

# Ladies' Gaelic Football Overview 2021

## By Mike Barnett

### Ladies' Gaelic Coordinator/LGFA PRO



This year saw a big change in the organisation of underage ladies' Gaelic football in county Down. The decision was taken by the county board to move to odd numbered age groups, to bring us inline with the boys, hurling & camogie. This meant that there would be competitive games at U11.5, U13, U15 & U18. The absence of U17s was due to an Ulster U18 competition, for which the county would need to provide its championship winners. It was felt at county board that it would be too much to ask of both clubs & players to hold both U17 & U18 competitions, so only an U18 competition would be staged.

Having initially planned for teams based on the previous age grade structure, the change led to a last-minute alteration of the teams entered for the 2021 season. With over 120 registered players in 2021, the club was able to field Ladies' Gaelic football teams at U11.5, U13, U15, U18 & senior levels. The U11.5s actually had so many registered players that they were able to field two teams throughout the season. These teams were split based upon age i.e., P6 & P7.

The U11.5s were managed by Ciaran Rice & Kevin Fitzpatrick, with assistance from Lisa O'Loughlin & Brendan Rice. The change in age grades meant that the U11.5s entered the league structure that was previously in place for the U12s. The girls had a very full season of matches, with excellent attendance at all. It was very clear to see that the young Blues very much enjoyed themselves.

Damian Doyle took charge of the U13s, in his first foray into team management. Damian had some very experienced assistance in the form of Annette Elmore, Paul Grant & Kevin Fitzpatrick, with Rosin Keenan also joining the management team, for her first stab at being a team mentor. The U13s were playing full rules & on a full-sized pitch, a first for almost all of the panel as they were all at U12 level last year. The girls found it hard to adapt to this step-up, something which was borne out by the results. Despite some disappointing results there were wins against Rostrevor & Loughinisland, which the girls certainly enjoyed. The U13s were unlucky to be drawn against Glenn, one of the strongest teams in the section, for the championship & did not progress. The enthusiasm & work-rate displayed the girls was a fine reflection upon the management team & will stand them in good stead for next season.

The girls at U15 were under the management of myself, I was assisted by Aileen McAteer, Paula Fegan, Kate Kelly & new mentor, Martin McGreevy. The biggest challenge with this group was balancing the numbers. At the start of the season 28 girls were registered to play for the U15s & whilst there was a certain drop off during the season, numbers remained high. With such high numbers turning up for matches, it was a challenge to ensure that all got good playing time, but this is a good problem to have. With the number of changes that inevitably had to be made during games to get girls playing, this did impact upon results, but importantly, girls got playing throughout the league season. The U15s went out at the first round of the championship with an agonising 1 point defeat away to Teconnaught. During the break between the league & championship campaign, the girls took part in the county féilé, the first time we've had representation at the county féilé for 5 years.

The U18s, had the very experienced management duo of Paula Howlett & Killian Quinn, in charge. Paula & Killian were assisted by Liam Howlett, Aileen McAteer, Maria Heatley & myself. The change in the age group structure certainly helped the club to be able to enter a team at this grade. Although there was a small panel at this age grade, a number of the U15s made the step-up, to ensure there would always be sufficient numbers to field. The ladies were placed in a very competitive section B & acquitted themselves very well throughout the season, despite losing vice-captain Orlaith Breen, for the entirety of the season, after she sustained a serious injury during the opening league encounter against Saul. There was an extended 9-week break between the league & championship campaigns, a time when a number of the panel focussed their energies on representing the senior team. The ladies' opening championship encounter was away to Rostrevor, where the ladies put in a tremendous performance, to progress to the final. The final is to be played on November 7<sup>th</sup> against Saul, in Newcastle. I would like to wish the players & management all the very best for this final. Given the amount of work that everybody has put into this team this year, it would be a very fitting way to top off the season, with some silverware.

The senior team was once again under the management of Ronan Magee, supported by Noreen Farrell, Declan Carvill, Ciaran Rice & Martin Carr. The senior ladies had a strong league campaign, which saw them finish on the same points total as Saul, at the top of the league. This led to a league final in Castlewellan where, despite putting in a great performance, the ladies were just beaten to the league title by 2 points. The championship campaign saw the ladies pick up victories against East Belfast & St. Michael's, however defeats to Saul & Bredagh B meant that the ladies would contest the B championship final, against Tullylish. In what turned out to be a rather one-sided contest, the ladies ran out very comfortable victors, to pick up the first piece of silverware for our senior ladies' team. A large number of the U18 panel played for the senior team this year & without doubt, these girls have made a huge contribution to the success of the senior team this year. This bodes very well for the future.

The county scene was very quiet this year, with competitive action only at adult & minor levels. At adult level, Caoimhe Shannon was invited to attend senior county training sessions, in a development capacity, to become our club's first senior ladies' player to be involved with the senior county team. At minors, Siofra McAteer, Cara Bradley & Anna Craven all represented the county.

This was an important year for ladies' Gaelic football in Warrenpoint, as it marked ten years since the introduction of ladies' Gaelic football in the club. There is no doubt that the sport is going from strength to strength in Warrenpoint & with the numbers we are seeing coming through, we can be confident that ladies' Gaelic football will continue to grow in Warrenpoint. This is due to the hard work of so many who have contributed as coaches, mentors, administrators & supporters.

I would like to conclude by thanking a number of people for their important contributions throughout the year. Noreen Kelly, Anne McCormack & Paul McKibben, have been wonderful for their advice & guidance, as always. No matter what challenges are presented throughout the season, I can be sure that with the help of Noreen, Anne & Paul, the challenge can be overcome.

To conclude, I would like to thank all of the coaches & mentors who have worked so tirelessly throughout the season, to give our players the opportunity to represent their club.

Le Mise

Mike Barnett

Ladies' Gaelic football coordinator/LGFA PRO

P.S. 8<sup>th</sup> November 2021. Our minor ladies faced Saul on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2021 in Newcastle, in the B Championship final. Having beaten the league runner's up in the semi-final, the ladies were full of confidence that they could go one better & defeat the league winners, in the final. They did not disappoint. In what was undoubtedly their best display of the season, the ladies put in an incredible effort, to nullify the physical threat of Saul & come away victorious, with a score of 1-11 to 2-3. Many congratulations to the players & the management team. These ladies have had a long season, with many involved with our senior team. To be able to put in a performance such as they did in the final, shows outstanding levels of determination & skill. They are a real credit to the club, as are the coaches who have worked so hard throughout the season.

# Senior Ladies' Gaelic Football Overview 2021

Ronan Magee (Manager)



I am immensely proud of what the Warrenpoint senior ladies have achieved this year. From the start of the season, they gave it their all, as they do every year. They vowed to come back bigger and better this season and to win silverware.

The girls worked relentlessly to improve themselves on the pitch this year again and I personally think this was key to their success.

This year saw high numbers at training, with 22 senior players, this included new players Laura Taylor, Lisa Cousins and Emma Owens to name but a few. They were welcomed into the team by the girls from the very first training session they attended.

Many of the minor panel played with the senior ladies again this season and it was great to see as a manager that the senior ladies and the minors were all on the same level, they played as one amazing very talented team. I'd like to say thank you to Lauren Quinn, Erin Carr, Ellen Daly, Siofra McAteer, Sara Daly, Katie Howlett, Lia Rice, Caoimhe & Enya Quinn, Cara Bradley, Jennah Doyle and Anna Craven for their dedication and commitment to the senior panel. I also would like to thank the minor management and coaches Mike Barnett, Paula Howlett, Liam Howlett, Killian Quinn, Maria Heatley, Niamh McNally and Aileen McAteer for their continued support throughout the season.

This year saw the girls reach a league final in Castlewellan against Saul. Unfortunately, the result didn't go our way. We then regrouped and focused on the Championship semi-final against Breda B in Cherryvale, again the result didn't go our way. As a team we were gutted but like always the girls picked themselves up and came together for Junior Championship B final against Tullylish in Saval.

From the start the girls' mind-set was to win, nothing else mattered. As a team, they all wanted silverware as the past few years have ended in disappointment. From the start of the game to the end, each and every player played their hearts out and as a manager it was an absolute pleasure watching the girls giving it their all and to see the passion and fire in them to succeed and win a trophy, the result of the match speaks for itself.

As manager, I'd like to thank my team; Marty Carr, Declan Carvill, Ciaran Rice, Noreen Farrell and Pauline Cunningham, I am forever in their debt for all they have done this year not only for me but for the senior ladies.

Finally to conclude I believe the senior ladies team would not have been so successful this year if it wasn't for their sheer determination, self-belief, commitment and appetite to win. With their ability to take on board what is asked of them, they are truly an amazing group of girls and as their manager I'm very proud of every single one of them and what they have achieved this season. In my opinion this team has not yet reached its full potential and I believe with the guidance of myself and my team we can help them move in the right direction.

I would like to thank Cumann Pheadair Naofa and the committee for giving me the opportunity to manage the ladies' senior team this year.

Ronan Magee.

# U18 Ladies' Gaelic Football Overview 2021

Paula Howlett & Killian Quinn (Joint Managers)



2021 has been a significant year in Cumann Pheadair Naofa's LGFA history as it marked the arrival of the first Ladies' Minor Team. This demonstrates the growth, development and advancing profile of Ladies' football within the Club.

While the Covid-19 Pandemic presented many challenges to all aspects of life, not less our sporting life, there was, in April, a light at the end of the tunnel, with restrictions being lessened and a sense of optimism returning. Indeed, it was the 12<sup>th</sup> April, that we held our first training session of the season. The excitement and enthusiasm was tangible and with a lot of catching up to be done the chatting and craic took precedence over any physical activity for the first few sessions. Down to work we went and the U18 ladies threw themselves in to the training routines which incorporated skill, physical and stamina training. On May 3<sup>rd</sup> the ladies had their first run out in a highly competitive challenge match, ending in a draw, against close neighbours, Burren.

Allocation to the B league resulted in the Cumann Pheadair Naofa Minor Ladies facing Bryansford, Mayobridge, Rostrevor and Saul. Selection of Captain, Siofra McAteer and Vice-Captain, Orlaith Breen completed the preparations.

The first match of season was against Saul at home. This was an extremely physical game which saw 2 of our key players, Lauren Quinn and vice-captain, Orlaith Breen incurring significant injuries. Unfortunately, Orlaith's injury was such that she has been unable to return for the remainder of the season. The Management Team and Players wish Orlaith a continued recovery and anticipate her return to the team next season.

The final outcome of the league saw Warrenpoint Ladies finishing in 3<sup>rd</sup> place.

The Championship round commenced on 24<sup>th</sup> Oct when the Cumann Pheadair Naofa Minor Ladies met Rostrevor. The Ladies successfully battled off stiff competition to pass through this round and will meet Saul in the final game of the Championship which is scheduled to be played on 7<sup>th</sup> November.

A special mention to Liam Howlett who, as part of the Coaching Team, supported the training sessions, where he delivered expert training based on an enviable knowledge of physical fitness, agility, skill and stamina training encompassing the Athletic Development Programme. Liam generously delivers and shares his knowledge for the benefit of each player and the team. Many thanks, Liam, your commitment to and passion for the sport has been a massive contributor over the year and we and the team are indebted to you.

It was with great pride and admiration that three of the Minor Ladies, Siofra McAteer, Cara Bradley and Anna Craven represented Cumann Pheadair Naofa at County level when they were successful in being selected to join the LGFA, Down Minor Panel. Congratulations and well done.

Several of the Minor Ladies supported the Senior Ladies both in the League and Championship endeavours and shared their success in a well contested campaign. Thank you to Ronan Magee and the Senior Management Team for providing this opportunity to the girls which, not only, contributed to their overall development but formed strong links with the Senior Ladies.

Warrenpoint Minor Team could not have achieved success without the support of the U15 Ladies who stepped up to the mark and showed themselves to be skilled footballers, having the ability to deliver at Minor level. Many thanks to these girls and their parents, your support is hugely appreciated.

The Minor Ladies have demonstrated true commitment to Cumann Pheadair Naofa club life and ethos when they involved themselves in the Sunday morning training programme for primary school children and also GAA For All.

Having acquired the GAA foundation course, Katie Howlett, Enya Quinn and Caoimhe Quinn coached and worked with the Primary 1 & 2 children on a Sunday morning at St. Mark's School. Their contribution and commitment supported this programme and the 3 girls represented positive role models for the younger children.

GAA For All, ensuring inclusivity for all children and providing an opportunity to take part in sporting activities when the alternative is to be left out. This, Sunday morning, weekly coaching at St. Mark's school was a major success and made possible by the dedication of the Minor Ladies, Cara Bradley, Lia Rice, Anna Craven, Lauren Quinn, Jennah Doyle and Erin Carr who all attended to coach and encourage the children, ensuring participation and fun for all. Well done to all the girls and congratulations on Justin McNulty, MLA, making reference, in Stormont, to your involvement.

Sincere thanks to the Ladies' Minor Team for their commitment, enthusiasm and passion for the game. It has been a privilege to work alongside these footballers, who have done themselves and the club proud.

Thank you also to the parents and families for their continued support, encouragement and positive recognition of their daughter's involvement in the team.

Developing and bringing forward the Minor Team has been achieved through the commitment of the coaches and managers who have worked consistently and collectively toward a shared outcome. Appreciation and thanks to Aileen McAteer, Niamh Doherty, Maria Heatley, Liam Howlett, Mike Barnett and Martin McGreevy.

Recognition of and thanks to Mike Barnett for his contribution to the continued development of Ladies' Football within the club and the support he has provided over the year to the Minor Players and Management Team.

It was the most wet and windy night of the year when Brendan Rice attended the Ladies' training session. He met with the team and delivered a message of support, review and encouragement, validating the team's place in the forthcoming Championship Final. Brendan, with his wealth of knowledge and experience provided a clear overview, motivating and re-enforcing the shared vision of the team. Sincere thanks to Brendan, from the Ladies and the Management Team, for taking time out to meet, this has been of significant value and a key encourager ahead of Championship Final.

Best wishes and Good Luck to the Minors ahead of the final.

Paula Howlett  
Killian Quinn

# U15 Ladies' Gaelic Football Overview 2021

Mike Barnett (Manager)



Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we were unable to start our season in the usual way with training indoors at St.Mark's. We began outdoor training as soon as was feasible, taking into account the weather & pitch conditions. Numbers were good from the start, with 28 girls registered to play for the U15s. A few did drop off as the season progressed, however there was never any problems with fielding for matches & attendance at training sessions was always in the mid-teens, at worst.

The girls were placed in section C, along with Teconnaught, Saul, St.John's of Drumnaquoile, Glenn, Burren B, Annaclone & Aghaderg. The opening match was away to Teconnaught, a match that rather set the tone for the season. Managing a panel of 27 on the day & ensuring that all got good playing time, was always going to impact upon the final result. Most importantly every girl got good playing time. This was very much the theme for the remainder of the season, with the girls working hard, but ultimately being on the wrong end of most results. The highlight of the league season was a resounding victory over neighbours Burren!

Following the conclusion of the league campaign & before the start of the championship, the girls took part in the county féilé, which was held in Castlewellan. After some teams dropped out at the last minute, the groups for féilé were changed & our girls found themselves in a group with Carryduff A & Burren A, winners & runners up in section A respectively, as well as Castlewellan, who won section B. The girls found it very hard going against the best teams in the county, but they had a good day out & it was great to see the girls represent their club, the first Warrenpoint representation at the county féilé for 5 years.

The championship draw saw the girls given an away tie against Teconnaught, a repeat of their first league match. Despite missing some key players, expectations were high, as the girls were only beaten by four points on their last visit. The match was played in very windy conditions with the girls playing into the wind in the first half. They managed to establish a slim lead at the half-time interval, but were unable to make the most of playing with the wind in the second half & were defeated by a single point. The disappointment was palpable; however the girls can be very proud of their efforts. This brought the season to a close for the majority of the girls. Some of the girls have been invited to be part of the U18 panel, for their championship campaign, which at time of writing, has yet to begin.

I'd like to thank coaches Paula Fegan, Aileen McAteer, Kate Kelly & Martin McGreevy for all of their hard work throughout the season. Working with such knowledgeable & dedicated coaches, makes the job of managing a team, that much easier.

It has been an absolute privilege to work with such a wonderful & enthusiastic bunch of young ladies this season & I wish them all the very best for their endeavours next season.

Le Mise

Mike Barnett & U-15 LGFA Coaches.



# U13 Ladies' Gaelic Football Overview 2021

Damian Doyle (Manager)



My first foray into team management was with the ladies' under 13s this year.

I was vaguely familiar with some of the girls as one of my own daughters is in this age group. I was essentially talking the reins from Brendan and Ciaran Rice, who looked after the under 12s the previous year. A tough act to follow by any means.

From our initial meeting on April 11th where Ciaran and Brendan were willing advisors to the incoming team of myself, Paul Grant, Annette Elmore and Roisin Sneddon, the hopes for the upcoming season were discussed with great enthusiasm.

Over the next couple of weeks, as the Rices departed the scene leaving Paul and I to it, we attempted to put our own mark on things. In the early days of the year training sessions were attracting reasonably decent numbers, in the high teens and occasionally over twenty with twenty-four being our best turnout at one session.

Our first game away to Mayobridge was a rude awakening and showed us where we were both technically and in fitness terms, as we seemed to run out of steam on the day. The girls, for all their endeavour failed to make an impact in the game. Paul has had some success with Coleraine, though at senior level and he and I both agreed that much needed to be done to match our opponent's intensity and skill levels.

We upped the tempo at training and pushed the girls as hard as we dared, risking depriving them of the fun element.

Another defeat to a highly skilled Glenn side was followed up by a win away to Rostrevor where we played arguably our best game of the year. We pushed harder again at training to attain a higher intensity and provide the basis for more victories but alas the Rostrevor victory was to be our one and only competitive win of the season. A win over Drumgath in a friendly added some consolation.

The girls for the most part, put in a great effort at training and whilst allowances should be made for the disruption caused by Covid-19 and prolonged summer holidays again due to Covid-19, I feel that with better attendance at training, better results may have been achievable. Unfortunately, some of our training sessions saw numbers dwindle to a mere 7 or 8 and in fact two sessions were abandoned completely due to lack of numbers. A big thanks to those girls who showed up regularly. I won't put blame on others for any shortcomings results wise as I picked the teams and am ultimately responsible for those, but I'd suggest that more training would have helped. The score in some of our other games was not indicative of the effort produced by the girls. Both games against Shamrocks for instance were impacted by lack of numbers and injuries. In short, if we had more girls available on both occasions I feel we could have won those games.

Over the course of the season I felt we never got to see the full potential of this group of girls who fought hard to the bitter end in all their games and deserved better results for their efforts.

I'd like to finish up with a thanks to Paul, Annette and Roisin and also to Kevin Fitzpatrick for all their help over the season. Also thanks to Ciaran Rice for his cameo appearances throughout the season. Finally, it was an honour and a privilege to work with such a fantastic group of young girls, some of whom will no doubt star for Warrenpoint seniors in the years ahead.

Thanks for opportunity.

Le Mise

Damian Doyle.

## U11 End of Year Summary

The 2021 season for the U11 girls was a very successful one. With over 40 girls forming the panel we divided the girls into 2 teams with the priority for the season to give each girl as much game time as possible. The girls played numerous Go Games matches throughout the season against, Bosco, Bredagh, Burren, Clonduff, Glenn, , Rostrevor, Saval & Shamrocks.

The dedication and application of both panels is a credit to themselves and to their families who made sure they turned up for training and games each week.

Final scores where never an issue but a winning one was a bonus. Losing a game but making a great catch, finding a team mate with a punt pass, blocking an opponent's shot were so much more important to these girls that their work rate and drive to do the simple skills correct were a joy to watch by all who attended.

Lisa Cunningham, Patricia Keenan, Ciaran Rice, Kevin Fitzpatrick, Adrian Lunny & Brendan Rice.