

CUMANN LÚTHCHLEAS GAEL CILL CHAINNIGH

SECRETARY'S REPORT 2024

A Chairde, is mór an onóir dom mar Rúnaí Choiste Chontae Chill Chainnigh fáilte a chuir roimh gach éinne anocht go dtí Comhdhail Bliaintúil 2024 agus tuarascáil don bhliain a chur ós bhúr gcomhair. Ba mhaith liom freisin mo bhuíochas a ghabháil do gach éinne a chabhraigh le obair Chumann Lúthchleas Gael i gCill Chainnigh a chur chun tosaigh i rith na bliana seo. It is a huge honour and privilege to report on all of the work, activity and achievement that occurred in Kilkenny GAA during the past year. Whilst disappointing not to qualify for the All-Ireland Final, when one reflects on the season just gone by, winning the Leinster title for the fifth year in a row and qualifying for the Allianz League Final for a second consecutive year must be considered a very encouraging.

Senior Hurling

Walsh Cup:

Kilkenny's year on the playing fields commenced with a Walsh Cup game against Carlow on Tuesday January 9th. The original fixture, on the previous Sunday, was postponed due to fog. Two goals in the opening 5 minutes from Billy Ryan and Liam Blanchfield set the tone for what was to be a one-sided affair. Kilkenny led 2-12 to 0-5 at the break. Kilkenny notched 1-8 without reply at the start of the second half and ran out easy 5-22 to 0-9 winners in the end. It was hard to imagine that a short few months later the two sides would play out a draw in the Leinster Championship on an historic evening for Carlow Hurling. It was then on to John Locke Park in Callan where the Round 3 game versus Wexford in effect doubled as a semi-final. This was a keenly contested affair as would be expected between these fierce rivals. Scoring was evenly matched in the first half but 5 unanswered points in the closing 6 minutes pushed the Slaney sides ahead 0-12 to 0-6 at the break. Early in the second half Wexford were reduced to 14 men when Tomás Kinsella was issued with a straight red card. This seemed to galvanise the Wexford players, and they still maintained their 6-point interval lead (0-15 to 0-9) with just eleven minutes remaining. Wexford lost another player to a black card and Eoin Guilfoyle slammed the resultant penalty to the net. But 13-man Wexford responded well and replied with 2 quick points. Billy Ryan did goal in injury time, but the Wexford side maintained their lead to run out 0-18 to 2-11 winners. This qualified them to meet Galway in the decider a final they dutifully went on to win defeating Galway 1-21 to 0-16

- **Round 1: Kilkenny 5-22 Carlow 0-9**
- **Round 2: Wexford (0-18) Kilkenny (2-11)**

Allianz National Hurling League:

Kilkenny enjoyed a relatively successful group stage of the Allianz Hurling League, winning three of their five games and drawing one to finish 2nd in the group and qualify for a semi-final against Limerick. The campaign began with a home game against Wexford on 4th February when over 7,000 supporters attended UPMC Nowlan Park. There was little between the sides in the

opening half with Kilkenny leading at the break 0-9 to 0-5 having played with a strong wind and depending mainly on Eoin Cody frees for that lead. The inevitable Wexford resurgence came midway through the second half when they outscored the home side 1-5 to 0-1 in a ten-minute period. Billy Drennan was introduced with 15 minutes remaining and made an immediate impact converting 2 frees and a penalty to push Kilkenny into the lead again. But a very resilient Wexford hit back with four unanswered points to push them into the lead again approaching full time. But a second Billy Drennan penalty in injury time looked to have secured a home victory only to concede a late Wexford reprise in the next attack (2-16 to 2-16).

Next up was an away trip to Pairc Ui Chaoimh for a floodlit encounter against Cork. This was to prove another close encounter. Kilkenny played some of their best League hurling in the opening 20 minutes and at one stage enjoyed a nine-point lead. However, a late Cork rally where they hit 1-3 reduced the lead just 3 points at the break (0-13 to 1-7). The second half was a close affair, and the home side took the lead for the first time with 58 minutes on the clock. But Kilkenny showed tremendous character in the final quarter and an injury time point from John Donnelly secured a one-point victory (0-21 to 1-17)

In Round 3 Kilkenny welcomed an Offaly side who had drawn with Wexford in Round 2 to UPMC Nowlan Park. With the aid of a strong breeze Offaly led by 6 points at the interval (0-14 to 0-8). But within 8 minutes of the restart Kilkenny had reeled in the lead and an Eoin Cody goal shortly afterwards put the home side into a lead they would not relinquish. (1-26 to 1-19)

Next up was a visit to Ennis to take on an undefeated Clare side. This was the first of three games with Clare which would ultimately define the 2024 hurling season for Kilkenny. The game marked the first seasonal appearance for both Paddy Deegan and T J Reid. In a tight contest there was little between the sides, but Kilkenny were to rue the many wides particularly in the second half. Having played with the wind Kilkenny reached the break 2 points to the good (0-11 to 0-9). John Donnelly was introduced for the second half and his contribution of three points kept Kilkenny very much in touch. Clare finished strongly with three unanswered points to run out with a three-point victory. (0-16 to 0-19)

Kilkenny's final group game saw us visit the newly refurbished Walsh Park to take on a Waterford side who had lost all their previous games. The game was played in continuous heavy rain which made ground conditions extremely difficult. Kilkenny started strongly and were 3 points to the good inside the first 5 minutes. A Patrick Curran goal in the eight-minute levelled matters and another from Dessie Hutchinson 5 minutes later put the home side in a strong position approaching half time. (2-5 to 0-9). The second half was nip and tuck on an increasingly difficult surface Kilkenny showed tremendous character in the trying conditions and finished strongly to edge out the home team by three points (0-18 to 2-09).

The reward for finishing 2nd in the group was a semi-final against then reigning All Ireland and National League Champions Limerick in Pairc Ui Chaoimh. Kilkenny elected to play with the strong wind in the first half and the result looked ominous as Limerick raced into a 5-point lead inside the first 4 minutes (1-2 to 0-0). But Kilkenny gradually grew into the game and goals from Eoin Cody, Luke Hogan and T J Reid had them 2 goals ahead at the break (3-6 to 0-6). Kilkenny lost Eoin Cody to a second yellow card early in the second half. The loss seemed to galvanise the team, and they matched Limerick score for score playing into the gale. They eventually ran out comfortable winners (3-17 to 1-15) to qualify for a consecutive National League Final where they would meet Clare in part 2 of the 2024 trilogy.

The final was played in Semple Stadium in early April. Kilkenny more than matched their unbeaten opponents in the first half but a series of misses, they scored 9 points from 22 attempts, contributed to their eventual defeat. An opportunist goal just before the break from Aidan Mc Carthy left the game nicely poised (1-8 to 0-9) at the break. 2nd half goals from David Fitzgerald and Aidan Mc Carthy put Clare into a seemingly commanding position entering the final 15 minutes. Kilkenny continued to carry the fight to Clare and a goal from Eoin Cody in the 65th minute reduced the margin to just 3 points. An injury time penalty from Eoin Cody was saved and despite scoring three more points Clare prevailed (3-16 to 1-20)

- **Round 1: Kilkenny 2-16 Wexford 2-16**
- **Round 2: Cork 1-17 Kilkenny 0-21**
- **Round 3: Kilkenny 1-26 Offaly 1-19**
- **Round 4: Clare 0-19 Kilkenny 0-16**
- **Round 5: Waterford 2-09 Kilkenny 0-18**
- **Semi-Final: Kilkenny 3-17 Limerick 1-15**
- **Final: Clare 3-16 Kilkenny 1-20**

Championship

Two weeks after the National League Final, Kilkenny entertained Antrim in UPMC Nowlan Park in Round 1 of the Leinster Championship. The opening quarter was tentative enough, but Kilkenny found their groove in the 2nd quarter where they outscored Antrim 1-10 to 0-3. Kilkenny had nine different scorers in the first half and went in at half time eleven points to the good. (1-15 to 0-7). Their dominance continued in the second half, and they ran out easy winners, outscoring Antrim 3-7 to 0-2 in the closing 10 minutes. (5-30 to 0-13).

A week later Kilkenny travelled to Pearse Stadium in Galway with an injury hit squad. Eoin Murphy, Mikey Carey, Adrian Mullen and Eoin Cody were all absentees. Galway opened the brightest and led by 4 points on four occasions in the opening quarter. But Kilkenny thundered into the game in the 2nd quarter reeling off 5 unanswered points to go into the break 4 points to the good. (0-16 to 1-9). 10 minutes into the second half a Brian Concannon goal had the sides level. From there to the end there was little between the sides. TJ Reid had pushed Kilkenny into a 2-point lead going into injury time. Galway pegged it back to the minimum. TJ was then penalised for overcarrying when many in the Ground felt he had been fouled. In the 5th minute of injury time Conor Whelan landed the equalising score from distance. (0-29 to 2-23).

Following the one-sided Walsh Cup encounter between the sides in January at the same venue few gave Carlow any chance in causing an upset here in this Round 3 encounter at Netwatch Cullen Park. But a dogged Carlow side had other ideas and caused Kilkenny trouble right throughout the field. Despite this, and having a man sent off before half time, Kilkenny looked poised for victory leading by 5 points at the break and with the wind in their backs for the second half. But Carlow were having none of it and a Conor Kehoe goal mid-way through the half energised both players and supporters. T J Reid scored twice to push Kilkenny 2 points ahead entering injury time. But a Marty Kavanagh point in the 5th minute of injury time – a repeat of the action a week previously in Pearse Stadium – secured a deserved draw for Carlow. (1-20 to 1-20)

With just 4 points secured from their opening three games Kilkenny headed to Parnell Park for a Round 4 encounter with Dublin. It was a contest that ebbed and flowed from one end to the other all the way through and while Kilkenny looked to be in control for a fair portion of the

opening half, they couldn't get away from the Metropolitanians on the scoreboard and Conor Burke's goal meant that Kilkenny only led by the minimum at the halfway mark (0-16 to 1-12). A Brian Hayes goal in the 55th minute gave Dublin a three-point advantage but instead of acting as a catalyst to kick on to victory, Kilkenny responded with the next three points as scores from man of the match John Donnelly and TJ Reid levelled up matters. It was nip and tuck then to the end but Eoin Cody broke Dublin hearts with an injury time goal to give Kilkenny a narrow 2-point victory. (1-28 to 2-23)

And so on to the now legendary end of round robin finale with rivals Wexford at UPMC Nowlan Park. This in effect doubled as a Leinster Semi-Final as did the Galway v Dublin game in Pearse Stadium. Much of the action during the opening stages was of the 'protect the ball' variety, with both teams playing a short game through the lines as they tried to pick open the opposing defence. In a scoring sense it was step for step - 0-01 each, 0-02 each and so on up to the 20th minute when Nowlan Park erupted when Conor McDonald goaled for Wexford. Despite having the wind at their backs Kilkenny ended the half two points in arrears. (0-12 to 1-11). As the wind died at the start of the new half Wexford came under increasing pressure as Kilkenny found their best game and began to play the ball with more purpose out of defence. Up front TJ Reid charged on and on, finishing with 1-13 to his credit. A penalty in the 51st minute put Kilkenny 3 points ahead. This was extended to 5 with 15 minutes remaining. A Wexford goal 6 minutes from time left just 2 points between the sides. In an intense finish Wexford reduced the margin to the minimum in injury time, but the clock ran out on them in the end. (1-24 to 2-20). Meanwhile, Dublin had a surprising 6-point win over Galway in Salthill to qualify to meet Kilkenny in the Leinster Final.

Kilkenny turned on the style from the opening whistle in comfortably getting the better of Dublin by sixteen points in their one-sided Leinster Senior Hurling Championship final at Croke Park. An early goal from Eoin Cody set the tone of their supremacy and a second goal from TJ Reid augmented by six Adrian Mullen points propelled the holders to a healthy 2-18 to 0-9 interval lead. While Dublin were far more competitive on the restart, an early goal required to ignite an unlikely comeback never looked likely to materialise as TJ Reid put the contest to bed when adding his second goal early in the final quarter.

And so, for the third consecutive year Kilkenny faced Clare in the All-Ireland Semi-Final. Cian Kenny was influential in the opening quarter, while Paddy Deegan and David Blanchfield also landed sweet efforts from play. Aidan McCarthy kept Clare in touch from placed balls, but they were rocked in the 24th minute when Eoin Cody netted an outrageous goal. Earlier on in the half Eibhear Quilligan had made a string of splendid saves, but the Clare net eventually danced following Cody's intervention. When Billy Ryan quickly added a point Kilkenny's advantage was six and Clare were in deep distress. Quilligan had to make another instinctive stop near the interval when a Cody sideline cut caused panic, but Clare survived the scare, departing 1-10 to 0-8 behind at the turnaround. Clare thundered into the reckoning after the restart, hitting four of the first five points. TJ Reid's excellent sideline cut steered Kilkenny 1-12 to 0-12 ahead and then Kilkenny blasted a second goal courtesy of Billy Ryan's opportunism. Clare, though, were beginning to believe, but were still 2-16 to 0-18 in arrears following a TJ Reid free in the 58th minute. But that was to be Kilkenny's final score. Tony Kelly, substitute Ian Galvin, and McCarthy landed points, reducing the deficit to the minimum. Mark Rodgers rifled over the leveller. McCarthy edged Clare into the lead for the first time and Kelly added an injury time point to ensure Kilkenny had to go scrambling in search of a last gasp goal. A late Richie Reid free was floated into a packed Clare goalmouth, but Clare refused to be denied and qualified to meet

Cork in the All-Ireland decider. They would go on to cap a memorable year adding the All-Ireland Title to the National League title they had won earlier.

- ***Leinster Round 1: Kilkenny 5-30 Antrim 0-13***
- ***Leinster Round 2: Galway 2-23 Kilkenny 0-29***
- ***Leinster Round 3: Carlow 1-20 Kilkenny 1-20***
- ***Leinster Round 4: Dublin 2-23 Kilkenny 1-28***
- ***Leinster Round 5: Kilkenny 1-24 Wexford 2-20***
- ***Leinster Final: Kilkenny 3-28 Dublin 1-18***
- ***All Ireland Semi-Final: Kilkenny 2-16 Clare 0-24***

Under 20 Hurling

Kilkenny were in a Group of three with Wexford and Laois in the Leinster Championship. The prize for Group winners was a semi-final place with the second team qualifying for quarter-final and third team facing Tier 2 opposition in 1st Round Knockout.

Kilkenny hit Wexford for four goals in their opening game on the last Saturday in March to help themselves get off to a winning start in the Tier 1 of the Leinster U20 hurling championship. It finished 4-21 to 2-14 at UPMC Nowlan Park, where Kilkenny grabbed first-half goals via Marty Murphy and Cillian Hackett prior to Niall Shortall adding their third five minutes into the restart and Murphy netting their fourth late on. This was an encouraging start for Mark Dowling's side who had lost out twice to their Wexford counterparts in the 2023 competition.

Next up was a visit to O Moore Park on the following Saturday when Kilkenny had a resounding 6-14 to 1-13 victory over Laois. This game was played during Storm Kathleen and Laois played with the gale towards the town end in the first half. Laois found themselves 9 points up after 18 minutes (1-7 to 0-1) with Kilkenny struggling to get the ball out of their own half. But a brave 2nd quarter performance with goals from Marty Murphy and a Gearoid Dunne penalty left Kilkenny just 1 point in arrears at the break (1-9 to 2-5). Two more Gearoid Dunne goals and a 6th from goalkeeper Niall Holland in the second half secured victory and a place in the Leinster Semi-Final with Offaly. Kilkenny had a break of almost 6 weeks to the semi-final which was played in Tullamore based on the Leinster knockout rota. This particular Offaly team had garnered a huge following from their exploits at minor level 2 years earlier. But for the second successive year, Kilkenny's Leinster Championship hopes would come to an end at the semi-final stage when going down to defending champions Offaly. Mark Dowling's under 20 outfit were behind for much of an end-to-end tussle that had it all and it was a 2-3 tally from Shane Rigney that gave the Faithful County the edge come the final whistle. A huge Offaly crowd was in attendance and the home side threatened to pull away when leading 1-9 to 0-7 nearing the end of the opening half but Kilkenny had big displays from the likes of Marty Murphy, Harry Shine and Eoghan Lyng and they only trailed by a point at the interval after scoring four on the spin. Another four points inside the opening seven minutes of the second period and all appeared to be going swimmingly for the side in black and amber but in a moment that probably turned the game, Shane Rigney bagged his second goal to level up matters at 2-10 to 0-16. That second goal sprung Offaly to life with Adam Screeney getting two points from frees immediately afterwards although they did get a bit of luck when Gearoid Dunne had a penalty effort excellently saved by Liam Hoare. Screeney and Rigney then continued to torment the Kilkenny defence and with only five minutes left on the clock, five points was the difference. A Niall Shortall goal in the 57th minute

increased hope of a late Houdini act. Immediately after that effort Marty Murphy bore down on goal but his batted attempt rebounded off the crossbar before Screeney and Alex Kavanagh pushed the Offaly lead out to four. There was to be a second Kilkenny goal when Harry Shine drilled a 21-yard free to the net but ultimately time wasn't on their side as Offaly booked a place in the final against Dublin. It was heartbreak again for Kilkenny who had no luck on this occasion with hitting upright, crossbar, a saved penalty and missed free proving decisive. Offaly would in time go on to win Leinster and the All-Ireland title on an unforgettable occasion in June in UPMC Nowlan Park.

- ***Leinster Round 1: Kilkenny 4-21 Wexford 2-14***
- ***Leinster Round 2: Laois 1-13 Kilkenny 6-14***
- ***Leinster Semi-Final: Offaly 2-17 Kilkenny 2-16***

Minor Hurling

Kilkenny began their 2024 Leinster Minor Hurling Championship campaign in impressive fashion in UPMC Nowlan Park on Saturday 20th April, beating Galway on a scoreline of 4-24 to 1-14. The win ended a 14-year losing drought for Kilkenny minor teams against Galway, with Niall Bergin's side the first to beat their opponents at this grade since 2010. Kilkenny started brightly and built a commanding 0-7 to 0-2 advantage by the 13th minute, with a blistering five minutes of scoring turning a level game at 0-2 apiece into a five-point lead for the home side. Kilkenny went in at the half-time break on the right side of a comfortable 2-13 to 0-7 scoreboard with goals from Bill Mc Dermott and Jake Mullen. The Tribesmen did show signs of improvement at the start of the second half, notching the first two points but this was as good as it got for the away team as Kilkenny powered on to victory with the goals coming from Patrick Lacey and Ed Mc Dermott. (4-24 to 1-14)

Any notions banded about that Kilkenny were potential All Ireland winners after their impressive opening win over Galway were firmly quashed on the following weekend in Wexford. Having trounced Galway by 19 points in the provincial opener the previous week, most observers would have expected Kilkenny to continue their winning ways but, helped by 13 points from the excellent Sean O'Brien, the hosts withstood a Kilkenny fightback to get over the line. Two Darren Rossiter goals were to prove decisive in this tie. A Kevin Buggy goal 10 minutes from time reduce the deficit to 4 points. They brought this back to 2 points on four occasions, but they could not produce that elusive goal that might have delivered a victory. (2-20 to 1-20).

With a Leinster semi-final place at stake Kilkenny welcomed Dublin to UPMC Nowlan Park a week later for the final Group game. A more economical Dublin enjoyed a narrow interval lead as they built an 0-7 to 0-6 advantage with a wasteful Kilkenny left to rue eleven first-half wides. The visitors continued to keep their opponents at arm's length upon the resumption with eight second-half points by Rory Flannery helping to secure a noteworthy and deserved success. Kilkenny depended on Eoin Brennan and Jake Mullen frees to keep them in touch, but supporters were at a loss to explain the absence of the free-flowing hurling from their opening game against Galway. This result pitted Kilkenny against Tier 2 Winners Kildare in a Quarter-Final. This game was played at Kildare's Centre of Excellence in Hawkfield and after a nervous opening half Kilkenny eventually got the better of the Tier 2 champions in the second half to run out comfortable 13-point winners in the end. (4-16 to 1-14).

The semi-final was a rematch of their opening game with Galway providing the opposition in Offaly's Faithful Fields Training Centre. An emphatic second half performance from Kilkenny ensured that they comprehensively avenged the 2023 Leinster final defeat to Galway, as they fired four second half goals to power their path through to a provincial decider against Dublin. The westerners started and finished the first half well, jumping into an early 0-3 to 0-1 lead, but Kilkenny took over from there and they shot eight of the next nine points, before Galway again rallied before half time. With the sides level 0-10 each at the break, the contest looked finely poised. Jake Mullen plucked a high delivery from Eoin Brennan out of the sky and slammed the ball to the net with the first play of the second half, and while Galway got the next two points, it was one way traffic after that. Kilkenny outscored Galway by 3-8 to 1-0 through the remainder of the game with Oisín Henderson and David Barcoe playing key roles in setting up two of the second half goals.

And so on to a Leinster Final with Dublin in O'Moore Park. A 48th minute goal from Ollie O'Donovan proved crucial as Kilkenny saw off Dublin to capture their first Leinster Minor Hurling Championship crown since 2021. Kilkenny led for long periods and helped by big displays from Jake Mullen, Robbie Doherty and Eoin Brennan, the Cats made up for defeat at the hands of the same opponents earlier in the competition. A first half Dublin goal from Eoin Brennan looked to have the side in sky blue in a good position leading by 5 points. But Kilkenny responded with 5 unanswered points, but Dublin went into the break in a strong position when only trailing by two points after playing into a stiff breeze. However, it was the third quarter where Niall Bergin's Kilkenny side really took over. Kilkenny scored four of the first five points of the second half and forced Dublin to open up their play a little and while the beaten side did get the last three points of the game, the job was already done for the Nore sidiers with Ollie O' Donovan's 48th minute goal proving crucial. The reward here was a semi-final place where Kilkenny would face reigning All Ireland champions Clare in a rematch of their 2023 semi-final.

Jake Mullen's 13 points saw Kilkenny dethrone All-Ireland champions Clare after a titanic extra-time tussle at Semple Stadium. The brother of senior star Adrian got the key scores to set up a final against neighbours Tipperary, just weeks after their second-string sides contested the Celtic Challenge decider. Kilkenny were now one game away from a first All-Ireland minor title since 2014. Both sides looked likely winners at various stages. Clare raced into an early eight-point lead while Kilkenny were four to the good approaching the hour mark. In the end, a 64th-minute leveller from Paul Rodgers, brother of Clare senior Mark, made it 2-15 apiece to trigger extra-time. Kilkenny rebuilt their four-point lead with scores from Mullen (0-2), Kevin Buggy, and an incredible Patrick Lacey effort. It went from bad to worse for Clare when Rodgers received a straight red card at the end of the half. 2-20 to 2-16 at the change of ends. Matthew Corbett struck three frees but Kilkenny held on with scores from Mullen, Robbie Doherty, and Lacey's second.

The final was set for UPMC Nowlan Park after Tipperary sportingly agreed to a toss for home venue. Tipperary's thirteen men overcame all obstacles to win a memorable All-Ireland MHC final. Sucker punch goals, a numerical disadvantage and a home Nowlan Park crowd were among the difficulties faced by Tipperary, but they were undeterred. Billy O'Brien's goal deep into extra-time eventually sealed a famous and deserved victory for them, sending the travelling support into raptures. As for Kilkenny, they will rue a string of wides in the second half in particular but they too played their part in an encounter that was at all times enthralling. Uachtarán Cumann Lúthchleas Gael Jarlath Burns mentioned in his speech that the late

Mícheal Ó Muircheartaigh would have been proud watching down and there was no doubt about that.

- ***Leinster Round 1: Kilkenny 4-24 Galway 1-14***
- ***Leinster Round 2: Wexford 2-20 Kilkenny 1-20***
- ***Leinster Round 3: Kilkenny 0-12 Dublin 0-17***
- ***Leinster Quarter-Final: Kilkenny 4-16 Kildare 0-15***
- ***Leinster Semi-Final: Kilkenny 4-18 Galway 1-12***
- ***Leinster Final: Kilkenny 1-13 Dublin 1-09***
- ***All Ireland Semi-Final: Kilkenny 2-23 Clare 2-20 (AET)***
- ***All Ireland Final: Kilkenny 3-12 Tipperary 2-17 (AET)***

Under 19

A new initiative this year, to help prepare players bridge the gap between inter county minor (u-17) and Under 20, was the introduction of an Under 19 Development panel. Mark Aylward (Shamrocks Ballyhale) assisted by Michael Farrell, Brian Kennedy, Dean Mason, Pádraig Keenan and Martin Comerford prepared a panel of 30 players. They participated in a Leinster Development League and were undefeated in contests with Dublin, Offaly and Wexford and ultimately won out the tournament in the final against Dublin in UPMC Nowlan Park. No doubt the work completed will greatly help the ambitions of the 2025 Under 20 panel. Well done to all.

All Ireland Junior Football Championship

There was a slight change in the format of the All-Ireland Junior Football Championship in 2024 with the addition of a second team from the USA. This required a quarter-final with Kilkenny being involved every second year in the preliminary tie. And so, on the last weekend in June Kilkenny travelled to Birmingham to take on Warwickshire with a much-changed panel of 32 players from previous years. The hope was that they would qualify for the All-Ireland Semi-Final/Final Weekend two weeks later. Alas it was not to be. Kilkenny got off to a slow start and were wasteful in front of goal. Half time score of Kilkenny 1-03 to Warwickshire 0-5 was not a true reflection of the performance that had been put in by the players. Warwickshire were up for this game and took a foothold at the start of the second half kicking from distance and being rewarded with the home crowd pushing them on. To Kilkenny's credit they never panicked, and some substitutions got them back in the game. With the second last kick of the game some great play led to new recruit John McNamara kicking an excellent point to draw proceedings. That left the game Kilkenny 2-08 Warwickshire 1-11. Kilkenny won the final kickout and as they attacked inside the 45 the final whistle sounded. The period of extra time was a close and cagey and Warwickshire pushed ahead mainly from frees. Kilkenny could only muster one score in extra time and a black card to a Kilkenny player proved decisive. Warwickshire were full value for their eventual 5-point win and Kilkenny players and management left with a note of regret for not taking their chances. With all that been said- bringing in 20 new players was no mean feat by the management team and the hope is that this panel will be back in training in 2025 especially with the carrot of a semi-final appearance in next year's championship. Warwickshire would ultimately lose out to New York in the semi-final with New York going on to retain the title they won against Kilkenny in 2023. As a footnote here, I would appeal to all clubs to encourage

players to make themselves available for the football panel. They commence training in February with just 1 weekly session. The competition finishes in early July well ahead of Kilkenny's main hurling competitions. I would also appeal to all clubs to facilitate the availability of players, once on the football panel, for the county training programme.

GAA/GPA All Stars

The 2024 all stars were dominated by Munster counties Clare, Cork & Limerick who divided the 15 awards between them. This was the first time in the history of the scheme that Leinster had no representation. Kilkenny had four nominations in Huw Lawlor, David Blanchfield, Cian Kenny and John Donnelly and it was disappointing that a team who captured a five in a row Leinster title and qualified for a consecutive Allianz League Final lost out in 2024. Maybe some motivational fuel for 2025!

Kilkenny Club Championships

St. Canice's Credit Union Senior Hurling Championship:

The story of the 2024 senior championships was undoubtedly that of Thomastown. Promoted eventually to senior ranks following a number of years of heart break at the intermediate grade the expectation was that the Thomastown side were equipped to deal with life at senior level. But few could have predicted the eventual outcome with "the Town" accounting for both Shamrocks Ballyhale and All Ireland Finalists O'Loughlin Gaels on route to a county title they last won in 1946. A crowd of almost 10,000 witnessed a truly comprehensive display on County Final day as they lifted the Tom Walsh Cup in front of their ecstatic supporters. They started the League campaign with three wins out of three before stuttering somewhat in the final two group games. They lost out to Mullinavat in the Shield Final before taking on the Shamrocks Ballyhale side in the quarter final. Many said that this team came of age that day with their narrow win over the former Kilkenny and All-Ireland champions. The semi-final was a repeat of the Shield Final but this time the result was reversed to see the Thomastown side through to their first senior final since 1988. On the other side of the draw O'Loughlin Gaels had an equally impressive start to the Group stages winning all five of their group matches. They were asked serious questions in their quarter-final with city rivals Dicksboro where they found themselves 3 points in arrears and reduced to 13 men with only minutes remaining. But playing like true champions they levelled with three unanswered points, and they snatched victory in dramatic fashion with an injury time goal from Kerry recruit Fionan Mackessy. In the semi-final they were relatively comfortable winners over Bennettsbridge to set up the final with Thomastown. This turned out to be Thomastown's most impressive display all year. Played in very difficult wet conditions Thomastown adapted best and brought a level of aggression that unsettled the favourites. They limited O'Loughlins to just 4 points in the first half and really turned on the style in the second half and ran out comprehensive winners 0-18 to 0-7. Having won the All-Ireland Intermediate title in January this year few would have expected them to be on the road again – a journey they will relish. The Senior season was also notable in that James Stephens lost out in the Relegation Final to Glenmore and will play in the Intermediate Grade in 2025. They had been playing at senior grade for 69 consecutive years.

Michael Lyng Motors Hyundai Intermediate Hurling Championship:

Lisdowney returned to senior ranks as they were undoubtedly the most consistent team at Intermediate level in 2024. They topped their group after the league stages and landed the league title with a narrow win over their closest rivals in 2024 – Young Irelands. They were destined to meet again in the Championship Final. Both semi-finals were close affairs with Lisdowney getting the better of Mooncoin by 2 points and Young Ireland disposing of Danesfort by a similar margin. The old adage “goals win matches” was very true of this game with their second, 10 minutes into the second half, putting Lisdowney 7 points ahead and leaving Young Irelands chasing the game. Lisdowney eventually ran out 3-point winners and a deserving return to senior ranks. Conahy Shamrocks started their league campaign with a win over Dunnamaggin on the first weekend of competition but that was to be their only win of the campaign and were subsequently relegated following defeat to Carrickshock in Relegation Final.

J.J. Kavanagh & Sons Junior Hurling Championship:

St Lachtains were worthy winners of the J.J. Kavanagh & Sons Premier Junior Championship with a win over Windgap in the Final. They had been relegated from the Intermediate Grade in 2022 and failed narrowly to rebound straight away in 2023 when they were defeated by eventual All Ireland Junior Champions Tullogher Rosbercon in the Final. And so, in 2025 they will play again in the Intermediate Grade where many punters felt was their true position. The Junior Championship in Kilkenny is very competitive, and all clubs can genuinely start out the year with aspirations to do well. I would also acknowledge the success of the James Stephens Junior team in winning the Section B Final and qualifying for the Junior Semi-Final. Along with their success at Minor level this will give the club great encouragement to bounce back to senior level with their first team in 2025.

JJ Kavanagh & Sons Football Championships:

2024 was all change in the JJ Kavanagh and Sons Senior Football Championship with Mullinavat absent from the final for the first time in many years. This year it was the turn of Dicksboro and Lisdowney to compete for the title. After a closely fought game, Dicksboro came out on top 1-9 to 1-6. It was a great achievement by Lisdowney to qualify for the final having been promoted from Intermediate on the back of their win in that grade in 2023. Thirteen clubs participated in the senior league and championship in 2024.

The J.J. Kavanagh & Sons Intermediate Final was won by Conahy Shamrocks who defeated Glenmore 3-8 to 1-10 in the Final in Thomastown in May. Nine clubs took part in the Intermediate League and Championship in the early part of the year. In the Junior final Graignamanagh defeated Bennettsbridge 0-11 to 1-6. Eight clubs participated in the Junior League and Championship. Congratulations to all the winners and all 30 clubs who took part in the Football championships this year.

AIB Leinster and All Ireland Club Championships:

2023/24 was another great year for Kilkenny Clubs in the Provincial and All Ireland Hurling series. County Champions O’Loughlin Gaels (senior), Thomastown (intermediate) and Tullogher

Rosbercon (junior) were all crowned Leinster Champions. Both Thomastown and Tullogher Rosbercon went on to win All Ireland titles and the clean sweep was denied when O'Loughlin Gaels lost out to St Thomas's of Galway 0-18 to 0-17 in the senior decider. Supporters were aggrieved as what appeared to be a legitimate goal from Owen Wall was missed by the umpires. In a tight match played in wet and windy conditions the decision might well have been the deciding factor. In the Leinster Intermediate Football Championship Mullinavat lost out to Ballylinan of Laois 1-14 to 0-7 and Lisdowney put up a very creditable performance against Kilbeggan of Westmeath but lost out in the end 1-15 to 2-7.

Competitions Control Committee/Fixtures Analyst:

2024 was another extremely busy year for the Competition Control Committee under the stewardship of Jim Fennelly (Chairman) and Martin Delaney (Secretary). This committee met on 38 occasions, certainly the busiest of our committees. Over 600 games were organised between the CCC and Junior Board catering for teams at Senior, Intermediate, Junior and Junior A-F and U 21. The Football Leagues and Championship at three grades got the year off to a positive start with over 30 of our clubs partaking in the football competitions. Whilst walkovers generally were not an issue in 2024, some of these in Intermediate Football had a negative effect on league tables. I would appeal to all clubs to ensure all matches are played to ensure the veracity of league positions.

The revised format for senior and intermediate teams over the early summer months continued in 2024. The format appears successful with all games completed. It is good to see that clubs continue to assess the value of these competitions as evidenced by inclusion of a detailed recommendation from Clara Club to tonight's Convention. An additional challenge this year was the inclusion of many minor players on adult teams following the move to even age grades. In this regard the co-operation between the adult CCC's and Coiste na nÓg is vital. I feel the planned move of Minor fixtures from Monday to Wednesday will greatly help here.

The scheduling of the Junior Hurling League and Championship continues to be problematic due to the early Leinster Club Championship deadline. Draft fixtures from Leinster for 2025 just to hand indicates a Leinster first round on Oct 26th. There is also a suggestion being floated that the Junior competition in Leinster be restricted to teams from Bob O Keeffe/Joe McDonagh counties with an Internal Leinster competition, without an All-Ireland element, for the other counties. If this comes to pass it may create some space in the calendar. This leaves little or no room for manoeuvre in terms of weather or bereavement delays. This is an area that will need to be examined ahead of next year's competitions.

One of the success stories from 2023, and commented favourably by both clubs and supporters, was the staging of all championship fixtures at club grounds all over the county up to quarter-final stage. This was continued in 2024 and provided some excellent events for local clubs all over Kilkenny. It was good to see new facilities being used such as Barrow Rangers newly acquired pitch and the widening of the Mullinavat pitch. Thanks to all clubs who embraced the hosting of games with real pride in their locality.

Besides the fixtures area, this committee was also responsible for the transfers and regrading along with several disciplinary issues during the year. A huge thank you to all concerned for a job well done in 2024.

This year Dermot Dunphy was appointed Fixtures Analyst I wish to congratulate him on his report printed elsewhere in this Convention booklet. Dermot also sits on the CCC committee and his work in analysing our Fixtures programme is invaluable.

County Championship Results 2024:

Senior Hurling:	Thomastown 0-18	O'Loughlin Gaels 0-7
Senior Football:	Dicksboro 1-9	Lisdowney 1-6
Intermediate Hurling:	Lisdowney 2-12	Young Irelands 0-15
Intermediate Football:	Conahy Shamrocks 3-8	Glenmore 1-10
Junior Hurling:	St Lachtains 2-15	Windgap 1-12
Junior Football:	Graignamanagh 0-11	Bennettsbridge 1-6
Junior A Hurling:	Young Irelands 2-15	Dunnamaggin 0-18
Junior B Hurling:	Threecastles 0-16	St Lachtains 1-15
Junior C Hurling:	Danesfort 1-22 **	Lisdowney 2-19
	**Danesfort won on penalties	
Junior D Hurling:	Graignamanagh 2-15	Erin's Own 1-14
Junior E Hurling:	Mooncoin 4-12	O'Loughlin Gaels 1-17
Junior F Hurling:	Young Irelands 0-19	Mullinavat 0-10
Under 21 Hurling A:	Dicksboro 3-21	James Stephens 1-14
Under 21 Hurling B:	Not yet Completed	
Under 21 Hurling C:	Not yet completed	
Under 21 Hurling D:	Not yet Completed	
Minor A Hurling:	James Stephens 1-16	Dicksboro 1-13
Minor B Hurling:	John Lockes 1-21	Danesfort 1-13
Minor C Hurling:	Shamrocks Ballyhale 2-15	James Stephens B 0-16
Minor A Football:	St Martins 3-13	St Patricks 0-4
Minor B Football:	Graignamanagh 3-11	Tullagher Rosbercon 1-4
Minor C Football:	Railyard 4-12	Carrickshock 0-7
U16 A Hurling:	Erin's Own 1-20	Dicksboro 2-13
U16 B Hurling:	Shamrocks Ballyhale 2-16	Barrow Rangers 1-14
U16 C Hurling:	Conahy Shamrocks 1-13	St Lachtains 1-8
U16 D Hurling:	Dicksboro 3-11	Cloneen 1-12

U16A Football	Not yet Completed	
U16B Football	Not yet Completed	
U16C Football	Not yet Completed	
U14 A Hurling:	Danesfort 0-12	Dicksboro 0-8
U14 B Hurling:	Shamrocks Ballyhale 3-11**	Barrow Rangers 3-11
	** Shamrocks won on penalties	
U14 C Hurling:	Fenians/St Patricks 1-12	Erin's Own 1-8
U14 D Hurling:	Blacks & Whites 4-4	Mooncoin B 0-6
U14 A Football:	John Lockes 1-7	Danesfort 2-0
U13 B Football:	Bennettsbridge 3-8	Kilmoganny 0-4
U13 C Football:	Slieverue 5-3	James Stephens B 1-8

Club Championship Sponsors:

Sincere thanks are extended to our competition sponsors St. Canice's Credit Union, Michael Lyng Motors/Hyundai, JJ Kavanagh & Sons, Iverk Produce, Country Style Foods, Kilkenny Vehicle Centre, and Duggan Steel for their commitment to our games in Kilkenny. Many of these sponsorships are long standing and we thank the businesses and their managements for their loyalty to and support of Kilkenny GAA, which is much appreciated. Several launches for the various competitions were organised with the sponsors in UPMC Nowlan Park and these were quite successful. Finally, it is important that our sponsors are supported, and I would urge all our members to take this on board.

Referees:

Referees continue to play an enormous role in our games. I would like to compliment newly appointed Referees Administrator Michael Walsh on all his work with referees in 2024. Nine new recruits have been trained but we are still under pressure during the busy playing season. We currently have just 40 active referees with 9 clubs not providing any to this list. In addition, 20 clubs are providing just one. The age profile of referees continues to be a concern, and I appeal to clubs to redouble their efforts in asking suitable people to join the ranks. A Foundation Course is planned for February, and I would encourage clubs to provide suitable nominees here. 2024 has been a relatively good year in terms of discipline but we still encounter periodic verbal abuse of officials at our games. Much work went into improving sideline behaviour especially in UPMC Nowlan Park. I would like to thank all the clubs for their co-operation here and this has greatly assisted our referees in officiating at these games. The challenge now is to extend this behaviour to club grounds around the county. Thanks to all our referees for their dedication over the last 12 months.

Coiste na nÓg:

I would like to thank Chairperson Willie Dempsey, Secretary Mary Fitzgerald, the officers and hard-working committee for their excellent work in organising our under-age competitions in 2024. It is not an easy task with so many teams and competitions in hurling and football across so many grades and the added complication of trying to avoid clashes with squads and school games. The move from under 17 to under 18 also brought its challenges with many clubs using up to the age minors on their adult teams. Added to the workload is the running of finals and collection of gates, all of which were done most efficiently. I personally attended two meetings of delegates where very worthwhile discussions took place. The Fixtures workshop early in the year gave the committee a great insight into the issues of concern to clubs. The second meeting later in the year brought clarity to a number of issues and the commitment to bi-monthly delegate meetings was welcomed by all. Well done to all concerned.

Junior Committee:

My thanks to the Junior Committee under Chairman Paddy Cooney and Secretary Pat Dunphy and their committee for their work this year in running our Junior A to F leagues and championships, and the Under 21 championships currently underway. The committee members are very dedicated to the junior grade and in 2024 provided in excess of 360 games. Besides their work staging these games a cohort of this group were regular attendees as stewards at UPMC Nowlan Park for the closing stages of our championships for which we are very indebted. We were very pleased to be able to host the finals of the A to F championships in UPMC Nowlan Park in August and September.

Cumann na mBunscoileanna

The year was another successful one at primary schools' level and we were delighted to be able to host many of the finals at UPMC Nowlan Park at the start of summer and some in October. A huge thank you to all the teachers for their continued support of our games. The provision of playing gear to schools by Tesco was another welcome innovation this year as was the inter schools' skills challenge featured in UPMC Nowlan Park on senior Semi-Final Day. As in other years, several children from schools all over Kilkenny featured in the INTO mini sevens on big match days in Croke Park during the summer. A huge thank you to Dermot Dunphy and his teacher colleagues for all the vital work promoting our games in 2024.

Second Level Schools:

Thanks are extended to the second level schools' teachers, coaches and players for their great work. They provide a crucial link between the primary school and adult levels as they work to develop their pupils' skills and interest in our games. Their provision of pitches and facilities to our county squads and fixtures programme is much appreciated. In this regard, we are pleased to continue investment in equipment for the second level schools catering for our players. The support by way of Sports Science to these schools, via Sean Kelly and other Coaching and Games Staff, is a key element of our overall Player Pathway Development, and we look forward

to future success for all our second level schools in 2025. Congratulations to St. Kieran's on winning 2024 All Ireland Colleges Title and to Loreto in the Camogie equivalent.

Coaching and Games Development:

2024 saw the further implementation of the "Mick Dempsey" Coaching Report with Staff numbers rising to 8 full time and 2 part-time. 16 clubs are now directly supported by our PO's (Participation Officers) whilst 20 more are supported by GDC's (Games Development Co-Ordinators) on a North/South basis. The impact of Michael Fennelly's appointment as Performance Lead in mid 2023 was really evident in 2024. The rebranding of the Development Squads to Na Cait Óga Academy fuelled an innovative programme, new structures, pathways, and educational opportunities designed to cultivate a broad and healthy environment for players, coaches and parents. Over the year, approximately 240 players from across all Kilkenny clubs participated in the pathway, supported by a strong cohort of 40 academy coaches. Sincere thanks to Michael for his professionalism and enthusiasm as Performance Lead.

Sean Kelly's role as the Athletic Development Lead, was another welcome innovation overseeing and implementing comprehensive athletic development programmes across multiple levels – Na Cait Oga, Post Primary Schools and Kilkenny Minor Team. In managing the Kilkenny GAA RYPT programme, Sean tracks the Athletic Development of almost 800 players between academies, schools and Inter County teams. Thanks to Sean for all his work here and congratulations to him on his role with Thomastown in their All Ireland Intermediate and Kilkenny Senior wins in 2024. Thanks also to GDC's Philip Campion and Nathen Culleton for their dedication during the year and to our PO's who work diligently in our clubs and schools. To give you some idea of the range of activity and reach of our Coaching and Games Staff it is worth noting that last month alone they engaged with over 3,400 players/students, 318 coaches/mentors/teachers over 41 venues.

Sincere thanks to our Coaching and Games Committee under Chairperson David Denieffe, Coaching Officer Patrick O'Flynn and Secretary Brian Ryan as it provides support and guidance to all the volunteer mentors who worked at Club, Academy and School level. There were two Under 14, two Under 15, two Under 16 and an under 17 Celtic Challenge Squad operating this year. 2024 also saw the 2023 Football Squad move up to under 16 in preparation for entry to Minor competition in 2025. With the assistance of PO Paudie Bradley and led by Manager Eoin Hennessy this group made great improvement strides in recent Carlow Tournament. Thanks to all those who worked with our squads this year for your time and input.

The activity in the Academy area in 2024 was greatly enhanced by the arrival of CluneTech as sponsors. We are very appreciative of Terry Clune's generous contribution and for hosting a number of events at the Tax Back premises during the year. We look forward to a mutually fruitful relationship over the coming years.

Full details of all Coaching and Games activity are contained in the Coaching and Games Report elsewhere in this booklet which I encourage you to read

Camogie:

It was a disappointing year on the playing fields again this year with the seniors bowing out to Dublin in the quarterfinals. It was doubly disappointing as the senior semi-finals were being played in UPMC Nowlan Park. The Minors also lost out on the opportunity of playing in the Final locally when they were knocked out at the semi-final stage. On a positive note, the achievement of Dicksboro on winning the All-Ireland Senior Club Final was laudable. On a personal note, I would like to extend a sincere thank you to the Kilkenny Camogie Board officers for their co-operation throughout the year, especially to Chairperson Theresa Aylward and Secretary Theresa Hunston and their committee. With integration very much on the agenda it is heartening to see that already in Kilkenny events such as Scór, Poc Fada and some officer training events are run jointly.

Handball:

Kilkenny continues to be successful at Juvenile level and the breadth of winners reported monthly at our County Board meetings by Handball Rep Gerry Murphy is outstanding. In the World Wall Ball Championships held in Limerick during the summer Kilkenny landed world titles in Ciara Mahon (Clogh), Anthony Clifford (Talbots Inch) and Kyle Jordan (Kilfane). Later in the Four wall version held later in October Anthony and Kyle were again successful along with Noah Manogue of O'Loughlins. In what was a terrific year for Noah he also won All Ireland titles at Minor Singles and Doubles. All Ireland titles were also landed by Jack Doyle (Windgap) in Mens singles, Johnny Brennan (Mothel) in Mens over 65 and Amy Brennan (Clogh) in Ladies Singles. Well done to all. The participation levels in the code are hugely positive and one cannot but be impressed by how the Committee, led by Michael O'Shea (Chairperson) and Martin Lawlor (Secretary), goes about its business in a quiet but highly effective manner. Probably the high point of the year was the hosting of the World 4 Wall championships in Kilkenny and other Leinster counties at the end of October. All of the Kilkenny Clubs put on a huge effort to welcome participants, and all concerned can be justifiably proud of representing Kilkenny on the world stage. Congratulations to all the medal winners at every level and sincere thank you to all the officers both at club and county level for the tremendous work in 2024.

Health and Well Being Committee:

Well done to the Health and Well Being Committee, led by Carmel Kenny, on another great year's work. The "Drugs Ruin Lives" series of 12 meetings attended by almost all of our clubs was a brilliant initiative. Another great initiative was the provision of Mental Health and Wellness signs for all clubs. During the year also, prompted by this committee, the County adopted the Critical Incident Response Plan, Substance Use Policy and Smoke Free Policy. The Healthy Clubs project was extended from eight to seventeen clubs all providing tremendous service to their local communities.

Hearings Committee:

I would like to express my thanks to Kilkenny Hearings Committee Chairperson Eddie Buckley, Secretary Aodán Ó Ruairc and their committee members for their work in 2024. Special mention to Tom Egan who stepped down as Chairman after a number of years but remained on as a committee member. Many thanks to all individuals, clubs, committees and referees for their co-

operation with the Hearings Committee in 2024. It was heartening to hear that most of the committee's work dealt with regrading and transfer appeals and that disciplinary hearings were relatively small.

Planning & Training:

The Planning and Training Committee, under the leadership of Planning & Training Officer Shane Kavanagh, focused on enhancing governance, training, and volunteer support through initiatives like the Club Officer Training Programme and the Club Compás Program. The Demographics Group, headed up by Demographics officer Seamus Knox, launched a pilot project in partnership with Croke Park, granting clubs access to the GAA's statistical hub specific to County Kilkenny. All clubs are due to receive individual reports shortly and these will be very beneficial in future planning for clubs. The Planning & Training Committee are also deeply involved in the Kilkenny GAA Strategic Plan for 2025-2030, a long-term roadmap emphasizing sustainable growth, community engagement, and inclusive practices. Thanks to all members of the committee, including David Denieffe, Seamus Knox, David Carroll, Pat Nolan, Nicky Dunphy and Thomas Healy for all their work in 2024.

Integration

The Integration process continues at national level towards a 2027 goal. We continue to see clubs locally embracing the idea and quite a few clubs are now actively moving to the One Club Model. Integration at local club level is key to the overall success of the project and this will be an enabler in bringing the associations closer together at national level. Meanwhile we continue to work closely with our colleagues in the Camogie Association and the LGFA. We were very pleased to facilitate the County Senior Camogie Final in UPMC Nowlan Park this October together with the Intermediate and Senior League Finals on the previous month. UPMC Nowlan Park has become the home of the All-Ireland Senior Camogie semi-finals together with the all-Ireland minor Finals. Besides using facilities at UPMC Nowlan Park for meetings, areas such as training courses, Scor, Poc Fada and Coaching are now the norm. Kilkenny Camogie National League and Championship fixtures are played at UPMC Nowlan Park and Kilkenny LGFA played a number of games at MW Hire Training Centre Dunmore.

Income and Expenditure

The Financial Report before you this evening will be a cause for some alarm. The County will show a deficit for the first time in decades. The figure can be offset somewhat when the surpluses from Bord na nÓg and Junior Board, 40k approx are taken into account. In the ten years prior to Covid surpluses of on average of 200k were posted and these were used to enhance facilities and investment in player development. Steps are already in place to reverse this trend, and we are confident that the Board finances will see a return to surplus in 2025.

Cost of living increases are impacting on individuals and all sections of society. The GAA is not immune and items such as Light & Heat, Transport, Accommodation and Food are all challenging. Team Administration expenses 10 years ago stood at €608,903 today they are well

over the million mark. We have rightly invested in our Coaching and Games area with our staff numbers rising to 10 and activity at squad level at an all-time high. But the extra activity generated has also generated a substantial increase in costs. Recognising the challenge this time last year there was a major focus on increasing income in 2024. We increased our Advertising and signage income by 70k, our Golf Classic raised in excess of 50k, we secured additional sponsorship from Clunetch and we had a 36k increase in Rental income due mainly to the hosting of the All-Ireland Minor and Under 20 Finals during the summer. Hurlers Co-Op Draw, Gowran Park Race Day and Yearbook and Calendar sales are all core fundraising activities that we continue to rely on. Our Supporters Clubs continue to work tirelessly to boost the coffers. Another welcome addition this year was the Black and Amber Forum where our Dublin branch was very much to the fore. I encourage all clubs to actively encourage members to join the Supporters Club in your area.

Whilst the figures outlined tonight are concerning steps are already in place to reverse this trend, and we are confident that the Board finances will see a return to surplus in 2025.

The continued support of our sponsors is much appreciated and essential. Sincere thanks go to the Treasurer Barry Hickey, Pat Henderson and Caroline Morrissey for all their work in micromanaging the County Board finances.

Kilkenny Hurlers Co-Op Draw:

This year 2024 saw the 42nd Kilkenny Hurlers Draw and yet again it provided an opportunity for clubs and County Board to raise much needed funds. There was a good take up from many clubs with over 9,000 tickets being sold, providing in the region of €250,000 much needed income for clubs and approximately €80,000 for the County Board. The work of Gerri Hickey and her team who co-ordinate the draw and also our County Treasurer Barry Hickey must be acknowledged in another successful year for the Draw.

Property Issues:

I referred to this item in my 2023 report. Disappointingly, we have had a number of cases where the correct procedures were not adopted when undertaking work at club grounds. Clubs need to seek County Board approval if they are purchasing or selling land, creating a lease or borrowing money to fund Club purchases and developments. Regarding property insurance and public liability insurance once again I would remind clubs that it is essential that they maintain a watchful and responsible look out for potential risks. It is also vital that the GAA Insurance Department is notified of all planned work on the premises before it commences. It is also essential that excluded or prohibited activities do not take place on Club property and that all non-GAA users of meetings rooms, indoor halls, function rooms, bars playing fields, walkways, playgrounds, all-weather facilities and gyms have their own insurance in place and that they can produce it. If any doubt exists, it is essential to have cover verified by our Insurers. Pat Nolan, the County Safety and Facilities Officer is available to assist clubs in the provision of Safety Statements and Risk Assessments. The log of the facilities in each club in the county enables a pro rata spread of the premium based on facilities and risks. Clubs should ensure this list is up to date and all additions or alterations to club facilities need to be notified to UPMC Nowlan Park to ensure all areas are properly covered. Clubs should always contact Ciara Clarke in Croke Park for advice before organising any events or one-off activities.

Tirlán:

A sincere thank you is extended to the Tirlán through the recently retired CEO Jim Bergin and Director of Corporate Affairs Pat O’Keeffe for their sponsorship of Kilkenny GAA teams from Minor up to our flagship Senior Hurlers. 2024 was the first year of a new agreement with Tirlán and we are indebted to Jim, Pat and Communications Manager James Brennan for the smooth transition from former sponsors Glanbia. The new Kilkenny jersey, with the Tirlán name and logo displayed along with the traditional Avonmore brand name, was well received by players and supporters alike. As mentioned in my report last year our relationship with Tirlán is one of partnership rather than just corporate sponsorship. Already some of our teams have availed of the facilities at Tirlán’s at the state-of-the-art HQ at the Abbey Quarter in Kilkenny and the involvement of James Brennan in our PR/It Committee has been very beneficial. Our teams continue to reap the direct benefit of Avonmore Milk and Sports Nutrition products.

James Nowlan Centenary:

2024 marked the 100th anniversary of the death of James Nowlan. Cian Murphy, who heads up the GAA History Committee, indicated to me in 2023 that they wished to mark the anniversary. Given the association with Nowlan Park and the naming of the All-Ireland Under 20 Hurling Trophy in his memory Kilkenny GAA applied to Central Council to play the 2024 All Ireland Under 20 Final at UPMC Nowlan Park in June 100 years after James Nowlan’s death in June 1924. Few would have anticipated that a crowd of 25,000 would pack into the Kilkenny Ground this summer to see an epic clash between Tipperary and Offaly with the scenes greeting the Offaly win living long in the memory. Ahead of the Final, members of the Kilkenny Saturday morning History Walking Group assembled in UPMC Nowlan Park where a number of contributors told the story of the opening of Nowlan Park and James Nowlan’s contribution to Irish history in those turbulent times. Another initiative was the broadcasting of a special programme, hosted by Iar Uachtaran Nickey Brennan, on Community Radio Kilkenny City. This was built around an interview with Jim Walsh of Slieverue who had written a history of James Nowlan in 2013. The book inspired Kilkenny GAA to have a gravestone erected over the hitherto unmarked grave in Glasnevin Cemetery. Thanks to all who contributed to a very special occasion. The GAA is also dedicating a special room in Croke Park Stadium in James Nowlan’s memory.

UPMC Nowlan Park:

Kilkenny County Board was delighted to see UPMC Nowlan Park again selected for some major games in 2024. Besides the regular Allianz League and Leinster Championship fixtures, the venue hosted both the All-Ireland Minor and Under 20 Hurling Finals in June. It also hosted the All-Ireland Senior Camogie Semi-Finals where Cork and Galway advanced to the Final in front of a crowd of over 7,000. In a seven-week period from the Bruce Springsteen Concert on May 12th almost 100,000 people descended on Kilkenny city for major events at the venue. The All-Ireland Minor Camogie Finals were also held here. The new format in the Allianz Hurling League will see

Galway, Limerick and Tipperary all playing at UPMC Nowlan Park in February and March next year. Huge thank you to our Event Controller John Byrne, Safety Officer Pat Nolan and all their teams for staging these games safely at UPMC Nowlan Park. Kilkenny County Board's partnership agreement with healthcare provider UPMC established in 2020 continues to be a very beneficial arrangement. The partnership is an excellent fit for Kilkenny GAA as health and wellness are an integral part of UPMC's mission and are of key importance to Kilkenny GAA also. Every year we receive calls from various sections of the organisation to hold games in UPMC Nowlan Park. This is particularly true of the September/October period. 6 Cumann na mBunscol Finals were played over several evenings in June with another four played on a weekend in September. 6 Junior A to F Finals were hosted in late August early September. The under 14A, under 16A and Minor A & B Finals were also played at the venue in September and October. From mid-September onwards the venue typically hosted 4 games every weekend right through to our last County Final on first weekend in November. Leinster Club championship games were also played there in November. We were also very pleased to host the Camogie senior and intermediate league finals in September and the Senior Championship Final as a curtain raiser to the Hurling Intermediate Final in October. We have been extremely fortunate with the relatively dry weather this autumn with just one Orange Wind warning causing postponements. Huge credit goes to John Coogan and the Nowlan Park staff who worked tirelessly against all the odds to try and maintain the surface in the best possible conditions for our games. Whilst we were pleased able to host finals at Junior level and also under 15 and minor this year, Boards and Clubs need to understand that there is a limit as to what the Ground can cope with especially give the abnormal rainfall which now seems to be the norm.

MW Hire Training Centre Dunmore:

We are all aware of the value of MW Hire Training Centre Dunmore to Kilkenny GAA primarily as a venue for our county teams to train and prepare under floodlights on dark winter nights. The venue is also used by our squads and the addition of the new gym has greatly facilitated the preparation of our teams. It has also been used by Bord na nÓg who hosted much of their knockout programme at the venue over the summer and autumn. Thanks to the work of John Coogan, Kevin McGarry and Sean Kiely under the watchful eye of Pat Henderson. The on-going maintenance of the goalmouths, sanding, verti-draining and watering ensures it is available for all teams in almost all-weather conditions. However, a word of caution. Climate change is having an impact on the availability of our pitches generally. Kilkenny GAA has just 1 floodlit pitch available for three inter county teams and we are relying on the goodwill of our clubs, who have floodlit pitches, to step up to the mark to bridge the gap in the county's preparations. Board Officers have spent much time this year trying to identify potential land that might provide the basis to extend our training facilities. With integration on the horizon, the demand for training facilities is only going to increase. The MW Hire Training Centre has been a tremendous asset to Kilkenny, but it is now totally inadequate especially given the necessity of preparing over the winter months for the condensed inter-county season.

Supporters Clubs:

Once again, our gratitude must be expressed to the Supporters Clubs in Kilkenny and Dublin led by John Mackey, Tommy Maher, Niall Butler and Dr Sean Dunne and their committees who

tirelessly raise much needed funds to help prepare our county teams. Membership of the Clubs, both personal and business, is an ideal way for the ordinary supporters to get behind our players as they strive for All Ireland glory. I would particularly appeal to supporters, who may have family in Dublin, to get involved with the Dublin branch. Also, if you have family and friends overseas, please encourage them to purchase membership on-line.

A Day at the Races:

Thanks to the great work of the organising committee under the leadership of John Mackey with assistance from County Board Officers Barry Hickey, Seamus Reade and Mary Morgan and Pat Mc Corry, Mick Duggan and Seamus O'Farrell of the Race Day Committee the annual Kilkenny Hurlers Race Day in Gowran Park on 9th November proved once again to be a great social gathering and an important fundraiser. Thanks to all for their work in recruiting race sponsors and selling advertisements for the race card on the day. Thanks also to Eddie Scally and all the Gowran Park team for their efforts in making the day such a success and for their ongoing support of Kilkenny GAA in such areas as the Poc Fada and Golf Classic. Thanks to all our Race sponsors and Advertisers many of whom support us year after year.

New Initiatives in 2024

Last year I identified in my report the need for Kilkenny GAA to bring in new income streams. Under the leadership of Phil Hogan, a Corporate Plan was put in place and a number of new initiatives set up. Among these was a **Golf Classic at Gowran Park** where a committee headed up by former hurler Eddie Brennan ran a highly successful event. All who attended were delighted with the arrangements and the prizes on offer. Many have vowed to return again in 2025. The committee also made a donation to the Fiends of St Columbas Hospital Thomastown from the proceeds of the event. A new **Corporate Advertising Signage Scheme** at UPMC Nowlan Park was also established. Over 10 companies have embraced the project, and it is hoped to entice even more clients in 2025. **The Black and Amber Forum** was set up and, in association with the Dublin Branch of the Supporters Club, two highly successful Corporate Breakfast meetings were held in Dublin. Sponsorship was secured from **Clune Tech** to fund Na Cait Óga Academies and this has been a hugely beneficial liaison as the activities in the Coaching and games area ramped up under the direction of Performance Lead Michael Fennelly. Sponsorship was also secured from **Tesco Ireland** to fund programmes at Primary schools' level including the provision of playing gear for school teams.

Media & IT Committee:

This year was another very busy one for Public Relations and IT Committee and I thank all the Committee members under PRO Mary Morgan for their work. While our website continues to be our IT centrepiece and receives a huge number of hits each day as searches for fixtures, details of events such as fundraisers and contact details for clubs. We have also witnessed an upsurge of followers of Kilkenny GAA on X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and Instagram. The major innovation in 2024 was the arrival of the Kilkenny Cats Social App. This is a significant addition to our suite of platforms and in time I expect it to be the go-to vehicle for all Kilkenny GAA news

and features. My thanks to IT Officer Ciaran Byrne for all his work in this area and his support of club officers in the IT area.

Foireann

Foireann is the GAA's Management Tool and now used extensively for much of the operational needs of clubs. Besides the core registration of members, it deals with Player Transfers, Grant Applications, Garda Vetting, Player Injury Fund, National Club Draw and many other elements. It also provides a comprehensive and safe Communications Tool for teams and committees within the club. Whilst Foireann has had its problems down the years I would encourage all clubs to embrace it. It is vital also that the GAA can reflect the true membership of the Association and to be in a position to supply accurate information in the demographics debate.

Kilkenny GAA Yearbook

The Yearbook Committee under Barrie Henriques (Editor), Pat Henderson (Chairman), Gerry O'Neill (Origination), Tommy Lanigan, P.J. Kenny (Cathaoirleach CLG), Mary Morgan (PRO), John Power (Junior PRO), Conor Denieffe (Central Council), Paul Fitzgerald (Leinster Council), Jimmy Walsh, and Conor Brennan have excelled and produced another top-class yearbook that covers activity at every level in Kilkenny, along with pen pictures, articles, tales of current and former heroes and opinion pieces. I have no doubt yet again the 2024 Yearbook is set to be a best seller. As we go to print it is hoped to have a launch of the yearbook, with members of the senior squad in attendance, once the supplies become available for the Christmas market.

Coverage of Our Games

I would like to extend my gratitude to all sections of the media for the coverage afforded to both our club and county teams and games with special thanks to both of our local radio stations, local newspapers, photographers, commentators and journalists for their work. Such coverage in local media, print and radio is invaluable as it serves as eyes and ears for those at home, who cannot attend our games for geographical or medical reasons. The number of games covered on our radio stations this year has gone through the roof and the advent of podcasts has also to be welcomed. The addition of the Kilkenny Cats app has been a welcome addition to our social media platforms. I would also like to note here the induction into the MacNamee Awards Hall of Fame Kilkenny's John Knox honouring a lifetime of dedication to GAA coverage. An award well merited – congratulations John. 2024 saw a comprehensive programme of games in Kilkenny covered by Clubber. This has been very well received bringing the games to people who might not be able to attend locally and also reaching friends and relatives abroad. Thanks to all the clubs for your co-operation here.

Programmes

Kilkenny is one of the few, if not the only county, to produce programmes covering all our adult League and Championship matches. Huge credit is due to all those who contribute to this mammoth task. Spearheaded by Mary Morgan and a host of co-ordinators at the game's

venues. Special thanks to all the club PRO's who submit team names each Tuesday and to all the Club volunteers who sell the programmes at our games and Gerry O'Neill doing the orientation of the programme. These colour productions, containing Senior, Intermediate and Junior are much welcomed by supporters and are the envy of other counties. The O'Loughlin Gaels club continues to produce and sell top quality programmes for county semi-finals, finals and Allianz League games in UPMC Nowlan Park, while it should be noted that the Junior Board and Coiste na nÓg produces programmes for its championship finals. Credit to everyone involved in the production of all these programmes at every level.

Cultúr

It is great to report that participation levels in Scór continue to improve. In 2024 over 30 clubs took part in the various competitions between Scór na nÓg and Scór Sinsear. The highlight of the year was probably the Stage Competitions in the Set Theatre in March where the large attendance was treated to some really terrific entertainment. Congratulations to all the winners and many thanks to all those who made an effort to participate. Míle buiochas do Sean Breathnach as ucht an obair a dhein se i mbliana.

Children's Officer

I would like to thank Caroline Clifford for her work as Children's Officer at County level in 2024. Her attention to detail and thorough approach always ensured that Kilkenny was never found wanting in this area and was indeed always to the forefront in what needed to be done in this essential area. Her work with the Development Squads and the Summer Cul Camps was invaluable. Having Garda Vetting, safeguarding 1 and a coaching qualification is mandatory for anyone involved with underage players. The use of Veo cameras raised its head in August this year with a ban on the use of these cameras for underage games and squad sessions. This created confusion among clubs as to what could be filmed and the number of under 18's playing with adult teams further complicated the situation. It is important for the GAA to issue clear guidelines as we have had questions over recording of under 21 games, minor games and even school's games here in UPMC Nowlan Park. To reduce the confusion, it would be helpful if clubs ensured that the Photo and Communication Consent section on Foireann Player Profiles is completed at registration time.

Bereavements

The sympathy of the entire GAA family is extended to any of our County Board members, Club Officers, referees, supporters and players who were bereaved by the loss of a family member or friend during the year. We remember, in particular Mick Crotty, Dick Dowling, Derry Noonan, Ollie O'Neill, Jim Conway and John Kinsella. We continue to note the sympathy of the board for bereaved friends at our monthly county board meetings.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha.

Buiochas

It has been a huge honour to continue to serve the Board as Secretary in 2024. Thanks all to all my fellow officers and members of our various sub-committees. To all the Coaching and Games Staff, John Coogan, Kevin McGarry, Christy, Declan and Seanie for all your work on pitches in UPMC Nowlan Park and MW Hire Training Centre Dunmore and especially to Caroline Morrissey who keeps the Nowlan Park Office ticking over, a huge thank you. Thanks to all the Club Officials I have worked with during the year. It is becoming more and more difficult to get volunteers to take on the onerous administrative work at club level. Your role is often thankless but from my point of view you provide a service that is second to none and clubs would not be able to operate without your dedication. Thanks to all.

Séamas Ó Maoildeirg (Rúnaí Choiste Chill Chainnigh)