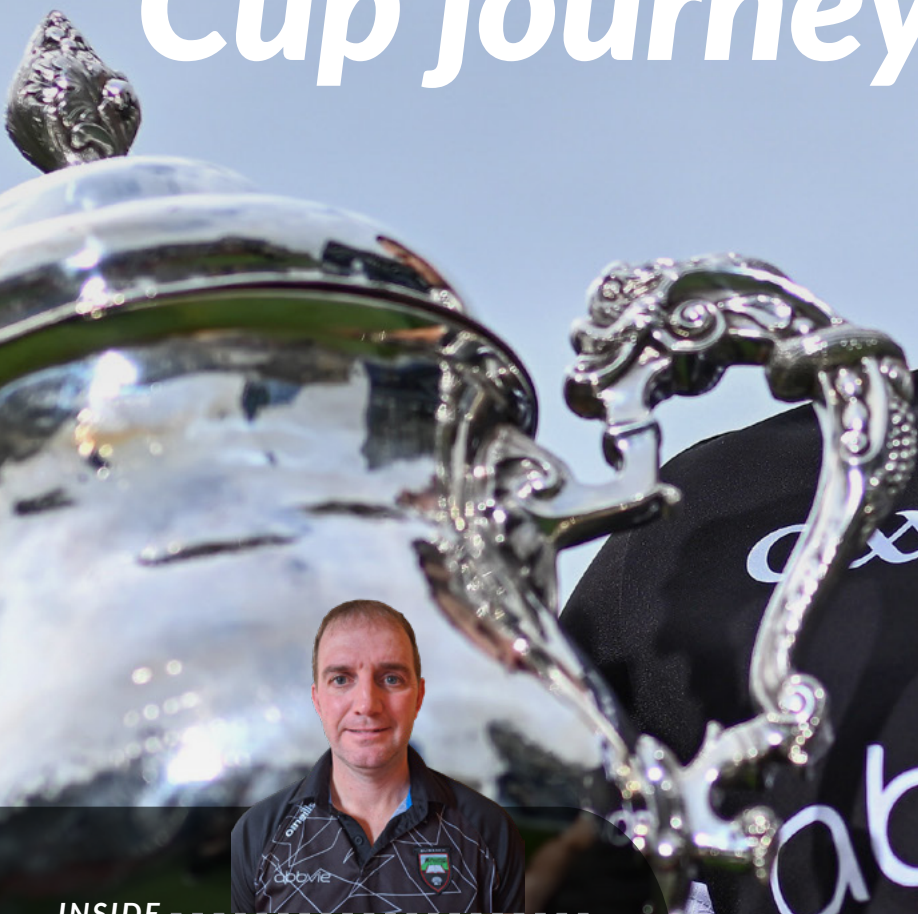


BLACK & WHITE

ISSUE 4 SUMMER 2024

A NEWSLETTER FROM CLUB SLIGO

Sligo's Tailteann Cup journey



INSIDE

LIAM Óg GORMLEY

We talk to Sligo's Head of Coaching and Games on his grá for the GAA

PLAYER WATCH

with Alan McLoughlin

for all the latest news see sligogaa.ie/ClubSligo

 **Club
Sligo**
Supporting Club,
Supporting County



YOUR SUPPORT HELPS ON AND OFF THE PITCH

You might have started to notice some changes around the place as Sligo GAA continues to invest in upgrading and improving our facilities.

Already this year, we replaced the dug-outs and pitch perimeter fence in Markievicz Park, which has led to enhanced views for supporters. This work, carried out by Rogers Fencing, was supported by an infrastructure grant of €120,000 from Croke Park.

We also completed a Skills Wall at the Centre of Excellence, which was supported by a Sports Capital grant of €100,000, with the work carried out by Cluain Dara Construction.

We will continue to work on improving our pitches over the summer with sanding and overseeding being



carried out by North West Landscaping. Thanks to our hard-working facilities committee for bringing these projects to completion: Richard Brennan, Pdraig Clancy, Michael Jacob, Joe Taaffe, Ronan Higgins, Pat Clifford and Eamonn McMunn.

MEMBERSHIP 2024

Platinum Membership (€1,500 per year)

- Entitled to purchase two All-Ireland football and hurling final tickets.
- Invitation for two people to attend post-match meal with team and team management.
- Six entries each month to "Club Sligo" draw.
- Official Sligo GAA O'Neills jersey and O'Neills jacket.
- Annual car sticker.
- Two free passes for Sligo Senior Championship final
- Photo publicity and media/social media promotion.
- Name listed in home National League and county final match programmes.

Standard Membership (€240 per year)

- Entry into 12 monthly "Club Sligo" draws per year.
- Official Sligo GAA O'Neills jersey or O'Neills jacket (new membership only).
- Annual car sticker.
- Free pass to Sligo Senior Club Championship final.
- Invitation to meet-and-greet night in Centre of Excellence prior to the football and hurling championships.
- Bonus members draw for two All-Ireland football and two All-Ireland hurling final tickets.



MEMBER DRAW RESULTS



Dermot Gannon, winner of the top prize of €500 in our March draw, is pictured receiving his cheque from Sligo GAA Treasurer Cormac Kearns.

JANUARY

Prize	Name	Address
€500	Alan Gilmartin	Maugheraboy
€100	Gerry McGwyne	New York
€100	St. John's GAA Club	
€100	Michael Jacob	Enniscrone
€100	RSS Document Management	Collooney
€100	Anthony Willilis	Riverstown

FEBRUARY

Prize	Name	Address
€500	Michael Tuohy	Riverstown
€100	Gerry Ballantine	Dromahair
€100	Keith Gilroy	Dromore West
€100	Darren Kearns	Geevagh
€100	Pat & John Clifford	Carraroe
€100	Michael Kilcoyne	Drumcliffe

MARCH

Prize	Name	Address
€500	Dermot Gannon	Tubbercurry
€100	Gerry Quinn	Pearse Road
€100	John Marren	Lavagh
€100	Michelle Lavelle	Enniscrone
€100	RSS Document Management	Collooney
€100	Andrew Kearns	Sooley

APRIL

Prize	Name	Address
€500	Ollie Lee	Tubbercurry
€100	Mary Kilgannon	Dromore West
€100	Michael Jacob	Enniscrone
€100	Pat McGrath	Ballymote
€100	Shamrock Gaels	Coola
€100	Siobhan O'Connor	Kevinsforth Heath



My Club Sligo

NAME: Martin Horan
CLUB: Calry/St. Joseph's
CLUB SLIGO MEMBER: 12 years



WHY DID YOU BECOME A MEMBER?

I have been a Sligo GAA supporter for over 60 years. I have fond memories of my Dad bringing me to my first Connacht final in 1965 (Sligo v Galway) in Tuam Stadium. I have supported Sligo teams at all home games and travelled all over Ireland to away matches in several county grounds as well as memorable trips to London and New York. I am very happy and proud to be a Sligo Club Member to contribute in some small way to the continuous improvement of underage and adult county teams.

FAVOURITE CLUB GAA MOMENT?

My favourite club moment was when Calry/St. Joseph's won their first Intermediate Championship in 2004 and I was part of the team management.

FAVOURITE COUNTY GAA MOMENT?

My favourite county moment was when Sligo won the Connacht Senior Championship in 2007 after a lapse of 32 years and my son Fergus was part of the winning panel.

'THE GRÁ FOR THE GAME STARTED REALLY, REALLY YOUNG'

The Black & White talks with **Liam Óg Gormley**, Head of Coaching and Games with Sligo GAA

Through school, college and his working life, Gaelic games have been a constant in the life of Liam Óg Gormley.

Reared in Bunninadden in south Sligo in a GAA household, Liam Óg played for Bunninadden throughout his childhood while attending Sligo matches and other intercounty games across Connacht with his father. "That love, that grá for the game came really, really young," he says.

As well as club and school football at Banada Abbey (now St Attracta's) Liam Óg played for Sligo at U16, Minor and U21 level. "I was on the senior panel for a short period of time too," he says, "but probably wasn't good enough to be a senior player".

Throughout it all, Liam Óg knew that whatever he did in life it had to involve sport. "I went to college at Ulster University in Jordanstown and qualified as a PE teacher but

never taught PE because I went straight from college into the Head of Coaching and Games job here in Sligo in May 2006 and have been in it ever since," he says.

As well as organising games development in schools and clubs across the county and the academies at the Centre of Excellence in Scarden, Liam Óg has also kept his hand in at coaching. "I've been club coaching since I was 16 years of age. I've qualified up to Award 2 level coaching, and I'm a qualified coach developer to train up coaches as well. I do some coaching in the underage academies here in Scarden, I do a bit in Summerhill College, and I coach the senior team in Ballymote where I now live as well."

When Scarden became operational in 2016 (with the official opening in 2017) Liam Óg's job immediately changed for the better. "Scarden was a massive game changer because it gave us a home. It gave a focal point

for the kids that this is the home of Sligo GAA – this is what Sligo GAA is about. You weren't making a hundred phone calls a week trying to beg clubs for pitches and stuff like that," he says.

"We've got to have a long-term process of how we develop the kids, and we try to make it that they never feel that they're gone out of the system, that there's always a chance down the road..."

"You had a home, and the kids knew where they were going and parents knew that there was a set place that they were going to every week, and they could work their schedule in and around that. Having this really good place to go kind of changed the mindset of the kids, the parents, the coaches, everyone involved in it.

"For us in coaching and games it was a massive, massive change in a very positive way. And now the additional support of having access to Summerhill's full size astro gives another bit of certainty about when you are organising something, that it's going to go ahead."

As well as those practical benefits, Liam Óg believes Scarden has brought broader benefits to Sligo GAA. "It has gelled the whole thing together. There was always a lot of people working really, really hard to make Sligo successful, a lot of the clubs and the schools were working hard. We were starting to grow the

BACKROOM TEAM

Games Development Coordinators Football

WEST SLIGO **Conor Gormley**
SOUTH SLIGO **Pat Kilcoyne**
EAST SLIGO **James Mitchell**
NORTH SLIGO **Nathan Boyle**

Games Development Coordinator Hurling

Darragh Cox
Head of Athletic Development
Sean Boyle



Liam Óg pictured with members of Cloonacool GAA who received their jerseys for winning the GAAmigos skills competition.

academies but, from the coaching and games side of things, the thing that helped to solidify everything was the centre here in Scarden," he says. When it comes to the academies at Scarden, the philosophy that informs youth development is to keep as many players as possible involved for as long as possible and to always leave the door open for a player who has been cut to return.

"We've got to have a long-term process of how we develop the kids, and we try to make it that they never feel that they're gone out of the system, that there's always a chance down the road that if you keep working hard and you keep putting in the effort that something might change for you," he says.

"And because we're so small, we can keep a great eye on everything that's happening and get a player back into the system very quickly. That's our advantage over a Mayo or a Galway, where they are very big and fellas can slip through the net very quickly, whereas our net is a lot tighter."

An essential aspect of the academy set-up is that the coaching element works in parallel with athletic development spearheaded by Head of Athletic Development for Sligo GAA Sean Boyle and his team of coaches.

Liam Óg also oversees the commitment to bringing Gaelic games to primary and secondary

schools across the county through the Club Development Officer programme, which is jointly funded by Connacht GAA, Sligo GAA and the clubs. "The development officers are in the primary schools from February to the end of June and our fulltime Games Development Coordinators (GDCs) go into them at the back end of the year," he says.

The GDCs – Conor Gormley, Pat Kilcoyne, James Mitchell, Nathan Boyle and Darragh Cox (hurling) – also work with the secondary schools on an ongoing basis.

Liam Óg says having the full-time staff is essential to delivering Sligo GAA's programme. "We cannot operate without the volunteer, but the volunteer also can't operate without us because they would have too much to do," he says.

"They need people that can put the structure and programmes in place and support them with organising things that will help them improve, whereas we could put all those things in place, but if we don't have the great volunteers that we have in the county, we're doing it for nothing.

"The support of the guys in Scarden is really important as well – Eamonn McMunn and Pádraig Clancy who manage the facilities are a massive part of the team. We've a very good coaching officer in Peadar Niland and Brendan Gillen from the academy side of things,

At the time of going to print, Liam Óg and his team were gearing up for a hectic period from the end of May through July. "We're flat out for the summer because we do GAA sports days in the schools. They go through to the end of June and then you are into Cúl Camps for the month of July and into August," he says.

Liam Óg sees the Cúl Camps as having three benefits for the GAA. "It's a great promotional tool, a worldwide brand; if you take a picture on holiday, you will likely see the Cúl Camp jersey somewhere in it.

"It's also an opportunity for kids to see if they like Gaelic games over an intensive period, and for us to train up large numbers of coaches. We take on 80 to 90 coaches every summer, so it's an opportunity for our young players to do a bit of coaching and make a bit of money over the five weeks. For us, it allows us to introduce them to coaching and their coaching module as well as their garda vetting and getting their child safeguarding done."

Sligo is one of the only counties in Ireland that has a camp in every single club. Two inclusive camps will also be run in Sligo this year. The Cúl Camps run throughout July for five straight weeks.

CÚL CAMPS IN NUMBERS

80+ COACHES **5** WEEKS

26 CAMPS **24** LOCATIONS

2,900+ CHILDREN AGED 6 TO 13

and that's supported by the steering committee – Seán Carroll, Cormac Kearns, Deirdre Gethins and Pádraig McKeon. It's about a lot of people working together to get things done."



Liam Óg speaking at the GAA Games Development Conference in 2008.



NEW BLOOD BRINGS FRESH PASSION TO SENIOR FOOTBALLERS

Sligo's senior footballers are on a strong performance streak as the progression of new blood into the panel has reinvigorated the side.

Some 18 of the 38 players now training with the senior team have been introduced since 2023; nine of those were in the match-day squad against Galway in the Connacht semi-final in Markievicz Park.

Sligo started off the year with some strong performances in Division 3, encouraging having only moved up into the division this year. Despite an unlucky start to the campaign in which they lost out to Clare in Ennis after going down to 13 men, Sligo went on to have two good wins over Wicklow in Sligo and Limerick in Rathkeale before delivering one of the best performances

of the season when they defeated Antrim at Markievicz Park by 1-20 to 1-13.

Sligo already secured Division 3 status despite being beaten by Down in Páirc Esler and even had a slim chance of promotion to Division 2 at one stage. But those chances were dashed with the draw with Offaly at home before they ended off the League with a flourish by beating Westmeath in Markievicz Park in their last game. After a comprehensive victory over Leitrim in the first round of the Championship, Sligo had a heartbreakingly narrow loss to Galway in the Connacht semi-final at Markievicz Park.

Sligo went into the Tailteann Cup and straight to battle against Wexford at home where Sligo came out with a six-point win, following that up with a 16-point hammering of Tipperary at Semple Stadium. Between the two games, Sligo scored a total of 5-43, impressive by anyone's standards. On June 2, Sligo's draw against Antrim in Cavan – in what was the highest-scoring goalless Senior Football Championship game in history – saw Sligo top the table in Group 2.

U20s DREAMS DASHED BUT HOPE FOR NEXT YEAR

Sligo U20s football team went into the season with the weight of a county's expectations on their shoulders.

Following back-to-back Connacht titles, there was high hopes they could make it three in a row – especially as many of last year's squad were still underage.

"There was a feeling across the county – and within the squad – that we could emulate what we achieved last year," U20 manager Paul Henry tells *Black & White*. "Unfortunately, we never got to the level of promise that the guys had showed, despite performing well during challenge games pre-Championship, including beating Kerry who ended up in the All-Ireland final."

On their first day out – against Roscommon in Markievicz Park – Paul says the team "felt flat" and ended up with a draw while against Galway in Tuam, they created lots of chances but didn't finish them off, leading to a loss.

"We struggled against Leitrim at home and, in the end, were very lucky to get a draw. In our final group game against Mayo, we were poor in the first half but pulled off a great second-half performance to win.

"I had hoped this would spark something in the lads for the semi-final but Galway performed so strongly in the first half; it was too much ground for us to make up."

Paul says the team didn't have too many injuries or adversities and praised the hard work and dedication of the entire coaching team who worked with the U20s during the year.

"It just didn't work out for us. The other teams were ready to do battle to ensure that we didn't do the three in a row. The lads were all disappointed as they did have such high hopes, but we just never seemed to click."

Paul is upbeat about next year's U20s team saying many players will still be available for selection. "There is also a batch of strong, new players coming through that is going to re-energise the group so I think you will see a very strong U20 Sligo team next year."



NAME: Alan McLoughlin **AGE:** 27
POSITION: Forward **CLUB:** St. Molaise Gaels

Sligo GAA fans will have noticed a new, yet familiar, face lining out for the senior footballers – and making a stir. Alan McLoughlin came on from the bench for the first League game and has started ever since, selected on the GAA's Tailteann Cup Team of the Week after his sterling performance against Wexford. But for those steeped in the club scene, Alan isn't a stranger. The St Molaise Gaels captain has played senior club for nine years. But what about county?

"I was involved with the seniors in 2019 for the League; I stepped away for various reasons. This is my first proper year," Alan tells *Black & White*.

"I had been asked but it wasn't the right time for me. It was always something I wanted to do. When Tony called this year, I was ready. I'm sure some people will think I have come out of nowhere but that doesn't bother me. Those familiar with the club game will know I have been around a long time. It just shows there are different routes into the team. I played with Sligo at Minor and U21, making two Connacht finals. While I stepped back from county, the door was open for me when I was ready. It worked out OK but the best route is through the development squads."

Born and reared in Maugerow, Alan played as soon as he could kick a ball at Scoil Naomh Molaise, Grange Post Primary and with St Molaise Gaels. Alan's father, Jimmy, who played with Maugerow, brought Alan to all the club games from a young age. His four brothers and two sisters are also involved. His two older brothers, Niall and Jamie, play alongside Alan at club level while his sister Sorcha played underage and senior for Molaise. "My younger brother also played underage and I have a niece on the Senior Molaise and Sligo Minors teams so it's definitely in the family," says Alan.

On making Team of the Week, Alan is modest. "We had many standout players but it is a nice recognition. We had two more on the latest team (Darragh Cummins and Niall Murphy); it's great to see Sligo lads getting recognised.

"There is definitely a buoyant atmosphere in the camp; a real good buzz. We have a great mix off all age groups and experiences and great progress is being made by management. When you are winning games, there's that good vibe."

Sporting moment:

Sligo winning Connacht Championship in 2007.

Hobbies:

Watching GAA, soccer, snooker, darts – I love all sports.

MIXED SEASON FOR SENIOR HURLERS



Sligo senior hurling manager Stephen Sheil has reflected on a first season in charge in which his team competed well in the League to reach the Division 3A final but were relegated from the Christy Ring Cup after falling short in each of their five matches.

While he says that a total of 28 players having short or long-term injuries during the season had a clear impact, he acknowledges that there were issues with consistency with the side only really performing in half

of matches rather than for the full 70 minutes.

With players now returning to their clubs, Stephen does draw some positives from the campaign. "The style of play worked well. We were working the ball out well and delivering it to the areas we wanted it in. On form, we were very good but too inclined to lose shape and drive when going behind. You're not going to be on top for 70 minutes, but you have to manage the damage when the other team is on top," he tells *Black & White*.

"The main positive was the full panel and backroom staff gelled. Everyone had each other's backs. Christy Ring relegation was a blow, but we can bounce back in the Nicky Rackard Cup next season."

Stephen will now review the season with the County Board, and he anticipates some additions when the squad regroups. "There are some areas of the pitch where we're very short," he says.

He also hopes to accelerate the process of what he wants to implement next season. "We only scratched the surface with some of the plans and processes that we want to put into place. That surprised me, but we'll get there," he says.

HUGE IMPROVEMENT IN U20 HURLERS DESPITE FALLING SHORT

When Barry Keenan took over as Sligo's U20 hurling manager last year, he had two weeks to prepare for their opening championship game against Derry – the toughest team they could have drawn.

Sligo had not entered the All-Ireland U20B Championship the previous year, but the management team wanted to push ahead. "We were putting a team on the field no matter what. For the sake of Sligo, the U20s had to get going to develop guys going into senior," Barry says.

Sligo lost that day, but managed to put 3-9 on the scoreboard. Unfortunately, the U20B Championship is a knockout competition and it is their only competition so their season was over. But this year, it was a different story. "This year we gave ourselves every chance. We put a brilliant programme of training and practice matches together and saw a huge improvement in the players."

Their opening match, an All-Ireland quarter-final, was against Roscommon at Markievicz Park. "Unfortunately for us we fell short. We didn't turn up in the first half.

We were down 2-12 to 0-6 at half time, and the game ended up 3-15 to 2-15 for Roscommon. We had an unbelievably strong second half, but it wasn't enough.

"These are honest young lads and are genuinely a pleasure to work with. It's just unfortunate that the B Championship is a knockout so it's a very unfair format for young hurlers," says Barry, who thanked the County Board, parents and the management team for their support.



NEXT ISSUE



We talk to **Aidan 'Scoop' Carty**
kitman with the Senior Footballers