

A Chairde

Twelve months ago, with no other person willing to put their name forward for the role of Chair, I allowed my neck to go on the line – so for the members, my election as Chair of this great club was really a bit of ‘Hobson’s Choice’ – take it or have no Chairperson. I was honoured and humbled to be asked to allow my nomination for Chair, and I do hope I have not disappointed my proposers or indeed any of the members, not least because this illustrious club has had a woman at the helm for the first time in its 132-year history!

Because of Covid 19 we cannot meet face-to-face as a group to hold our regular monthly meetings nor can we hold a regular AGM – AGM 2020 is taking the form of an ‘AGM Day’ on Sunday 29th November 2020 from 2-6pm. The documents normally associated with the AGM – Secretary’s Report and Minutes of last year’s AGM, will be available on the Club’s website – www.clonduffgac.net as usual and for the first time the Chairperson’s address will also be available online because there will be no live audience to address! Accounts are available for inspection by appointment. Three separate boxes will be available for members to post their Comment/Queries/Questions/recommendations on (a) Financial Statements (b) Secretary’s Report and Chairperson’s Address and (c) Members recommendations/suggestions for the incoming year. The Election of Officers will take place when it is safe to do so on a face-to-face basis or by means of a ‘Personal Delivered Vote’. One way or the other, the new Executive will be in place before the start of the new playing season.

As the country went into Lockdown in mid-March there was barely a ball kicked or pucked! So, we were faced with the unprecedented situation of No training, No games, No activity in what should have been the busiest part of the year!

Thankfully that’s not exactly how it worked out! We in Clonduff Club set up ‘Coronavirus – Clonduff People Supporting Each Other’ and compiled a cross community database of people who were willing to do shopping, collect/deliver prescriptions, deliver food parcels or simply make a phone call to the housebound and vulnerable; we collaborated with the local St Vincent de Paul and the local council; we distributed Health & Wellness packs to the elderly and vulnerable in our community, officially partnered with the local pharmacy, VolunteerNow NI and Down Rural Community Network to get the help to where it was needed and to each and every one of those volunteers, I say a massive ‘THANK YOU’.

With club facilities out of bounds our youth coaches across all codes did excellent work from afar via video – and parents of the younger children videoed their children practising the skills and they in turn were shared on our Social Media platforms. Indeed, some very famous names in the GAA across the country commented on the work our mentors were accomplishing with the youngsters. The older kids and adults were sent their training programmes and by and large these were followed – there was a lot of running, walking, cycling etc going on. Just after Easter a few of us got together and organised the ‘Clonduff Connected Campaign’ and I wish to single out Sheenagh Walsh and Charlie Carr for their unstinting efforts in this 7/8 week campaign which involved us sourcing appropriate themes/material, compiling and uploading of a new video every week – messages from Clonduffians around the globe/country, messages to loved ones working in NHS, The Big Clean Up; photographs of our magnificent scenery sent in from where you live, etc and what about that song – 33 singers/musicians collaborating and recording their individual pieces at

home – coordinated and collated by our Scór Singer Kayleigh McPolin and she was responsible for the final production – well done to everyone involved! Thank God for modern technologies!

We took up the GAA Step Challenge and whilst there were many problems with the 'My Life' health app we did have over 120 registered people out walking every day during the month of June and this set us up nicely for 'Clonduff 2020' a fundraiser for two local charities mainly organised by Seamus Parr and a small group of club members – we raised £3,200 in our 5 days of 'movement' at beginning of July – this was divided equally between the local St Vincent de Paul and the Southern Area Hospice.

In June, Charlie Carr answered the call from 'Destination Newry' to take up a spot on 'Hilltown Newsbyte' – Charlie made it a 'Clonduff Newsbyte' but when on-field training resumed Seamus Parr took over the reins. It has grown to such an extent that our PRO Shereen Lyness assists Seamus – Seamus concentrates on the wider Community events and information while Shereen concentrates of Club activities and news.

By mid-July we were putting procedures in place for a 'Safe Return to Play' and we did return safely – we expended a lot of time, effort and money in putting the essential measures in place including the identification of responsible people who would carry out the duties of 'Covid Supervisor' for every team across the club – we did succeed in keeping Covid 19 out of the club though some individual members did contract the virus but away from the club. I envisage Covid Supervisors being an integral part of our club life for the foreseeable future.

Tommy, the Club Secretary, has reported on the teams' performances through the protracted season and just as Clonduff Senior Footballers qualified for a League Final a halt was again called to the season. In that time our Senior Camogs retained the Senior Championship for a fourth year in a row but some of our teams never got to play a single game in their Championships and some juvenile teams didn't get to finish theirs – it's doubtful if that will actually happen now in 2020.

At the time of writing we are once again in the hunt for new Senior Football Management – Adrian and Mark were tempted by the offer of managing their home club although they had verbally committed to Clonduff and were ratified at the November Executive meeting and within 24 hours the news broke that they were taking up the reins in their own club. We take the opportunity of again thanking them for their commitment over the last two years and wishing them well for the future.

With GAA indoor facilities out of bounds throughout Lockdown and still are up to the present time, many of us on the Executive embraced the 'Zoom' technology to hold our monthly meetings – some people didn't like it and others were hampered by poor Internet coverage – however, we did have 17/18 members out of 22 'virtually attend' our monthly meetings from May onwards. Many thanks to our County Secretary Sean Óg McAteer for his advice and support on the running of our 'Zoom' meetings. We tried very hard to keep members of the Executive 'in the loop' in between meetings via WhatsApp and email.

I want to pay tribute to: our players in all codes (Club and County) without whom there would be no Club; the outgoing Executive who have supported me throughout the past twelve months – unfortunately some of them will not be seeking re-election; our coaches, the small number of hardworking volunteers who give tirelessly of their time to make this club – **Your Club** – a better

place for you and your children. We depend very much on volunteers, and we had some great young people come on board during Lockdown, who make themselves available whenever required – fundraising, matches, cleaning, Lotto, admin, match reports/photos, field and facilities maintenance, etc. We are one of the largest clubs in Down and certainly the largest rural club – we really do need your help! A small group of our Youth Coaches put together a database of potential helpers just before Lockdown; some of those on the database were utilised as Covid Supervisors. We will be following up with others who replied to the Volunteer Survey. Your offer of assistance no matter how little, will not be ignored. If you are not already on the database please try to make yourself available for an hour or so per week or even per month! If you/your child is benefitting from **Your Club** and its excellent facilities and coaches, I urge you to come forward. If you are unable to volunteer personally due to personal/work commitments, I would ask you to consider joining the club's fundraising efforts. Please get in touch with any Executive Member or Coach and tell them you want to help out and what you are willing to do – don't wait for someone else to do it first. Your first step in offering your help is the biggest one you will take in helping improve the physical, psychological and social development of your child, his/her team, **Your Club/Your Community**.

For a club the size of ours with almost 1,000 members we are very short on referees across all the codes. Games from U11/12 down can be refereed by coaches and only for that we would not be able to field the number of teams we do at this formative age. From U13 up games can only take place under the charge of an officially trained referee. I am appealing to the very large number of supporters who attend our games, to those of you whose playing days may be behind you or simply to those of you who wish to see our games continue and grow, do consider putting your name forward for Referee Training – **WITHOUT REFEREES THERE CAN BE NO GAMES!**

Unfortunately, there are unsubstantiated rumours circulating about the Club's position with regard to the proposed wind farm on Gruggandoo. Three years ago, the Club held an Extraordinary General Meeting where the members agreed that the Club would remain neutral. Since that time, the Club's stance has remained unchanged. There was no letter sent from the Club since that time nor has the Club been involved in 'brain-washing' any of its members in this respect. What individual members choose to do, is entirely up to them.

My sincere condolences to the members our Club and our Community who lost loved ones during the past difficult year; Ár dheis Dé go raibh a n-anamacha. The Annual Deceased Members' Mass has been deferred until January and if we still cannot hold a standalone Mass as usual, Fr Charlie Byrne will be happy to incorporate our Annual Mass into a regular weekend Mass.

In conclusion, I beg you all to adhere to the Covid 19 Guidelines so that we get back to playing our games and taking part in our cultural activities in a full, safe and meaningful way.

#BeSafe #StaySafe #WeCanDoThis

Go raibh mile maith agaibh!

Anita Ón Uí Chránaig