

Tuairisc Bhliantúil An Rúnaí

I am pleased to present my report detailing the activities of the Munster Provincial Council in 2020, my third such report. The year will undoubtedly go down as one of the most testing and stressful for the Association and the country.

2020 Playing Season. A Normal Beginning.

The year began as a normal one with the pre-season competitions providing counties with some warm-up games ahead of the start of the Allianz Leagues. The Luimneach Senior Hurlers set out their stall for 2020 by winning the Co-Op Superstores Munster Senior Hurling League, defeating Corcaigh in the Final. The Luimneach Senior Footballers claimed their first McGrath Cup since 2005, also defeating Corcaigh in the Final, to demonstrate their rising stock in Gaelic Football. Both finals were played as a double header in the LIT Gaelic Grounds in front of 5,295 spectators. Next, came the Under 20 Football Championship, moved from its summer billing in 2019 to February in 2020. Bad weather made playing conditions very difficult, with switches of venue and dates at short notice needed to get the competition finished. Ciarraí dethroned All-Ireland Champions Corcaigh in the Final, winning their 3rd title in 4 years, with 3,000 people in attendance. It would be the last Inter County game in Munster in 2020 that had a crowd in attendance.

Lockdown

Meanwhile the Allianz Leagues were progressing, also against a backdrop of stormy and difficult weather conditions. But, this was nothing compared to the storm that was ahead for the Association and the country. Games were being played against the backdrop of increasing speculation and focus on the Covid-19 virus, which had emerged in China just the previous December. Amidst a deteriorating situation in Italy, where hospitals were feeling the full force of the virus's potential to cripple health systems, and amidst increasing worry and concern that it was only a matter of time before Ireland faced a similar challenge, restrictions, including the closing of schools, were introduced on March 12th. While sporting activity was still allowed at that stage, the GAA moved to cancel all activity at all levels on the same day. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar addressed the nation on St. Patrick's Day, March 17th, and Ireland was placed on full lockdown on March 29th.

GAA pitches and clubhouses, normally the scene of great activity across all age groups in the evenings and at weekends, fell silent. Facilities were shut as people adjusted to the stark reality of being confined to their homes. However, clubs did not stop serving and assisting their communities. Clubs across the country mobilized their volunteers, and 20,000 in all assisted the most vulnerable in our Communities by delivering shopping, medical prescriptions and so on. For many, the GAA member at the door would have been the only person they would have seen for days.

The GAA made many of its facilities available to the Health Authorities free of charge. Testing centres were set up at GAA grounds across the country, including Croke Park, Páirc Uí Chaoimh, Cusack Park and Fraher Field. The Munster GAA Offices in Luimneach, became a hub to coordinate the Community response by the Limerick County Council, Gardaí, GAA etc. And the response didn't stop there. Clubs all over Ireland engaged in online fundraisers for various charities, many of whom had seen their income sources dry up. The clubs of Cork alone raised almost €800,000 and it is estimated that approximately €8 million in total was raised by

Clubs and Inter-County teams across the country. Clubs also kept in touch with their members and players and coaching moved to Social Media platforms, with all sorts and types of ‘skills challenges’ set for players. While a deafening silence descended on our playing fields, the hum of club activity was never louder and never more needed by our members and our communities.

Resumption of Activity

By June, restrictions were easing, and by late July, Clubs were back in action, with training and games taking place. After four months of inactivity on the playing field, our club facilities burst into life again. There was palpable relief from players, parents and coaches alike, that our young people could once again enjoy meeting their friends and playing our games, with the obvious associated mental and physical health benefits.

Clubs benefitted from having all of their players together for a defined and certain period of time, where all could train and prepare for games together. At adult level alone, over 1,400 Championship games were played across the Province of Munster between the end of July and the end of October. There were some notable victories too, and none more dramatic than Kiladangan’s win in the Tipperary Senior Hurling Championship.

As a result of reports that some County Final victories around the country were followed by celebrations that were in breach of Government Covid-19 Guidelines, the GAA took the decision to halt all Club games on October 5th. This left a number of County Championships unfinished. However, as the Association had shown throughout the year, it was taking the hard decisions when they needed to be taken. This was regrettable for the Clubs that lost out on the opportunity to play in their Championship Final, but it was the right thing for the Association to do.

There followed a barrage of negative and uninformed commentary on social media and other outlets, with many accusing the Association of being responsible for the second Covid-19 wave in the country. While celebrations following a small number of games contributed to clusters in some counties, the second wave coincided with similar increase in numbers across Europe, and a general opening up of society. The number of games that caused issues was a minute fraction of the thousands of games played across the country.

These celebrations should not have happened. However, the enormous contribution of our Association to the National effort, through the aforementioned volunteering, fundraising and provision of facilities etc, not to mention the many hours of safe activity provided for hundreds of thousands of members, is what the GAA should be remembered for in 2020.

Provincial Club Championships

January 2020 saw the All-Ireland Club Semi-Finals and Finals taking place at Senior, Intermediate and Junior Level. Buiríos Uí Luíoch (Tiobraid Arainn), An Athar Uí Néill (Corcaigh) and Fánaithe an Ruiséalaigh (Corcaigh) all qualified for the Final in their grade, but unfortunately all three were unlucky to narrowly lose out on winning the coveted titles. Na Gaeil (Ciarraí) won the All-Ireland Junior Football Championship, becoming the 5th Kerry club to win the title in the last 6 years.

Unfortunately, County Champions did not get the chance to compete in the Provincial and All-Ireland Championships in 2020. As the fixture calendar had to be redesigned, there simply was not the room to facilitate these games. Provincial Club Championships are always a highlight of the GAA year, and there is a huge sense of achievement and pride associated with winning a Provincial title. Hopefully, 2021 will see the return of these competitions.

Provincial Senior Championships

When the Senior Inter-County Championships did get going, they provided the Country with wonderful entertainment. It was an eerie atmosphere at first, as teams ran out to silence in empty stadiums across the province and the country. However, the action took over and players provided many thrilling moments for the hundreds of thousands watching at home.

In Munster, the Senior Football Championship, so often in the shadow of its Hurling counterpart, turned out to be one of the most exciting and historic championships ever. The Championship began with Luimneach beating Portlárige and Tiobraid Árann beating An Clár in the quarter-finals. Both semi-finals provided drama not seen in the Football Championship for some years. Firstly, Tiobraid Árann played Luimneach in the Semi Final at the LIT Gaelic Grounds. Luimneach were heading to victory, until Tiobraid Árann Captain, Conor Sweeney, scored a miraculous point from the side-line in additional time to take the game to extra time. Tiobraid Árann held out to win in extra time by one point. The following day, Corcaigh played Ciarraí in the second semi-final in Páirc Uí Chaoimh. Played in torrential rain at times, this game also went to extra time with Corcaigh scoring deep into injury time to level the game. Ciarraí were 1 point ahead in additional time of extra time, when Mark Keane hit the back of the net with the last kick of the game to send Corcaigh to the Munster Final.

But the drama didn't stop there. On Saturday November 21st in Croke Park, the GAA held a poignant and emotional commemoration of the events of 100 years before, when 14 innocent civilians were killed by Crown Forces in Croke Park at a football challenge game between Tiobraid Árann and Áth Cliath. Tiobraid Árann player, Michael Hogan, was among those who lost their lives on that day. On November 22nd, in Páirc Uí Chaoimh, Tiobraid Árann, wearing a replica of the jersey that Tiobraid Árann wore on that fateful day on November 21st 1920, won their first Munster Senior Football Championship since 1935, playing a lovely brand of open and attacking football. There were emotional scenes at the end as Tiobraid Árann Captain, Conor Sweeney, accepted the Munster Senior Football cup. It was certainly a pity that the players didn't get the opportunity to take the cup to celebrations in Tiobraid Árann that evening and that thousands of Tiobraid Árann supporters were not there to witness it in person. However, that was the way it needed to be, and in many ways, winning the Championship under such difficult restrictions, will make the victory even sweeter as time goes on.

It was extraordinary too that the four Provincial Championship winners in 2020 were the same counties that claimed those honours in 1920. Tiobraid Árann went on to lose out to Maigh Eo in the All-Ireland Semi-Final, but 2020 will long be remembered by Tiobraid Árann GAA people for the bridging of an 85 year gap to win the Provincial title.

In Senior Hurling, Luimneach were all conquering. They defeated An Clár in the Munster Senior Championship quarter-final, which doubled up as the Allianz League Division 1 final. This was followed up by victory over Tiobraid Árann in the semi-final, played in terrible weather conditions on an immaculate Páirc Uí Chaoimh surface. Portlárige, who defeated Corcaigh in the other semi-final were Luimneach's opponents in the Munster Final and it was the Treaty County men that emerged victorious, retaining their 2019 title and winning their 20th title overall. They went on to beat Gaillimh in the semi-final, and were joined in the final by Portlárige, who produced an outstanding second half display to record a famous victory of Cill Chainnigh in the other semi-final. This set up an all Munster All-Ireland Final, the first since 2013.

On the day, Luimneach showed the country that they are a powerhouse of the game at present, winning their second Senior title in 3 years. These are extraordinary times for Luimneach hurling, winning 2 All-Ireland Senior titles, 2 Munster Senior titles and 2 Allianz League titles in a 3-year spell. For Portláirge, this was the second final defeat in four years and prolongs the wait for a Senior title, last won in 1959. However, they showed in this year's Championship that the talent is there to win it and hopefully it is only a matter of time before the long wait for All-Ireland Senior glory is over for The Déise.

Minor and Under 20 Championships

As with nearly all other competitions, Covid-19 had an impact on both Minor Championships and the Under 20 Hurling Championships, with the move to Level 5 Restrictions in November causing the cessation of games. When action resumed, 11 games were played in 12 days, resulting in all competitions being completed before Christmas.

Luimneach won their second Minor Hurling title in a row, defeating Tiobraid Árann in the Final after extra time. Ciarraí were crowned Minor Football Champions for the 8th year in row, defeating An Clár in the Final. Corcaigh won the U-20 Hurling Championship, defeating Tiobraid Árann in the Final, which was played on Wednesday December 23rd. It was particularly encouraging to see Ciarraí enter the Minor Hurling and Under 20 Hurling Championships. Great work is being done to promote the game in The Kingdom, and both teams gave a very good account of themselves. Hopefully, their participation will be ongoing.

With the cessation of all Intercounty and Club activity for the month of January 2021, the All-Ireland series for these 3 competitions remains un-played. At this point in time, it is the intention of the GAA to complete these competitions, so hopefully there will be more All-Ireland silverware heading to the Province.

Cynical Play in Hurling

There is a debate at present as to whether cynicism exists in the game of hurling and at a level that warrants action by way of new rules. There can be no doubt that there were some tackles of a cynical nature in this year's Championship, and these tackles denied clear scoring opportunities. The number of them is irrelevant in my view. It is important that the Association deals with this question now, as opposed to take a 'wait and see' approach. It is not a question of living with it if it is only a few incidents here and there. If a cynical tackle confers an advantage to the team of the player that commits the foul, it is unfair. Cynical fouling needs to be discussed in that context.

Top Quality Playing Surfaces

Special credit must go to the pitch maintenance crews in our grounds around the Province. With such a heavy load of Intercounty games being played in October, November and December, it was a great achievement that games were played on such top-quality playing surfaces, particularly given the weather that some of the games were played in. It shows that the investment in professional pitch maintenance by all Counties has served us well.

The winners of all our Inter County competitions in 2020 are outlined in table 1.

Senior Hurling	Luimneach
Under 20 Hurling	Corcaigh
Minor Hurling	Luimneach

Senior Football	Tiobraid Árann
Under 20 Football	Ciarraí
Minor Football	Ciarraí
Co-Op Superstores Munster Hurling League	Luimneach
McGrath Cup	Luimneach

Table 1: Winners of 2020 Intercounty Competitions

Post Primary, Primary Schools and Third Level

Nowhere in the Association has the impact of Covid-19 been felt more severely than the education sectors. Covid-19 restrictions meant the total cessation of all activity from March onwards, and the January 2021 lockdown is having similar repercussions. At this stage, it is unclear as to when activity in schools and third level colleges can recommence.

2020 began well, with the Sigerson and Fitzgibbon Cup Competitions taking place. UCC won the Fitzgibbon Cup, their second title in a row and the 10th year in a row the title has come to a Munster College. At Post Primary Schools level, St. Flannans College Ennis won their first Dr. Harty Cup title since 2005, while Tralee CBS won the Corn Uí Mhuirí, the 9th year in a row the title was won by a Kerry school. Unfortunately, the various Provincial winners did not get an opportunity to compete for All-Ireland titles.

At Primary School level, activity was also severely curtailed, and almost 500 children missed out on the chance to participate in the Munster Primary Games, which are the exhibition games played at half time in our Senior Games. This is always a huge occasion for the children and their schools and hopefully we will see the return of this wonderful initiative as soon as possible.

Full Council, Sub-Committees and Workgroups

While the work of the Council and its various sub-committees was severely hampered during 2020, online meetings became a feature of the year. In total, the Council met on five occasions, with the Competitions Control Committee (CCC) also meeting on five occasions. The main purpose of these meetings was to deal with the fallout from the Covid-19 crisis, such as the reorganisation of our various competitions, completion of competition draws and adopting of new competition regulations etc. The Finance and Management Committee had a busy year, meeting on 12 occasions. This Committee dealt with 48 club applications for borrowing, leasing, land purchase and so on. The Committee also oversaw the completion of the Munster Council accounts and the annual audit. A report from each Sub Committee is contained in this convention book. A list of the members of the Council is contained in Table 3, while a list of the Chairpersons and Secretaries of all the various sub-committees is contained in Table 4.

Cathaoirleach	Liam Ó Loineacháin
Runáí/POF	Ciarán Ó Lidí
Leas-Chathaoirleach	Gearoid Ó Riain
Cisteoir	Diarmuid Ó Loingsigh

Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí	Roibeard Ó Riain
Bainisteoir Oibríochtaí	Seán Ó Braonáin
Uachtarán	Pádraig Seosamh Ó Riain
An Clár	Ciarán Céitinn agus Seán de Fáwl
Ciarraí	Seán Ó Laoire agus Gearóid Mac Cárthaigh
Corcaigh	Micheal Ó Beirne agus Gearóid Ó Laighin
Luimneach	Donnacha Ó Cearúil agus Séamus Ó Tuama
Port Láirge	Pádraig Mac Gráinne agus Micheál Ó Phaidín
Tiobraid Árann	Sean Ó Dubhghaill agus Seán Ó Nuinseann
Colaistí Triú Leibhéil	Cathal Mac Cárthaigh
Iarbhunscoileanne	Colm Ó hAodha
Bhunscoileanna	Tomás Ó hAiniféin
Liathróid Láimhe	Cionnaith Ó Chonbhuí

Table 3: Members of the Munster Council

Management & Finance Committee	Liam Ó Loineacháin	Seán Ó Braonáin
Provincial Competitions Control Committee	Liam Ó Loineacháin	Ciarán Ó Lidí
Provincial Hearings Committee	Donncha Mac Thomáis	Liam Ó Conchúir
County & Club Grounds Safety Workgroup	Ciarán Mac Cana	Seán De Bhreitt
Club & County Administration & Officer Training Workgroup	Eamon Ó Súilleabháin	Micheál Ó Broin
Referees Administration Committee	Caoimhín Breathnach	Seán Ó Seasnáin
Coaching & Games Development Committee	Gearoid Ó Riain	Pádraig Ó Sé
Inter-Firm Workgroup	Micheál Ó Maolchathaigh	Proinnsias Ó Siúit
Coiste Cultúrtha	Antóin Breathnach	Micheál Ó Drisleáin
Obair Ghrúpa Scór	Maighréad Ní Fhaoileáin	Gearóid Ó Dúda
PR & Marketing Committee	Roibeard Ó Riain	Eamonn Ó Donnghaile
Fixtures Planners	Eamon Ó Súilleabháin	Seán Ó Braonáin
Club Fixtures Monitoring Committee	Liam Ó Loineacháin	Ciarán Ó Lidí
Munster Provincial Regional Handball Committee	Micheál Ó Conchúir	Donal Ó hAodha
Planning and Physical Development Committee	Liam Ó Loineacháin	Seán Ó Braonáin
Games for All Health and Wellbeing Committee	Gearóid Ó hIcidhe	Gearóid Mac Conmara
Risk And Audit Committee	Seosamh Ó Cruadhlaoidh	Diarmuid O' Cathasaigh

Table 4: Council Sub Committees and Workgroups

Finance

The Accounts of the Munster Council for 2020 show a loss of €843,732. The Finance Report of Diarmuid Ó Loingsigh and Seán Ó Braonáin outlines in detail the reasons behind this, and as everyone will be well aware, it is due to the collapse in gate receipts owing to our games being played behind closed doors, along with a major reduction in funding from Central Council, commercial income and so on.

Our six counties also suffered a significant reduction in income as their Club Championships were also mainly played behind closed doors and the normal funding from the Munster Council and Central Council was not available to them either. Two of our counties recorded a surplus, while four recorded a loss. The combined overall loss stated in the County Board accounts is in the region of €940,000, and there are further losses in the operation of County Grounds, which are accounted for separately in some of the County accounts.

Losses of this nature will undoubtedly impact on the ability of the Association in the Province to invest in development. For example, the GAA supports the employment of 41 Games Development Officers in the Province, 7 of these located in Third Level Colleges. These staff undertake a myriad of roles, including the organisation of Cúl Camps, the provision of coaching in Primary and Post Primary Schools, the organisation of juvenile blitzes, roll out of Coach Education programmes and so on. Central Council and the Munster Council have always supported the development of our clubs through an annual Munster Club Development Grant scheme, worth in the region of €1.2 million annually. Unfortunately, this has had to be cancelled for 2020, and possibly for 2021. This scheme has assisted clubs in the development of facilities across the Province, which help to improve and promote participation.

€30.795 million in Government Funding was made available to Gaelic Games in 2020 (GAA, LFGA and Camogie Association). €15 million of this was a special grant to assist with the running of the various Inter-County Championships, with a further €5 million of the fund allocated to GAA Clubs. This was a most welcome boost, and the various Championships could not have been held without it. The Munster Council is very grateful to the Government and Sport Ireland for this much needed injection of finance.

I am sure many will wonder why an Association like the GAA needs Government intervention. The reason is simple in that the policy of the Association has always been to reinvest its income back into the development of the games, through grants for capital development, grants to assist with the employment of 370 Games Development Staff around the country, grants to counties to assist with team preparation costs, rent to grounds that host games, investment in the Player Injury Fund and so on. While the potential for considerable loss of income due to economic factors, such as a recession, is always there, no one could have foreseen the sheer scale of the income loss that Covid-19 visited upon us. The GAA is not alone in this of course as all sports organisations in the country have seen major reductions in income.

As already stated, the Government funding announced in 2020 was a welcome and much needed boost, but the reality is that further funding is required in 2021. At the time of writing, there are very few indications to suggest that 2021 will be any better financially than 2020, as even the most optimistic observers do not see crowds returning to events like GAA games for some time yet.

Sport is an essential part of modern life, both for the physical and mental health of people, and particularly our young people. There is also the considerable economic benefit that major sports events bring to towns and cities across the country. It is essential that sports organisations can pick up and get going again when this crisis comes to an end. Society as a whole will suffer if

it takes sport several years to recover its activity levels, and so continued Government investment is essential to tie organisations over in 2021.

Games Development

As with all areas of GAA activity, Games Development was significantly constrained during 2020 with the March 29th lockdown resulting in the cessation of all GAA activity. Clubs soon turned to online activity to try and maintain a connection with their players. With the easing of restrictions, the Association proceeded with the flagship Cúl Camps, with 20,000 children participating in Munster and over 70,000 children participating across the country. It was a great achievement given the constraints that Covid-19 placed on the organisation and running of the camps.

2020 also saw the publication of the ‘Munster GAA Return on Coaching Investment’ report, which detailed the level of Games Development activity across the province. The research, which uses the Social Return on Investment methodology, concluded that parents see a value of €9.61 for every €1 they spend on their child’s GAA Membership. The report also demonstrated the enormous level of GAA activity in Munster, with 2.1 million hours of Games and Training time generated annually for underage players, and over 10,000 mentors and coaches actively involved at underage level alone. 74% of clubs reported either increased participation in recent years, or participation levels remaining static. There were also some areas of concern referenced, such as need of all clubs to attract and retain volunteers, the difficulties facing clubs in rural areas, and the need for a programme of regular and meaningful games for underage players.

2021 will see the launch of the Munster GAA Club Development Programme. The programme is designed to help clubs develop across all areas of activity and will be managed by the Games Development team in the Province. It is planned to roll it out to all clubs over an 18-month period, once Covid-19 restrictions allow for this. A greater level of detail on all of the above is contained in the Coaching and Games Development Committee report.

Overseas Development

The Munster Council has a long-standing twinning arrangement with the North American Board. This has been a very fruitful arrangement over the years with support provided by the Council in the areas of games development and referee development. Activity in North America was also severely restricted by Covid-19 with the US GAA finals cancelled. These finals are always a great occasion, and in 2019, 114 teams from across the USA attended. It is great to see the growth of the games in the US and hopefully the dedicated officers of the North American Board will be able to continue their good work in 2021.

In February of 2020, Labhrás Nac Cárthaigh (Corcaigh and Nua-Eabharc) became the first ever overseas delegate to be elected President of Cumann Lúthchleas Gael. It is a great honour for Labhrás and the GAA in Nua-Eabharc and a sign of the growing strength of our games across the world. I would like to wish Labhrás all the best over the next three years and I look forward to working with him.

Referees

Each year, a dedicated group of people do the often-thankless job of refereeing our games, thereby ensuring the vast games programme across the province can take place. I have written in the past about the need for all counties to make every effort to increase the refereeing pool

available to them. We can talk all we like about games programmes and the need to provide more games, but this can only be done if we have the referees to officiate at them. Social Media has made the job even more difficult now due to the public scrutiny of referees and the decisions they make. A huge amount of work is going on at Provincial level in Munster, on developing both the skill and fitness of our referees. We have a very dedicated Referees Development Committee overseeing this work and hopefully 2021 will allow us to continue to bring new referees through from County to Provincial level.

Fixtures

In last year's report, I referenced the Munster Council Management Committee's submission to the National Fixtures Task Force, which called for a split Club and Intercounty Championship Season. The main rationale behind this proposal was to give club players clarity as to when they were playing Championship games and to facilitate intercounty players being available for their clubs for a defined period of time. The Task Force had good reasons not to proceed with a split season, and instead offered some innovative solutions to the problem, such as the limiting of the number of teams that can participate in County Senior Club Championships.

The Covid-19 crisis resulted in the 'split season' becoming a reality, with Club Championships being played in the period July end to October, and the Intercounty season being played from there on. The reaction from clubs and club players was overwhelmingly positive, as they had a clear and concise programme of championship games, with their intercounty players available to them for the entire window.

2021 will see the split season become a reality, with the Intercounty Championships pencilled in first, followed by a Club Championship window. It does mean that once we return to normality, the All-Ireland Finals will be in July. An argument can be made that finishing the 'shop window' of intercounty activity so early will result in a loss of media promotion etc. However, there was never going to be an easy solution to the club fixtures problem, given the nature of our Association, with two codes and players playing across codes with a number of teams etc. Therefore, we must arrive at a solution that achieves our core aim, which is to provide club players with clarity of dates. Hopefully, the split season will help us to achieve this aim.

The Task Force also has a number of recommendations on the future of the Provincial Football Championships. Ultimately, it is Counties that will decide the future of these competitions. Certainly, moving them to early spring to act as warm up competitions for a new look All Ireland format, will severely diminish their status. There is no doubt, that there are of issues of dominance in our own province, but this year's Provincial Championship victories for Tiobraid Árann and for An Cabhán in Ulster show that these competitions in their current position hold a special status for players and supporters alike.

Competition Sponsors

I would like to thank our 2020 Competition Sponsors who provided valuable revenue to the Association and much needed exposure for our games, particularly in this difficult year. AIB, EIR and SuperValu (All-Ireland Senior Football Championship), Bórd Gáis Energy, Centra and Littlewoods Ireland (All-Ireland Senior Hurling Championship), Allianz (National Leagues), Electric Ireland (All-Ireland Minor Championships), Bórd Gáis Energy (All-Ireland Under 20 Hurling Championship), EirGrid (All-Ireland Under 20 Football Championship), John West (National Féile Competitions), Kelloggs (Cúl Camps), AIB (All-Ireland Club Championships) Masita (All Ireland Post Primary Championships) and Co Op Superstores

(Munster Senior Hurling League) have been great supporters of the Association and we look forward to working with them in 2021.

Noel Walsh

Many people who served the Association over a lifetime passed away during the year, too many to mention here. However, one of those great Gaels I would like to give a special mention to is Noel Walsh of An Chláir. Noel served the Association at all levels and was Munster Council Chairman from 1995-1998, at time when An Clár tore up the hurling script by winning 2 All-Ireland titles. He served the Association with great distinction and was always a voice of change. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hAnam.

Social Media

I was saddened to read about the level of abuse on Social Media platforms directed at one of the Province's longest serving GAA administrators, Pat Fitzgerald of Contae An Chláir, and his family. The Fitzgerald family have given years of service to the Association at club and county level. I know Pat for many years as a very hard working and dedicated GAA administrator, who goes well beyond the call of duty. The abuse is a cowardly act by the perpetrators. There is no doubt, that, while Social Media has its positive points, the unfettered ability of people, often acting behind pseudonyms, to direct sustained and vile abuse at individuals and organisations, is undoubtedly a major downside. The negative effects of this are well documented.

Thank You

Each year, it takes a huge effort from many people to enable the Council to carry out its role. While activities were curtailed in 2020, it still took a major amount of work to run our competitions, given the restrictions we were working under. It is not possible to mention everyone in this report, so apologies to any group or people that I have missed.

Firstly, thank you to the Officers of the Council, who diligently carry out their roles and are always on hand to provide assistance and advice. Thank you too to all those who serve on our various Committees and Workgroups. Their time is greatly appreciated and their work, while often unseen, is invaluable.

Thanks to the six County Secretaries in the Province for their help and support over the last year. We are very fortunate in the Province to have the high calibre of County Secretary that we have, and they do an enormous amount of work for the Association, often in difficult circumstances.

I would like to give a special mention to the enormous contribution of Árd Stúirthóir, Tomás Ó Riain, Uachtarán, Sean Ó hÓráin, and the team in Croke Park, who did superb job of steering the Association through a very difficult year. I would also like to wish Sean Ó hÓráin all the best as his term of Uachtarán of the Association comes to an end in February.

I would like to thank the staff of the Council (Eamonn Ó Donnghaile, Eoin Ó Riain, Máire Ní Mathúna, Nuala Ní Nialláin, Seán Ó Braonáin, Padraig Ó Sé & Seosamh MacArtáin) who go well beyond the call of duty in carrying out their roles.

Lastly, thank you to the officers, players and management teams at club and county level who operated in difficult circumstances to give us all many hours of sporting enjoyment.

Looking Ahead to 2021

The one thing we can say for certain, is that there is a great deal of uncertainty at present as to how 2021 will progress. While an Inter-County fixture schedule has been adopted, and County Boards have put club fixture programmes in place, no one can say for certain that these can be adhered to or whether a complete rejig of County and Club programmes will be required. We are two weeks in to 2021 and the intercounty training date return has already been altered.

Sport is facing a very uncertain time as our hospitals and health service struggle to cope with the latest surge in Covid-19 cases. Above all, it is the strain on our health system that is by far the most important consideration at this time. Sport may have to take a back seat for a while as our country copes with one of the worst-case surges in the world.

Financially, the Association faces another uncertain year and as stated already, further Government support for the Association will be needed. There is hope of course. The development of a number of vaccines and the roll out of these will, in time, help a return to normality. In the meantime, we must all listen to the health experts and do our bit to help keep case numbers as low as possible. I hope that clubs get to return to activity as soon as possible and that over the year we get to welcome supporters back to our games. We all look forward to a return to normality, and hopefully 2021 will see that wish come true.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh.

Mise le meas,

Ciarán Ó Lidí,

Rúnaí/Príomh-Oifigeach Feidhmiúcháin,

Comhairle Na Mumhan CLG.