Cumann na mBunscol

Tir Eoghain



**Chairman’s address 2015**

**Who are we?**
Cumann na mBunscol is the voluntary organisation of primary school teachers on the island of Ireland who promote our native games of camogie, hurling, football, rounders, handball and athletics.

**Structure**
Cumann na mBunscol is structured along the same lines as the GAA. In the GAA the basic unit is the local club. In Cumann na mBunscol the basic unit is the local national school. The next layer in both organisations is the county committee followed by the provincial committee and finally the national committee. Each county runs its own competitions.

**Activities**
Cumann na mBunscol is an inclusive organisation that welcomes all children regardless or creed, ethnic background or gender. Cumann na mBunscol prides itself in being an inclusive organisation and promotes participation and fair play.

Cumann na mbunscol Tir Eoghain was formed in 1986 and to date has promoted gaelic games for 28 years.

Cumann na mBunscol Tir Eoghain provide a series of competitions/quizzes which involve 5 sports across the county through 65+ schools making it the biggest sporting organisation among primary schools in Tyrone.

Initially 40 schools played boys football. Today over 65+ schools take part in a range of gaelic games - boys and girls football, camogie, hurling and handball. We also host an annual quiz at county and Ulster level. We host indoor games with Tyrone and Ulster competitions.

Children are selected on skills ability to play at half time games in the Ulster Championships in football and hurling and at Croke park. We aim to provide opportunities for our pupils to play and enjoy gaelic games.

**Thanks**

It has been an honour to be Chair of this association for the past 5 years. I must pay tribute to our committee and teachers who organise competitions on our behalf. Thanks to all committee members who attend meetings and assist or run competitions and half time games etc. At Ulster and National level our Tir Eoghain association is well respected and viewed as progressive. Indeed Pat Mc Givern represents Cumann na mBunscol Naisiunta as a central delegate to Croke Park with Michael Quinn presently the Chair of the Cumann na mBunscol Uladh.

I thank all teachers and school staff who have both led and supported Cumann na mBunscol and who laid such strong foundations over their many years of involvement. We remember those teachers and colleagues who have died who have promoted our games over the years.

Thanks also to Niall Mc Quaid for the many hours of hard work he has given over the last 4 years in his role as secretary. He has proven himself as an able secretary and constantly encourages schools to participate in gaelic games. We wish him luck in his efforts in compiling a history of Cumann na mBunscol in Tyrone and gaelic games in primary school and we are sure we can count on your support in supplying interviews and pictures etc. Thanks to our sponsors Allianz for their continued support of the Cumann na mBunscol at Tyrone and national level.

Our members have spent many an afternoon coaching children and introducing children to gaelic games. The work that our teachers do is invaluable to these children and follows on from a tradition of teaching gaelic games in primary and national schools from the start of the association.

For many children the experiences of gaelic games in primary schools will be their first experience of the GAA and even sport. The value of these experiences in building community, setting goals and celebrating putting on a school jersey will have a profound impact on the pathway that these children take through life. The voluntary ethos of the GAA much admired is reflected on the many teachers, principals and schools staff that give up their time after school and spend time coaching children and encouraging gaelic games outside the busy classroom and the present demands of the classroom.

Our thanks to Anne Daly Tyrone Games Development Officer for her hard work and vision in developing gaelic games within our schools. Anne is enthusiastic and a clear thinker (and also patient). In 2011 Anne with members of the committee devised a yearly fixture planner to incorporate and co-ordinate a full range of activities through out the year to maximise the opportunities offered to our primary school children. Our thanks to the county board coaches in gaelic football, hurling and camogie who support the work of the teachers in the primary schools.

What is most pleasing for all on the committee is the large numbers of children who participate in our competitions or events. In boys football it is great to see non traditional schools playing gaelic. To all who won leagues and competed in school finals day congratulations. The levels of participation in girls football has greatly improved with some schools entering for the first time over the last 3 years. Having being involved at finals day I was greatly impressed by the skill levels and determination of the children competing on the day and the introduction of a girls competition at finals day has greatly enhanced the spectacle.

The handball competitions were once again fiercely contested with 6 schools participating and it is a realistic aim to try and increase the numbers of children competing in a gaelic sport that is the ultimate individual test. Initiatives such as the one wall game and its development in second level schools offer a model for development and I am aware of schools that have or will install one walls in school playgrounds. It would be a realistic aim to build on our one wall competition to support the work these schools are doing.

Through hard work and determination and some gentle persuasion it was great to see resurgence in hurling and camogie throughout the last 5 years. Building on last year’s work we hosted four regional blitzes and a finals day in both hurling and camogie and a total of 20 schools competed in the hurling blitzes and 16 in the camogie blitzes.

We also have a project ‘young whistlers’ started in some of our schools and are lucky to have three serving referees as teachers. We hope to develop this project and therefore raise the profile of refereeing among the pupils but also build respect for referees within our association.

We are living in times of reduced budgets and school rationalisation. Emigration has returned and threatens the existence of the parish community and local clubs. In times of recession and a perceived lack of opportunity teachers are lead up a pathway of data, standards and the need to improve scores. This inevitably shifts the emphasis of schools and offers a narrow perspective of education. School budgets are leaner and decisions have to be made on providing sub cover, freeing teacher time and transport by the Principals. Often the extras like sports and perceived luxuries of bus trips and equipment are first to go. We as teachers need to provide leadership and recognise the importance of gaelic games, sport and providing a broad education for our pupils. The GAA needs the primary school to promote games as the nursery of future GAA people.

The work that teachers do is valued by pupils and parents – the excitement of wearing a school jersey, winning a county medal or running on to Clones or Croke Park will never be forgotten by them.

**Brian Mc Gurk**