

## 2020 AGM Hurling Report

### HURLING COMMITTEE REPORT by Declan Doyle

2020 has been a year that we have not experienced before, both on and off the pitch, and as like all others involved in the GAA around the country we had to adapt to our new surroundings. With the season being condensed for all age groups, it provided a better focus on our competitions and games.

From a juvenile perspective it is disappointing that our kids were unable to practice their skills together for such a long period within their vital development years. However once started, and our online questionnaires were filled in and everything was sanitized, we got back to some normality!

The opposite could be said of Senior level, where we seen an increase of players, coming through from underage and a mixture of new and old faces coming into the extended squad. Part of the attraction was the re-modelling of the Betsy Gray Shield to facilitate reserve teams for the clubs that had enough. This competition started with a great win away to new opposition in East Belfast GAA and finished in a Semi-final loss away to a strong Portaferry team. Currently, the Seniors are currently still training waiting for the commencement of the Junior Hurling Championship. They did have games In Division 1 of the league which saw some tough results against established teams, most notable was the harsh defeat to Bredagh in Cherryvale, who went on to beat Ballycran for their first ever Senior Championship win. Several weeks later we welcomed them back to Moygannon where our young team got tore into them and were in the game right into the last 10 minutes before Bredaghs expertise got the scores to put them out of reach. As tough of a league campaign as we experienced, these are the teams we want to be playing against so we can learn and develop.

Once again, thanks to senior committee for all their help and assistance throughout the year, particularly club Secretary Anne McCormack and fixtures secretary Daniel Bird. Thanks also to both Larry Byrne and Paul McKibben who have both been on the other end of the phone when we needed assistance or advice. Thanks to Gerry O'Neill who once again acted as hurling representative on senior committee alongside our Hurling Chairperson, Collete Lock. Gerry & Colette provide the vital link between the hurling section and senior committee and their work is invaluable in continuing the improvement of establishing hurling within the club.

Many thanks to Dermot Donnelly, in his role as Hurling PRO, for his continuous promotion of hurling within the area and well done on his further roles within the County setup.

Also, thanks to Kieran Rice who continues to act as our Cumann Pheadair Naofa hurling referee. Most notably Kieran has officiated at multiple championship finals this year at all levels in both Hurling and Camogie.

A big thankyou to all our section sponsors, especially our main Senior sponsor Pizza Point. Also, our various jersey sponsors and all businesses that supported us throughout the year. Jersey sponsors are Pizza Point, Friar Tucks, WBR Credit Union, JY Hygiene, JBC Security, The Lough and Quay and Newcell Paper. Also, to AMG Fuels who sponsored our coach's jackets, making us look very official at training!!! Unfortunately, this year we did not have a Hurling & Camogie Week or any St Dallans coaching sessions. These are valuable entry points for children into the world of Hurling, and once permitted will be re-established asap. We must say a word of thanks to the teachers in the local schools who continue to help with hurling coaching, and also to Eamon Blaney, our local Ulster GAA Hurling Officer, who also coaches in the schools and who has met with club representatives on several occasions to develop a plan to put a hurl in every child's hand in the Warrenpoint.

We are continuing to work towards allowing every child in St Dallans the opportunity to give hurling and camogie a try. We are currently working with coaches from Ulster GAA and Down GAA to look at the opportunities with the Warrenpoint catchment area to develop schools hurling and help them reach their potential.

**Hurling PR** in 2020 has again seen plenty of articles and photos across multiple platforms, thanks to the continuous and tireless work of Dermot Donnelly.

Fixtures in 2020 were plentiful at all age groups in the end and gave every kid a chance to play hurling. Many thanks to our friends in Clonduff, who we once again worked with at Under 15s and 13s to ensure any kid in both parishes got to play at their own age group.

#### **Aims for 2021**

Increased senior panel – the success of the reserve competition, giving our extended panel plenty of hurling and to give those who played at underage an option to come back and play hurling at a more suitable level. We want to give all hurlers in the area the chance of game time no matter what standard. Maintaining and growing number of players in each team – We have again seen continued

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growth at our younger age groups which keeps driving the section. It is encouraging for our coaches as the numbers increase, and it is important as they mature and develop, that we can amend our coaching to suit, and to keep them involved within the hurling family.

The strong numbers are a recognition for the coaches and their teachings, and their priority in ensuring they try and provide each child with as much enjoyment whilst learning the arts of Hurling.

Continued coach education – as above our numbers continue to increase and we continue to target ex-players and parents, with varying levels of success! As new coaches come in, we are committed to providing them with basic training. We are committed also to continuing to develop existing coaches. This helps keep a freshness for the coaches and players.

### **SENIOR HURLING by Tom Daly**

In a season that is still not completed, the 2020 senior hurling season started with the team preparing for our return to Division 1 hurling in 2020. In light of schedule impacts related to Covid and the placing of the Junior Hurling championship to the tail end of the GAA season, the team continue to train hard and await clarity around delivery of the final key games in the Down GAA season.

The 2019 management team carried through with 1 key change with the addition of Martin Houlihan as coach and reserve manager. This included a very hardworking backroom team of Sean Mallon joint manager with Thomas Daly, Liam Boyle as lead coach, Gerry O'Neill as selector and team liaison officer, Aileen McAteer and Amy Freer looking after logistics, and finally Dermot Donnelly acting in the statistics and team PR roles.

The 2020 season so far consisted of 2 challenges and 5 league games or 7 games in total for the senior team versus circa 60 training sessions.

The reserve championship also provided 6 championship games with 3 wins and 3 losses accrued.

By the start of the league, our squad had increased to 38 with some players returning from overseas or breaks from the game. The league season saw us go toe to toe with intermediate teams plus Bredagh who impressed in the senior grade this year. The league provided us with competitive games and some of the performances marked most of the high points of our season so far.

In summary 2020, the commitment, work rate and scale of the senior hurling squad displayed continuous improvements from previous years and these traits of this current team can only be admired by anyone who follows them.

Tom and Sean would sincerely like to thank all the players, backroom team, and the hurling committee for supporting the Senior Hurling Team in 2020 who will strive for continuous improvement for the remainder of 2020 and will be boosted by any support getting behind the CPN Senior hurling team.

### **Under 17 by Adrian McNally**

This year again seen the 17s play under the name Patrick Rankins, with the squad mainly consisting of Warrenpoint players and had a handful of Shamrocks boys bolstering the squad.

We started our season back in January with indoor work in St Marks gym, where we managed multiple sessions before we were hit with COVID. After lockdown we got 3 more sessions outside, before our first match, which was home to O'Rahillys(Liatroim & Castlewellan) losing on the day by 10 points.

Our first win came in the next game at home to Ballyvarley, followed by another 2 wins, firstly away in Belfast, against Cuchullians(Bredagh & Carryduff), and then home to Kilclief

Round 5 saw the start of the return fixtures, starting with an away trip to O'Rahillys which ended in a heavy defeat to a very strong team, this was also the end of the Patrick Rankins amalgamation.

Round 6 was away to Ballyvarley, and for the first time in 2 years, our Minors wore the Blue & White jerseys and as much as it was a great sight to see, this didn't help the score line and ended in a hard fought defeat, being punished for not taking our chances.

Round 7 was home to a very different Cuchullians side than that who we met earlier in the year in Cherryvale. We were well defeated in what turned out to be our last game off the year, as our last game away to Kilclief was conceded due to several positive tests in the locality.

All in all, not a great year, but a brilliant sight to see our young men out playing in the blue and white again. We have high hopes for next year as the whole team bar one is eligible again.

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### **UNDER 15 by Dermot Donnelly**

2020 will no doubt go down as a very strange year. When lockdown started the U15s were, like most other teams expecting to be on the field within a few weeks. When it became apparent that the situation was getting worse the fear was that we would not get any Hurling at all. Thankfully when the restrictions were lifted, we were able to get six league games. Unfortunately, due to small numbers and few injuries to players, picked up playing football, there was never a game where we had a full panel of players. This year we were again reliant on three players from Clonduff, who were a great help and having been part of last year's U14 team were no strangers to the Warrenpoint lads. There was always plenty of good banter amongst the players and with John Murphy (Clonduff) assisting in the training and team management there was always something new to focus on after the previous week's game. Although we started with small numbers, I was delighted to see some of the younger players stepping up to the challenge and both John & I noted that some of the lads grew in confidence as the season progressed.

On the field of play we once more fulfilled all our fixtures in DIV2 winning both games against Kilclief, who unfortunately were in the same situation as ourselves numbers wise. Our best performances on the field came in the last three games, after a narrow one point win away to Kilclief in mid-August where we totally dominated the 15 minute period after the second water break to score 2-3 and win by a solitary point saw the team really pull together when they faced the possibility of a humiliating defeat. The following week we were at home to Ballyvarley and so nearly came away with victory after a gutsy and determined performance that should really have earned a well-deserved and overdue victory against the Scarva Road side. Our last game of the season saw us travel to Carryduff, playing on the large field with 12 a side we were able to hold the league leaders scoreless for 10-15 minutes, given that Carryduff were in the luxurious position of being able to run lads on/off the field of play, it was just a matter of time before they would take control of the game. Carryduff won the league quite easily and eventually entered the later stages of Div1, but after the game it was remarked that that game was the best game that Carryduff had had all year and several of the Warrenpoint lads would not look out of place on their starting fifteen.

Once more I would like to thank John Murphy from Clonduff for helping out and running most of our training sessions, he is a great coach and the lads looked up to him as a player who had done exactly what he preached. I would also like to thank Colette Lock & Gerry O'Neill who acted as Covid supervisors at many of our training sessions & games, their vigilance on these matters ensured that we were always kept safe. To the parents who this year had to drive up & down the county taking their son to matches, it made both John & my job of running the team so much easier.

I hope the 2020/21 season will see some sort of return to normality and the increase in the number of fixtures for these lads.

### **UNDER 13 by Paddy Lock**

2020 was my second year with the U13's working alongside Liam Boyle, Averil Campbell and Colette Lock. Although, we knew we were very low on numbers we wanted to try and keep a team in play, whilst we only had four players registered at U13.

We started in early January where the U13s attended the indoor athletic development program to build on their core strength and proved to be a great program enjoyed by all. Our Indoor training commenced in early February and continued each Friday. No one could foresee what was to happen in March. We went into complete Lockdown and all training and matches were stopped.

The GAA gave a return date to train for Monday 29<sup>th</sup> June and parents/guardians were asked to complete an online eLearning module and complete a health questionnaire prior to training. We agreed a start date of Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June, where we followed the correct guidelines to ensure training was kept safe for everyone. We entered the U13 hurling shield, first playing Kilclief at home and then away to Ballela.

The management had a meeting to discuss the future of the U13 team as due to low numbers and relying on U11 players to step up and U11 matches played on a Saturday we were finding it was really putting on pressure on players. We spoke to players and parents on going forward and agreed to consult with Clonduff for the option of the 4 players getting a sanction to play, as management we wanted the players to play and train at their own level. Having spoken with Clonduff and getting agreement from the county board, all players got a sanction. This proved to be a very good decision for the players as they played very well and we had a good partnership with Clonduff with Liam Boyle being the Cumann Pheadair Naofa

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representative. Clonduff finished top in their league and were due to play Castlewellan in the shield final although this has been postponed at present due to the current climate.

Going forward next year only 2 players move to U15. I would like to thank management, players and parents for their continued support and ensuring safe training as always.

### **UNDER 11 by Averil Campbell & Colette Lock**

2020 started off very well with the boys taking part with the club indoor athletic development program in early January and continued with the program for several weeks and this helped develop the team in building up core strength and fitness.

Early February saw the start of competitive action at an indoor blitz in DKIT playing Shamrocks, Clonduff and Ballela, providing a great afternoon of hurling and a great start for the year. Early March, we returned to DKIT for another afternoon of hurling, where the team performed very well, and each player proved to be tough competition for their opponents which ended our last outing pre-lockdown.

We returned to training in late June, where we entered U11 go games which included Clonduff, Shamrocks, Ballela and ourselves.

We were first to face Shamrocks away in early August, and although down on numbers, due to injuries and holidays, we fielded a team that included U9 players stepping up in a great match. We then played Clonduff home and away, followed by a home game to Ballela. Unfortunately, all games were not played as there was communions, confirmations and other commitments from both sides.

Going forward next year out of the 14 players 8 players will move to U13. Averil and Colette were delighted and thankful with the commitment of the players and parents to ensure we safely returned to training and matches and look forward to next year.

### **UNDER 9 by Conor Keenan**

2020 was a difficult year for all the GAA, especially for our young gaels in our U9 age group, just starting out on their journey in Gaelic games.

As in years past our season started indoors with indoor games organised in Dundalk IT. This is no longer co-ordinated by Leinster or Ulster GAA, but by local clubs which is a shame. Before the pause in GAA activity, we had time for only two outings, so the lockdown came very early on for us.

Having considered many online alternatives, we decided to allow families to select from their own range on online resources, aware that the duty or pressure to submit online videos on a regular basis could have added to parental stress at a time when many of us were under pressure. We were delighted to see that many children enjoyed for example TJ Reid's online hurling workouts, as well as resources that the Club and Down GAA produced.

Upon re-commencing GAA activities, we as a coaching team had met to discuss why, if at all we should go back to activities. We came upon a rationale that for the good of families, restarting team activities would provide health, exercise, vital social opportunities and a focus for our children as well as being some measure of relief for the families of our community. We took our responsibilities very seriously in this matter and I hope that families could see the work done by the Club committee and Covid officers who took on extra duties and responsibilities.

In general, our year was to focus on playing the sport of hurling. We wanted the lads to have a sense of excitement on Fridays about playing matches, and not doing repetitive drills and exercises. In addition, we as a coaching team were reluctant to initiate too many games with other clubs, in an approach that some may have seen as overly cautious. Again, our priority was providing safe, local activity, not necessarily competitive action at a time when it was harder for some families to facilitate.

Some young gaels have not returned to hurl with the U-9s for I am sure a variety of reasons. We as a management team hope that in the coming months conditions will facilitate a more relaxed environment where we can let the lads enjoy the sport to its fullest.

We are conscious of the fact and appreciative that families from multiple parishes including, Mayobridge, and Rostrevor, choose to bring their children to play hurling with us. Indeed, a large percentage of this year's team are Burren lads from Carrick Primary School. This is the reality of our area and something to be appreciated, that so many families wish their children to learn about and play this great game of ours. In the meantime, I hope our families and the lads have seen while hurling is a team sport, a huge amount of skills and technique can, and must be practiced on an individual basis. The game's vast array of skills requires dedicated individual rehearsal, something that any lad can focus on in the coming months.

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Sincere thanks to our team sponsor Brendan Downey from Friar Tucks, and condolences to him and his family on the passing of his late father Stephen.

2020 U9 Coaching team (Liza Friel, Diarmuid Williams, Peadar O'Loughlin, Thomas Magee, Conor Keenan)

### **UNDER 7 by Sean Mallon**

This year has seen a number of changes for this group of young hurlers, ranging from the age group change from U6 up to U7, social distancing, and Covid-19 health checks prior to training following the dreaded "Lock Down" we experienced from March to June.

The year started off with much anticipation and training on Friday evenings in St Marks attracting very good numbers, with plenty of new players and coaches attending. As preparations were being made for the brighter evenings and better weather, "Lock Down" was announced and after a short number of weeks as it became evident this was not to be a short term inconvenience, it was decided to introduce digital training for U7's!!! Short videos were produced showing various hurling skills delivered by members of the U7 squad.

Finally, the news was delivered that GAA sports could restart, a return to training date was set and since then, come Friday evenings in Milltown it is no surprise to see 40+ U7's enjoying their sport.

Several challenge matches had been organised, but unfortunately only 2 have taken place to-date due to Covid issues in the wider community.

The coaching team would like to thank the parents for their patience, understanding and ongoing compliance with the Covid health questionnaires, and other Covid related procedures that are required to keep us all safe.

We look forward to continuing U7 hurling into the winter months if possible, but if not, we will regroup in 2021. Many thanks to all the Under 7 coaches and all who helped this year.