

## **LGFA Report 2024**

### **Chair – Colette Lock**

As I began my first year as Chair of the LGFA, my main goal was to foster a collaborative environment where we could all work together to promote the LGFA within our club. The LGFA is one of the largest sections in our club, with the U14 age group fielding two teams, while the U16, minor, and senior teams each field one. By encouraging management to collaborate and support each section, we enabled players to step up and play above their age group. This helped ensure that teams had enough players and could field full squads for matches.

The fixtures were provided by the county board, and Kevin Fitzpatrick and I worked closely to organize the scheduling of the two U14 teams, ensuring that they had home and away matches every other week while accommodating pitch availability. The football committee has been incredibly supportive during my first year, and Mike Barnett has been instrumental in guiding me through the rules and regulations, ensuring that the year ran smoothly in both league play and championships.

Additionally, Kate Dinsmore and I have served as the LGFA representatives for our club. We made sure that at least one of us attended the monthly meetings and kept the teams updated by relaying all relevant information. This communication has been key in keeping everyone informed and engaged throughout the year.

Many thanks to all coaches and committees in our club who totally voluntarily ensure training and matches are taking place.

### **U14 Report by Kevin Fitzpatrick**

With great anticipation our U14 Ladies season commenced indoors at St Marks on the 1st February 2024 with 32 girls in attendance at our first session, we could tell by the noise levels that the girls were certainly enjoying being together again and relishing the opportunity to develop their skills.

We started outdoors and moved to twice weekly training sessions from 4th April. With a panel of 38 girls to begin with we entered 2 teams in to the U14 League for the 2nd year running.

With having 2 teams there was a few different ways we could have split the girls/teams, for example there isn't that many other clubs who have enough girls for 2 teams though those clubs that do tend to split their teams in to A and B teams based on ability. Whilst there was some discussions and debate on how best to do it, we decided to split the teams by age and have older & younger teams, the older team was called the Blue team and the younger team was called the White team. We decided to split the teams this way for a number of reasons including 1) this was the way we split the teams the previous season and it worked well & 2) it made sense from a longer term succession planning perspective given that the majority of the older Blue team had played together the previous season and would all have to move up to U16s together next season and all the younger White team had played together the previous season at U12 and they would all be together again at U14 next season.

Our U14 league games started on the 14th April playing normally fortnightly on a Sunday alternating with the U16s.

### ***BLUES (Older Team)***

- The Blues were placed in a tough section C after the older team had won the section D league the previous season but only 5 players remained from that team this season as the others had to move on to U16s.
- Despite having a panel of 39 (18 Blues & 21 Whites) during the season fielding 2 teams on the same dates & times was challenging particularly during the summer months so that meant that a high number of the younger White team also played regularly with the Blues during the league but of course weren't allowed to play for the older team during the championship and vis versa.
- Section C was challenging for the girls as most teams we came up against had a couple of County players and we unfortunately don't have anyone at that level yet so it was difficult but it showed us the standard that we need to get to and we competed very well, the way that the girls didn't give up and fought back in a number of games was particularly pleasing.
- We did make the case at the start of the year and during the season for a Split Spring/Summer League which had been the case in previous seasons and which had always worked well though we weren't successful in our lobbying, the split Spring/Summer league would have worked for both our teams as it always meant the 2nd half of the league and therefore the championship was always more competitive & fairer.
- The Blues won 4 out of their 14 league games, there was some great wins which were highlights including beating Downpatrick in Milltown after a heavy defeat away, beating Bosco at home after a heavy defeat in Newry and beating Mayobridge in Mayobridge who then went on to win the Championship.
- Over the years we've had some difficult games and heavy defeats against the likes of Bosco & Mayobridge so it was positive to see how much the girls are developing that we were able to beat the likes of them.
- The Blues finished their playing season losing away to Tullylish in the championship quarterfinal.

### **WHITES (Younger Team)**

- There was quite a bit of discussion and debates at the start of the year and during the season about what section was the correct one to play the Whites in but ultimately it was decided to play them in section E. The reasons being that a number of the older girls in this team had played in section E the previous season and it was at the right competitive level for them last year and that there was a number of younger girls in the Whites team who were new to U14 football from U12s and hadn't played full pitch & rules before so it was felt that section E would be a good introduction for them to build their confidence and then after having built the experience & success of U14s this year they will be well capable of playing in a significantly higher section at U14s next season and should do very well.
- The cons of section E is that it is a development league and some of the teams in the section have just started LGFA so there was 2 very comfortable wins and also unfortunately 3 teams conceded against us unable to field.
- From the league games played the Whites won 6 out of 8 games.
  - One of the most pleasing things was that despite having the setbacks with a couple of defeats the girls didn't let that knock them or deflate them, in fact they got back up again and worked even harder to finish out the season very strongly.
- The league finished with a league final play-off on 3rd November vs Drumaness in Annaclone, the girls played brilliantly and got a well-deserved win.
- In the championship the Whites won the preliminary round game at home to East Belfast, the quarter-final away to Burren B, semi-final at home to Drumaness and then won the final comfortably vs St Michael's in Aghaderg.

- Finishing the season as League & Championship double winners was absolutely fantastic and it was a brilliant way to end the season by the girls being presented with their medals by the senior ladies at our end of season celebration.

We ended the playing season with the U14 E Championship final which took place on Sunday 17th November and then a celebration back in the clubrooms afterwards, a great day was had and it was very pleasing that we could bring home double silverware back to Warrenpoint. A number of girls from the whole panel enjoyed the celebrations which was a lovely way to finish the season and great recognition for the girls' hard work & efforts all season.

We also had an end of season party for the whole U14 panel in the club on the 28th November which included the presentation of league & championship winners medals to the Whites by the senior ladies.

Whilst it's fantastic to win silverware and perform well the primary focus of the U14 management team in managing a panel of 39 girls has always been to ensure they all get good playing time, long term success for us was making sure all the girls had fun, developed their skills and that we kept high numbers involved to move up through the age groups in future years. There is many long-term fitness, mental health & community benefits of keeping the girls playing and involved at this key age so finishing the season with a panel of 39 girls was very pleasing and should set the U14s & U16s up well for further success next season.

One of the really positive things about this year was the development and succession that was evident through our panels, for example we had U12 girls play in the U14 younger White double winning team, we had a high number of Whites play with the older Blue U14 team, we had older U14 Blues play in the U16 team during the season which got to a championship semifinal and we also had a number of U14s who played with the minor squad this year which got to a championship final. It was also very pleasing to see a number of U16s that were U14s last year in the Senior panel that reached a historic Ulster Final for the first time.

During the entire season I think it's worth noting some numbers which make positive reading;

- We had a Panel of 38 girls at the start of the season and finished with a total Panel of 39, I think that's a testament to how much the girls enjoy their football and it's great news for the Club as the girls continue to progress their football careers and move up through the teams with a lot more football & success to come.
- The season started indoors on the 1st of February and finished on Sunday 17th November.
- We were training for over 9 months and it was outside twice a week for over 7 months from the 4th April.
- We had a total of 62 training sessions during the season and there was a total of 29 matches – 15 matches for the Blues and 14 for the Whites.
- The above numbers include many many hours of voluntary community involvement & contribution.

It's worth noting that a very enjoyable time was also spent by the U14 panel of girls and coaches at the LGFA Family Fun Day in Moygannon during the summer and we also had coaches & players involved in coaching and assisting at the Club Football Summer Camp week which was also thoroughly enjoyed and a great beneficial experience for those involved.

I would like to acknowledge and pass on my sincere thanks to the U14 management team of Triona McCarthy, Damian Doyle, Julie Blair, Helen Carvill, Paschal McErlean & Johnny Rooney as without them the above many hours of time & dedication to the enjoyment & development of our girls couldn't have taken place.

We had great support from the Club and the Football Committee all year in terms of anything we needed or asked for we got so thank you to Paul, Steve, Johnny and the rest of the Senior & Football Committees.

I have been involved in coaching ladies football for quite a few years now and this was the 3rd year in a row that we've had 2 teams and I have to be honest and say that this was the most difficult year doing it particularly in terms of organising and rescheduling fixtures and fielding both teams despite the 39 players.

I think it goes to show you how hard and a thankless job it is when the County Fixtures Secretary resigned half way through the season so I would like to say thanks to the County board and in particular all the referees because without them and their work we wouldn't have any games.

I've highlighted how hard a year it was in terms of getting matches arranged and played but I can't do that without calling out and saying a special note of thanks to our Club LGFA rep Colette Lock because all the hard work and difficulties that we had Colette had the same if not more, so huge thanks to Colette who was always very helpful with quick responses which was much appreciated and Colette was very much a part of the success of these girls and teams.

Thank you to the Club for the opportunity to work with the girls, it has been an absolute privilege to work with such a wonderful & enthusiastic bunch of young ladies. Next year the older Blue team will move up to U16s and the younger White team will continue at U14 we would like to wish them all the very best for next season and hopefully their many more years of enjoyment & playing with Warrenpoint.

### **U16 By Damian Doyle**

U16 ladies played in section c for this year. Training began in early February with 22 girls on the panel, which included a few U14s. Only 4 sections were allocated for the year, which left a peculiar format of 7 teams in section a, 8 teams in section b, 9 in c and 11 in d. As a consequence of this, section a and section b teams played each other twice in the season while section c and d only met once. Section d at least had 2 more games to play while section c played only 8 league games all year. We believed our league was to be split upon completion in order to facilitate a league playoff to decide a winner, which would have given us the extra few games. That didn't happen. We played our last league game on August 8th and finished exactly mid table with 4 wins and 4 losses.

Aside from a challenge game v braynsford, our next competitive game was 1st round of the championship v newry shamrocks on October 2nd. Almost 8 weeks after the last league game. A number of our u16 ladies were involved at minor level, and these girls at least were kept playing but those not involved saw no football for that entire period. Minor football was Thursday nights and clashed with our 16s training slot which left us with a single session per week for everyone who was available to train together. Obviously the girls involved with minors benefited hugely from the experience, and it helped develop their skills more quickly. The flip side, unfortunately, was that the other 16s missed out on that. Everyone was invited of course, but not everyone wanted to go. We encouraged the remaining girls to join in training with 14s but as expected, none of them seemed to want to and decided to stick with the Tuesday slot only.

Our championship opener against shamrocks was played in Pairc Esler under floodlight, and we managed to come away with a hard fought win against the home side.

It was a great experience for the girls to play there, and the victory set us up for a tough semifinal away to league winners saval. We were definite underdogs for this game but held

our own for the most part. With only 10 minutes gone however, we suffered a very harsh red card, which made an already difficult task that much harder. We went in at half time 4 points down but not yet out. In the second half we pulled the game back to within 2 points before savals numerical advantage eventually started to show. Our girls showed great character and determination to fight on to the very last second but eventually lost out to the strongest team in the division who went on to a win the final and secure a league and championship double.

Our season ended in saval but we feel it was hard to keep the girls focused with the long gap from league ending to championship beginning. Regardless of that the girls committed well throughout the season and aside from the expected exam and holiday absences were keen and driven when matches came around.

Special thanks to Ciaran rice and to Kevin Fitzpatrick who helped when available.

Also a big thank you to Kate, Ciara and Annette for their assistance and help all year.

It's been a privilege to work with the girls and I wish them all well in their future footballing days.

### **Minor Ladies by Fergus Bradley**

This years Minor Ladies season was a great improvement on the year before.

With the support of the 16s coaching team led by Damian Doyle there was a much-improved turnout from that section.

The 2023 results were a reflection of a struggle to attract enough players to field strong teams, with only one win and a meek exit from the championship in the first round.

This years league performance was much improved with wins against Bosco, Ballymartin, and Bredagh B and gaining the points against Glen and Dundrum who couldn't field. A narrow defeat by Shamrocks and reverses against Kilcoo and Annaclone left the girls in fourth place level on points with 3rd placed Shamrocks.

There were positive signs going into championship, which was much earlier than last year. We were paired against a Bredagh B side, in round one, who had defeated the girls last year. In an open and attacking game the girls ran out winners by a goal.

In the semi final the girls faced a much fancied Dundrum team and in what was certainly one of the games of the season, at any grade, the Blues again prevailed in a game which could have gone either way by a goal margin again.

The Championship final would be against a Saul team who had dropped down from the division above. In fairness the girls would have needed their strongest team out and a lot to go their way on the day but it wasn't to be.

Overall this was a very successful season. The improvement of so many players led to results on the pitch. Five minor players made their debuts for the Senior Ladies this year with many of them playing an important part in the winning of the Clubs first Adult Championship.

The cooperation and overlap between the U16s, Minors and Seniors in terms of training and support this year has undoubtedly contributed to probably the most successful year in the Clubs LGFA history.

Well done to Alicia Jones who played for the Down PDP team this year, and good luck to the girls who have been called up for trials for Down Minors.

A huge thanks to all the players and their parents and guardians. Thanks also to the Support from Mike and Anne Barnett, Colette and Ben Lock, Damian Doyle, Ciaran Rice, Kate and CD, Kevin Fitzpatrick, Brian Murphy and the many Senior Ladies who helped out.

Thanks also goes to our Chairman, the Senior Committee, the football Committee and anyone else who has made this year such an enjoyable one for all involved.

## **024 Senior Ladies Season Overview - Brian Murphy.**

### **Targets for 2024 (Set by Club Chairman Paul McKibbin)**

At the start of the year, Club Chairman Paul McKibbin outlined two main goals for the Senior Ladies team:

- 1. Secure Division 2 League Status**
- 2. Win the Down Junior Championship**

Both of these targets were achieved by the ladies with determination, teamwork, skill, and a boundless resilience.

- Division 2 League Status:**  
The goal to secure Division 2 status was accomplished by the narrowest of margins. The team secured this vital position with a **one-point win over Saval in Moygannon**, a thrilling victory that was crucial to our season's success.
- Down Junior Championship:**  
The Senior Ladies team triumphed in the **Down Junior Championship Final** with a well-earned victory over **Mayobridge**. This win marked the second of our set targets for 2024, demonstrating the team's resilience and ability to perform under pressure.
- Ulster Championship:**  
The team's performance in the **Ulster Championship** was a source of immense pride. Although we were narrowly defeated in the final by **Downings of Donegal** after extra time, the team showed great character and skill, only losing by **one point** in a highly competitive match.
- Kilmacud Sevens Tournament:**  
The team also participated in the **Kilmacud Sevens Tournament**, an important experience that provided valuable exposure to a different competitive format, offering insights into our strengths and areas for improvement.

### **Acknowledgements**

- Club Chairman Paul McKibbin:**  
A special thank you to Club Chairman **Paul McKibbin** for his vision and leadership in setting clear targets for the team at the start of the season. His support and encouragement were instrumental in our success.
- Management Team**  
A big thank you to the **management team**, including medical teams and volunteers for their dedication and expertise in elevating the team's performance and whose behind-the-scenes work kept everything running smoothly. Their expertise helped the players refine key skills and elevate their understanding of tactical play, which was evident in the team's performance during the championship. The results of this coaching were key factor in our overall success.

- **Players:**  
To every player who contributed to the team's success, your hard work, commitment, and spirit were invaluable. Special mention to **Kate [c]**, **Emma [vc]**, for their leadership and efforts both in training and on the field, keeping the morale high even during the toughest parts of the season.
- **Support:**  
To our main sponsor Conrad Developments the community, families and wider club, your continued support and passion for the team were felt throughout the season. Thank you for standing by us during both the high and low points

## **Conclusion**

The 2024 season has been a year of achievement, growth, and perseverance. The team has met and exceeded many of its goals, particularly securing Division 2 status and winning the Down Junior Championship. The progression to the Ulster final and the positive impact to the clubs underage teams show the potential for even greater success in the future.

Looking ahead to 2025, the focus for the incoming management team should be on strengthening squad depth, improving consistency, and continuing to develop both individual and collective skills to build on the solid foundation laid this year.