

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

- The changes all seem positive:
- More young people are more games and health aware — at least, up to a varying and indeterminate age when 'beer, birds and business burdens' take their toll.
 - With the new popularity of camogie, ladies football and even mums' games the GAA club has to a great extent replaced daft discos as a romantic rendezvous.
 - Children from overseas families are to be seen at the naíonra sessions.

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

See Response to Q 12

Against 'The run of play' my Club, CLG Raheny, Dublin 5, has had ^{only} one woman officer, Margaret O' Moore - and only as asst. secretary and only for a brief term - in its 50 years' history.

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

Local Raheny Catholic curate was co-founder of CLG Raheny. Fr. Richard (Dick) Ryan, from Doon, Co. Limerick, was a hands-on activist, who recruited and built up the youth of the area into the early teams in the fifties and early sixties. On his transfer an equally energetic curate, Ciarán Foley, took on the role. About this time, too, a Fr. Laurence Forrestal who was to become Bishop of Ossory was very supportive. A de la Salle Brother, Canice, was Patron & President as is V. Rev. Tom Kearney, Whitehall, at present even though the time he can give is limited.

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

Loosely, I suppose the commonly proclaimed commitment by Fianna Fáil and the GAA to the Irish language and Irish culture generally was a similar attraction.

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

I get annoyed to go into GAA clubs and have to tolerate erstwhile 'foreign games' blaring from TVs and Big Screens while one has to fight to get a hurling or football match on.

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

1 See Q 7

A generation or more ago all you had to do to identify yourself in any pub, shop, bank etc. was to start a chat about last Sunday's GAA games. In all or most parts of the country now you'd draw a blank. You'd better be up to speed on Man. Utd.

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

As in Q15 - There is a passive nod to the Irish language but any passion for its advancement or use is shared by few. In fact, for all practical purposes you could drop the ~~G~~ out of our Great Association and few would quibble.

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

Rivalries are the lifeblood of all progress
The great rivalries, Kerry/Dub, Cork/Tipp etc. in our time almost universally lead to great, dignified mutual respects and often lifelong friendships for those on and off the field.

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

1
Indispensable at all levels

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

We all love a winner!

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

In 1957-59 a casual gathering of Irish played hurling - of a low standard - in Wormwood Scrubs on Sunday afternoons when the pubs were closed under the cold shadows of the grim prison.

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

It is said - I believe with some exaggeration - that Pádraig Ó Caoimh, long-serving General Secretary of the GAA used to have to go around the Dublin newspaper offices in the 1920s in September pleading to put a paragraph in their pages on the Saturday issues announcing that the All-Ireland (hurling + football) would be played on the morrow. The arrival of the Irish Press in 1931 saw wide coverage, which the rest of the media had to follow.

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

Semi-professionalism that has already crept in must, inevitably, lead to an unsustainable slippery slope where down the ranks more and more people, ~~will be~~ ~~looking for~~ including the 'volunteers' you mention in Q20 will cause problems fighting for 'pay for play.' Already, apart from the current attrition involving 'fat' county team and major club managers and their squads, it is dismaying to see Mickey Mouse mentors bringing a team of youngsters out for a couple of hours for matches/training and coming back to cash-strapped clubhouses claiming expenses.

Q25: What does the GAA mean to you?

See Q7

REFERENCE NO. (OFFICE USE ONLY):

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?

See Addendum 1

See Addendum 2

— both attached

— M.C

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

Go n-beirimid beo céad bliain agus níos faide ar aghaidh!

Q28: How did you hear about this project?

Imposed upon by local GAA Club, CLG, Rath Eanna, Dublin 5, To complete Questionnaire

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 Conin

Date: 27/2/2010

Please Note: If you are aged 18 years or younger this must be signed by your parent / guardian. Failure to do so will mean that we are unable to include your responses in the Archive