

BLACK & WHITE

ISSUE 7 SUMMER 2025

A NEWSLETTER FROM CLUB SLIGO

The BIG Markievicz Makeover

----- **INSIDE**

PLAYER WATCH

with **Nathan Mullen**

BIG INTERVIEW

Former Chairperson **Joe Taaffe** on his life-long connection to Sligo GAA

DEVELOPMENT SQUADS

FOCUS ON our **U16 Development Squad**

for all the latest news see sligogaa.ie/ClubSligo

 **Club Sligo**
Supporting Club,
Supporting County



Markievicz Makeover

Work is well underway on the significant regeneration of the playing surface at Sligo GAA's main ground, Markievicz Park.

The entire project is costing just over €120,000 and was funded by the Croke Park Capital Infrastructure Fund. It will see the grounds ready for use by the middle of next year. The decision to resurface the pitch was made due to the unstable condition of the pitch as seen in the early stages of this year's National League. A thorough analysis and assessment were carried out by specialist expert advisors and agronomist Eddie Connaughton was appointed as an advisor.

In the first quarter of the year, the process for tendering and contractor selection was undertaken, with Prunty Pitches, from Newtownbutler in Co. Fermanagh, appointed as the contractor to undertake the resurfacing works. The

existing surface first had to be removed, which took place at the end of April, with the stripping of the worn-out surface to a depth of about 25mm.

The installation of pipework for the sprinkler system was installed before Wexford sand was delivered, and the new sand was blended with the pitch's base layer.

The surface was then levelled and fertilised. Seeding was delayed due to the exceptional spell of dry weather we experienced in April and May but has now been carried out with high-quality robust, modern ryegrass blend sports turf.

A plan is being put in place for the annual upkeep of the pitch which will include routine sand top dressing, fertilisation and robotic mower cutting, along with smarter management of warm-ups and match scheduling.



Picture of new surface taken in mid July 2025

It has been exciting seeing the transformation of Markievicz Park. We will continue to keep you updated on progress and we look forward to seeing the Men in Black back on the pitch by this time next year.

New Chairperson

Black & White would like to extend a warm welcome to Declan Rouse (left) as new Chairperson of Sligo GAA.

A native of Enniscrone, Declan was elected by delegates to the Sligo GAA County Committee at the end of May. Declan is well known to the Sligo GAA community due to his role in his club, Enniscrone/Kilglass, where he is current Chairperson, and as a member of the Sligo GAA Management Committee where he was the sitting Assistant Treasurer.

Declan takes over from Seán Carroll of Coolera/Strandhill who stood down from the role in April for personal reasons. We would like to extend our thanks to Seán for all the work he has done for Sligo GAA and wish him all the best for the future.

MEMBER DRAW RESULTS



Club Sligo draw winner Eamonn Cunningham of EJ Menswear being presented with his cheque by David Cummins, member of Club Sligo Finance Committee



Club Sligo draw winner Peter Devaney being presented with his cheque by John Clifford, member of the Club Sligo Finance Committee

JANUARY

Prize	Name	Address
€ 500	Gerard McDonagh	Athy, Kildare
€ 100	Vincent Hannon Architects	Sligo
€ 100	Ronan Hennessy	Knocknahur
€ 100	Micheál McHugh	Cliffoney
€ 100	Ollie Lee	Tubbercurry
€ 100	Brendan McHugh/Ronan Higgins	Gurteen

FEBRUARY

Prize	Name	Address
€500	The Glasshouse Hotel	Sligo
€ 100	Michael Kilcoyne	Drumcliffe
€ 100	Peter Devaney Recovery	Sligo
€ 100	Liam Óg & Sinead Gormley	Ballymote
€ 100	Thomas Haran	Grange
€ 100	Rouse Project Developments	Enniscrone

MARCH

Prize	Name	Address
€ 500	EJ Menswear	Sligo
€ 100	Barry Gilhooley	Bunninadden
€ 100	Tommy Carroll	Carraroe
€ 100	Kingsbridge Private Hospital	Sligo
€ 100	Finian Carroll	Athlone
€ 100	Michael Keane	Strandhill

APRIL

Prize	Name	Address
€ 500	Peter Devaney Recovery	Sligo
€ 100	Adrian Keane	Sligo
€ 100	Pat Donohue	Ballymote
€ 100	Francis & Ann Taaffe	Ballintogher
€ 100	Michael Kilcoyne	Drumcliffe
€ 100	Sligo Weekender	Sligo



My Club Sligo



NAME: Mary Kilgannon

CLUB: St Farnan's GAA club

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A MEMBER?

I couldn't put a figure on it but for a good few years!

WHY HAVE YOU BECOME A MEMBER?

My son Eamonn is involved in football and trains with the Sligo footballers, so there's that connection. More broadly, I show my support because I love to see young people involved in Gaelic football and hurling and any kind of sport. It's great to see people active.

FAVOURITE GAA MOMENT?

St Farnan's won the Sligo club intermediate championship in 2021. We're a small club so we suffer a lot from emigration and our young players heading away for the summer on student visas. To win that year was fantastic!

Your support of **Club Sligo** allows us to develop players and infrastructure across the county. This is Your Club Sligo.

TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP:

go to **sligogaa.ie**
email **administrator.sligo@gaa.ie**
call **071 9168750**



Gathering of members from around the county pay tribute to Joe Taaffe's contribution to Sligo GAA

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU. AND I HAD GREAT PEOPLE AROUND ME.

The Black & White speaks to Joe Taaffe on his life-long connection with Sligo GAA

Although regulars at Markievicz Park and other GAA grounds across the county are very familiar with his face, Joe Taaffe prefers to stay well in the background.

The St Michael's clubman has been involved in Sligo GAA since the early 1970s and is a former GAA Chairperson and Sligo County Board Ard Comhairle delegate. However, he is not a man for the limelight, quietly getting on with work behind the scenes.

Eldest child of Frank and Peggy, Joe grew up in Lavalley, Ballintogher with his seven siblings and his uncles' interest in football was instilled in him and his brothers from a young age.

Playing club football since 1965, Joe started with his local team Ballintogher until it stopped operating two years later. He joined Sooeey and then Shamrock Gaels whom he played with until the end of 1975.

Indeed it was in November 1975 when he attended his first county board meeting, when the Ballintogher club reformed. He continued to play with his club, renamed St Michael's in 1983, until 1996.

One memorable club game for Joe was the Divisional Final in 1980 when there were six Taaffes on the team as he lined out with all four brothers - and a cousin against Geevagh.

Chair of Ballintogher in 1981 to

1983, he took on the same role with St Michael's when it formed and, apart from two short breaks, still holds that role to this day.

A builder by trade, Joe still lives in Lavalley with his wife Ann where they raised four children: Aoife, Damien, Ciara and Donal and now enjoy their many grandchildren who all live close by.

COUNTY TIES

In 2001, Joe was elected to the Connacht Council, a role he held for nine years, and was also the county referee administrator from 1996 to 2009 until he was appointed Connacht Council Treasurer for three years and then moved on to managing gates across the county.

"When I took over organising the gates for the county, we were in financial trouble. We were in a lot of debt and some structure was needed to try and bring in more money," Joe says. "At the time, we were taking in around €43,000 on gates across the county and we were €1.5m in debt. People were being waved through at a lot of gates around the county and it was costing us; it wasn't really understood how much money it takes to keep things running."

By the time Joe stepped down from managing the gates at the end of 2023, that figure had almost quadrupled.

In 2014, Joe was elected Chair of Sligo GAA. It was a time when there was a lot of financial pressure on the county. "There was a big push on to raise money through Club Sligo, on the gates and in other ways. It really was a large focus of my time as chair," says Joe.

"We applied for National Lottery funding and got €300,000 for the development of Scarden which was a huge deal as we only had pitches there but no fencing, no lights, nothing and it wasn't really being used. The National Lottery funding kicked off the development.

"With this money, as well as grants from the Connacht Council, Croke Park and the money from the gates and Club Sligo, we have been able to develop Scarden, including the building, the car park, lights, the two pitches - as well as invest in Markievicz Park.

"It just goes to show that you can do things no matter how bad the situation may seem. This wouldn't have happened without the huge team in Sligo GAA who put so much time and effort into making it happen.

"It's all about the people around you. And I had great people around me. I'd like to thank all the people on the gates - too many to name - for their valued help during this time as well as Peter Greene, who was then Treasurer, John Clifford and John Murphy for all

JOE'S SLIGO GAA HIGHLIGHTS

1. Sligo defeating Mayo in Castlebar to become Connacht Champions in 1975
2. Winning the county title with St Michael's in 1992
3. Sligo playing New York at Gaelic Park in New York in 2002; the first time in decades that a championship game was held in the U.S.
4. Sligo defeating Galway in Roscommon to become Connacht Champions in 2007.

their work on Club Sligo. A special mention to Richard Brennan for helping me sorting out debtors and also helping organising the gates. Also, thanks to Eamonn McMunn for his outstanding contribution in the office and his help over the years."

Although he has stepped down from his county board roles - in February 2024, he finished up as being Central Council delegate, a role he held for five years - Joe is still embedded in Sligo GAA. When we initially tried to arrange this interview, Joe was on his way to Croke Park for a meeting and was heading straight from there to Enniskillen for Sligo's Tailteann Cup clash against Fermanagh.

Looking to the future, Joe would love to see more clubs getting more involved at county level. "Some clubs are great at getting involved but others just come in at the end of the year at convention and elect new committee members. Clubs are the county board and they have the power to change things. But some clubs see the county board as separate," says Joe. "We should all be working together for the common good. Everything that is being done at county - including the development squads - feeds back into the clubs."



Joe Taaffe getting a special presentation from Sligo GAA to mark his long years of service. The presentation was made by his cousin Anthony Willis during a celebration at The Innisfree Bar in Ballintogher at the end of last year.



Player Watch

NAME: Nathan Mullen AGE: 25

POSITION: Midfield CLUB: Coolaney/Mullinabreena

'Mindset' is a crucial part of Nathan Mullen's game and his general outlook on life. It's a strength that has helped him navigate the challenges of an impressive sporting and academic career.

As he continues his recovery from a hamstring injury, Mullen is also pursuing a PhD at the University of Galway, building on his degree in biomedical science and pharmacology. A career in medicine lies ahead, and he's currently undertaking his clinical attachments at St Vincent's Hospital in Dublin. "Injury recovery can be slow, but I've learned from people like Marc Mulholland and his Next Play Mindset that accepting where you are helps tackle big challenges. I'm on track to be back soon, I hope."

The south-west Sligo native grew up on a farm near Achonry and attended St Attracta's, Tubbercurry. He got his first taste of county football with the Sligo Development Squad. "I was mad about sport as a teenager - football, soccer, everything," says Nathan. He credits various coaches for aiding his development, including Pat Kilcoyne in his underage days, Colm McGee at St Attracta's, and Aidan Rooney during his days in the Sligo development panel. With sport dominating his free time, Nathan eventually decided to focus on Gaelic football with Coolaney/Mullinabreena. "I remember Aidan Rooney told us, 'You can be good at everything, but only great at one thing,' and that stuck with me - so I committed to football."

That decision, fully backed by his parents Damien and Fiona, paid off. His career flourished, culminating in a call-up to the senior Sligo panel. Nathan's club is also a constant support: after he won the Sigerson Cup with NUI Galway in 2022, Coolaney/Mullinabreena presented him with a special memento of the achievement.

The recent injury has been a tough test. Watching Sligo from the stands felt 'strange', he admits - but his positive mindset and disciplined focus are guiding him back. "Like I said, it's a slow process, but I'm getting there - and I'm excited for what lies ahead, in both my studies and football."

Favourite movie? Happy Gilmore

Favourite musicians? Amble



CATCH UP WITH OUR DEVELOPMENT SQUADS

Each week, the Sligo GAA Centre of Excellence at Scarden plays host to 367 young footballers and hurlers and dozens of coaches who volunteer their time to help the players get the most out of themselves as part of Sligo's Development Squads. No stone is left unturned in the effort to ensure the players needs are catered for. Indeed, this year, a six-week programme of maths grinds was on offer before training every Saturday morning for students preparing to sit their Junior and Leaving Certificate exams.

Across the two codes, there are seven development squads, with the U15 and U16 footballers also having extended panels. Some of those squads are still in the middle of their seasons, while some have finished for the year. Head of Games Development with Sligo GAA Liam Óg Gormley provides the *Black & White* with a brief update on most of the squads with an in-depth look at the U16 Development Squad on the opposite page.

U14 FOOTBALL

We have around 85 players training every Saturday morning. They get five national blitz days alongside challenge games. They've played two of their Connacht blitzes so far. They are seven-a-sides, and we bring two squads with 60 players in total. They've also played challenge games against Fermanagh and Leitrim. We have around 12 coaches working with them. The lead coach is our full-time staff member Conor Gormley.

U15 FOOTBALL

Our U15s are led by two full-time staff members, Pat Kilcoyne and Nathan Boyle. They have a squad of 60 and six coaches working alongside them. They train once a week. They have played two of their national games, beating Longford and Leitrim in the Humphrey Kelleher U15, which is the national competition. They also had a challenge game against Fermanagh.

The season is from March to mid-September. Then, along with all the other squads, they work with Sean O'Boyle on their athletic development through the winter. There is also an U15 extended panel of 20 players that trains fortnightly.

MINOR U17 FOOTBALL

The U17s have finished up. They played in the Connacht Championship, but it didn't go the way they would have wanted it to. Then they got a run in the All-Ireland Minor 'C' Championship and were beaten by Longford, the eventual winners, in the semi-final. The squad of 40 would have trained three times a week under lead coach Aidan Rooney along with Joe Neary and Fergus Leonard. Oisín Mc Donnell was S&C coach.



U20 FOOTBALL

The U20s were beaten in the Connacht semi-final by Roscommon. They had a decent season, picked up a couple of injuries that didn't help them, but they were only narrowly beaten by Roscommon in the Connacht semi-final. There were 32 in the squad training three times a week under Paul Henry and his management team of Enda Mitchell, Ross O'Carroll, John Marren and Gregory O'Regan. Stephen Scanlon was kitman and Fintan Kennedy was in charge of stats. Conor Igoe was S&C coach.

U15 HURLING

The U15 hurlers finished up their national competition when they were beaten by Monaghan in the Hibernia Cup. They had a squad of 38 players training every Sunday morning under John O'Callaghan, Barry O'Neill, Declan O'Brien, Davina Bulger and Enda Gallagher.

U17 HURLING MINOR

The U17 hurlers train twice a week at Scarden under manager Martin Feeney, Stephen Crowe, Jeff Hynes and Tony Quigley. They competed in the Celtic Challenge and were knocked out by Armagh. They worked with 30 players from January.

FOCUS ON U16 DEVELOPMENT SQUAD

Creating a positive environment for young players and helping players take responsibility for their own development are two of the key elements that Ownie Coyle likes to bring to the table as Manager of this year's U16 Development Squad.

The Donegal native, who teaches 4th class at Scoil Naomh Molaise in Grange, has been involved with the development squads since his current players were U14. "This year, in January, we started with in-house trial matches. We had over 50 of last year's U15s and about 60 lads in total. We wanted to make sure that we gave everybody an opportunity, so anybody that wanted to take part in the trial could take part whether they had been involved in development squads before or not," Ownie says.

Following the process Ownie and his team of coaches now work with a squad of 38. "It was difficult ringing parents informing them that their son wasn't going to be on the panel, however, we also maintain an extended panel for players who haven't made the main panel but have really good attitudes and really want to develop as players. So, they get the opportunity to continue their development, and we monitor and play them regularly," he says. "It gives lads the opportunity to develop in a county environment. Liam Óg Gormley does a lot of work with this group."

Aside from Ownie, the coaching team also includes James Mitchell, who is also a coaching development officer, and John Feeney from Easkey. Kyle Murray looks after S&C under the guidance of Sean O'Boyle and David Rolston of Easkey and the Shannon Blues is kitman. Keelan Cawley, who has 15 years' experience playing with Sligo seniors, has joined the coaching team to create a link between the U16s and the senior pathway. There is also great support through Scarden from Eamonn McMunn and Liam Óg.

The squad train on Saturday mornings and Monday evenings and, along with challenge matches, they compete in the Fr Manning Cup. To date they have played, Longford, Antrim, Tyrone and Donegal. Their first match in the competition was a good win against Longford at Scarden in April, followed by an away win against Offaly in July with the final group game against Leitrim in July.

"Our challenge matches and the Fr Manning Cup game went very well. We were competitive in them all, which was our goal, and we made sure that everyone got game time. That's the important thing at this stage. The focus at the moment is around individual development," Ownie says.

"From the outset, we try to give every player an opportunity. We try to engage with individuals as much as possible to create a very positive environment. You want players in a position where they're asking questions of themselves and their own development. We want the lads to be able to approach us



Members of the U16 Management Team, John Feeney, Ownie Coyle, James Mitchell and S&C coach Kyle Murray.

and talk to us about their next challenge in development. Communication is vital."

He says the number one thing he and the coaching staff have to remain aware of is that there is more going on in the lives of young players than football. "There's a lot of stuff going on in their lives. Small things to us as adults can be huge things to them. We have to be very conscious of that," he says.

"The lads are really enjoying it. It's a two-way thing; us coaches are really enjoying it also."

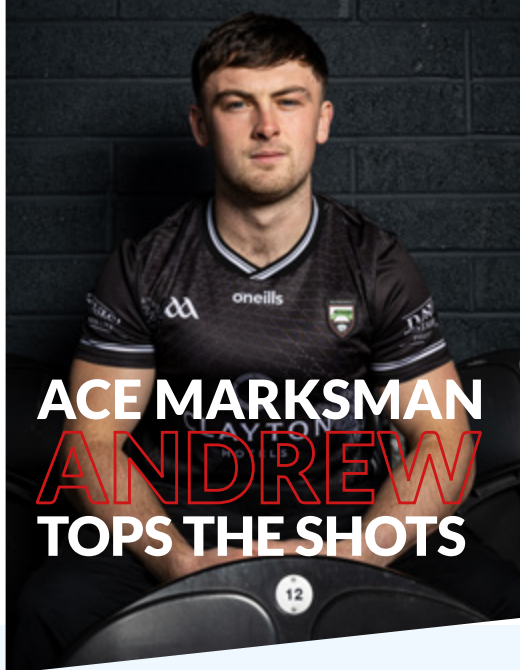
"That's where the individual connections come in and the individual communications with each player as opposed to speaking broadly to the whole squad. You try to focus on the individuals and understand them and get to know them. We make a point of interacting as much as possible. We don't always get it right, but we try our best with communication."

At the time of writing, over half the squad were preparing to sit the Junior Cert and play in club finals. "So, on Monday night we actually had ice creams on the pitch for the squad to take down the intensity of the session a little and ensure they had a bit of fun. There's a balance to get between striving for excellence and enjoyment. The lads also get Maths grinds in Scarden every Saturday before training for six weeks in the lead up to their exams."

This level of attention seems to pay dividends. "Training attendance is always very good. They seem to enjoy coming in. The facilities are fantastic. There's a very, very positive attitude around the camp," Ownie says.

"There are always new challenges, and we'll have lots of bumps in the road, but to date the feedback that we're getting from players and parents is that the lads are really enjoying it.





ACE MARKSMAN ANDREW TOPS THE SHOTS

After a promising early campaign, the Sligo hurling team's effort to reach the Nicky Rackard Cup final came up just short in their final game against Armagh in Tubbercurry. There was one bright spot however with Easkey's Andrew Kilcullen emerging as the leading scorer in the competition, with an outstanding total of 6-43 (61 points) from five games, 2-13 of which was from play. That include a haul of 4-7 scored against Fermanagh and he was twice named in the hurling team of the week during the campaign.

Over the past three seasons, through his exploits both for Easkey, which includes three successive Connacht Junior club titles, and with Sligo, Andrew has established himself as one of the leading forwards in hurling outside those participating in the Liam MacCarthy Cup. He has been Sligo's leading scorer for the last four years and was named in the 2022 Christy Ring, Nicky Rackard, and Lory Meagher Team of the Year.

PLANNING FOR NEXT YEAR



While the high summer sees intercounty competition come to a climax for the leading counties, for counties like Sligo that have exited the championship, the focus now is preparing for the next intercounty session which throws in six months from now.

This year Sligo GAA is in the unusual position of having to find new management teams for each of its county senior teams after the decisions of Tony McEntee, after five years, and Stephen Sheil, after two years, to stand down. Both have done a lot of good work and, while they exited their championships earlier than hoped, there is much to be positive about in the calibre and progress of the panels they had been working with.

For each team, Sligo GAA hopes to appoint a new

management team in advance of the forthcoming club championship campaigns which begin on July 26 for hurling and August 1 for football. Two separate selection committees have been established. Each committee consulted extensively inside and outside the county to establish who is available for, and interested in, the role. They then advertised for expressions of interest from which a shortlist of candidates will be invited for interview.

We look forward to talking with the new managers in an upcoming edition of *Black & White*.

"ON THE ASTRO..."

A new feature of the Centre of Excellence at Scarden has come into use since our last edition of *Black & White* with the completion of an artificial turf training area and skills wall. We will look at this in more detail in our next issue but it has already proven a big attraction, both in terms of taking the burden off the grass pitches and allowing us to do more, particular with younger players.



NEXT ISSUE

We focus on some of the **volunteers** who are vital to the smooth running of Club Sligo