



Chairperson's Address to Fermanagh GAA County Convention 2022

Is mor an honour dom a bheidh anseo anocht ar oiche do CLG Fhear Manach.

Tonight, it's a great honour as county chairperson to welcome you to our 2022 convention here in the SWC.

I would like to thank everyone at SWC for their assistance with the organisation of this evening's county convention and thanks also to Fr Brian for celebrating mass for all deceased members of the association in the county.

As I reflect on my first year in office, I feel tremendous pride and appreciation having witnessed the dedication shown by all the clubs in the county to the ethos of the Association "Where we all belong". The new club championship structures provided clubs with the opportunity to showcase their facilities and each one of our clubs stepped up to the mark. Once again, the clubs in the county displayed leadership in our community by volunteering at vaccination centres. This commitment was recognised by Ulster GAA when they invited all the vaccination volunteers to a meal in the Westville hotel and provided complimentary tickets for the Fermanagh V Tyrone UFC game in Brewster Park.

The change to the round robin format for our Senior and Intermediate championships proved to be a great success and fulfilled the objective of providing more championship games for the clubs. I must also congratulate the coverage provided by Fermanagh GAA TV under the guidance of our assistant secretary Phil. It was amazing to see the professional approach adopted by all involved, even though some improvisation was required when a power supply had to be sourced from across the border, I don't think our treasurer has received the bill yet. In total over 40 matches were televised. Thanks also to Monaghan Bros for their continued sponsorship of Fermanagh GAA TV. As our treasurer will confirm, vital income is generated by the televising of the games and an analysis of the viewing data will reveal that our matches are viewed all around the world.

The move to online ticketing for our games proceeded with caution and unlike some other counties we still prevailed with a hybrid system whereby patrons could still pay at the gate. I want to put on record my thanks to all involved in the setting up of the system and especially our treasurer Sean and his merry band of gatemen/women who covered the gates at all our games no matter what the weather. Also, a special work of thanks to all the clubs who made their grounds available for matches sometimes at very short notice.

The introduction of the split season brought some form of certainty to the overall fixture calendar. Nationally this new format was well received by both county and club players, but it remains to be seen whether a congested club fixture plan during the second half of the year is the ideal solution.



The county secretary Tom has provided us with a comprehensive report on all County teams, it just remains for me to say thank you to all our managers, coaches, backroom teams, and players at every level in both hurling and football for the effort and commitment to Fermanagh GAA and for the many great days you give us in 2022.

In this evening's convention booklet, each subcommittee has provided a report on their activities during the year, I ask each one of you here to read the reports and highlight to your club the outstanding work that is been carried out at all levels within the county. Very often during my first year in office I was asked what certain committees were doing, you will find all the answers in our convention booklet. I want to put on record my sincere thanks to each committee and thank the Chairpersons and Secretaries for their leadership and guidance during the year. As I said at the youth convention, A very wise man one told me:

“Get the right people in place, then no matter what all else you might do wrong after that, the people will save you. That's what being a chairperson is all about.”

I can safely say, that without a doubt that in relation to all our sub committees I have the right people in place.

One of the most active subcommittees is CCC under the leadership of John and Phil, sometimes their efforts are not always appreciated but without their wisdom and understanding no games would be played. Well done on a great year's work.

Thankfully our Hearing's committee were not over worked this year, however they form a vital cog in the smooth running of the association within the county and decisions were always reached with due diligence and fairness. Thank you, Pat and Martin and all the members of the committee, for making yourself available very often at short notice.

At the start of the year the chairperson of the county health and wellbeing committee Damian McHugh asked me to nominate a designated charity, I choose Friends of The Cancer Centre their work focuses on three key areas – patient care, patient comfort, and research – and supports the services provided by the Health Service. Overall due to your generosity almost £4000 was raised during the year for this very worthy cause with more to come. Thank you and thanks to Damian and Anne and all the committee for their continued promotion of Health and Wellbeing within our clubs. Well done to the clubs who have received The Healthy Club accreditation and I encourage more clubs to get involved it can only be of benefit to everyone in the club and the local community.

During the year several issues surfaced in relation to the development of hurling this necessitated the bringing together of all those with an interest in hurling within the county in order that these issues could be addressed. As a result of this get together six areas of work were identified as outlined in the secretary's report. The implementation of these



specific areas must be a key priority at the start of 2023 if hurling is to continue to develop within the county. I look forward to working together with all those involved in hurling in so that we can continue to build on the good work that has already been done in the last number of years.

The whole scenario around catchment areas in respect of inter club transfers come to the fore once again during the year. Thanks to the work group ably chaired by Tiernach Mahon good progress has been made and hopefully an acceptable template will be forthcoming in the not-too-distant future which will be acceptable to all clubs.

I congratulate all clubs who have published their Club Plans this year and those who have received Club Maith accreditation. I encourage all other clubs to embark on developing a club plan and to obtain Club Maith accreditation, should funding become available at short notice both are essential criteria to obtain grant aid. Well done to Roslea Shamrocks, St Macartan's Aghadrumsee on receiving their Ulster GAA Club Awards. A very special congratulations to Peter Carty on receiving the Ulster Presidents Award for lifetime service to the Association. Thoroughly deserved.

Congratulations to all clubs from U13 up to senior level that won trophies this year. Well done to the clubs that went on to represent the county at Provincial level, Lisbellaw who were narrowly defeated in the UIHC after extra time, Enniskillen Geals in the UCSFC who reached the semi-final only to succumb to the reigning All Ireland club champions Kilcoo, Devenish who were defeated by Castlerahan in the 1st round of the UCIFC and The First Fermanagh's who reached the semi-final of the UCJFC and lost out to Drumlane from Cavan.

It was indeed a joy to witness the return of Scór naÓg and Scór Sinsear, to my recollection for Tráth na gCeist 19 clubs took part. Ciaran our Cultural Officer put in a tremendous amount of effort and commitment into revitalising Scor. Thanks to the clubs that participated, and I would appeal to other clubs to do everything in their power to enter Scor competitions at all levels in 2023. It should be noted that some club members came out of retirement to take part.

I don't know how many of you received emails from me during the year requesting that you send me money, fortunately I don't think anyone answered my request. Thanks to Phil and Niall for highlighting these scams but if you are feeling guilty about not sending on the money you can give it to me after convention. Practically everything within the association is now IT based, meetings, registration, correspondence even admission to games etc. We are indeed fortunate to have so many IT literate members on our committees and within the clubs.



Often a lot of work within the GAA goes unseen, none more so than the whole area of safeguarding, fortunately or maybe unfortunately I have witnessed first hand the complex nature of the work that our County Children's officer Anita encounters in her role. She has carried out this work in an efficient and confidential manner as only she can. On behalf of all the clubs in the county, I say thank you Anita.

Our PRO Deirdre has guided me through my first year in office and the County chairperson's forward at the front of the match day program is always well put together. I always have to read it straight away to find out what I have said. Thank you, Deirdre.

The Youth Committee in conjunction with CCC provided a comprehensive program of games at all age grades during the year. One extract from Leanne's report needs consideration," U13 and U17's in particular need to commence at the end of July, to ensure that the burdens of this season on our officials, isn't repeated in 2023". So, food for thought as we move forward.

To our coaching staff under the direction of Teresa McNabb Fermanagh Games Development Manager, thank you for all your hard work and dedication throughout the year. The Coaching & Games Report contained in tonight's convention booklet outlines in detail the extraordinary amount of activity that was undertaken by our coaches this year. It is important that all clubs are made fully aware of both the amount of work undertaken by our county coaches and the assistance that they can provide to clubs.

Incidents across the country involving match officials have hit the headlines, let me state that there is absolutely no place in the GAA for this form of abuse either verbally, physically, or even from keyboard warriors who use social media platforms to hurl vile abuse at referees, remember like us all referees are volunteers they have families. Let those who decide to indulge in such abuse take a whistle in their hand themselves. During the year I attended many games and according to those present it appeared that the referee was wrong 50% of the time, mind you one of the clubs involved in shouting at the referee had no club referee of their own. It's as simple as this and you have heard it all before, if we have no referees, we will have no games. I appeal to all clubs please take responsibility for the actions of your team mentors and players and fully support the Give Respect Get Respect Initiative, made the recruitment of referees in your club a key objective.

To all our referees I say thank you. Congratulations to all our inter-county referees who have officiated at many matches across the country. To Fergal our referees' appointments officer, I really don't know how you do it, especially during the months of Sept and October, thank you

Work to upgrade The Fermanagh GAA Centre of Excellence at Lissan is continuing at pace under the expert guidance of the Safety and Facilities committee chaired by Sean Donnelly.



This ambitious project requires funding and thankfully Club Éirne under the leadership of Gerard Tracey (Chairperson) has stepped up to the mark with their fund-raising initiative, 'Win a house in Fermanagh'

I appeal to all clubs in the county to fully support this initiative, Gerard will without doubt present a comprehensive report outlining in detail what has been done and what still needs to be done to realise target sales. We are indeed fortunate to have such a proactive Club Éirne committee and I thank each one of them. A special mention to our sponsor Patsy Treacy who has worked strenuously to promote this fund-raising initiative having sold well over 100 tickets to date, maybe we could all follow his example.

Thanks to all our sponsors as listed in the secretary's report, they are the financial lifeblood of our association and provide much needed resources for the promotion of our games. They support us, so where possible please support them, although I do sincerely hope the sponsor of the JFC Peter Carty doesn't get too much support.

Thanks to everyone involved in the smooth running of county and club matches at Brewster Park from the ladies that make the tea, to Greg who supplies the chocolate biscuits and tea for the media, but a special word of thanks to the grounds committee who have the unenviable task of having the pitch prepared for matches, well done.

At National level, The GAA at congress voted overwhelmingly to prioritise integration between the association, camogie and women's football. Former president Mary McAleese has agreed to chair the integration process and the sooner this becomes a reality the better. We look forward to working more closely with the LGFA especially around the whole area of fixtures and venues.

Age grades is another issue that have been debated at club level throughout the county and numerous times at Provincial and National level. There appears to be an eagerness at National level to introduce U17 and U19 county age grades, however several questions need addressed, a county like fermanagh with a small player base could only operate with decoupling at U17, what can be put in place to link U19 to senior level and where does that leave the internal age grades within the county. As they say, say nothing until you hear more.

Finally to my fellow officers I say thank you for all you help and support during my first year as Cathaóirleach, a special word of thanks to our extremely dedicated County Rúnaí Tom Boyle who kept me on the straight and narrow during the year, to our very hard-working and efficient County Treasurer Sean Burns, anytime I phoned Sean he was somewhere on the Sligo Rd either going to a match or coming from a meeting and our rúnaí cúnta Phil Flanagan who wears many hats, and possesses the ability to construct a master fixture plan that caters for the overall games program at all levels.



I want to extend to all who have suffered the loss of a loved one in the last twelve months our deepest condolences.

Ar dheis lamh De go raibh a anamacha.

In conclusion I thank you the clubs for your support throughout the year and I wish all present and your families a Happy Christmas and a successful 2023.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir.

Brian Armitage

Cathóirleach