

Tuairisc Bliantúil 2022

I am delighted to present my report for 2022, my 5th such report. The report will focus on a review of the competitions run by the Munster Council in 2022 as well as reviewing the performance of Munster teams in the All-Ireland Championships. The report will also discuss age grades, discipline and the split season.

Introduction:

2022 began with great hope that the dark veil of the Covid 19 Pandemic was finally lifting from the country and that life would shortly return to normal. While December had seen a major spike in infections, the success of the Government's vaccination programme meant that hospital admittance numbers were declining, and the impact of the disease was becoming much more manageable for the Health Service. The various lockdowns that had resulted in a shutdown of society were soon to be a thing of the past and people began to return to life as we knew it before the early days of 2020.

While sports activity had been taking place for months, attendance restrictions were slowly lifted and by the start of the Munster Senior Championships in April, attendance normality had been restored. The pre-season competitions saw an immediate benefit to the lifting of restrictions, with record crowds attending both the McGrath Cup Final and the Co Op Stores Munster Senior Hurling Cup Final, the latter attracting 8,000 spectators, the largest crowd at a Munster GAA game since 2019.

Inter County Senior Championship Review

With the full implementation of the new 'split season', the Munster Intercounty Competition Season was packed with great games and provided exciting entertainment for supporters. Across all competitions, the Council played 51 games in a 9-week period, which was the largest number of intercounty games ever managed by the Council and played in the shortest season in the history of the provincial body.

2022 was a very successful year at Senior level for our counties, with Luimneach and Ciarraí capturing All Ireland Senior Honours, and Ciarraí and Port Láirge capturing Division 1 League honours. It was the 29th time in the history that both senior titles were won by Munster counties in the one year, and the first time since 2010. It was only the 4th time in history that the Senior Hurling and Football League and Championship titles were annexed in the one year by Munster teams, and the first time since 1997.

The Munster Senior Hurling Championship proved as popular and exciting as ever, with just over 262,000 people attending the 11 games played. Waterford had signalled their intention to challenge for All Ireland honours when winning Division 1 of the Allianz League for the 5th time, with a fast paced and skilful victory over Corcaigh in the final. Unfortunately for the Déise men though, the Championship proved to be a major disappointment, and the All-Ireland finalists of 2017 and 2020 couldn't repeat their form in the league, and their challenge petered out. Tiobraid Árann also struggled to find form, while Corcaigh who had 2 opening defeats to Luimneach and An Clár, got their campaign going with victories over Port Láirge and Tiobraid Árann, and finished 3rd in the table. However, it was An Clár and Luimneach that proved to be the 2 form teams and both qualified for the final with unbeaten records.

The final captured the imagination of the public and the sold-out signs went up well in advance of the game. The public's love affair with the Munster Championship was clearly evident when 11,000 terrace tickets which were put on sale online were snapped up in 11 minutes. The game itself lit up the Championship summer like few other finals have done. It is widely regarded as one of the greatest Munster Finals in history and will be particularly remembered for an outstanding Gearoid Hegarty goal and an extraordinary piece of skill by Tony Kelly of An Clár, who cut a side-line ball over the bar to take the game to extra time. The persistent rain on the day could not dampen the spirits of the 46,000 fans in attendance, and a rip-roaring period of extra time saw the Shannon-siders use all their experience and strength gained over the last number of years to emerge victorious and in doing so became the first recipients of the new Mick Mackey Munster Senior Hurling Cup.

It was heart-breaking for An Clár, who were seeking their first title since 1998, and they struggled to rekindle the Munster Championship form in the All-Ireland series, going out at the semi-final stage to Cill Chainnigh. Corcaigh also exited the competition, going out at the quarter final stage to Gaillimh. However, Luimneach entered the records as one of the greatest teams of all time by capturing their 3rd All Ireland in a row, and 4th in 5 years, beating Cill Chainnigh in a pulsating final played before 82,000 spectators in sweltering July heat. The achievements of John Kiely and the Limerick team are truly extraordinary. In winning the 3 in a row, they have become the first county outside of Corcaigh, Cill Chainnigh and Tiobraid Árann to achieve such a feat. They have also become the first county outside the aforementioned trio to win more than ten All Ireland titles. This team has won finals in the depths of winter during the Covid crisis, and in the height of summer and have smashed through hurling's old order in doing so.

The Senior Football Championship followed an all too familiar pattern. It began in history making fashion, as a highly entertaining quarter final game between Luimneach and An Clár was decided by a penalty taking competition. It was the first Senior Football Championship game in the history of the Association to be decided by penalties, and it was Luimneach who emerged victorious. Luimneach went on to defeat Tiobraid Árann in the Semi Final and qualify for their first Munster Final since 2010.

The other side of the draw saw Corcaigh drawn to meet Ciarraí in the Semi Final. The game itself became more of a sideshow to a disagreement over the venue. Enough has been written and spoken over the matter at this stage, but the game eventually went ahead in Pairc Ui Rinn, after Ciarraí offered to break a long-held agreement between the 2 counties so that the game would take place. The game itself was an entertaining affair, but Ciarraí moved up a gear in performance in the last 10 minutes and emerged victorious by a margin of 12 points. Ciarraí marched on to defeat Luimneach in a one sided final, winning their 83rd in total and their 9th title in 10 years. The Championship itself continues to struggle in the shadow of its hurling counterpart and needs Corcaigh in particular to emerge as annual contenders. It is 2012 since the Senior Football title was won on Leaside, and this is a very long time for a county with such a rich football tradition. Underage All Ireland titles in recent years give hope to Corcaigh, and there is hope in Leaside that the County will dine again at Gaelic Football's top table in the not-too-distant future.

On the Intercounty stage, 3 of the counties of the province made their way to the All-Ireland Quarter Final stage. An Clár qualified following an exciting win over Ros Comáin and exited the competition following a defeat to Doire in a free flowing and high scoring contest. Corcaigh exited at the hands of an Ath Cliath side that was shaking off their poor early season form. But it was the men from The Kingdom who wrote another glorious chapter in their famed and storied history, by capturing their 38th All Ireland title. Sam Maguire was once again in green

and gold hands following an impressive victory over Maigh Eo in the quarter final, a last gasp one point win in a titanic battle against Ath Cliath in the Semi Final and a 4-point win over Gaillimh in the final, in what many regard as one of the finest All Ireland Finals ever played. Great credit must go to Jack O Connor, returning for his second spell in charge, to mould years of exciting underage talent into an All-Ireland winning outfit. They also did it playing the way generations of Ciarraí teams have done, with an emphasis on the core skills of the game and attacking prowess. This team will surely go on now to achieve even greater success.

Minor and U-20 Intercounty Review

The Minor and U-20 Munster Hurling competitions both saw new formats introduced, with both operating a ‘2 groups of 3’ system. Given the different timing of the Senior Hurling and Minor Hurling competitions, minor curtain raisers were no longer possible, and so the Minor Hurling was run as a stand-alone competition. Luimneach showed that their Senior success is having a very positive impact on the development of hurling in the county, with their U20’s being very impressive in capturing their 12th Munster U20/U21 title, defeating Tiobraid Árann in the final by 4 points in a very entertaining game. At minor level, Tiobraid Árann won the Munster title, following a penalty shootout in a pulsating game with An Clár, also a first in the history of the GAA. It was certainly a very tough way for the An Clár players to lose out on a provincial title, particularly at the age group these players are at, but there was always going to be some aspects of the new split season model that would not be considered if time still existed for replays. This particular matter is discussed later. In football, Corcaigh dethroned Ciarraí in the minor grade winning their second title in a row, while at the U-20 grade, Ciarraí overcame Cork to win their 29th title.

On the All-Ireland stage, Luimneach were unlucky to lose out to Cill Chainnigh in the All Ireland final, losing by just 1 point. In the Minor All Ireland Final, Tiobraid Árann showed us that a game is never over until it is over, by scoring a last gasp goal to beat Uíbh Fhaíle in the final, played before an astonishing 25,000 supporters in Nowlan Park in Kilkenny. On the football front, there was disappointment in the Minor and U-20 competitions, with Corcaigh and Ciarraí falling at the semi-final stage.

A full list of all the 2022 Munster Intercounty Competition Champions is included in table 1 below.

2022 Munster Champions	
Senior Hurling	Luimneach
Senior Football	Ciarraí
U20 Hurling	Luimneach
U20 Football	Ciarraí
Minor Hurling	Tiobraid Árann
Minor Football	Corcaigh

Table 1: Munster Intercounty Competition Champions for 2022

Club Championships

The 2021 Munster Club Finals took place in January of 2022 as the Association's calendar was still feeling the effects of the Covid Pandemic. One of the more extraordinary finals took place at Junior level, with next door neighbours Baile Giblin and Sceichín-A-Rince meeting in the final. It is rare that neighbouring clubs reach finals, and the result was a huge level of local interest in the game. With Covid restriction still in place, a 50% capacity in Mallow saw 2,500 supporters present, with 1,000 tickets available to the general public being snapped up in a matter of minutes. On the All-Ireland stage, Baile Mhic Gonair finally climbed the steps of the Hogan Stand to collect the Tommy Moore Cup, by defeating Ballyhale Shamrocks in the most dramatic of fashion, with a last gasp goal securing a one-point win. Incredibly, it was just the 3rd time that a Munster Club has won the competition since the dawn of this century and it marked a pivotal moment for Baile Mhic Gonair, who had many frustrating journeys on the road to try and win the competition over the years. There was heartbreak for Baile Giblin in the Junior Final and for Cill Mhaoile in the Intermediate Final, both losing by 1 point and 2 points respectively. On the football stage, there was disappointment as our 3 representatives fell at the All-Ireland semi-final stage.

The 2022 Munster Club Championship Finals saw Baile Mhic Gonair and Baile Giblin continuing their great run of success, as the former retained the Munster Senior Club Hurling Championship and the latter the Munster Junior Club Hurling Championship. Baile Mhic Gonair have had an extraordinary 2022, having won 1 All Ireland title, 2 Munster titles and their 9th Waterford County Championship in a row. They have deservedly been awarded the 2022 Munster GAA Club of the Year. Moin a' Lín from Luimneach won the Intermediate Hurling title, becoming the 3rd Limerick club to do so. There was a clean sweep for Ciarraí in the Club Football Championships, with CLG Ceirns Ó Rathaille capturing their first Senior Title, CLG Rath Mhór winning the Intermediate Title and CLG An Fosadh the Junior Title. The 2021 and 2022 winners are listed in table 2 and 3 below.

2021 Munster Club Champions	
Junior Hurling	Baile Giblin
Junior Football	Gníomh go Leith
Intermediate Hurling	Cill Mhaoile
Intermediate Football	Na Gaeil
Senior Hurling	Baile Mhic Gonair
Senior Football	Fionnbarra Naofa

Table 2: 2021 Munster Club Champions – finals played in January 2022

2022 Munster Club Champions	
Junior Hurling	Baile Giblin
Junior Football	An Fosadh
Intermediate Hurling	Moin a' Lín
Intermediate Football	Rath Mhór
Senior Hurling	Baile Mhic Gonair
Senior Football	Ceirns Ó Rathaille

Table 3: 2022 Munster Club Champions

Relationship with Camogie and Ladies Gaelic Football

2022 saw a very positive development, with double headers taking place with our Senior Hurling and Senior Football fixtures. Two Munster Championship Ladies Gaelic Football games took place as curtain raisers to our Senior Football games, with the Munster LGFA Final being played with our Senior Final for the first time ever. We also joined up with the Munster Camogie Association for the first time, with no fewer than five championship games forming double headers with our Senior Hurling games. This is a very positive development for the promotion of both female codes, and this is a relationship that will continue to grow in the years ahead, as the three Associations continue on a path of integration. 2023 will see this relationship grow further, with an increase in double headers being planned.

Age Grades

The topic of age grades is once again to the fore as a major debate takes place across the Association as we try and reach agreement on what is the best set of age grades for players at club and county level. The biggest argument for moving away from the uneven age grades at Club level is the drop off of players once they leave the U-17 grade. This is because, in many clubs, there isn't room in the adult set up for these players, and because attempts to introduce competitions with a meaningful number of games between U-17 and Adult has been patchy in terms of success.

There are 2 critical elements to the debate, both of which revolve around the decoupling of Minor and Adult, regardless of whether Minor is at U-17 or U-18. The GAA has grappled with these two elements for many years, one being fixture making and the other being the load placed on some players because of the number of teams they are on. Both are interlinked and the reality is that the more teams we put players on, the harder it becomes to make fixtures and the higher the burden of training and games placed on these players.

It will be argued, that all this can be managed, but the problem the GAA has is that our record in this area has been very poor over the years, with players being pulled from pillar to post by managers who want their team to be the team that the player commits to, and so the player tries to keep every manager happy.

The Player Burnout report of 2007 couldn't have been clearer in its findings on the result of over training and over playing. For example, the report noted that "in a presentation to the Task Force, Mr Gerry McEntee, Consultant Surgeon and former Meath intercounty footballer, pointed out that in the past ten years the number of referrals to medical sports specialists, referrals for surgical opinion and the number of operations for chronic groin injuries has increased dramatically. Referrals are almost exclusively male, typically in the 15-21 age-group, and most commonly involve Gaelic footballers". A PhD study of 534 Gaelic Footballers quoted in the report noted that "approximately 30% of all players surveyed suffered from elevated physical and emotional exhaustion".

Our record on fixture making has been equally as poor, hence the need for the split season, not to mention the number of task forces and reports published on the matter over the years. The rural clubs argue that if the 18-year-old is not allowed to play with their adult team, then the task of fielding a team, already becoming impossible for many because of rural depopulation,

gets even more difficult. On the other hand, if we don't decouple and move minor to U-18, do we then end up reducing the number of minor fixtures in order to cater for the minor player playing at adult level? In that case, we are making fixtures to suit the few and discommode the many. This is hardly a fair solution either. Our own statistics from Foireann do not back up the argument either that the minor at U18 is needed to field an adult team. Of the 1,600 clubs registered, only 6% registered less than 28 adult players.

Bringing minor to U-18 at club level can work, but not decoupling the minor grade from adult grades is short-sighted. There is some speculation that some counties are looking to return the Intercounty U-17 grade to U-18 and do the same at Club level without decoupling from the adult grade. This will place a huge burden on players, and especially elite intercounty players, as the number of teams they are eligible for increases. History shows us that it will create more problems than it will solve.

It is time now for us to pause this debate, gather the medical experts once more, present the most up to date information to the Association and then make an informed decision. I have barely heard mention of any reference to medical advice in this debate to date, and given our record of managing overtraining and overplaying, it is a critical part of this debate that needs to be discussed. Brexiteers said they had enough of experts when making that particular decision. We shouldn't go the same route with this issue.

The Split Season and the Tailteann Cup

2022 saw the Split Season as it was intended to be, with all Intercounty activity finished before the end of July and a Club Championship season taking place from then on. As stated in previous reports, the Munster Council lobbied for the Split Season before it was fashionable. Of course, it has its drawbacks. There is now a huge concentration of Intercounty games, and the number will increase in 2023 with the new Football Championship format coming into place. There will be weekends where some games will get lost in terms of national media coverage, and that will be unavoidable. However, I have yet to meet a Club player or an Intercounty player that doesn't like the new system. Players really enjoy being together as a group for an uninterrupted period of time and having an uninterrupted schedule of Championship games. It is what players were seeking for many years. Yes, there are downsides in terms of the Intercounty Championship season being over so early, but in my view, the positives outweigh the negatives.

One such consequence of the Split Season is the introduction of penalties to decide games that finish level after extra time. The penalty taking conclusion to the Munster Minor Hurling game was particularly controversial, given the age group involved. Penalties present a fair way of deciding a winner. Each team has the same number of kicks/pucks, and other issues such as weather conditions don't convey an advantage to one team over the other. The golden score concept would certainly present challenges, as the team with a strong wind would certainly have an advantage. Just imagine too the referee that gives one team a 'soft free' to win a 'golden score' game! Penalties take all this away. From minor down, there may be ways of deciding a winner to reduce the number of times penalties are needed, such as the team that scored the most goals over normal and extra time being declared the winner. However, the fact remains that given the removal of replays from the calendar, penalties remain the fairest way of separating teams level after extra time.

In last year's report, I referenced the urgent need for a meaningful Tier 2 competition in Gaelic Football, similar to what has operated in Hurling for many years. It was great to see the success

of the Tailteann Cup, with Iar Mhí claiming the inaugural title following a most entertaining final victory over An Cabhán. This was followed by a huge crowd turning up in Mullingar for the homecoming, where thousands of supporters celebrated with the victorious team. This is what the Senior Football Championship has been lacking for many years. It has long needed a meaningful second tier competition that players strive to win, and supporters celebrate in big numbers. Hopefully, 2023 will continue to see this competition continue to grow in stature.

Ticket Sales

2022 saw the complete removal of cash sales from GAA venues, with all tickets going online through Ticketmaster. All patrons attending games must now purchase their ticket online as there are no ticket sales facilities at grounds. Munster GAA was heading in this direction even before the Covid 19 pandemic forced the removal of cash handling at venues. This has been somewhat controversial, but it is undoubtedly the correct thing to do. Cash at venues presents security issues and safety issues for staff and stewards. Cash must be taken to and from venues for each game played. While security companies can manage most of this, it was not always practical to have cash security companies on site either. Having cash sales at venues for the 51 games we organised in a 9-week period would have added a significant management burden on top of the organisational challenges of so many games in a short period of time. Over 400,000 people attended our games in 2022 and all attended using a ticket purchased online. We have provided limited card tap facilities at venues, and this along with the availability of tickets in Supervalu and Centra shops meant that there were very few people, if any, unable to attend our games. Cash at venues presents a risk, and there is little need to take this risk any longer in this day and age.

Discipline

2022 saw a number of well publicised incidents of ill-discipline, both on and off the field. These incidents are a blight on our great Association, and each one doesn't just affect the clubs and players involved but impacts on all members. The newspaper headlines reflect very poorly on the GAA, and we all, by association, are connected to these headlines. It is high time for these outbursts of violence to stop.

The 'melee' has been with us for a very long time. We know our games are high tempo games, played at a fast pace. We know that the very corner stone of our Association is the feeling of deep loyalty to the local club and to the 'parish'. We know that over our history, the Championship has always been held in a much higher regard than any other competitions. Mix all three together, and we get high emotions which in some cases, ignite the 'all in melee'. While rare, these paint a very poor image of our Association, and it is incumbent on all players, mentors and supporters to ensure that these become a thing of the past.

A worrying aspect of the attitude to discipline in the Association occurs when Clubs and Counties know that a player did wrong but try to 'get him off' by hoping to spot some technicality or other which might lead to an appeal succeeding. The Munster GAA Hearings Committee is an Appellate Hearings Committee and deals with appeals arising from sanctions imposed by County Hearing's Committees. I have seen this issue at first hand. Many appeals we deal with involve the club and/or the player lodging an appeal to see if the particular part of the process which they feel wasn't handled correctly might lead to the suspension being

overturned. For the record, very few actually succeed. Most either fail or are sent back to the County for reprocessing with recommendations on how to carry out the process correctly.

However, it is the failure to accept that the player was wrong and deserves a suspension that shows our attitude to ill-discipline is not what it should be. Winning is more important, so there is an acceptance that ill-discipline can be tolerated. John Mullane, the outstanding Waterford forward of that great generation of Deise players, one famously elected to accept his suspension and not seek a hearing, saying that ‘when you do the crime, you do the time’. This was an example of outstanding leadership. It is more of this that we need, and I believe we need to get our disciplinary process to a place where all that matters is whether the particular infraction was committed or not. I fully support the proposals going to Congress to address this issue. Barring a blatant miscarriage of justice, technicalities must stop suspensions being overturned, and appeals based on flimsy technical matters that fail, should see the suspension increased. Clubs, Counties and players might think twice then before proceeding to waste the time of voluntary committees with these appeals.

A very worrying aspect to ill-discipline is something I have written about before and that is the abuse of referees. We are slowly sailing towards a situation where we will not have enough referees to manage the enormous games programme of the GAA, not to mention the enormous games programme of the 2 Ladies Gaelic Games Associations. It is high time we instilled a culture of acceptance of refereeing decisions, and this must start from the ground up. The most important thing that any set of Club Officials and Club Mentors can do is to pass on the baton of the Association to the next generation in a better and improved state than when they were in place. This will not be the case if the result of their actions is less people willing to become referees. I have always said that there are 3 elements to any game. The first is the 2 teams involved, the second is a pitch and the third is the referee. We will always have teams and pitches, but we can’t always count on having referees.

Full Council, Sub-Committees and Workgroups

As in all years, the Council could not operate without the hard work and dedication of a number of Committees, Sub-Committees and Workgroups. In all the Council met on 6 occasions, with the Competitions Control Committee also meeting on 10 occasions. The Finance and Management Committee is particularly busy, with 10 meetings and a significant amount of work taking place between meetings dealing with club property and borrowing applications and all matters of expenditure. A special mention must go to the Munster Hearings under the stewardship of Micheál De Burca and Liam Ó Conchúir. This Committee met on 16 occasions during the year and did so on a number of occasions at the shortest of notice in order to facilitate hearings. A report from each Sub Committee is contained in this convention book. For the record, a list of the members of the Council is contained in table 4, while a list of the Chairperson and Secretary of all the various sub-committees is contained in table 5.

Position	Name
Cathaoirleach	Gearoid Ó Riain
Runaí/POF	Ciarán Ó Lidí
Leas-Chathaoirleach	Tadhg Ó Murchú
Cisteoir	Diarmuid Ó Loingsigh

Oifigeach Caidreamh Poiblí	Roibeard Ó Riain
Bainisteoir Oibríochtaí	Seán Ó Braonáin
Uachtarán	Micheál De Paor
An Clár	Seán de Fáwl agus Bearnárd Ó Catháin
Ciarraí	Seán Ó Laoire agus Gearóid Mac Cárthaigh
Corcaigh	Micheal Ó Broin agus Gearóid Ó Laighin
Luimneach	Donnacha Ó Cearúil agus Séamus Ó Tuama
Port Láirge	Pádraig Mac Gráinne agus Micheál Ó hUaidín
Tiobraid Árann	Sean Ó Dubhghaill agus Seán Ó Nuinseann
Colaistí Triú Leibhéil	Séamus Mac Fhíobhuí
Iarbhunscoileanne	Colm Ó hAodha
Bhunscoileanna	Tomás Ó hAiniféin
Liathróid Láimhe	Micheál Ó Conchúir

Table 4: Members of the Munster Council

Management & Finance Committee	Gearóid Ó Riain	Seán Ó Braonáin
Provincial Competitions Control Committee	Gearóid Ó Riain	Ciarán Ó Lidí
Provincial Hearings Committee	Micheál De Burca	Liam Ó Conchúir
County & Club Grounds Safety Workgroup	Ciarán Mac Cana	Seán De Bhreitt
Club & County Administration & Officer Training Workgroup	Séamus Ó Tuama	Micheál Ó Broin
Referees Administration Committee	Micheál Ó hUdáin	Seán Ó Riain
Coaching & Games Development Committee	Tadhg Ó Murchú	Pádraig Ó Sé
Inter-Firm Workgroup	Micheál Ó Maolchathaigh	Oilibheair Mac Giolla Phadraig
Coiste Cultúrtha	Antóin Breathnach	Micheál Ó Drisleáin
Obair Ghrúpa Scór	Maighread Uí Fhaoileáin	Gearóid Ó Dúda
PR & Marketing Committee	Roibeard Ó Riain	Eamonn Ó Donnghaile
Club Fixtures Monitoring Committee	Gearóid Ó Riain	Seán Ó Braonáin
Munster Provincial Regional Handball Committee	Micheál Ó Conchúir	Donal Ó hAodha
Planning and Physical Development Committee	Gearóid Ó Riain	Seán Ó Braonáin
Games for All Health and Wellbeing Committee	Bernie Ní Rinn	Gearóid Mac Conmara
Audit and Risk Committee	Séamus De Brún	

Table 5: Council Sub Committees and Workgroups

Games Development, USGAA and Wheelchair Hurling

Games development continues to be a key area for the Association in Munster, and 2022 was another busy year of activity. The lifting of the Covid-19 restriction meant that Games Development could return to its normal levels of service. Pádraig Ó Se and Seosamh Mac Artáin have included a very detailed report on the activities of their department in this Convention book, and highlights include the continuing popularity of the Cúl Camps with 43,000 kids attending and projects such as Super Games Centres, Munster Skills Awards, Celtic Challenge, Croke Park Activity Days, Provincial Activity Days, Under 14 Club Super 10's and Provincial Go Games. Coach Education continues to be a major area of activity and in total 56 Introduction to Coaching courses and 5 Award 1 courses were delivered across the province. In addition 130 workshops and seminars were delivered to coaches operating at various levels within our clubs.

There was good news for Munster Counties during the year, with details of the new Games Development funding model being released by Croke Park. Collectively, the funding available to the 6 Munster Counties has increased from €1.3 million to €2.7 million. This extra funding will be of huge benefit to our counties. 2023 will finally see the long overdue increase in full time staff in the province, with 20 extra GDA's to be employed. The extra staff will have a transformative effect on the service we deliver to our units, and it is our intention to put an increased focus on developing and assisting juvenile club coaches. This is a key element in the development of players, because by the time a player reaches the age of 14, they will have had 8 years of club coaching. A higher standard of coaching will have obvious benefits for the player and Association. We are fortunate that so many people give their time to coach our underage players at Club level and we must provide every assistance to all these people to help them to be the best coach that they can be and for our players to have the best possible experience.

I am delighted to see our twinning arrangement with USGAA get back in operation after the Covid 19 Pandemic. We continue to support the training and development of referees and coaches with the aim of the Association in the US becoming self-sufficient in these areas over time. The games continue to grow across the country with new clubs forming every year. Teams and clubs face many challenges of course, not least the sourcing playing fields and teams to arrange games with, given that there is very often a large distance to the nearest club. Nonetheless, it is very encouraging to see the numbers of players growing, and particularly the number of US born players. The USGAA Finals were held in Chicago this year and was a huge success with 100 teams playing over 200 games over the 3 days of the event. This event is always a credit to the GAA in the US and to the US GAA Board, who give a huge amount of their time to promote the games. It is only a matter of time before the Association is going to have to look at full time administration, because the workload is becoming unmanageable for voluntary people.

A special mention must go the Munster Wheelchair Hurling team who captured the 2022 All Ireland Wheelchair Hurling title. The Council's Games for All Committee under the stewardship of Gearóid Mac Conmara and Bearnáirdín Ni Rinn show huge dedication to support this team in organising training and in arranging games and tournaments. The Council will be honouring the players and management team at a function in early 2023.

Munster Development Plan

The Council hopes to be in a position to launch its development plan in early 2023. The plan will have a particular focus on playing facilities at county level as well as focusing on finance, games development, administration, Munster GAA service to counties and refereeing.

Investment in facilities in the province will focus on facilities that encourage participation and those that assist counties with team preparation along with the playing of club and school games. We must look towards the funding of a network of artificial floodlight pitches and floodlight sand-based pitches around the province. Some of these may be part of our Centre of Excellence network, some may be in conjunction with other bodies such as third level education institutions while others may be part of municipal community developments. What is clear is that given the increase in winter activity, and with the ongoing integration of the 3 Gaelic Games organisations, not to mention the increasing pressure on facilities in urban areas, we need to steer investment towards playing facilities.

Regarding our county grounds, “the scheme of playing fields is very elaborate and the inclination is to erect too many large fields”. These aren’t my words. They are those of the General Secretary of the Association in 1949 and are contained in a newspaper article of the time. He was concerned at the large grounds being proposed around the country, and in many respects, his words are as applicable now as they were then. Building large stadia is one thing, maintaining them is another. Our county grounds are becoming a strain on our resources, as they age and require ongoing maintenance. They are a vital part of our infrastructure, but GAA games do not return the revenue to Ground Management Committees to facilitate large scale debt repayment and to assist with the normal day to day maintenance and upkeep. Concerts are always a bonus but can’t be relied on as a source of income.

It may be the case in future, that we may need to look more towards quality and less on quantity. It is better to have a compact small-scale stadium that can be managed than a large one that can’t. Municipal grounds may also need to become part of the equation too. What would be wrong with a facility owned by a City Council that all sports use when needed? This model has been successfully used in other codes in the country, so why not the GAA? Our Association will always need its own playing facilities for the playing of all Gaelic Games codes at club level, but this is not necessarily the case for the playing of large-scale fixtures at intercounty level.

Intercounty Team Costs, County and Provincial Finances

It was welcome to see all six counties of the province return a financial surplus for 2022. The combined surplus for the six counties was in the region of €2.8 million, although €700,000 of this was as a result of two counties having one-off house draws. The combined surplus was returned in spite of the fact that the costs of preparing intercounty teams in Munster hit a record €8.77m, an increase of €837,000 on the last comparable year of 2019. The increase can be explained by the rise in costs being experienced across society, and by the fact that two counties in the province contested All Ireland Senior Finals in 2022 versus one in 2019. Munster also saw 6 of its 12 intercounty teams compete at the Quarter Final or Semi Final stage of the Tier 1 Hurling and Football Championships in 2022, and the further teams progress, the higher the costs of preparation will be.

The topic of unsustainable team preparation costs has been with us for a long time now. We must take into account what is involved nowadays in preparing teams, and we can see the

results in terms of the fitness, agility and skill levels of players. It'll be a brave county that becomes the first to start cutting training sessions, strength and conditioning etc. A few bad performances in that year will lead to calls for a total overhaul of the way that county is being managed! However, at some stage, the point will come when we cross the line of unsustainable time commitments for amateur players and unsustainable costs for County Boards. Many will say we have already crossed that line. The cost of €8.77 million by Munster Counties was spent on the male side of Gaelic Games. If the same amount was spent by the Ladies County Boards in the province on their teams and development squads, the combined cost for the 3 Associations across the 4 codes would have come to over €17 million. Full integration of the 3 Gaelic Games Associations, which I am in favour of and believe will strengthen Gaelic Games across the country, will need to include a major rethink on expenditure on Intercounty teams.

On our own finances, it is certainly welcome to see a return to normal income levels following the ending of the Covid-19 pandemic. This return to normal income generation has allowed us to return to funding the Association across the province, as evidenced by the €807,000 allocated to County Grounds in field rent, the €642,00 allocated to Team Expenses and the €1.8 million allocated to Clubs in capital development grants. The Council is also putting in place a 'Strategic County Development Fund' to help finance the goals outlined earlier in the section on the Munster Development Plan, and €500,000 has been put aside for this fund.

Referees

Each year, I dedicate a chapter in my report to our referees. I have already covered the matter of ill-discipline in the Association and the consequences for the GAA of not recruiting new referees.

Munster GAA will continue to work hard to assist with the development of refereeing in the province. In 2022 Munster GAA introduced a new Referee Development Panel, which saw 6 emerging referees at club level attend physical and rules-based training sessions. This complements the training programme that we have put in place for our established referees, and the response to these training sessions has been most encouraging, with average of 25 from our panel attending each evening. It is initiatives like these that will help us to promote refereeing in a positive light, and I feel the standard of refereeing across all our 2022 competitions has been excellent.

I want to pay the highest compliment possible to our Referee Administrator Committee, and in particular, Séan Ó Rian, Micheál Ó Phaidín and Gearóid Ó Laighin who undertake the enormous task of match official appointments. A huge workload was placed on this Committee in 2022 with so many games being played in such a short period of time. It wasn't unusual for this Committee to appoint 32 officials in a one-week period. However, they responded to the challenge and put in a huge amount of time in facilitating us to complete all our competitions.

Donncha Mac Thomáis and Dillon Quirke

Over the course of 2022, we lost many people who have served the GAA at all levels and who have left a great mark on our Association. It would not be possible to mention all those deceased in 2023, but there are two people I would like to make a special mention of. Donncha Mac Thomáis from Oola in Co. Limerick served the Association with distinction at Club, County

and Provincial level. Donncha served on the Munster Council for a number of years and was also Chairperson of our Hearing's Committee for many years. He had a thorough knowledge of our rules and was always on hand to assist when needed.

A great sadness fell over the Association in August of 2022 with the sudden passing of Tipperary and Clonoulty Rossmore player Dillon Quirke, at the age of just 24. Dillon passed away while playing for his beloved club in a Championship game in Tipperary. The GAA community, and his club, responded with a huge and heartfelt show of support to Dillon's family as thousands visited the parish to pay their respects. Our thoughts and sympathies go to his family, his club and his county.

Tim Floyd and Pat FitzGerald

2022 saw the retirement of 2 of Munster's longest serving and most respected administrators in Tim Floyd of Tipperary and Pat FitzGerald of Clare. Both have given a lifetime of invaluable service to the Association and have steered their counties to great success on and off the field. Pat FitzGerald became Secretary in Clare in 1990, and in that time, the county enjoyed unprecedented success, winning 3 All Ireland Senior hurling titles, 4 U-21 All Ireland hurling titles and a Minor All Ireland hurling title. The County also won its first Munster Senior Football title since 1917 in that time. Tim Floyd took the reins in Tipperary in 2008, and also oversaw a very successful period for the Premier County, with 3 All Ireland Senior Hurling titles won, along with 4 All Ireland U21/20 titles and 3 Minor Hurling titles. The County also enjoyed unprecedented football success, with Munster titles at Minor, U21 and Senior won, along with a Minor All Ireland Football title in 2011. All Ireland titles aside, both were skilled administrators, and oversaw major change and development in their County. I would like to wish both all the best in their retirement and both can be very proud of their great contribution to the Association and of their legacy. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish Murtagh Brennan (Tiobraid Árann) and Deirdre Murphy (An Clár) all the best in their roles and I look forward to working with both in the years ahead.

Competition Sponsors

I would like to thank our 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 (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) and AIB (All-Ireland Club Championships) and Co Op Superstores (Munster Senior Hurling Cup) have been great supporters of the Association

Buiochas. Thank you

Each year, it takes a huge effort from many people to enable the Council to carry out its role. 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. The amount of time that Officers put in to attending the numerous meetings and events that take place over the year is enormous. They show a great level of dedication to their roles and provide a steady hand in steering the ship.

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.

I would also like to thank 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 calibre of County Secretary that we have. As already stated, we will have 2 new people in these roles in Munster in 2023 and I wish both well.

Lastly, 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. They are always on hand to run our events and games, no matter what day of the week these are on. We are lucky to have such a dedicated group of employees.

Looking forward to 2023

2023 will see a further expansion of the Council's games programme, with a 5 team Round Robin taking place in Minor and U-20 Hurling. This will guarantee each county 4 games, 2 at home and 2 away. The Council will face another very busy championship period from the end of March through to early June, but it is great to see the level of activity now taking place.

2023 will also see a major change in the Senior Football Championship, with group stages taking place in the Sam Maguire and Tailteann Cup competitions. As I have already said, these extra games will present a challenge to the Association in terms of the logistics required to run all of these games and the challenge of ensuring some games are not lost in the heavy traffic. The new GAA Go model will be a game changer in terms of access to our games for our patrons.

I look forward to another year of thrilling action on the field of play. Our games have provided us with so many precious sporting memories over the years, and I have no doubt that 2023 will be no different.