

Secretary's Report on the activities of Eastern Harps G.A.A. Club 2018

A dhaoine uaisle, tá fáilte romhaibh uilig go dtí an Cruinniú Ginearálta Bliantúil anocht.

Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome you all to our AGM this evening. I'm delighted to present the Secretary's Report on the activities of Eastern Harps GAA Club in 2018.

This year past on the playing field, though not as successful as 2017, was still a reasonably good year with our U12 Division 1 boys team going unbeaten all year and winning their league, while our U12 Division 3 boys team only lost out by the minimum in a thrilling final on the same evening. On the ladies side, things were more positive this year with silverware being obtained by three different teams i.e. our seniors, U16s and U14s, while our U12 girls were narrowly beaten in two finals.

Unfortunately, it was a disappointing season for our senior mens team as, having reached the Senior Championship final for the first time since 2010 last year, this year they had to survive a relegation battle. However, the important thing was to retain senior status for 2019 and that was secured. It was also a disappointing senior league campaign as we finished just one point above the relegation zone. The fact that we won our final two games of the league against the teams which finished 2nd and 3rd in the overall standings suggests that there is more potential in this team, particularly if the necessary commitment is shown by all players involved. There is cause for optimism in the years ahead with four of our minor panel this year making their Senior Championship debuts during the season, Alan Davey, Tomás Taheny, Shawn O'Hara and Bryan Molloy. Eoin Dwyer, while just over age for minor this year, also made his senior debut at just 18 years of age. There are several other young players, who are well capable of playing senior football, progressing from the minor/u21 ranks this year and we look forward to them lining out with the more experienced players in the club in 2019.

After taking some time to consider his position, it was with regret that we learned that Shane King and his backroom team of Shane Gallagher, Paul Judge, Paul Duignan & Des Horan were stepping down as the senior management team after 4 years at the helm. I wish to thank all of them most sincerely for their commitment and dedication all during this period. It is widely recognised that our team is in a period of transition and it is a noteworthy achievement that senior status has been retained in both championship and league during their tenure. The highlight of course was the exciting run we enjoyed in reaching the Senior Championship final in 2017.

I'd like to acknowledge the huge contribution of Des Horan, who did First Aid for three teams this year i.e. the senior men, junior men and minor boys. I sincerely hope that Des will continue in this essential role 'on the bag', a role which makes a massive contribution to the club.

Our junior mens team had an encouraging start to their Division 3 campaign by winning their first two games against Shamrock Gaels and Tourlestrane respectively. Unfortunately, they turned out to be the last games won in the league and they were followed by defeats

to Cloonacool, Curry, Ballymote and Owenmore Gaels. Disappointingly, St. Mary's withdrew from the league resulting in us finishing the league in 6th place on a total of 6 points.

St. Mary's were also drawn in our Junior A Championship group along with eventual winners, Easkey. As a result, following a heavy defeat to a very strong Easkey side in the group, we progressed to the quarter-final and secured a great win against Curry. Our next opponents in the semi-final were Owenmore Gaels, who had gone on to win the Division 3 League earlier in the year. Unfortunately, Owenmore Gaels proved too strong on the day and ran out comfortable winners on a scoreline of 2-13 to 1-08. With an influx of eligible minors becoming available for 2019, competition for places should be more in evidence which can only be a good thing for the club. Thanks to Aiden Ward, Patrick Henry and Tom O'Connor for looking after our junior team during 2018.

On the Ladies side, the year got off to a bright start when Claudia McGovern took on the role of Ladies Chairperson. Claudia set to work straight away and wasted no time in getting Aisling Stephenson on board as Ladies Secretary. Early in the year they both set about getting coaches in place for the start of the season which ensured things got off to a good start for the ladies and girls teams. As the old saying goes, a good start is half the battle, and it's no coincidence that the fortunes of the ladies side of the club improved this year.

On the field, the graph is definitely on an upward curve for the ladies. Fielding many very talented younger players, our senior ladies went on to win the Division 2 League, winning all their league games and going on to defeat St. Michaels in a goal-fest the final, the scoreline reading 8-11 to 6-11.

Having won the Division 2 League, our senior ladies were placed in the Senior Championship. They started brightly in the competition, winning their first two games against Eoghan Rua and St. Marys. However, that was their last victory in the competition, as they went on to lose their next three games to St. Nathy's, Geevagh and St. Michaels respectively. That ended their interest in the competition, however, the future does look bright for these girls as they have a very young team which should only improve over the next few years.

We thank Gabriel Gallagher, Garry Ward and Claudia McGovern for their time and dedication managing the senior ladies team during 2018.

New Clubhouse

Off the field of play, our new clubhouse project is progressing towards its final completion. As most of the work in this phase is internal, the amount of work being done is not as clearly obvious. However, I can assure you that the contract is progressing on schedule & Phase Two is expected to be completed early in the New Year. A huge amount of work has been done and is still being done to see the development through to completion. I am sure I speak for all of you, especially our players, when I say that we are looking forward to the day when the clubhouse is operational next year.

On that note, I must acknowledge the support and patience shown by our players who had to cope with less than ideal facilities over the last couple of years. They especially will be

glad to see the inside of our new dressing rooms and especially a warm shower after a cold night's training. Thanks also to our management teams for their understanding during this period of redevelopment of our clubhouse. I should also acknowledge the support of the many clubs around the county, as they never complained about our reduced facilities over the last couple of years.

Getting back to the funding of the project, unfortunately (but rather fortunately as it turned out), we were unsuccessful in our application for Sports Capital funding despite a very good application being submitted. However, another avenue for funding became available through Sligo LEADER. The reason we were fortunate, as mentioned earlier, is that we would have been ineligible for LEADER funding had we received even a small grant from the Sports Capital Fund.

Under the expert guidance of Seán Scott, our Development Committee got to work putting an excellent application for grant aid in to Sligo LEADER. A massive effort went into submitting the best application possible and we were delighted to hear that we had been approved for a grant of €200k. The LEADER organisation made it known to the club that the work which is being done by our club in the community, and the exceptional quality of our application, were the reasons for the successful application and was reflected in the amount of grant awarded. More recently we have been informed that we have been successful in our grant application with the Connacht Council, where we have been awarded a grant of €10k. While all of the Development Committee contributed to the success of these grant applications, I think it would be remiss of me not to highlight the outstanding contribution of Seán Scott. Seán has put in countless hours of volunteer work and displayed a great amount of skill and expertise in putting these applications together which, as this type of work is done behind the scenes, may go unnoticed by some.

I'd also like to thank my other fellow members on our Development Committee, Tom Murray, Thomas Cryan, Paul Taylor, Pdraig Henry, Damien McGovern & Lisa Casey, for their tireless work on this project. Once again, I'd also like to thank our engineer on the project, Michael Rowley and Associates. Also, I'd like to thank our contractors, T & S Gormley Ltd. who were successful again in winning the public tender for Phase 2 of the project, as they were for Phase 1.

Even though we have secured significant grant aid, it would not be possible to complete the project without a bank loan of €120k which we have recently drawn down to complete the stage payments for Phase 2. This will require us to repay the loan over the next 10 years which will necessitate the club continuing to fundraise over each of those years to service the loan. However, when the project is delivered, it will be clear that we have a clubhouse which will stand the test of time for generations to come.

We have also been approved for Revenue's tax incentive scheme, whereby donations to the club of €250 or more in a calendar year can result in the tax which would have paid on the amount of the donation being paid back by Revenue to the club.

Huge work continues to be done to raise funds to make this project a reality. The weekly bingo in Gurteen Hall, held in conjunction with Gurteen Hall Committee, is central to the

success of this project. Great credit is due to the members of Harps Bingo Committee, (Damien McGovern, Eamonn Clarke, Ciarán McGovern, Pauline Gorman, Deirdre Gillen, Amy McGovern, Mark Tansey and Kate O'Neill) who unselfishly give up their Friday evenings for the good of the club. I urge you all to try to attend the bingo more regularly as not only would it help the club greatly, but it is a great social outlet and, of course, there is always the chance of winning a few euro as well.

Our main fundraiser held this year was the Race Night held in late October. This fundraiser proved to be a huge success, surpassing our expectations. With some of the pledged money still to be collected at time of writing, it is expected that the final total raised will be in excess of €50k. Tremendous credit is due to the organising committee, consisting of Seamus Hannon, Brendan McHugh, Ronan Higgins and Kevin Cryan. I'd also like to thank all the members of the executive and others who sourced sponsorship from businesses both inside and outside our club area. I'd also like to thank those who sold horses, which also ensured the success of the event. Of course, those businesses and individuals who supported our fundraiser contributed their hard-earned money to the club and we are very grateful to them for their support. I would encourage you all to support those businesses which have supported our club at this time.

The Race Night itself ran very smoothly. Thanks must go to the MC, Today FM's Paul Collins, those who helped out in any way on the night. Of course, our hosts, Patrick Ward and the staff of the Fox's Den deserve great credit too, as there was plenty of food & refreshments for everyone to enjoy and a great night was had by all.

For the 2nd year running, a Golf Classic has been held in Carrick-on-Shannon Golf Club. This event is organised by members of the senior team and management, with Michael Keville also providing a lot of assistance. This year the money raised was split evenly between the Development Fund and going towards the costs of running the senior team. Great credit is due to the organisers and many of the senior players who take part to help with the fundraising effort, even though golf is not their no. 1 sport.

In what has become an (almost) annual event in the past number of years, Operation Transformation was held from January to March again this year. With 150 approx signing up, it was once again a great success. Fitness classes were held in Keash Hall and Gurteen Hall, in addition to bootcamps which were held for the first time in Coláiste Muire, Ballymote. We teamed up again with Parkrun in Lough Key each Saturday morning. A great party was held in Teach Murray to mark the closing of the event, where we were entertained once again by Backwater Jack. This year four new members got involved in the OT organising committee, putting in huge work to ensure the event ran as seamlessly as possible. I'd like to thank those four new OT committee members, Carmel Taheny, Catherine Cryan, Dorothy Connolly and Aneta Holub. I'm glad to say that they are raring to go again with OT 2019 and I encourage you all to get involved. It is a great way to start off the year by becoming fitter and healthier and having some fun along the way. I'd also like to thank our fitness instructors during last year's event, Aiden Ward, Ann Wynne & Rachael Martens.

A new initiative by our Healthy Club Committee this year was the introduction of our monthly Walking Series, held at 10am on the 3rd Sunday each month since April. Various venues are chosen such as Union Wood, Ben Bulbin Forest & Killaspugbrone in Strandhill, as well as some held in more familiar locations locally. Perhaps the most important part of this initiative is that when the walk is completed, everyone taking part is encouraged to have a well-earned tea or coffee and a chat together afterwards.

In conjunction with the GAA and the RNLI, our Healthy Club Committee also organised a very worthwhile talk on water safety in July. This proved to be a very successful event with a total of 84 people of varying ages attending. A representative of Sligo RNLI, Hugh Slevin, came to the club to give the talk and he was joined by our local Councillor, Paul Taylor, who was very good to share his difficult personal experiences in relation to the drowning tragedy in Strandhill 20 years previously on 17th May 1998, where his brother Bobby and his two friends Tommy Coyle and Michael Higgins were so cruelly taken from their families, friends and clubmates on the fateful day which we will never forget.

To mark the 20th Anniversary of the tragedy, on the Sunday 20th May, our club and Gurteen Celtic organised a Remembrance Mass in Gurteen Church. It was a lovely Mass and a very appropriate way to show the support of the community for the families involved at this difficult time. I know that the families were very appreciative to everyone for attending and were very happy with the respectful nature of the ceremony. I'd like to thank Fr. Caulfield, Fr. Doherty, Fr. Murphy and Fr. O'Grady for concelebrating the Mass on the day. Also, the beautiful singing of the choir really made it feel extra special. I'd like to acknowledge the contribution of Adrian Tansey of The Crossbar, for providing the refreshments after the ceremony.

Underage Football

A full report will be provided by each team management as part of the AGM booklet which will be published nearer the time of the AGM, so I will not be going into great detail in summarising the progress of each team during the year.

To begin with, and as I mentioned in my AGM report last year, I think we need to redouble our efforts to ensure that we are putting sufficient resources into coaching to ensure that our young players are getting the best opportunity to learn and develop their game. I think that, in the early years, the focus needs to be on enjoyment and learning the skills of the game properly. To do this, we need to ensure that we have enough coaches in place. However, unfortunately, it is becoming more difficult to source coaches for various reasons. I encourage anyone interested in coaching, particularly parents, to help us ensure that our young players receive the best possible opportunity to improve. Please give your name to any committee member and the necessary steps will be put in place to get you up-and-running as a coach. This involves taking a foundation level coaching course, a code of ethics course and being Garda vetted. As the safety and welfare of our children are paramount, these are the absolutely right and proper steps which need to be taken to become a GAA coach. So please get your name in early (as in right away) to get the ball rolling in time for next year. Seeing the young players develop their skills and grow in confidence is very rewarding.

Our U6/8/10s started off their season indoors with many of them playing in the Pella programme in Coláiste Muire and many of them are ending up their season indoors also, as the club has started an Activity Camp for children of this age group in Gurteen Hall on Saturday mornings. In between, they were out each Wednesday evening for training and matches. It is a sight to behold on a Wednesday evening when there are U8 & U10 matches going on, with huge crowds of players at each age group and parents cheering them on. Great credit is due to all the coaches involved at this age group. I'd especially like to acknowledge those who started the Activity Camp towards the end of the year. This is a great initiative which is more about fun and activity than football. However, it is an introduction to physical activity and we are hopeful that many of those in attendance will line out for the club at our younger age groups next year.

On the boys side, the highlight of the year was our U12s winning the Division 1 League in the county. They were almost matched by the U12 Division 3 team coming so close to winning their league also, with only the kick of a ball in it at the end of their final, despite the fact that the majority of these players were actually under 11 years of age. Perhaps more importantly though, is the way these lads play their football with such heart and determination, and with great skill and intelligence also.

I'd like to thank their coaches who organised a trip to Croke Park for these lads for the Tyrone v Monaghan All-Ireland semi-final. This was a great initiative and one which the club should consider again for a wider group, as the group tickets are available at a very low cost. A lot of sponsorship was received for this trip, including the tickets, the bus and some food

on the way home and I'd like to acknowledge the generous contributions of the sponsors involved.

Our minor boys had a disappointing year by their high standards as they did not land any silverware this year. However, not all success can be measured in silverware. The progress of some of our minors straight into the senior team bodes very well for the future. I know there is more to come from these players and from some other minor players who are well capable of challenging for positions on our senior team next year. However, gaining a regular starting place on our senior team does not come easy and I urge them to put the necessary effort in next year to push for a place on the senior team. For those who are not just ready for senior football next year, it is important that they line out for our junior mens team to gain the necessary experience of adult football to continue to learn and improve.

Our U16 boys had a very small panel and had to rely on some U14s to have enough of a panel to compete. However, they competed well throughout the year and eventually reached the B Shield Final but lost out to our neighbours, Shamrock Gaels.

Our U14 boys competed well during the year and an enjoyable year was had by all the players. It was a difficult year in some respects as they were up against strong opposition in many of their games. However, this did not deter them and they played with determination through the year. As said previously, the important thing at this age is that the players are continuing to develop their game at this age.

Our U13 feile team endured a difficult competition in the 'A' group but would have learned a lot by playing such good opposition too. It was difficult for them as the majority of our players were actually under 12 competing against players who were, in the main, a year older. However, the experience of playing on a full-size pitch will be very good for them as they go on to play under 14 next year.

More recently, our 21s played in their Championship. After losing narrowly to St. Mary's in their first group match and then beating Ballymote/Bunninadden in their second game, they went into the last group match against Coolera/Strandhill knowing that a win would see them through to the semi-finals. However, an abject first half performance left them several points down at half-time. With some strong words from the management team of Keith Carty, Sean Scott and Mikey O'Grady at half time, the lads put in a much better performance and showed glimpses of what they were capable of in the second half, but ultimately it was not enough to get the win, losing by a single goal at the end. It was a very disappointing end to the Championship as this team was more than capable of progressing to at least the semi-finals had they applied themselves properly.

On the girls side, our minor girls team was made up mostly of under 16s and there were only two games this year. Firstly, it is disappointing that this age group only had two games but I think this is a reflection on the number of girls who are dropping out of football at this age level in all clubs. It is a challenge for all clubs to keep these girls involved into minor and senior football and, unfortunately, it is a challenge which is not easily solved.

Our U16s girls endured a difficult league campaign, however, they remained competitive throughout and were rewarded for their resilience in the B Championship by going one step further than last year & winning the U16 'B' Championship Final. This was a highly entertaining game, on 6th October in Kent Park against Geevagh. The girls played with huge determination all through and eventually ran out comfortable winners on a scoreline of 6-12 to 2-07.

Our U14 girls had a very enjoyable year. They finished 3rd in their league, winning 3 of their 5 matches, but only just losing out on a final spot. However, they went one better in the U14 B Championship by beating St. Nathy's in the final on a scoreline of 2-12 to 3-06. This was a very exciting game with the result in doubt to the very end.

Our U12 girls also had a great year but will probably feel a little disappointed, having reached two finals without having any silverware to show for it. On both occasions they lost out to a very strong Eoghan Rua team. However, the girls should not be too disheartened as they are a very good team who will surely go on to win some silverware in the future.

I'm glad to say that our Under 10 girls had a better year this year than last, mainly due to more players attending and more organised games. The girls competed well in both blitzes and individual games. It is great to see more girls turning out at this age group which will only help our under 12 girls team next year.

I'd like to acknowledge the time and effort put in by all our coaches at all levels, in both boys and girls, men and ladies. Without giving their time generously, it would not be possible to cater for all the teams in all the competitions we enter as a club. It is a great achievement to be able to field teams in both boys and girls at all age groups, including a senior ladies team and senior and junior mens teams. The coaches put in a huge amount of work preparing these teams for training sessions and matches, not to mention perhaps having to rush home from work early, grab a quick bite to eat, be there on time, while also being last to leave.

I'd also like to thank the players and their parents for bringing them to these training sessions and matches. Your support is also essential to ensure that we can enter teams at all age groups.

G4M&O

It is great to see our G4M&O team progressing year-on-year. It was great to see one of their players, Sarah Gallagher, actually move on to play a starring role in our senior ladies team this year.

Once again, they returned undefeated from their annual blitz in Portmarnock. Even the mighty 'All Blacks' in rugby don't have as good a 'win' record as our G4M&O ladies. However, the most important thing about G4M&O is that it provides a great outlet for ladies of all ages to enjoy some sporting activity without the pressures usually surrounding competitive sport. The emphasis is on the fun, craic and camaraderie, more so than

competition. It is open to all ladies to take part, whether you have ever played football or not and you can be assured of a great welcome if you decide to get involved.

Our pitch

I'd like to thank our Pitch Committee, led by John Cryan and Eamonn Clarke, for the many hours work they put into ensuring our pitch is kept in good shape. Brian McCrann has once again done many hours of work on the scheme which is of enormous help to the Pitch Committee members. Having been over visiting the clubhouse development recently, I couldn't help but notice that the pitch is in excellent condition at the end of the year. This just shows that the money spent sanding and spiking the pitch earlier this year is money well spent and that the caretakers of the pitch have done an amazing job to keep it in such good shape throughout the year. I am also pleased to say that there was great work done more recently to replace all the lights in our floodlights. There is still a problem with the lights on one pole but we hope to get to the bottom of this before the start of the new season. A special thanks for the work involved in replacing the lights goes to John Cryan, Paul Taylor, Raymond Garvin and Keith O'Hara (Height for Hire - Sligo) for the work involved. It is not an easy task and it is difficult to get everything right on a particular day over a weekend, especially the weather, so well done to all involved.

Sponsors

Once again, I'd like to thank our premium sponsors who have provided invaluable support to our club over the past year and previous years. I sincerely hope that your support will continue into the future. If any other organisation or individual would like to become a premium sponsor, please contact any member of our committee.

Speaking of the committee, I'd like to thank all of our Executive Committee members for their guidance of the club over the past year. It is invaluable to have a committee who have the interests of the club at heart and are prepared to do the work behind the scenes. I'd particularly like to thank my Assistant Secretary, Avril East, who was always eager to help out whenever called upon. Avril and Carmel Taheny have once again put the AGM booklet together this year and I thank them for that. I also thank my colleague as Secretary of the Ladies Committee, Aisling Stephenson.

I would like to congratulate Paul Taylor, who has recently been appointed as manager of the Sligo Senior Football team. On hearing the news, I offered my services as a forwards coach but he said that he had already learned everything he knew from playing alongside me in the full-forward line for Harps for over a decade. I jest of course, but on a serious note, I wish Paul the very best in his new role. He faces a difficult task ahead but I'm sure he will rise to the challenge, as he has done many times for Harps and Sligo over the years.

I'd like to congratulate all those who got married, engaged or had new additions to the family in 2018. I extend our sympathies to those whom have been bereaved during the year.

As all of our volunteers know, while it can be very rewarding, it also cuts down on the amount of family time available. I would like to especially thank my family, Anne, Ciarán, Aisling & Orla for their support during the year.

I apologise in advance for any omissions or errors in this report.

Here's to continued success and enjoyment for our club and community in 2019!!!

I submit this report to our members for ratification at our AGM.

Mise, le meas,

Seán Ó Dorraídhín

Rúnaí