

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

Listening to the great broadcasting Sean Michael O'Shea's commentary on the only all-Ireland football final to be played outside the country. It was the 1947 final between Cavan & Kerry that was played in the Polo grounds New York. It left an indelible imprint on my young mind. After the epic contest that Cavan won, I wanted to emulate the Breffni legends such as Phil Hughes, John Joe O'Driscoll, Simon Duggan, Tony Tighe & Mick Higgins or the Wicklopes' Danny Keefe, Paddy Barron, Brogan, Faddy Kennelly, J.J. Dunne & Batt Corry, Cogan & Connor, Gus Collins & John Kane.

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

Yes my grandfather Willie Martin was one of the founding members of the Athlone GAA club in 1895. My late father John Martin played in an All Ireland hurling final for Westmeath against Cork in 1913. The game was played in Jones' Road, of course now Brook Park. After a memorable contest Cork won by a few points. Notable people in attendance at the game included Sam Maguire over from London, Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith and Eamon De Valera. The Westmeath team had soup and dumplings after the match in the Clarence Hotel.

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

My father would relate to me about his years playing senior hurling with Athlone at the turn of the last century, from 1905 to 1914. He was captain of the team in 1911 & 12 when they won the Westmeath championship. When they were playing up in North Westmeath they would travel from the town on the old steam train to Mullingar. If they were playing a club based team, fifteen or even twenty miles from Mullingar, they would travel by two horse drawn tender, or a brake as it was called at the time. Then on the return journey to catch the train home, the team & mentors would teach themselves waltz by singing rowing, rebel songs, maybe on a cold and frosty October night. What dedication!

Q4: Tell me how GAA affected your family life?

After the well being of the immediate family and the little bit of food on the table, your religion, the GAA came next and was talked about at breakfast, dinner and supper. We lived in a rural area about a mile and a half outside Athlone. We had a radio in the house that was worked by a wet battery dry battery, vibrator and all kinds of wires crudely tied together. When the great Michael would be giving a commentary on a big match hurling or football, the neighbours would gather, when the inside of the house would be full, men and women would sit out in the yard on bales of hay or straw or spare chairs and listen to the game enthralled to hear Michael describe the exploits of the legends on the playing field. Of course at half time the pros & cons of the game would be debated with the bottle of stout for the other folk or a cahn of the black market tea, abiding memories.

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).

Supporting my club and county was infectious with myself from a very young age. One of my abiding memories was travelling for the very first time on the old steam train to the county senior football final in Casack Park in 1947 between Athlone & Kinnegad when I was eleven years old. In retrospect it was indeed a memorable spectacle and being on the cake was Athlone victorious by two points after a thrilling contest. Forty or fifty other children from my age group including my two brothers & five sisters also made the journey. At half time we took out the little box of sandwiches and the little bottle of milk that our mothers had packed for us which we ate with relish and abandon. It was one shilling for adults and three brown pennies for children. Ah, into the game but man on the gate did not take our pennies we were brought into the team carriage to hold the cup on the way home. As the train crossed the quays & ran on the driver gave three shrill whistles from his steam engine and Athlone came out in force to welcome home their heroes. The Athlone pipe band led the cavalcade & hundreds of supporters up to the bonfire that was blazing high in the old fairgreen. Again it leaves abiding & nostalgic memories.

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

It would have to be the All-Ireland senior hurling final between Wexford & Cork in the mid fifties. For sheer excitement brilliant hurling and excellent sportsmanship it could not be surpassed. To witness the maestro himself Christy Ring solo sixty yards from the Cusack stand side with the ball glued to his stick, and then unleash a rocket from about fifteen yards out, only to see the great old Jockey the Wexford custodian bring off a superb reflex save, and then to see Christy coming in and shaping Arty's hand was something special. When the full time whistle sounded after a truly nailbiting contest that Wexford won by four points, the three Wexford legends Nicky, Bobbie & Billy Baxter carried the great Christy shoulder high off the park. The memories will live on into perpetuity.

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

Coming from a family that was involved with Gaelic games since 1885, the GAA has made a huge impact on my life in many respects. I have made life long friends through my involvement with the GAA in many categories, including friend and foe alike that I played with and against on the peering fields of Westmeath and many venues throughout Ireland. To feel very much part of the best amateur sporting organisation in the world has certainly impacted on my life and times. To promote the aims and ideals of our founding fathers in Hayes Hotel in Thurles in 1884 continues to make an impact on my life to the present day. To see my four sons, John, Samon, James & Joe play in all grades with my club Athlone, and now to watch my five grandsons, Steven, Brendan, Duinnid, Samon and John is unique & special & a huge impact.

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

My club has played a huge part in the welfare and life and times of the local community and vice versa over all down through the years. The club is a focal point for hundreds of men women and children. In these harsh and tough recessionary times with doom & gloom coming through the airwaves on a daily basis, the people come to their local club for refuge camaraderie, friendship and even sustenance. Over a cup of tea, coffee or biscuit or a little drink in our modern facilities, they can discuss their club affairs and the many activities run by the club for themselves and their families. The community is the club in reality.

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

The ethos of the GAA and its promotion of Gaelic games, Irish culture and heritage was as important as the school curriculum itself in my school and college. After primary I attended the Marist college Athlone, that was run by the Marist Brothers community. They were keen in the town of Athlone regarding the promotion of Gaelic games football, hurling, handball and athletics. The headmaster Bro. Hubert was chairman of the Athlone club for many years. He was very much instrumental in producing the great Athlone senior football team that won six Westmeath senior titles in a row from 1955 to '60 a feat that has not been equalled in W. Meath to the present day.

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

Definitely the grassroots and the unsung heroes that keep Gaelic games, culture, heritage and folklore alive and well in the cities, towns & villages throughout the thirty two counties. Without people like them the GAA would be a great starting monument that it is today. It is the unsung heroes that has made Croke Park what it is now one of the best stadia in Europe if not the world. The people in the higher echelons of our great Assoc. should be lauded in their praise and pay due tribute to these gallant men & women at every opportunity time.

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

The removal of the ban on foreign games has been a major change and certainly has enhanced the peace process considering Ireland's rather turbulent history. Also the allowing of rugby and soccer internationals to be played on our hallowed grounds was a big gesture for change. Then the visit of the Queen Elis. and Prince Philip with the camán and sliothar, was a great way of removing ill feelings from yesterday on both sides, and is certainly a big help to our GAA clubs throughout the length and breadth of England. Of course allowing County teams back into the championship in hurling and football was a major change, but whether it was a good or a bad idea is still a matter of conjecture for the back door or in old time Ireland the half door.

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

In untroubled Ireland of the present time the influx of foreign nationals over the past ten or fifteen years has certainly impacted to an extent in our club and I am sure probably in all clubs. For instance this year a boy from Nigeria played with distinction at midfield on the Athlone U<sup>14</sup> championship winning and they were also Westmeath Gaelic champions, his name was Sam Omokuru. There are many other boys and girls from other countries taking part in our national pastimes and culture. Their parents in many instances are now hard working members of our club. Of course the severe downturn of our Country in monetary terms has meant that more of our talented young people girls and boys had to emigrate, thus affecting the playing numbers in my club, and all clubs.

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

Yes the role of women in the GAA has changed dramatically over the last twenty years or so. With the support of their club teams on the field of play and left the actual running of the club to their husbands, boyfriends or partners. But now as in public life with over two lady Presidents of Ireland in recent years, the women in our club and in the GAA in general hold administrative roles such as chairperson, Sec. treasurer fund raiser's etc. with this trend continuing I predict in the not too distant future a woman will be elected ~~chairperson~~ <sup>chairman</sup> ~~club~~ <sup>league</sup> DA <sup>GAA</sup>   
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Q14: Describe the role of the churches and clergy in your club and how it has changed over the years?

With the church and the GAA established in every parish throughout Ireland, it was only natural that the two great bodies ran in tandem in many respects down through the years. In my own club Athlone, three priests and a Marxist brother were teammates of myself on what is considered Athlone's dream team the six in row football team of the fifties + sixties. Up until recent years we always had a senior church dignitary throwing in the ball at hurling and football finals. At times the church may have been lukewarm in their support for the GAA. In recent years that has changed in a big way. They know now the great work club members do for thousands of girls and boys as well as nurturing them on the skills of public games. They also put them on the straight and narrow path for life, by teaching discipline and the three great virtues, Punctuality, Regularity + Obedience.

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

Not really I never had an active role in politics nor did it ever enter our club in any shape or form immaterial of what one's persuasion was or the way they voted all was of equal status within the club. I myself had a leaning towards Fianna Fail for I thought they identified more with the ethos of our founding fathers in 1884 which was all about giving the plain people of Ireland, or the peasants as the assembly liked to call us at that time, their own national pastimes to participate in. Where as other parties were in particular tended to lean towards the big fig, farmers or landed gentry. Which was not conducive in promoting Gaelic games and culture.

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

Again the people in the higher echelons of our Assoc. tend to be very slow, reticent and cumbersome when rules need to be changed for the betterment of our games. The hardness at this juncture in time will sound the death knell of Gaelic football if it is allowed to continue in its present form. It will kill the art of spectacular high fielding and precision kicking. Only the goalkeeper on either team should be allowed to fist the ball out to a corner back etc. The same in hurling. Also the square ball rule should be abolished.

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

Yes, the GAA has certainly shaped my own identity in many ways. It has made me proud to be Irish especially on all Ireland finals day when our national games are broadcast to the worldwide audience. And that includes the fastest and more skilful game in the world hurling. Also to be in Croke Park of yesteryear on St. Patrick's day when we had upwards of sixty thousand fans in attendance to witness the cream of the provinces do battle for the Harpur cup in hurling and football, made one really proud to be Irish. Oh what has happened to that great competition that will go down in the annals of GAA history of having been a superb spectacle and great occasion in every way. Now to escape the rampant bad news daily, the GAA is great respite & sustenance for myself, family and friends.

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

The Irish language and culture has played an important role in my club and on my own personal involvement within the club. Having been chairman of the Athlone club for a number of years, <sup>was</sup> beneficial and appropriate to address important meetings such as AGMs etc. with the cúlra social. Culture is also very much to the fore in the club, with Irish music and dance. We also run a live dance music for the senior citizens every Sunday night in the club.

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

Rivalries are important within the GAA and really manifest themselves in a big way on the playing fields. One can think of a Munster senior hurling final in Thurles between Cork and Tip. The rivalry is intense with an electric atmosphere prevailing on the day with justly thousand plus spectators in attendance. My own rivalries at the present time are to be able to compete with our rivals in other codes such as rugby and soccer. And strive to make our games hurling football more attractive for our young players.

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

In truth and in essence the GAA would be non-existent without the thousands of volunteers that work tirelessly night and day, countywide and nationwide promoting the ideals and aspirations of the Gaelic Athletic Assoc. for the past one hundred and twenty six years. They are the women and men who never want or seek the limelight, who are never bestowed with the plaudits or accolades that their Herculean endeavours so richly deserve. Cognances should be taken of that fact at our All Star awards celebration every year when we honour the cream of talented players in hurling and football. Yes my good friends it was and is the volunteers that nurture and create the All Stars by looking after them from six year old up to eighteen years of age.

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

As a player I was lucky enough and privileged to have won every Westmeath football championship from U14 right up to the distance six in a row team. The six in a row era was memorable and 1959 was extra special when the Spire band came down from the Capital to lead the parade round on County Agricultural Day. I emulated my father to an extent when I won a minor hurling championship with distance in 1953. I also played with my County at all levels that included three years a county minor. My playing days certainly hold many interesting memories. I met many unique characters including coaches, managers, team mentors and great supporters, and of course great opponents that are life long friends.

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

My experience with the GAA outside Ireland is limited, apart from attending a few games in Australia. I also visited a few clubs on offshoots of clubs with mutual friends on social occasions. I do know that GAA clubs throughout England play a huge role in finding accommodation and gainful employment for many young hurlers, footballers and camogie players that were forced to emigrate. That noble gesture is ongoing in America, Australia and many other countries. Maybe that is something our great Assoc. should ponder on in regard to the jobs crisis at home.

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

Since Michael O'Hara gave his first official commentary on an All-Ireland senior football semi final between Monaghan and Cuala in 1938 at Pusey Park Mullingar, media coverage has changed within radio and television. We now have a lot more coverage of games and events in the GAA almost on a weekly basis. While the advent of television in the early sixties was monumental publicity wise for our games, while the likes of the great Michael O'Hara will never be replaced, a few people are good at the job, at least Michael O'Muirheartaigh.

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

To be able to compete with other codes by making our games more attractive to play for our young people, especially at club level. To extol and promote the importance of the units, the clubs nationwide and worldwide at all times. At one time the game of rugby was for the elite in our society absent from Limerick and parts of Cork. But now that has all changed the game of rugby is up and running in every parish and anyone can play. Likewise with soccer, they are trying to manipulate young players with the lure of old Trafford or White Hart Lane in the offing. The GAA must stay ahead of the posse by looking after our games in an ultra professional manner at all times.

Q25: What does the GAA mean to you?

Without the GAA and its tradition and culture, there would be a deep void left in myself and my family's life of unimaginable proportions. Maybe to sound selfish and a wee bit patronising, to watch my four sons play hurling and football with Athlone and Westmeath at many levels was extra special for myself and my wife. Then the icing on the cake for us now is to see our five grandsons and one granddaughter play hurling, football and camogie, respectively with my beloved club Athlone. To have had the honour and privilege to play on the Athlone senior six in a row team remains an enduring and abiding memory for me. For me the GAA will always remain a bastion of strength and a beacon of light towards all things Irish.

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?

*course*  
 Of I have many team photo's etc. I also have my late Father's three championship medals that he won with Athlone and the Dubane County over a century ago, and they are extra special indeed. I have a video of a fifty year reunion reception for the six in row team in the club that took place exactly twelve months ago. I myself was M.C. on the night. It is good, maybe you can view same at a later date.

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

*Always extend the hand of friendship from headquarters Creebo Park. And maybe try to ensure that the man carrying the bottle of water, or the magic bottle for club teams all over Ireland and beyond, may be able to procure a watch ticket on all Ireland final day.*

Q28: How did you hear about this project?

*From Andrew O'Sullivan, Pabreal, Heights, Athlone in conjunction with Tom Hunt, Mullingar.*

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: *Edward Martin* Date: *6-12-11*

\*\*\*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\*\*\*

## REFERENCE NO. (OFFICE USE ONLY):

### Data Protection Information

The GAA Oral History Project aims to record the fullest possible picture of what the GAA has meant to the Irish people, in their own words. The project will record face-to-face interviews with thousands of people in Ireland and internationally, including GAA members and supporters, current and former players, managers, officials and administrators; anyone who has ever had any contact or involvement with the GAA. In addition, in order to reach the largest number of people possible, the GAA Oral History Project is also requesting that people fill out one of the questionnaires or send the project a letter or email about the place of the GAA in their life.

At the start of each questionnaire are a number of biographical questions, which we hope will be completed by each respondent. By including this section we aim to build up a profile of the socio-economic, religious and political composition of the people involved in the GAA. As this project aspires to be the largest public history project carried out in the state to date, the material collected will provide possibly the richest source of material to the sociologists of the present and the historians of the future. By including biographical information such as religion, political affiliation, education and occupation this project will allow academics, family or local historians and interested individuals to build up a picture of the composition of the GAA in a locality, a county and in the country. The interviews that are conducted and the questionnaires that are collected will allow current and future family members of participants to hear and see their ancestors, to view their handwriting, to learn about how they lived and the place of the GAA in their lives.

The interviews, questionnaires, letters, documents, recordings and photographs gathered will be preserved as the GAA Oral History Project Archive – a permanent resource on the history of the GAA in particular and Irish society in general. Samples of the collected material will be made available to the public on our website [www.gaahistory.com](http://www.gaahistory.com) and may be used in: public performances, lectures or talks; publications, including print, audio or video cassettes or CD ROM; public reference purposes in libraries, museums and archives; on radio or television; in educational establishments, including use in a thesis, dissertation or similar research; publication worldwide on the Internet.

The entire GAA Oral History Project Collection, i.e. the full length interviews, questionnaires, letters, photographs, documents and recordings, will be made available to the public through the GAA Museum and Archive.

It should be noted that all contact details provided will be kept entirely confidential and will be accessible only by the staff of the GAA Oral History Project Team. Your contact details will only be retained so that we can contact you to clarify factual information, to send out a thank you note for your contribution, or to request clarification on items that you may have donated. Under no circumstances will your details be passed on to a third party, without your prior consent.