

Title –

“An investigation into whether the GAA’s embrace of professionalism is being hindered by it’s inherited culture.”

Author –

Niall Horan

“This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for achieving a Master in Business Strategy and Innovation Management”



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List of Abbreviations

- GAA – Gaelic Athletic Association
- SM – Sean McKeigue
- WD – William Dervan
- AC – Adrian Cullinane
- AMH – Annemarie Hayes

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Abstract

The GAA, since its humble beginnings in Thurles 1884, has long been the bedrock of Irish sporting culture. Each summer teams and supporters alike follow the dream of capturing a place in history alongside the elite of sporting folklore. Far and wide across the world the colours of one’s county team are worn as a symbol of pride and heritage. The organization has prided itself on its ability to draw crowds and players from all around the country to play for merely the love of the games and to exact a sense of pride in a community. Yet as players become more and more entranced on a fixation of winning and success the boundaries for preparation would appear to be stretched to the limit. The GAA have always had a strict ethos of “playing without paying”, yet this status of amateurism has become more contentious over the past 10-20 years. Players are now expected to exert themselves for arguably the entire calendar year with the ultimate objective of winning. Thus this dissertation aims to examine the circumstances that have hindered the evolution of the GAA towards becoming a fully professional body and hence gain the opinions of other’s on the controversial and debateable issue.

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1.0 Introduction

“I think the GAA have decided not to go down that road . . . they are not into the professional game and personally I wouldn't like to see that ever happen.” – Former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. (2006).

“There had been talk that once you set off down the road to professionalism, like rugby did a few years ago, there's no turning back. So far the GAA has resisted that but who can say whether they can in the future.” – Sean Moran, GAA Correspondent Irish Times

The quotations that have been used above are a mere glimpse of the differing opinions and perceptions of what a professional GAA would mean. The notion of the organisation losing its sense of identity with the Irish people both at home and abroad provokes a sense of emotion and parochial discomfort, even anger in some quarters. Yet the GAA has come a long way throughout the years with advances made not only in the sports themselves the lifestyles a player at the top grade must now live, the degree of viewing audiences there now is along with the money that is now being generated as a result of the “amateur” organisation.

The focus of this dissertation is to investigate the changes that have been seen throughout the years of the GAA’s existence and the writer intends to forward a number of rhetorical questions and assumptions for the reader to ponder – one being – many argue the notion of a professional GAA is not possible and would completely ruin what the GAA stands for.

Yet on the GAA’s two most famous days of the calendar year, the hurling and football finals respectfully, why is it that every business either directly or indirectly including the GAA make their largest degree of revenue – whether it is people selling flags or food outside the stadia, every person appears to make their cut – that is apart from the people the supporters have come to see – the players.

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The writer intends to begin the overall dissertation by giving the reader an insight into the background of the GAA and the values on which it has been based. This will allow the reader to see a clear pattern and evolution throughout the years of the organisations existence. By introducing the GAA this will set the scene of how the writer intends to structure the overall theme of the dissertation.

The culture and identity of sport is an extremely relevant issue when approaching the issue of moving an historical organisation from an amateur state to a professionalised body. The writer will firstly convey the themes of culture and the background there is behind sporting culture within a specific country.

Culture is a vast area of study thus the writer will look to identify Irish culture predominantly with comparisons drawn against the cultures of various other countries. Specific literature should allow the writer to develop an informed background into the culture of Ireland and thus this will permit the reader to have a defined impression of the identity of where the writer will move the dissertation to next. It will also be important for the writer to draw reference to the importance of a national cultural identity – ie the fact that Gaelic Games are original to the Irish culture.

The overall focus of this dissertation is to identify and examine the reactions of individuals to a professional GAA and how the identity of the GAA has been influenced by inherited perceptions. Thus, this writer will address and examine the different contexts of change management and more specifically change management in sport. Change management is a vast area of study also, although this writer may well be assessing the area of a radical change in terms of change from amateurism to professionalism.

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As well as examining change management, this writer will also investigate the subject of ethics and how ethical dilemmas can relate to sport. This area of study could and should be quite topical and open to one’s specific interpretation. For example, if there is a future professional GAA, who will get paid? The issue of payment of players is extremely topical.

Donal McAnallen wrote for the Irish Times in April 2008 that “Gaelic games stand alone as beacons of popular amateur sport.” Yet as more payments of different kinds are being made to the sports leading players “it would make top-level Gaelic games formally quarter-professional, and would in turn undermine the rules, volunteer structure and ethos of the Association.” (McAnallen, 2008). Thus literature of this nature will help the reader to have a necessary scope on what personal conclusions they will make on the ethical nature of the radical changes within the GAA.

The writer is also keen to draw comparison on other sports which have moved professional in the last number of years – namely Rugby Union and Australian Rules. Although these sports cannot be fully compared due to the fact that they globally followed and played sport, there will be comparisons that can be drawn from for examples the so called home nations ie Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

The argument and debate still burns in both urban and rural Ireland as to whether the GAA will one day, possibly in the near future, lose its position as being the largest and most envied amateur organisation in the world.

When one assesses and examines the culture of Ireland, what does one think of - The “Céad Míle Fáilte”, our well publicised drinking culture, the agricultural heritage of Ireland? All are indeed associated with Irish culture, yet far and wide the Irish, both home and abroad will always be aware of the passion and support given to the local GAA and the pleasure in which it brings to a community spirit. Viewers, year after year, observe on our television screens just what it means to supporters, to win a piece of silverware that a geographical area has passionately waited for. One reflects on the historical achievements of Armagh and Tyrone in 2002 and 2003 respectively winning the Sam Maguire cup, Gaelic footballs pinnacle accomplishment, for the first time and how their supporters, both young and old shed tears of

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joy. One considers the blood, sweat and tears left on the Croke Park pitch, the associations most sacred ground, all in the name of pride and victory.

Yet then one examines why these athletes endeavour and exert themselves selflessly. Possibly four to five nights per week of physical training with little or no weekends where one can enjoy somewhat of a “normal” social life, all in the aid of community or county pride and satisfaction? This may be the valid argument put forward from the pro-professionalism perspective.

The vast majority of these athletes, one would assume, hold full-time employment, possibly have families, wives/girlfriends. The GAA sells hundreds and thousands of tickets every year and it is the players who the audience and crowd have come to see. It could be suggested that surely these players are entitled to a share of the financial “cake”. In August 2005 the newspaper “The Western People” wrote “Players are entitled to sign sponsorship deals with private companies and who can blame them for wanting to cash in on their all too brief careers. They are aware of the huge money that is being generated by the GAA and they want a slice of the action. Players now realise they can make ‘easy’ money by simply agreeing to carry the name of a company on their boots or hurley”. (The Western People, 2005).

Thus people in favour of a more financially attractive and rewarding organisation believe that players should avail of the opportunities that have arisen as a result of the evolution of the GAA. “The Western People” goes on to add “There is no doubt that the GAA has been overtaken by its own success. No-one could have predicted the number of marketing and commercial opportunities that would flow from the regular televising of football and hurling matches. (The Western People, 2005).

RTE is now earning vast sums of money from gaelic games and a whole industry has been built up around the two sports. Football analysts, reporters, photographers and merchandise companies are all making a good living thanks to the magical skills of the country’s best talents.” (The Western People, 2005).

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This article was written 5 years ago one must remember thus it would appear the GAA has progressed even further in that space of time. This obviously an article written with the intention of gaining support for radical changes within the GAA organisation yet one must have an extensive and varied opinion when assessing the matter.

One must identify what precedence will then be set should the association go professional? Are the Irish people prepared to lose or at least surrender something that has been viewed as a cultural identity. “With the foundation of the Irish free state, the GAA became the third pillar underpinning the nation after state and church. (Magdalinski, Chandler – 2002 Page 27).

As John Sugden and Alan Bairner suggested “the GAA’s pre-political function was more or less inverted from a traditional position of antagonism to the state to that of outward supporter; whereas the GAA had been formed in the 1880’s as part of a campaign of resistance against British hegemony, by the 1920’s it had become a vital part of the institutional infrastructure of the fledgling Irish free state”. (Magdalinski, Chandler – 2002 – Page 28).

Thus the GAA is not merely seen as an organisation for sport, the traditions and ideology run much deeper in Irish history and culture. Conservatives and traditionalists alike may argue that, should the GAA become similar to foreign sporting organisational bodies, would the entire GAA be selling its’ soul?

There are other issues regarding a professional organisation that can be questioned such as where will the proverbial line be drawn as to who will get paid and in what sums of money. There is the issue of television rights. The GAA already is competitively sought after as it stands in terms of broadcasting. Should the GAA’s hierarchy elect a professional itinerary there will be stern struggle to gain broadcasting rights which may affect the average supporters viewing right. One also could examine the ethical standards and patterns with which the GAA is based on. Are the GAA acting in an ethical manner and are they justified in denying top GAA players specific sponsorship deals when it would appear the players are the true “entertainers”?

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The underlying issue behind any proposed professional body is losing a great and significant cultural identity should there be a change to the professionalism era that has seen, as many have argued, the ruination of the soccer identity. These are all issues that this writer would like to examine and address throughout the course of this particular dissertation.

1.1 Motivation behind study

The writer obviously has a keen interest in the matter of the GAA yet the justification for the research is to gain an insight into the differing opinions and reactions that various individuals have on the topic. The rationale behind the research is due to the fact that this is a burning social issue nationwide with opinions made and aggressively stood by in many cases. It is the writers’ objective to examine these opinions, relate the academics of research to the matters discussed and make a personal conclusion and informed interpretation on the research made.

This writer is an avid follower of the GAA but is very aware that an objective and non-biased view will need to be held although the researcher is aware this maybe quite difficult when assessing a matter that is as hypothetical as a professionalised GAA.

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2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Purpose of the Literature Review

A literature review goes beyond the search for information and includes the identification and articulation of relationships between the literature and your field of research. While the form of the literature review may vary with different types of studies, the basic purposes remain constant. (Boote & Beile 2005). The literature review also offers an overview of the relevant and significant literature on a particular specific research area.

It reviews the critical points of current knowledge on a particular topic with the purpose of the review being to demonstrate ones ability to identify the relevant information and outline existing knowledge ie. identify the "gap" in the research that your work will address; produce a rationale or justification for your study. (UCD Library, 2010)

2.2 Origins and Values of the Gaelic Athletic Association

“The GAA is a community based volunteer organisation promoting Gaelic games, culture and lifelong participation. The GAA is a volunteer organisation. We develop and promote Gaelic games at the core of Irish identity and culture. We are dedicated to ensuring that our family of games, and the values we live, enrich the lives of our members, families and the communities we serve.” – (GAA Mission statement 2009)

Irish people have always had a natural love of games and gambling on games, and Gaelic sports can boast an ancient lineage. The author deemed it necessary to begin this dissertation by giving the reader an informed and relatively thorough background into the origins and values of the Gaelic Athletic Association. Since its foundation in Thurles, Co. Tipperary on 1 November 1884, the GAA has seen many changes. It is the writer’s obligation to show the reader how and why these changes have occurred and hence furthermore make personal conclusions on the modern organisations position in terms of what lies ahead in the future.

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The GAA is the largest amateur sports body in the world and the most successful voluntary organisation in the history of modern Ireland. Its games are played in every parish, village and townland of Ireland; its influence on Irish public life is immeasurable.

One of Ireland's national sporting treasures, the great GAA commentator Micheál Ó Muircheartaigh describes the evolution of the GAA in a very appropriate manner. He believes that historical events in Ireland's history have clear links with the GAA. “From the 'Bloody Sunday' massacre in 1913 to the more recent lifting of Rule 42 - banning 'foreign' games from GAA grounds, the Association's often turbulent history has mapped the changing political and social landscape of the Irish nation. Yet throughout its existence, it is the story of its games and the heroic players who graced them that resonates strongest”. (Ó Muircheartaigh, 2009 - abstract).

Hurling and football have produced some of the most wonderful moments in Irish sport. Thus this writer believes that it is indeed the notion that the GAA is profoundly and uniquely Irish that makes it the root of many passionate debates. Many believe it is ‘ours’. It can be argued that the GAA defines our nationalism and patriotism.

The man many believe to be the fathering founder of the GAA and who helped to develop distinctively Irish games was Michael Cusack (1847–1907). Doherty and O’Riordon, both of University College Cork, track the history and how Cusack was driven by the desire to revive Irish games and promote a sense of nationalism and loyalty to Ireland in a time of British rule. He is known to have written in the Freeman’s Journal in 1885 that he wished to ‘nationalise and democratise sport in Ireland’. (Doherty and O’Riordon, 2003). The seeds of nationalism within the sporting arena in Ireland were then sown. Cusack considered founding a national organisation to preserve Irish games, and published anonymous articles about this in nationalist newspapers.

The writer Richard Holt analysed the foundations of the GAA and believed it was ironic that Cusack had, at the time of the GAA’s origins, been making “quite a good living from cramming students for the British Civil Service examinations when he devised a means of playing both hurling and football on the same pitch. He stressed Irish ethnic distinctiveness through sport”. (Holt, 1990 Page 239). On 11 October 1884, the papers published his article

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‘A Word about Irish Athletics’. Here Cusack appealed to the Irish people to reject English sports and customs, which he described as ‘imported and enforced’. He believed they would destroy Irish nationality. (Holt, 1990)



Fig 2.1 *Michael Cusack, original founder of the GAA.*

This writer suggests that political unrest and continuous suspicions among Irish nationalists in particular towards their British counterparts were defining factors in the promotion of a separate sporting organisation and for the consequential popularity that followed. Cusack condemned the holding of athletic meetings in Ireland under the rules of England’s Athletic Association. (Doherty & O’Riordan, 2003).

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The GAA’s official website tracks the historical events which occurred before and during the foundation stages of the GAA. At 3.00 p.m. on Saturday 1st November 1884, a small group of men, at least seven and possibly as many as fourteen, met in the billiard-room of Miss Hayes's Commercial Hotel in Thurles, and there founded the Gaelic Athletic Association with the defining and core value being the “Preservation and Cultivation of National Pastimes.” (“GAA History Timeline - 2010”). The seven founder members were Michael Cusack, Maurice Davin (who presided) John Wyse Power, John McKay, J. K. Bracken, Joseph O’Ryan and Thomas St. George McCarthy. (“GAA History Timeline - 2010”)

Michael Cusack wrote in enthusiasm: “The Association swept the country like a prairie fire”. (“GAA History Timeline – 2010.”). The rules for football and hurling were drawn up at the third meeting of the GAA in January 1885 and were published in the United Irishman newspaper. For political reasons and the ever present hostilities among groups in the northern areas of the country, the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) had been monitoring GAA activities.

Members of the RIC were hence banned from GAA sports in 1888, a controversial rule which was in place for many years. It is the writer’s opinion that the GAA was most probably seen as method for illustrating nationalism in a non-military manner. For example, in the modern era the singing of the Republic’s national anthem in nationalist areas of Northern Ireland such as Omagh, Co. Tyrone caused conflict, yet it was a signature of heritage and Irishness in a relatively peaceful manner. Further influences and catalysts for GAA loyalty lay ahead.

The first of the infamous and horrific “Bloody Sundays” occurred on November 21st, 1920 – the day of the calendar All Ireland football final. In all 14 Irish civilians were killed in retaliation to any earlier attack by Irish rebels on their counterparts. (“GAA History Timeline - 2010”). The massacre sparked outrage among the Irish people and it was suggested that loyalties, if any, to the crown of England were lost that day. Consequently not only did the dead become remembered by Ireland as a nation, the GAA was used as a flagship for all that was profoundly Irish and anti-British.

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The Irish people championed the GAA and it became known as everything that Britain was not. Eamonn Sweeney from O’ Brien Press describes the effects the GAA had on the localities and townlands of Ireland. The organization grew at a fascinating pace in this writers’ opinion yet some of the reasons for its popularity would explain why.

Throughout the twentieth century Irish people often needed an outlet, a reason to feel proud, to feel bonded to a parish or local spirit. At a time of relentless economic woes, religious repression and political instability, sport was the most immediate means of providing an outlet, almost to take ones mind off the everyday frustrations. The GAA was that channel for this good feeling, something the organisation recognised and encouraged.

From its beginnings the GAA made use of the local pride and patriotism in Irish society. (Sweeney, 2005 – Page 12). Local clubs were generally organised on a parish basis and the championships were contested between county teams. Players, with a few exceptions, played for the parish or county where they were born and bred, and would spend their whole career with the same club. This is a tradition that has been handed down through generations of families and friends.

There was a unique intensity to local rivalries and endowed the best counties with a powerful, long-standing tradition. For instance, Kerry emerged as the undisputed kings of Gaelic football, while the “Big Three” of Tipperary, Cork and Kilkenny have long dominated hurling. (Sweeney, 2005 – Page 13-14).

The GAA brought a level of interest to parishes who had limited resources and the weekend games were, and still are spoken about in detail. Christy Cooney, president of the GAA spoke about the values and heritage of the GAA. “Over the past 125 years the GAA has taken a leadership role in our society. The passion and commitment of our members and clubs has contributed to the growth and development and sense of identity of communities. We will put in place a process to address the issues surrounding the amateur status and implement a clear framework to maintain it at the core of the Association.” (The GAA Strategic Vision and Action Plan 2009-2015)

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Fig 2.1 *Christy Cooney, present acting GAA*

president

The GAA has always had a clear and defining framework in place on which its core values have been evidently built upon.

In the 2009-2015 GAA framework the values are again identified as being traditionally based on community activity and the promotion of the theory that the “parish” is at the heart of the association. The GAA state that everything they do helps to enrich the communities they serve and they hope to foster a clear sense of identity and place. Again there is the clear distinction drawn between the amateur core values on which the GAA is based. The strategic plan states “We are a volunteer led organisation with all our members playing and engaging in our games as amateurs. We provide a games programme at all levels to meet the needs of all our players. We welcome everybody to be part of our Association. We are anti sectarian. We are anti racist.” (GAA framework 2009-2015)

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One merely needs to look at the pride that is shown when a county or club wins silverware. The GAA has been unique since its foundations and above all would appear to be everything associated with being Irish. Thus culturally it would appear the GAA is uniquely Irish and the historical sports are what make our country original. Thus should the GAA move into an even greater professionalised era, should there be a recognised threat to Irish people’s culture and identity?

2.3 Culture, Identity and Uniqueness

While the writer has looked at the origins and values of the GAA it is also important to recognise culture in terms of one’s heritage and but also in terms of its’ overall significance. It is not common law that each particular country or society has its own specific culture but it can be argued with reason that individual states have their own originality and uniqueness that sets them apart from one another.

The Italian writer’s Birukou, Blanzieri, Giorgini, Giunchiglia defined culture as the “whole complex of traditional behaviour which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation.” (Birukou, Blanzieri, Giorgini, Giunchiglia, 2009, Page 5). They also argue however, the notion of culture with respect to a given human society was needed in order to study other societies. Thus as these writers have explained, it is this writers’ prerogative to address the elements of the Irish culture in comparison to many others. The Italian citation goes on: “A culture is less precise. It can mean the forms of traditional behaviour which are characteristic of a given society or of a group of societies, or of a certain race, or of certain area, or of a certain period of time”. (Birukou, Blanzieri, Giorgini, Giunchiglia, 2009, Page 6).

Thus the author will look at what makes Irish people Irish. Is our Irish culture so much different from others around the world and have we as a people the ability to embrace cultural changes that may arise in the future?

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Philipp Hammond examined and made suggestions regarding the issue of identity and its importance. “We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept, theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life. The word itself has acquired a huge contemporary resonance, inside and outside the academic world. The idea that identity is important because it is in crisis is commonly invoked. (Hammond, 2007, Page 2).

As Kobena Mercer also remarked: ‘identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty’. (Mercer, 1994, Page 259).

Thus as a result of addressing and assessing these specific citations one must look to examine culture in relation to Ireland.

Researchers and analysts have studied the attitudes and perceptions towards the playing of the Republican national anthem directly before GAA games. Many have mentioned that the distinct GAA culture has seen a unique level of passion and patriotism arise in GAA players from the six Northern counties of Ireland.

Speaking of the songs that are identifiable with GAA supporters, Bateman and Bale argued that “clearly such county songs build on tradition, and many of the verses and airs have their roots in the song-collecting renaissance of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century...A significant proportion of these songs detail matches and events from the first decades of the GAA, and locate themselves in an emergent sporting culture that was resisting the (both political and cultural) colonial Britain.” (Bateman, Bale, 2008, Page 214).

Perhaps there is not an immediate threat to their culture but these players and supporters justify their nationalism through singing this song and the argument could be put forward that it would appear that they are making a statement to their unionist counter parts that while this song and moment is present they are entirely of Irish origin. This is merely a theory in the opinion of the writer it must be added.

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Thus the over-riding issue of professionalism and evolution would appear to be testing the significance of the GAA’s identity as being sincerely “Irish”. As has already been stated, the GAA is the largest serving amateur organisation in the world which makes it unique. Should we move towards losing our uniqueness in this respect, it would be conceivable to say that supporters and conservatives would oppose such a concept.

Michaelene Cox, writer of the book “Social capital and peace-building: creating and resolving conflict”, suggests that as a whole the GAA can be described as being engaged in “sportive nationalism” where there is a “conscious exploitation of Irish games as a way to foster support for a united and independent Ireland.” (Cox, 2003, Page 13). Thus one must speculate if the GAA hierarchy would be prepared to embrace such cultural change as a professional organisation when it is supremely obvious that the GAA is deeply embedded in traditionalism.

When addressing the matter of sport and its relatedness to culture and identity one must seek to examine the changes and evolution that other sports have taken throughout a period of time. The writer would like to address the culture embedded in rugby union for example and its importance to the national identity to New Zealand. Rugby is New Zealand’s national sport. It seems to be embedded in the hearts and minds of its people and watching the sport has become somewhat of a religion. Many New Zealanders would say it is an “integral part of the country's culture.” (“Cultural History”, 2010).

The official website for New Zealand goes on to state that “for almost 140 years, the sport of rugby has been the country’s national passion and has been a determining influence on New Zealand life and culture.” (“Cultural History”, 2010). Thus key comparisons can be assumed and made when one addresses the culture of this sport in New Zealand and the GAA in Ireland. It would appear that rugby has helped “shape modern New Zealanders into a proud, sporting, innovative nation determined to make its mark on the world.” (“Cultural History”, 2010). New Zealand has been able to reveal its cultural background ie. The Haka and Maori heritage are on a world scale as a result of playing rugby and thus this has highlighted the country’s identity.

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Jay Scherer and Steven J. Jackson, of the University of Otago and Alberta respectively, wrote a paper on the advertisement and marketing of such an identifiable and culturally unique symbol such as the Haka. In 1999, Adidas-Salomon (Adidas) released a television commercial in the inaugural year of their sponsorship of the All Blacks, New Zealand’s iconic sporting team. (Hope, 2002).

The commercial, entitled “Black”, articulated the Adidas brand with Maori imagery intertwined with images from an international rugby match constructed around the commercial’s focal point - the All Blacks traditional pre-match performance of the Ka Mate Haka. Although the commercial was produced by advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, Wellington, and ran in New Zealand, it was primarily designed to reach a global audience.

“*Black*” subsequently aired in more than 70 countries worldwide, ran in numerous cinemas (including more than 500 in the United Kingdom), and was widely awarded within the advertising industry. (Scherer & Jackson, 2008, Page 3).

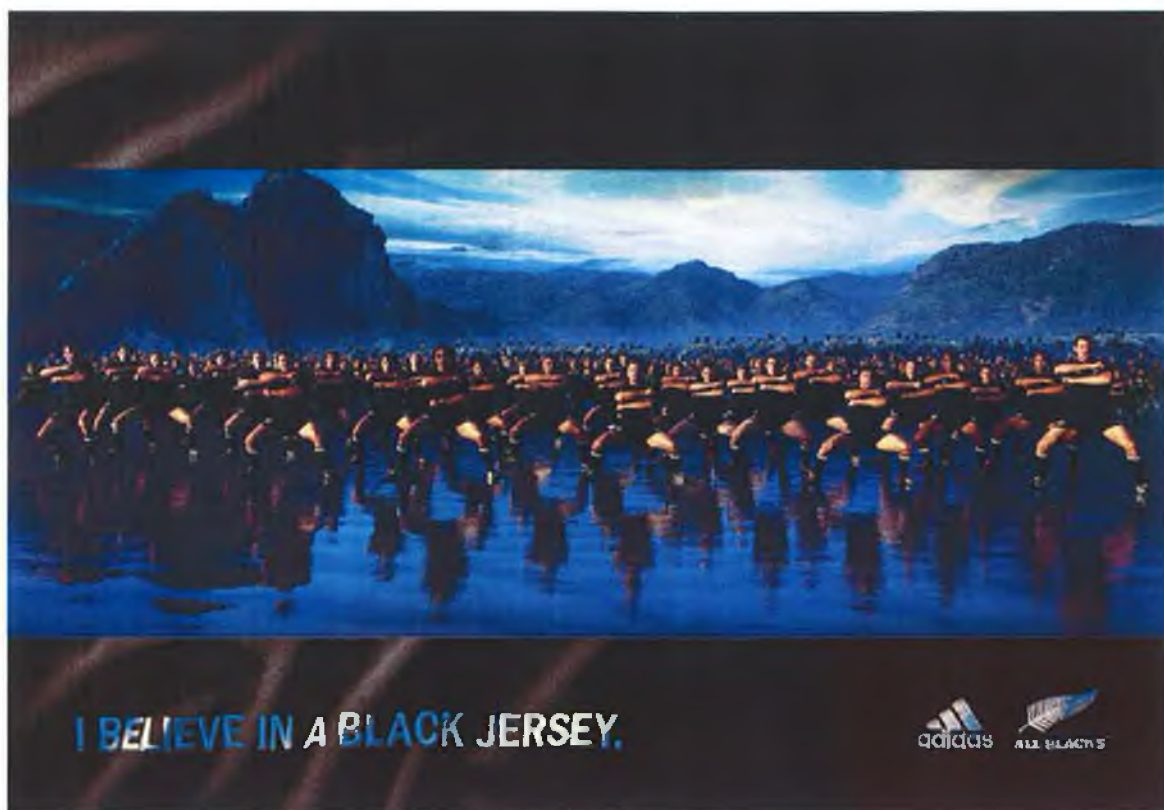


Fig 2.2 All Black Rugby Team – performing the Haka for Adidas Advertisement

“An investigation into whether the GAA’s embrace of professionalism is being hindered by its inherited culture.”

The image above depicts an advertisement Adidas have used in conjunction with the popularity of the Haka. It appears to showcase mountains and surroundings synonymous with New Zealand culture thus representing New Zealand to the outside world through a sports advertisement.

The New Zealand Ministry of culture stated in a case study regarding the (Kapa) Haka that Maori culture and heritage is what makes New Zealand unique, and is one of the most powerful expressions of mana for iwi (Mana for the people) groups all around the country. The traditional aspects of Maori Intangible Cultural Heritage in Kapa haka have been retained, through “their key symbolic dimensions – wairua (spirituality), te wehi (awe) and te mauri (life force) – expressed through aesthetic features of the dance such as pūkana (dilating of the eyes), whētero (the protruding of the tongue) and pōtētē (the closing of the eyes at different points of the dance).” (Ministry of Culture & Heritage, 2008, Page 2)

All features are inherently common while the All Blacks put forward their challenge while on the rugby field thus this writer believes as a result of media exposure to the famous Haka ritual, New Zealanders can portray their specific identity and historical culture through the marketing of their beloved sport.

This begs the question that should Irish heritage and GAA culture be marketed in such an appealing manner perhaps there may be a global market that could be identified for the games. Of course rugby union has a far greater population worldwide playing the sport yet there are Irish people in a host of countries around the world and those of Irish heritage may identify and appreciate the national and cultural emblem being promoted. Thus it would be appear naïve to disregard the actual importance sport has on a nation’s pride and the overall reach that cultural identity can have.

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Comparisons can also be made between Ireland and Australia when relating culture and sport on the basis of forming a unique identity. When Australia commemorated 200 years of European settlement in 1988, John Rickard published ‘A Cultural History of Australia’. Rickard makes the point that much of “Australia’s brief history had been preoccupied with a quest to form a national identity.” (Baker, 2005, Page 3).

Similar to New Zealand, sport has been an integral part of Australian culture. “Aussie” or Australian Rules football can claim to be Australia’s one truly local, home- grown game. “Sport has been an integral part of Australian culture dating back to pre European indigenous society and forms a key element of current Australian life. For example Aussie rules has origins in the traditional indigenous game of “Man-gurt - an Australian Aboriginal domestic traditional recreation, where one individual kicks a "ball", with the object and caption being to "never let the ball hit the ground". (Baker, 2005, Page 6).



Fig 2.3 Australian Rules being played in Ireland

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And though ‘the footy’ as it is known to Australians, faces stiff competition from sports like cricket and soccer that have a global following, many Australians are “confident about the future of the game precisely because it is so embedded in local culture.” (Baker, 2005, Page 8).

Similar worries have arisen in Ireland with the enormous emphasis put on the promotion of rugby union in Irish schools as a result of the recent national successes yet with more young people playing rugby than ever before.

Yet Daniel McDonnell, Irish Times writer, suggested the GAA had been tested by the popularity of alternative sports before. The famous performance by the Irish national soccer team at Italia '90 had seen many spin-offs for Irish soccer and the same apparent sense of threat hung in the air for Gaelic games with the tremendous support Jack Charlton, the Irish soccer manager, and his team received.

But conversely the subsequent decade ie the nineties, saw an extraordinary rise in the popularity of Gaelic games, particularly at inter-county level. After Ireland's most successful World Cup, 1991 saw Gaelic football's popularity increase with “Meath and Dublin in a four-game Leinster first round football epic, and Cork and Tipperary in two epic Munster hurling final clashes, had provided the perfect riposte. The novelty successes of northern teams namely Derry, Down and Donegal and hurling's 'golden age', shaped by Clare and Wexford successes, fuelled a renaissance period.” (McDonnell, 2009)

It was important for the GAA, at this time, to regain support for its home grown games and this sequence of results throughout this decade appeared to have the perfect effect.

In terms of Aussie Rules the game is played by “approximately 650,000 Australian children and adults alike, with almost 3,000 registered clubs spanning throughout the country's entirety. There are also leagues in over 20 countries, as far afield as Japan, England, the USA, Canada, Vietnam and Scandinavia. “Footy” is a hugely popular spectator sport in Australia.” (Baker, 2005, page 11).

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Thus it would appear that although “Aussie” Rules has become a semi and largely professional industry the sport has held its cultural identity with being entirely of Australian heritage. As with the marketing and promotion of the Haka that has already been mentioned, Australia’s identity has been marketed around the world to great effect also. The argument can be put forward that Irish people may lose our entity by “selling” the GAA yet have we not already seen the benefits of opening the doors of the GAA to a global audience.

Tom Inglis makes a strong argument to those who have shown conservatism in the face of cultural change, particularly the infamous 2005 lifting of Rule 42, which seen the GAA headquarters of Croke Park allowing Rugby Union and Soccer to be played on its soil.

He suggests that it seems ludicrous that these sports have taken so long to be played in Europe’s fourth largest stadium. He believes and this writer would have to agree that while it was remarkable soccer and rugby union were forbidden from being played in Croke Park, it was “permissible to hold a Michael Jackson concert and an American Football game between the Navy and Notre Dame.” (Inglis, 2008, Page 135). It was also permissible to have our, semi and full-time professional Australian counter-parts play an International Rules series against the pick of the country’s GAA talent. (Inglis, 2008).

It is this writer’s opinion that the GAA is more than an organisation to the people of Ireland and to Irish people around the world - it is what makes us as a nation different. It is essentially unique to our land yet the argument will be put forward that in order for us as a people to fully embrace evolution and change the GAA may have to look to further ideologies. Australia and New Zealand have both shown that by marketing culture and identity you are essentially opening the doors of your country to exploration. Should the GAA look to market the organisation, there can be no doubt that there is a potential global audience ready to embrace such activity.

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Tom Inglis goes on to explain that the GAA is not just local and national as many Irish may perceive. It is followed by Irish diaspora around the world. “There are 88 clubs in Britain, 120 in the United States (50 in New York), 70 in Australasia, 21 in Europe and 13 in Canada. As well as football and hurling the GAA is responsible for women’s football, camogie, handball and rounders. In 2004, 2 million people went to grounds throughout the country to watch games.

Millions more watched on television and listened on the radio.” (Inglis, 2008, Page 139). The GAA is viewed, listened to and spoken about all around the world thus many will argue perhaps to truly justify and enhance its capability the GAA should market worldwide.

Before the doors of Croke Park were opened to soccer and rugby union in 2005, many around the world had not imagined that Ireland had such a glorious stadium at their disposal. Yet it was only when the stadium became available that global audiences were informed of the GAA’s heritage, the traditionalism, the political background which had held such significance to the stadium.

We have seen how countries such as China in 2008 with the Olympic games and South Africa’s soccer World Cup in 2010 have evoked a sense of pride and necessity to explain individual cultures and unique identities thus many would argue that Ireland could well be justified by following in their footsteps and embracing cultural changes. Yet with cultural change comes restrictions and limitations, it is quite difficult to imagine how traditionalists and the GAA “die-hards” would imagine such dramatic changes as players who are employed for their services on the pitch. Many will argue this goes against the ethos of pride in one’s own parish, sacrifice in the name honouring your locality. This issue is severely complex and complicated at times and if stirring change is to avail in the near future then it will need to be managed in a fashion that is of the upmost quality and efficiency.



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2.4 Change Management in a sporting context

“We live in a world full of change. The ability to lead change even became a platform on which the 2008 US presidential election was fought. Mastering change management is a key skill for the twenty-first century and living with change is a key survival skill”. (Paton & McCalman, 2008, Page 1).

Today, the term “change management” takes on a variety of meanings. Jeff Hiatt, author of “Employee's Survival Guide to Change” and Tim Creasey suggested that the most practical and useful definition of change management is the process, tools and techniques to manage the people-side of business change to achieve the required business outcome, and to realize that business change effectively within the social infrastructure of the workplace. (Hiatt, Creasey – 2008 – Page 2).

If one were to imagine the degree of change that would be needed to completely modify the ethos of a famous institution such as the GAA, it would be without doubt an immense and controversial task. Yet with the defining theme of this dissertation being change in terms of culture and how inherited traditionalism can hinder change, one must investigate why there would appear to be a changing nature within the GAA that has seen the organisation evolve into a modern and financially powerful institution. “Decision making in sport organisations is complicated because decisions impact diverse groups of people (athletes, fans, the community, business, the media) whose interests are often in conflict” (Sherry, Shilbury, Wood, 2007, Page 1).

This statement above is particularly true in terms of the GAA. Conservatives and traditionalists by nature generally tend to have a particularly narrow-minded opinion on any theories of radical change and in this instance the GAA. Yet opinions and views can easily be shaped and formed by the opinions and judgements of others. For example respected writers in the media, as Sherry, Shilbury and Wood suggest, may have a strong influence in shaping a readers opinion. That being said, the athlete within the GAA may have a much different opinion to that of the supporter. They are seeing their sport up close and personal thus they are aware of the efforts that are being made to achieve success and may be in favour of forming a professional body, in this example the professionalization of the GAA.

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Aaron Smith and Bob Stewart suggest that “professionalism refers not only to occupations that emphasise training, service and ethical standards, but also to be the best, smartest, most efficient and effective management practices that can be employed in any given situation.” (Smith, Stewart , 1999, Page 3). Many experts and researchers have acknowledged that the GAA has become more financially attractive and hence more demanding in terms of the entertainment that athletes are required to provide in order to maintain the objectives of not only winning but keeping the GAA’s sports compelling and enjoyable for viewers. Yet it is not only relatively recently that the GAA has seen an evolution in terms of professionalism and financial benefits.

The sports industry has not been immune to the need for professionalism, particularly as it becomes increasingly commercialised. Colm Keys, writer for the Irish Independent, wrote about the desire former Kerry football manager, Mick O’Dwyer, had to see his players financially rewarded for their successes and the level of accomplishment that they had brought to their county. The Kerry football team had generated fabulous success at the end of the nineteenth-seventies and early eighties and as a result were in demand as one of the most famous teams in Ireland. (Keys, 2007)

Colm Keys states that Mick O’ Dwyer was famous for his ability to see an opening and thus had an ability for, in a sense, a level of change management. The 1981 Kerry team tour saw O’Dwyer’s fundraising skills at its best. In the space of a few short months he had “organised a committee of businessmen and players to raise some £109,000 to be put at the disposal of the Kerry county team. They sold pictures, they played exhibitions in the north and were given the match day funds, much to the chagrin of the GAA. Each player was given average spending money of £1,700 on the tour.” (Keys, 2007)

O’Dwyer never hid his desire for the players to cash in on their success. Yet it was in 1985 that the greatest level of controversy in terms of player or teams payments arose. “On the morning of the 1985 All-Ireland final against Dublin many of the Kerry players and O’Dwyer appeared in an advertisement beside a washing machine with the slogan 'Only Bendix could whitewash this lot'. (Keys, 2007). The advert was shown in two Sunday newspapers and drew little amusement in many official GAA quarters. The parameters were being over-stretched by O’Dwyer.”

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Perhaps the Kerryman felt, because of the great successes and image his Kerry team was portraying for the persona of Gaelic football they were entitled to gain benefits from their popularity and almost hero-like status.

This writer suggests that the argument can again go two ways. The pro-professionalism supporter will say that these players were well entitled to financial benefits and that a change from the amateur status was rightly altered and swerved by O’Dwyer. Perhaps his argument was that the sponsors and those involved behind the scenes of this great team were cashing in on their achievements thus perhaps he felt the need to reward his players. Yet on the contrary, this was one of the most celebrated teams of the GAA’s past, thus perhaps it would have been fitting for this manager and players to show their defiance and disregard for financial payments. This would, one would imagine, even further the ethos of amateurism and further convey that not all great athletes are tempted by the lure of money.

Again if one is to explain and investigate the issue of change management within the GAA one must investigate other examples of change management in other countries or sports. For example the governance and management of sporting organizations in Australia is continually evolving as it progresses on its path from the amateur and volunteer based organizations established throughout the twentieth century, to an increasingly professionalised and bureaucratized sport system today. Sherry, Shilbury and Wood again suggest that progress towards a “professional” sport “management model occurs differently across the wide variety of sports and sporting organizations, resulting in many cases in changes to management and governance structures on an “as needed” basis.” Sherry, Shilbury & Wood, 2007, Page 3).

This writer agrees with the three named authors when they suggest that it could be expected therefore that the identification and management of ethical issues and the potential for conflict of interest within Australian sport organizations would follow a similar process of development and implementation which could be identified as being quite similar to Ireland.

This writer has already drawn reference to the fact that Australians see sport as being a source of identity and culture which defines them as being original in some cases. Take for example Aussie rules, as has been mentioned previously regarding culture. This sport is of Australian

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heritage yet as the world and in particular sport has evolved countries such as Australia have had the ability to change their objectives and perspectives regarding the issue of non-payments for players.

Russell Hoye, of La Trobe University, believes that professional sport in Australia and New Zealand is an important and increasingly significant feature of the Australasian sport landscape. Australia and New Zealand “sustain a wide range of professional sport leagues, including a multitude of professional football leagues, one of them a uniquely Australian brand of football. There are currently fifteen national leagues in Australia covering a variety of sports with one of these including Australian rules football with the majority of players either semi or fully professional.” (Hoye, 2005, abstract).

Tony Woods, AFL (Australian Football League) International Development Manager, spoke about the adaptations and clear strategy that the Aussie Rules Federation have for the expansion of the sport as a result of increasing popularity. “A 2010 snapshot of global AFL (Australian Football League) initiatives, coupled with the massive growth in participation numbers has led to momentum building for a more focused and sustained approach to developing and promoting the game of Australian Rules in markets throughout the world.” (Woods, 2010).

Woods states that there are many groups of expatriate Australians whose “passion for the game results in Australian Rules football clubs forming in cities around the world.” (Woods, 2010)

This writer has already drawn reference to the worldwide coverage and interest there is within the circles of the GAA, spanning all around the world thus it would appear that Ireland is quite similar in terms of people’s passions and desires to establish teams and clubs in new countries.

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business. Players such as David Beckham have become business icons as a result of the popularity of soccer.

At Real Madrid in 2005, over one million David Beckham shirts were sold when he joined, representing well over 50% of the club's shirt sales that year. (“Tiger Woods v David Beckham”, 2003). It would appear the soul of soccer has been removed by money and this writer believes this is one of the pivotal reasons behind organisations such as the GAA having an ethos of strict amateurism.

There then is the case of television viewing rights. As the GAA has evolved and changed the structure in which both the hurling and football championships have been ran, there has been a greater demand in televising games.

Both codes of play have seen their respective championships lengthened in terms of the amount of games being played as a result of the 1997 “backdoor” system where each county team gets two attempts to progress. This has led to greater revenue for the GAA in their various stadia throughout the country yet as the organisation further evolves and popularises the battle for television rights could be a defining factor in which direction the GAA goes.

We see the continuing and almost trivial battle for broadcasting rights in the UK every year with BT, the BBC and Sky all at logger-heads to secure various packages. On July 1st, 2010, Richard Wray of the UK Guardian wrote about the battle between BT and Sky over pricing of Sky Sports channels. “BT announced plans to sell Sky's sports channels at a steep discount to the satellite broadcaster, sparking a bitter row between the two companies. Sky Sports 1 and 2 would be on offer from BT for £16.99 a month from August, undercutting Sky, which charges £26 for the channels. But the move drew an immediate and aggressive response from Sky.” (Wray, 2010).

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In a surprise move, Sky said it would raise its own prices by £3 a month from 1 September, upping the cost of its basic TV package that includes all sports channels to £38 per month. (Wray, 2010).

Thus it is all too apparent that financial power and bullying are these companies primary objective when it comes to sport. Should the GAA look to go down the proverbial road of professionalism there will be a steep increase in revenues with more and more companies willing to get involved within the organisation. This will, one would imagine, encourage and entice organisations such as BT and Sky to review whether there is a possibility of making money out of these games and thus perhaps there will become bidding rows and controversy that may affect the entire roots and ethos on which the GAA was based. This is an area of change that could end very negatively for Irish supporters should prices begin to increase as a result of a broadcasting battle.

An article written for the sports business website spoke about the negotiations that are already taking place for broadcasting rights in the GAA. It would appear the market is already lucrative and thus when figures are spoken about in terms of millions it does beg the question whether there are deeper ethical issues which need to be spoken about. TV broadcasters would appear to be making and profiting in enormous sums of money while the “actors” or “entertainers” receive no financial rewards. The unnamed writer speaks about the negotiations and deals that have been met as of 2008. “The Gaelic Athletic Association agreed multi-million euro TV and radio rights deals with RTE and TV3 that carve up coverage of the GAA championship. Under the deal, Irish national broadcaster RTE secured the live rights for all GAA championship games, with the exception of ten games, which will be shown by free-to-air broadcaster TV3 until 2011. TV3 will transmit ten games of their choice live, exclusive of RTE’s first choice selection of 20 games. In total, RTE will have rights to transmit 40 games live.” (“GAA awards TV rights to RTE, TV3, Setanta and TG4”, 2008).

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TG4 will have the rights to Sunday afternoon League games and Club and Colleges games, while Setanta will show floodlit games on Saturday nights and four Sunday afternoon League games. A range of highlight packages have been awarded to RTE, TG4, Setanta Sport and the BBC. UTV secured a 'Clips' package. (“GAA awards TV rights to RTE, TV3, Setanta and TG4”, 2008).

There are many broadcasters involved in the battle to gain coverage rights thus this may lead to future battles that turn out to affect the customers as has been seen with Sky and BT in Britain. TV broadcasting rights will continue to evolve as the GAA evolves and the threat of outside sports becomes more apparent thus should the GAA look to hold the coveted amateurism status broadcasting will need to be capped as it would appear money and financially driven companies will look to take over.

Should they take over, where will the level of money and financial rewards go? There will surely be the question asked as to why players are seeing no financial gains when the people who view them must pay broadcasting rates. Yet if one player is employed and benefiting, where is the proverbial line drawn as to who should be paid and who should not? These ethical matters are pivotal should the GAA look to go down the road of professionalism.

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2.5 Ethical Matters relating to a professional GAA

Warner Fite, writer of the book “An Introductory Study of Ethics”, defined ethics as being commonly described as the study of moral conduct. He goes on to explain that moral conduct can be basically broken down into the judgement of what is right and what is wrong. Another writer, Socrates, purports that “ethics is about improving one’s soul; the best reason for being ethical is that it makes one’s soul better and makes one a happier person than otherwise” (Hartman, 2008). Epicurus’s main teaching on ethics was that “its chief principle is joy”. (Morgan, Thiagarajan – 2009). Both definitions are quite easily understood, by doing the “right” things and acting in the “right” manner one feels better about ones self thus are more content with life.

Sherry, Shilbury, Wood (2007) suggest that the impact of business practices and business culture on sport has occurred as a result of a societal change towards more ethical behaviour of organisations and changes and the development of the sport industry. This contention is supported by Doig (1994) who argued that “recognition of, and unease with, the growing links between sport and business within the sporting community, has fanned the embers of the ethical debate as far as sports managers are concerned’. In terms of the ever evolving popularity and interest in the GAA as a result of increasing media exposure and a larger global audience, business and sport have clearly become intertwined. An article written in 2003 by Stephen McMahon and Ian Kehoe for the Sunday Business Post gives examples into the evolution and increasing levels of revenue that are becoming available within the circles of advertisement in the GAA. As of 2003, International brands Nike, Puma and Adidas were looking to cash in on the public obsession with gaelic games.

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At that time recent football boot deals with Adidas and Puma marked the developing relationship between international manufacturers and the GAA, in anticipation of a relaxing of rules that exclude non-Irish manufacturers from the lucrative replica jersey market. The introduction of competition into the jersey market was an increasingly attractive proposition to the teams, given the financial crisis at County Board level at the start of the decade. The writers’ state that in 2003, 35 County Boards, including London, Lancashire and New York, paid out on average a sum of €37,851 in preparing their teams for the championship.

Without new revenue streams, the future of 19 boards was uncertain. GAA television rights generated only €3.5 million per annum, making alternative revenue streams vital. (McMahon, Kehoe – 2003).

Thus this article was written as of 2003 one must remember. The GAA has become even more powerful and desperate for revenue as other sports continue to evolve in Ireland. We see here that the rules for companies outside of Ireland advertising within the GAA were becoming ever more relaxed thus one must ponder the notion that if these rules have become more relaxed, seven years ago as of writing this dissertation, has the GAA become unethical in its dealings? It holds a stance of being a supremely amateur organisation yet should it survive, it has become apparent that the GAA has needed to look outside of Ireland for the revenue to “stay” popular. Hence, is there a notion of hypocrisy with the GAA vehemently denying any player the opportunity to gain financial benefits from one of these international companies who are offering such large sums of money to be involved in sponsorship deals?

This Sunday Business Post article goes on to explain that the GAA had known that marketing and advertising was to become crucial for future developments. “The GAA is slowly realising the need to develop and maintain a central coherent marketing strategy .Three months ago, Sean Kelly (then acting GAA President) appointed a marketing sub-committee to advise the association on commercial issues. The committee comprises both marketing specialists and GAA officials.” (McMahon & Kehoe – 2003). Thus many people would have no issue with the GAA being promoted and marketed in fashion that held the integral ethos of the GAA at heart and promoted all that was good in Ireland to impressionable youngsters. Yet there is,

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then again, an the issue of hypocrisy. In 2007 Hopkins PR, a Cork-based company employed by Barry/Fitzwilliams Maxxium, the Irish distributors of Corona, paid well known Cork hurlers Niall McCarthy and Kieran Murphy, pictured below, an undisclosed sum to display the Mexican beer's logo on their boots in the All-Ireland SHC quarter-final win over Waterford. The deal sparked outrage in certain corners of the GAA hierarchy.



Fig 2.5 Niall McCarthy (Left) & Kieran Murphy (Right) who were involved in controversy and (Below) an image of the Corona label on the players boots.

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The GAA believed that there should not be specific individual benefits made from wearing gear that reflected any other brand than that of the main sponsor Guinness. It would appear that the GAA were slightly jealous by the deal and essentially because the deal was done behind their back. Yet Mark Hopkins, of Hopkins PR said the deal was made to help the players in question. Hopkins said "The notion of all the training they undertake and the little reward they receive is something I feel very strongly about.... "We are doing this in the interest of players they are training six nights a week and my view for a long time as a player and as a person involved in marketing is that they should be able to get something outside of the rules. There is nothing sinister in it. I didn't feel like we are breaking any rules." (Irish Examiner, 2007).

So it would appear the GAA are satisfied to see sponsorship coming into the GAA so they can have revenue to market and advertise the GAA yet when it comes to individual players, who are the core individuals behind the GAA, the organisation is not prepared to see benefits being received.

The issue was even more controversial in 2003 when the well known nook maker Paddy Power agreed a deal with a number of hurlers to wear the company name on their hurley's on the day of a televised game. Ciaran Walsh, writing for RTE sport, explains the controversy and the subsequent results of the deal. "Wexford's Damien Fitzhenry and Paul Codd along with Cork's Sean Óg Ó hAilpín all carried 'Paddy Power' brandings on their hurleys during the recent All-Ireland semi-final, prompting a furious reaction from GAA President Seán Kelly. The players in question are being investigated and possible suspensions may arise should their actions be construed as a breach of rule 14 of their official guide (Rule 14 states that playing kit (not including football boots) 'be of Irish manufacture' (Walsh, 2003). "We take a very dim view of any company ignoring totally our regulations and procedures and showing scant regard for our ethos for our sponsors, both national and county, and undertaking a cheap shot... "The association is being shabbily treated. It is totally unprofessional for any reputable company to behave like that towards another organisation, particularly a voluntary organisation like the GAA," acting GAA president said in the wake of the controversy. (Kelly's fury over hurl logo 'ambush', 2003).

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Dessie Farrell read a statement on behalf of the Gaelic Players Association in relation to the incident. “Players have been advertising GAA sponsors for over a decade now (as of 2003) with little or no compensation so it is entirely understandable that opportunities such as this would eventually emerge. We would therefore call on the authorities to view the players actions in this context and adopt a conciliatory approach towards resolving any difficulties surrounding the issue.” (Walsh, 2003)

Thus the issue needs to be raised as to where exactly a line can be drawn between the GAA receiving substantial sums of money every year through sponsorship and gate receipts and the lack of leverage there would appear to be in terms of player’s gaining a degree of sponsorship. Is it unfair or unethical for the GAA to act in such a way and will it lead to further problems in the future?

It has been seen already what can happen with player unrest when there is a perceived lack of respect mistreatment. One merely needs to assess the 2008 Cork hurling strike as an example. It was reported in the Irish Examiner in 2008 why the controversy was taking place. “It is alleged that the two player representatives went to a meeting of the selection committee to choose a manager, only for the five other county board representatives to propose that (Gerald) McCarthy (then acting manager) be re-appointed for another two years, with no-one else even mentioned... ‘This panel are ready to go the whole distance, we’re ready to pull out, tell them to work away next year’ – Captain Ben O’Connor (“New Cork hurling strike on the cards”, 2008).

It is clear players still have a powerful say into where the GAA will go and in this instance at least, it shows they are prepared to take controversial steps to stand up for their beliefs.

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2.6 Conclusion to Literature Review

The recent writer's and authors have given this researcher a greater knowledge on the specific areas spoke about throughout the course of the literature review. Although there are and have been limitations in specific academic literature in the area of sport and specifically the GAA the writer is confident that the material used has further enhanced and whetted the appetite of the reader to assess the methodology behind the research at hand and furthermore examine the subsequent findings. A wide ranging and broad use of authors were used throughout the literature review spanning a number of years in time thus a relatively comprehensive and tedious process should give the reader ample background into where the research will follow ie the research methodology.

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3.0 – Research Methodology

3.1 What is a Research Methodology?

Research defined as– “A search or investigation directed to the discovery of some fact by careful consideration or study of a subject; a course of critical or scientific enquiry”. (“An overview of international research into the library and information needs of visually impaired people”, 2007)

3.2 Purpose of Research Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the research methodology used by the writer and why it was chosen and in what way it was carried out. Research methodology involves a process that ranges from understanding the theory on a particular subject and then going about the activity of collecting and analysing data on the subject area and presenting the results and comparing them to the previous literature. Domegan and Fleming (2003) explain in their textbook that good research must be systematic, objective, valid and also reliable. From analysing most research books they recommend that researcher should follow a research process which is made up of different stages which one must pass through. The following diagram is an excellent example of a research process. (Domegan, Fleming, 2003)

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3.3 Research Process Stages

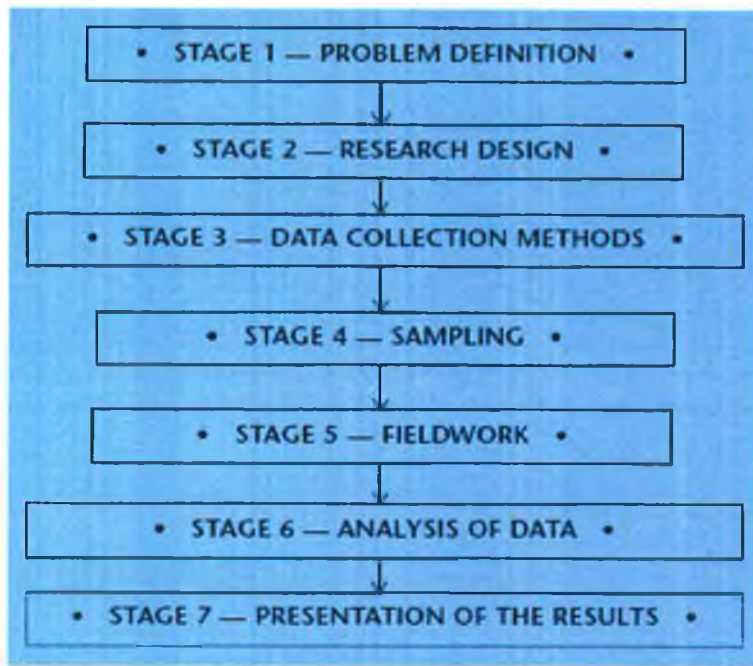


Table 3.3 – The Research Process Stages

3.4 Stage One: Problem Definition

This stage involves the writer contemplating what will be the research topic or question and why. The brainstorming of ideas in coming up with a subject is important at this stage. The identifying of a Problem Definition is crucial and this will be the basis on which the entire research will rest.

The name problem definition sometimes can be misunderstood as the problem definition should really represent an opportunity for a researcher and not necessarily a problem. Brannick and Roche, 1997, Page 6-7 defined this stage as “The process of developing the research question begins with the identification of the broad research area; this is followed by the formulation or definition of the research question or research problem”

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This dissertation is based on a topic that is limited in literature or previous informed research. The subject of how a professionalised GAA could be hindered because of history, tradition and an inherited culture is relatively speculative and although there are numerous books and articles where the notion of a professional body is spoken about, it is merely hypothetical especially in terms of the impact a new form of GAA could have on the supporter along with the young people playing the GAA’s games at present.

Drawing reference to articles such as Kobena Mercer’s “Welcome to the jungle: new positions in Black cultural studies” or “With God on Their Side: Sport in the Service of Religion” by Tara Magdalinski & Timothy Chandler, the writer will hope to whet the appetite of the reader into what should be a relatively intriguing investigation as to where people stand in their views as to whether something that has been so sacred to Irish people over the years will follow the similar paths as to other sports. Is there any other realistic evolutionary course that the GAA can take other than to turn professional?

Alternatively with proper and prompt management and promotion can the organisation resist the temptations of potentially massive financial revenue? The fact that the writer has a huge interest in the area of sports was the main trigger or motivation behind the matter mentioned and this in turn led to the choosing of this topic for conducting research on.

Domegan and Fleming (2003) identified four subsections which make up the problem definition. These are as follows:

1. Problem Identification
2. Problem Clarification
3. Problem Formulation, and
4. Objectives/ Hypotheses setting

By taking these stages into consideration this writer could identify what exactly the purpose was of the current study and also how the outlined objectives could be achieved.

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3.4.1 Research Question

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3.4.1.1 Primary Objectives

The primary objective of this project is to investigate culture, sporting change management and ethics in terms of the GAA and explore various individual reactions to a professional organisation. Upon doing this the writer hopes to develop an informed personalised opinion on the issue of a professional GAA organization and assess some of the reasons why the GAA could be hindered by its perceived inherited history.

3.4.1.2 Secondary Objectives

- To give an informed background to the origins, values and evolution of the GAA from its initial beginning through to the modern day organisation.
- To give an academic examination on the different researches on culture and thus how this will apply to the cultural changes within the GAA.
- To examine how change management research could and should apply to a transforming professional organisation. Change management will be assessed in terms of change management in sport.
- To investigate how ethics applies to a traditional amateur organisation revolutionizing to a professional body. This may apply to the national identity of a sport and the influences, whether they are negative or positive, can have on the originality this specific sport may have.
- To observe and draw conclusions from the individual reactions of people in relation to a professional GAA – ie through qualitative research namely by interview.

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3.4.2 - Critically reviewing the literature

The literature review involves the reviewing of the main ideas and research that is related to the chosen area of interest (Bryman and Bell, 2007). In terms of a Masters Dissertation which this writer is undertaking, Cooper and Schindler, (2003 page 66) believe its main purpose is to “demonstrate the knowledge that is additionally gained by the student on a particular subject area and then to display an ability or skill to organise all the data together into a well integrated and defined research project.”

The writer of this dissertation conducted a long and relatively tedious review of the literature on the subject of the GAA, Irish and sporting culture along with issues that have related to changes in the management of the GAA, its evolution and the ethical implications of the GAA moving into a professional era.

The reviewing of the literature first was essential in order to guide not only the reader along the trail of the overall dissertation objectives but was also used to give the writer a greater insight and knowledge of the defining themes that needed to be approached before investigating reactions of people closest to the matter in question of a professional GAA. A very interesting and extremely useful perspective was offered by (Saunders et al, 2003) who suggested that when conducting a literature review it is advisable to tackle it in the form of a funnel approach which includes the following seven steps:

1. Set out a general level before narrowing down to a specific area.
2. Provide a brief overview of key ideas
3. Summarise, compare and contrast the work of the key writers.
4. Narrow down to highlight the work most relevant to your research.
5. Provide a detailed account of the findings of this work.
6. Highlight those issues where your research will provide fresh insights.
7. Lead the reader into subsequent sections of your project report.

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This has been the framework that this writer has looked to follow throughout the course of gathering information. (Saunders et al, 2003,

3.4.3 Secondary Data Sources

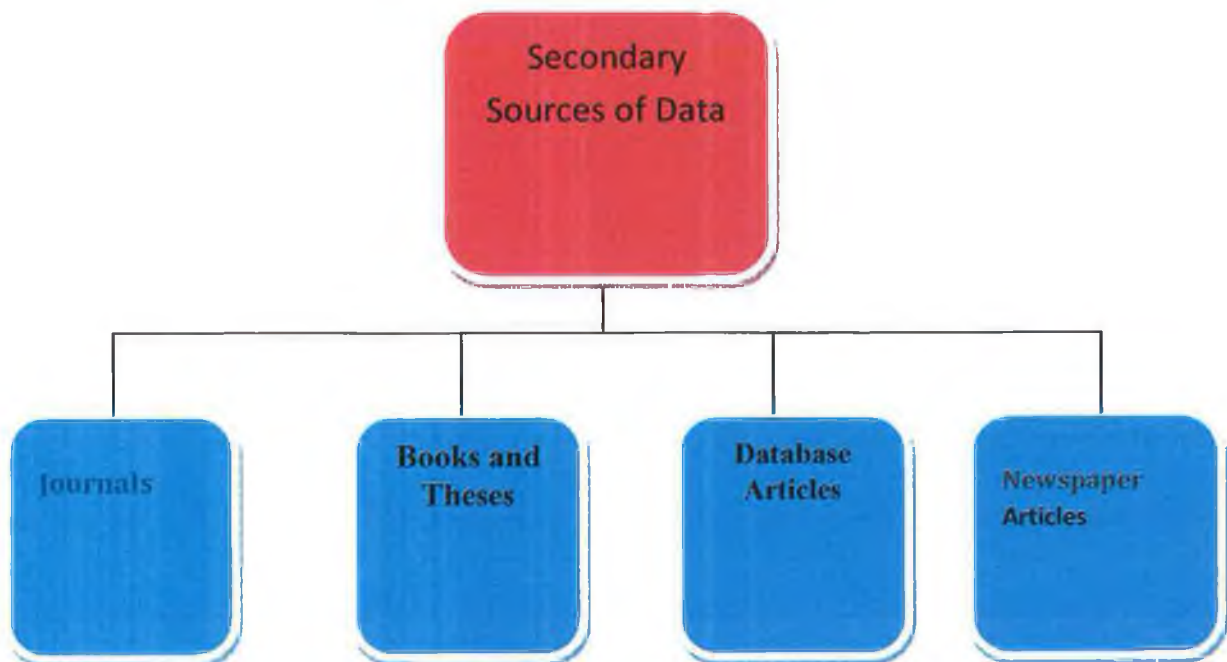


Table 3.4.3 - Secondary Data Sources

3.4.3.1 Library and Other Searches

- Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
- National University Ireland Galway
- The University of Limerick

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3.4.3.2 Previous Dissertations

The writer found that dissertations completed on the subject of the GAA were relevant in terms of speaking about the values and movements within the organisation yet the investigation into the movement of the GAA in the professionalised era has seen very little research thus this source was limited at best. Key scholars were found and identified however in terms of academic material in the area of culture and ethics thus this was quite helpful for this writer in forming the literature review. Such thesis’ such as sports sponsorship and sports marketing were also helpful in gaining a broader insight into the relationship between sport and business.

3.4.3.3 Database Searches Online

The author undertook numerous searches online entering key words associated with the subject of culture, professionalism and the GAA in order to find any articles published which would be of use regarding the subject. Search engines like Google Scholar and Yahoo were used as well as those available through Galway Mayo Institute of Technology. The database available through GMIT, Emerald, was possibly the most used source.

3.4.4 Research Approach

Saunders et al. (2009) have stated that research can either be deductive or inductive. Deduction is described as testing theory whilst induction is building theory (Roe, 2004). As the basis of this research is built on theory explored during the evaluation of the literature the research approach selected is a deductive approach. A deductive approach aims to explain causal relationships between variables. The deductive approach relies on the researcher’s creativity and tends to falsify rather than verify the theory (Hamlin and Stemplowska, 2010). Thus creativity is this writers’ sense will rely on the ability and skills of interpretation and investigation into the opinions and demeanours of those who will be interviewed regarding the professionalization of the GAA and how its’ inherited culture may affect future evolution.

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3.5 Stage Two: Research Design

A research design is a broad framework upon which the research project will be based on (Domegan and Fleming, 2003). Three main categories of research design exist namely exploratory, descriptive and causal. Exploratory research aims to explore and determine issues about the research problem (Blyth, 1998). Descriptive research aims to describe the various characteristics and elements of interest in a particular situation, whilst causal research aims to establish a cause and effect relationship between two or more variables (Gofton and Ness, 1997).

The research design of this writers’ research project can be categorised as an exploratory study. Saunders et al. (2003) define exploratory research as “research that aims to seek new insights into phenomena, to ask questions, and to assess the phenomena in a new light.” As the objective of the research project is to investigate various categories of people’s reactions as to how an inherited GAA culture may impact the professionalisation of the organisation, numerous questions will be asked and explored by this writer in order to investigate the phenomena in greater detail.

Two methods of conducting exploratory research include conducting focus groups or in-depth interviews (Saunders et al., 2009; Roe, 2004; Domegan and Fleming, 2003; Gofton and Ness, 1997). This researcher has chosen in-depth interviews as they are deemed the most appropriate means of gaining personalised information on such a hypothetical issue such as a professional GAA. The writer hopes to use the appropriate skills and manner to allow the interviewee to give a broad and honest opinion on the matter in question thus there will be no pressure on the interviewee to provide any “right” or “wrong” information as this is merely an investigation into ones insights on the matter.

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Clearly there are many reasons for the use of focus groups also as there are many arguments to do so yet as Gates (2005) suggested this qualitative research tool provides a subjective, but not statistically valid, understanding of the larger community’s attitudes. Although in-depth interviewing may not be seen as being statistically valid either the only reason the writer has chosen this option of interviewing is due to target population of the interviewees. The writer did not believe that a true and fair opinion could be gained if interviewees were in groups thus this is the rationale behind this writer’s method.

3.5.1 Research Strategy

In order to differentiate between the quantitative and qualitative research Naresh Malhotra (2009 Page 14) in the book “Marketing Research: An Applied Orientation” stated the following “Qualitative research provides insights and understanding of the problem setting, while quantitative research seeks to quantify the data and, typically, applies some form of statistical analysis”.

Some common contrasts that are often made between quantitative and qualitative research would include: Numbers compared to Words, Theory testing and theory emergent, structured and unstructured, hard reliable data versus rich deep data and finally generalization compared to contextual understanding. The mixed method approach is the name used when describing a research project that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques but not at the same time (Saunders et al, 2003).

It is the writer’s opinion that qualitative research is helpful in understanding or explaining unusual situations that could not be identified through quantitative methods. The researcher can also adjust data collection procedures during the process, based on the issues that arise. Thus this augurs well for this writer in terms of research as the objective of this dissertation is largely an investigation that may not be explored to a successful degree through quantitative research.

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3.5.2 Access and Address Ethical Issues

The gaining of access is often the single most challenging obstacle when conducting research. If the researcher cannot gain access to the necessary individuals then the research project is in serious danger of being unable to be completed.

Saunders et al, (2003) divided access into two main sections which are physical access and cognitive access. Physical access is the first stage and it involves merely gaining entry to the individual or organisation containing the needed information. The second stage which is cognitive access identifies access as not just a single event but a process which continues over time.

Saunders et al, (2003) proposed certain guidelines which help in gaining access to the necessary respondents, there are as follows:

- Allow sufficient time
- Using existing contacts and developing new ones
- Providing a clear account of purpose and type of access required
- Overcoming organisational concerns about the granting of access
- Identifying possible benefits to the organisation in granting access
- Using suitable access
- Facilitating ease of reply when requesting access
- Developing your access on an incremental basis
- Establishing your credibility with intended participants

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3.5.2.1 Gaining Access

This writer was extremely satisfied and appreciative of how helpful the individuals who were interviewed were in allowing access to their homes and facilities when interviewing. Also the fact that the writer is heavily involved in sports, namely the GAA, was very helpful as the use of contacts gained from playing the sports throughout the writers' life made access to certain individuals much easier. These contacts allowed the author to make contact with the key members behind a GAA club who, this writer believes, are essential interviewees for this particular dissertation.

3.5.2.2 Ethical issues

The issue of ethics is a very important subject for researcher to take into consideration when conducting any type of research. Ethical issues such as sensitivity of questioning and overall confidentiality have been taken into consideration by this researcher.

3.6 Stage Three: Data Collection Methods

The researcher utilised both secondary and primary sources in order to research the objectives of the research project. The secondary research took the form of a literature review. Primary research was gathered through the use of conducting in-depth interviews ie interviewing various people who have been, in the past and, are at present heavily involved in the make-up of the GAA.

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3.6.1 Primary Research

The research used, as already stated will be by in-depth interview to attain the required information on the research objectives. According to Domegan and Fleming (2003) in-depth interviews are appropriate when probing an interviewee for adequate answers and information.

Saunders et al. (2009) state interviews can take a variety of forms, namely structured, unstructured or semi structured. Structured interviews rely on a predetermined set of questions used to guide the interview. Unstructured interviews are informal and the main aim of the interviewer is to gain as much knowledge about the topic as possible. Finally, semi structured interviews rely on rough themes and questions used to guide the interview but allowing room for deviation and the introduction of other topics (Roe, 2004).

For the research project the researcher aims to use the unstructured approach to the in-depth interview. In this instance, this researcher aims to make the interview relatively informal easing the interviewee into conversation on the matter of a professional GAA and thus then hopefully gain an insight into this persons true feelings on the questions that will be asked regarding the issue.

The unstructured approach is appropriate in this instance at the researcher aims to perform 3-4 interviews with members of the GAA whom the researcher would be known to. Thus by setting the scene as informal the interviewer/researcher can gain an insight into where these particular people stand on the issues that will be raised. All interviews will be conducted face to face as greater results are achieved (Birn, 2002). All interviewees will also be recorded electronically to increase the reliability of the data.

Domegan and Fleming (2003) state a primary advantage of in-depth interviews is they can uncover more complete, rounded answers than may be obtained from other methods of qualitative data collection. Due to the ability to probe the interviewees more accurate information is attained.

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A disadvantage or limitation that Domegan and Fleming (2003) point out is in-depth interviews have a relatively small sample size and as a result the results recorded may not be representative of the whole population. Any validity issues will be documented in the limitations section of this chapter.

3.7 Stage Four: Sampling

The fifth stage of a marketing research project involves who to talk to, identifying who has the required information which is named sampling. Sampling is essentially “choosing a small number of people or objects to represent the larger population or universe from which they are drawn” (Domegan and Fleming, 2003).

There are two main types of sampling. These are probability and non-probability methods. In probability sampling the chance for selection for each case in the population is known so generalisations can be made about the population. With non-probability sampling the chances of selection are not known; therefore the ability to generalise about the population is reduced (Gofton and Ness, 1997).

The sampling method chosen for the purpose of this research project is probability as the chances for selection are known for each interviewee. The target population for this project varies in so much as the researcher has looked to select a range of differing individuals in terms of their perceived opinions on the matter of a professional GAA.

Although this will obviously put a limitation on the research and findings, the investigation will still offer an insight into some of the general opinions of people on this matter. The sampling frame refers to the list of the population from which the sample can be selected (Birn, 2002).

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The researcher researched possible candidates in various ways. It was quite difficult to itemise potential candidates thus the interviewer used a formation of age and even more so - candidates who have a deep relationship with the GAA thus having a sense of heritage with the organisation. Thus the interviews that were performed were – 3 within the writers’ own GAA club – namely a member of the older generation (60-70 years old), the present hurling team manager, along with the captain of the team at present. The writer then interviewed a member of the current Galway camoige panel.

Saunders et al. (2009) describe this as *purposive* or *judgemental sampling* as the researcher uses their judgement to select the cases that will best enable them to answer their research question and objectives.

3.8 Stage Five: Fieldwork

In the fieldwork stage, the researcher physically collects the data (Roe, 2004). Prior to the physical collection the researcher creates a detailed plan on how to contact the samples, when the interviews will take place, where the interviews will take place and any special requirements or requests on behalf of the samples (e.g. the interviewer may not be able enter the premises of the sample due to health and safety legislation). As the interviews were planned to be unstructured, the researcher drew up an informal interview guide and tested the questions to ensure comprehension and coherence.

The researcher contacted the samples by letter then phone prior to interviewing. The researcher gave a brief outline of the research, why the sample was selected, explained how their participation would be greatly appreciated and finally asked permission to interviewee each sample at an agreed time and place. The researcher also asked permission to electronically record the interviews and highlighted how the recording would remain confidential. Electronically recording the interviews will ensure transcription of the data will be made easier at the analysis stage of the research (Roe, 2004; Blyth, 1998).

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Table 3.9.1 illustrates the individuals that were interviewed, where they were interviewed and when the interviews took place. As the writer is heavily involved within the home GAA club, there were very few problems arranging time and dates with the interviewees.

The rationale each interviewee being chosen is quite simple and apparent. The first of the four interviewees, Mr. Sean McKeigue was chosen as he is the current manager within the local GAA club to whom where this writer is from. He has played GAA for many years thus he has seen the evolution throughout the years within the GAA and the current effort that is required to become a successful GAA player.

The second interviewee, Mr. William Dervan is a long-standing respected member of the writer’s local GAA club. He is aged approximately between 60-70 years of age thus he was chosen to give the writer an insight into where his particular generation may stand in terms of drastic change within the GAA ie the professionalisation of the organisation.

The third interviewee is a GAA athlete heavily involved with the Galway senior hurling panel of 2010. Mr. Adrian Cullinane was chosen due to the fact that he is currently playing GAA at a highest level and thus sees at first hand the time and constraints involved in playing at this level which should give the writer a greater perspective into investigating some of the subsequent interview questions.

The final interviewee is Ms. Annmarie Hayes, currently playing with the Galway Camoige team and thus is playing at the highest possible level of her sport. She was chosen to give her insight into the particular questions this writer has in relation to playing at the highest level, what the GAA values mean to her personally and her views on professionalism. This should also give this writer an adequate gender balance in terms of interviewees.

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Mr Sean McKeigue (Team Manager)	Interviewed on July 28, 2010	Kiltormer Club Complex, Kiltormer, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway
Mr William Dervan (Member of Kiltormer GAA Club)	Interviewed August 3, 2010	His home, Laurencetown, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway
Mr Adrian Cullinane (Member of the Galway Senior Hurling Squad)	Interviewed July 30, 2010	GMIT, Dublin Road, Co. Galway
Miss Annmarie Hayes (Member of the Galway Camoige Team)	Interviewed July 31, 2010	Killimor GAA clubhouse, Killimor, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway

Table 3.9.1 Table listing interviewees names, date of interview and location where interview took place

3.9 Stage Six: Analysis of Data

In essence, analysing qualitative data received from in-depth interviews involves interpreting the data to derive conclusions, assumptions and recognise relationships between categories.

The researcher aims to transcribe each interview in detail and take written account of each

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3.10 Stage Seven: Presentation of results

Gofton and Ness (1997) outline the presentation stage of a research project is crucial in the overall success of the research. Presentations of the results of the interviews are detailed in the following chapter. The researcher has structured the chapter and the results in a format which is easy to read and the consistency in the chapter ensures it is unproblematic to cross reference the results received from each question and each company.

3.11 Limitations of the research methodology

The primary limitation of the research methodology used for this research project is stipulated by the use of a non-probability sampling technique. This limits the ability to generalise the findings to the entire population (Blyth, 1998). This research is generalised and its interpretation is of course can be opinion based in terms of the reader. This investigation is more of an exploration then a specific hypothesis solution. The matter in question has not yet occurred thus the writer is speaking hypothetically which may tend to influence the interviewees answers when it comes to findings.

Saunders et al. (2009) outline any interpretation of the content collected from in depth interviews is under threat from observer bias. The researcher has strived to be as impartial as possible in interpreting the data but research can guarantee full reliability. As a result there is a threat to the validity of the results.

This again becomes apparent the more passionate an individual is on a particular matter yet the researcher has trained to merely research and not debate with the interviewee.

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3.12 Conclusion

The rationale of this chapter is to highlight the steps taken when conducting research and the steps and procedures chosen. The researcher chose the seven-stage marketing research process as outlined by Domegan and Fleming (2003) in their very useful book “Marketing Research in Ireland: Theory and Practice” and applied in the assistance of completing the research project. The researcher aims to answer the research question and meet the objectives outlined earlier in the chapter through the combined use of secondary research and in-depth, unstructured, interviews. The researcher chose the non-probability method of judgemental sampling as a basis for the in-depth interviews.

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4.0 Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings obtained from the data analysis stage of the research process, as outlined in the research methodology chapter. The findings are examined in relation to each the primary and secondary objective outlined in Chapter 3.

A discussion of the findings will assist in answering the writers research question - **“An investigation into whether the GAA’s embrace of professionalism is being hindered by its’ inherited culture.”**

The conclusion derived from these findings will also be presented in this chapter along with a discussion in relation to this writers’ personal opinion on the matter.

4.2 Primary Objective

To explore various individual reactions to the possibility of a professional GAA and investigate the various circumstances that has hindered this development.

Again it must be stated that the literature review on the matter of a professional GAA being hindered by its’ inherited culture has been relatively exhausted without any clear conclusions being made. The investigation is to a large degree merely opinion based and hypothetically speaking. This of course places clear limitations on this writers’ findings, conclusions and overall hypothesis yet it is the authors’ objective and ambition to gain an insight into how a particular and chosen group of people react to a formulated set of questions in relation to the research question.

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In an effort to illuminate the most important themes behind the dissertation this writer has placed the interview questions under four noticeable headings – “An inherited GAA”, “Culture”, “Professionalism”, and “Ethics – Right & Wrong”. The headings should allow the writer to have a slightly more structured interview in terms of the overall flow, while still keeping the overall theme of the interview informal. Each heading will also highlight the greatest themes of the dissertation and investigation.

4.3 Inherited GAA

Reisman (2007) states that there is an assumption that human culture is inherited by means of social learning. He also argues that human culture is not inherited by social learning alone; the capacities to learn from and modify our environments also play a significant role. If one were to assess one’s life and childhood the likelihood is we have been encouraged to develop our beliefs behind that of our parents and those closest to us.

Whether it is in terms of religion or the political party you are a member of the notion of a personalised opinion at a very young age has very little grounding. Thus we as Irish people have grown up with the GAA around us in this country. We hear about legendary players who have achieved great highs and who have given their all in the name of the jersey on their back or the parish to where they have been reared and grown up. This is largely the case throughout the country and it is on these grounds that the writer has decided to begin the dissertation interview – to gain the differing perspectives on the notion that a love and belonging for the GAA has been passed down from differing generations.

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Under the above heading, Inherited GAA, the writer posed two questions to each interviewee as a means for beginning the interview and getting each candidate’s perspectives from an early viewpoint. The first question the writer posed was the following –

Do you believe the history and values of the GAA are past down from one generation to the next and are these values important to supporters & players?

All four interviewees believed that the history of the GAA is still an important factor in keeping the organisations background relevant yet it was interesting to note that two of the candidates believe that the values upon which the GAA was first built are not as well known or respected with the younger generation of today. All candidates however agreed that encouragement and nurturing at a young age certainly whets the desire of a young person thus on this evidence the GAA would appear to still have a large degree of inheritance.

- *“History and tradition are what really make the GAA unique in terms of the name players and counties have built for themselves. Youngsters of today here about legends of the past from their fathers or grandfathers and become fixed on the games.” (SM)*
- *“I have my doubts if the values of the GAA are still as strong. Years ago playing for the local club was the most important thing and having the supporters there with you when winning was the highlight. Youngsters these days seem to have been influenced by other sports maybe because of television and money and I don’t think the GAA is doing enough to change their minds” (WD)*
- *“Friends and neighbours would be around the house talking about the weekend matches so I suppose that’s where it began for me. I inherited a love for the game in that sense. I would think the values aren’t as strong as they were once, playing at county level doesn’t give you the time you would like to spend at home with your club and I think that’s what the GAA was really based on, the club.” (AC)*

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- *“My father and uncles played a lot of hurling and football for as long as I can remember so there was something wrong I guess if I didn’t pick it up...I think supporters respect players who give their all for the club and take pride in its heritage.” (AMH)*

Thus analysis of the aforementioned answers is relatively clear. The idea that the GAA is inherited, whether it is from supporters or more so family members is very clear and relevant when assessing each candidate’s answer. Upon reviewing the literature earlier in the dissertation it was stated that the GAA was the greatest distraction for communities in times of economic woes. Thus a level of pride developed in success over ones neighboring parishes. This developed a sense of pride in the club that each candidate speaks about. It would appear each candidate believes the pride in ones club is the greatest value behind the GAA, although from reviewing the answers two candidates are unsure this value is as strong as it had been in past years. Yet all would appear to agree that the GAA is certainly inherited throughout generations.

The second question the writer posed to the interviewees in relation to the theme of an inherited GAA was –

What do you believe are the most important values behind the GAA?

This question was indirectly answered by three of the candidates in the previous question thus the writer attempted to place more relevance on the particular values and principles upon which the ethos of the GAA is based upon. It was very interesting to find all candidates mentioned the fact the GAA is an amateur organisation and that this has been the overriding legacy that the organisation has tried to hold and preach. Candidates mentioned the interaction between the player and supporter as being of great significance in terms of values also.

Interviewees also put a weight of importance on the fact that the GAA has always been valued

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as an alternative to other sports also. The following are quotations each interviewee had on this question:

- *“...interaction of the supporters with the players is very special. Perhaps this is down mainly to the fact that this is the GAA’s way, there is a level of innocence even about it. That’s where the amateurism comes in, players are just normal people.” (SM)*
- *“I think the main value I’ve seen is the fact there is no real money in the GAA. The players play the games to win, fair enough, but they play the games because they love them... Players are no different to supporters and they can speak to each other whether it is in the local pub or outside mass on a Sunday. That’s always been the way of the GAA and I think that’s the real strength and value behind it”. (WD)*
- *“I think because anyone can pick up a hurl or play football that’s the most special value... Other sports have so much crazy money now, the GAA has always stood strong as being amateur. That’s its greatest value in my opinion.” (AC)*
- *“Definitely the real value is the community spirit within the GAA. It is so voluntary, the local AGM every year isn’t begging people to show up yet people give their time and efforts to help every year.” (AMH)*

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Thus again the analysis from the answers given above is very relevant in terms of where the overall theme of this dissertation may be leading to. There has been noticeable agreement that the most important value upon which the GAA has been based and grown is the sense of community and camaraderie between those who play the GAA games and those involved within the local club. Candidates appear to agree that this is as a result of the voluntary sacrifices people have made and that this is what the GAA has been based upon and which has made the organisation so strong throughout the years. The degree of money and revenue that is now being seen in alternative sports such as soccer is also a talking point. The candidates appear to agree that the GAA is much better off as an amateur organisation, on the matter of the values of the GAA and at this point in time of the interview.

4.4 Culture

Tarling and Gomez (2008) suggest a nation's identity is dependent upon the construction of nationalist culture, which tend to be produced from the perspective of a dominant minority group... Nationalist culture needs to be legitimated by reference to and promotion of a nation's past 'dignity, glory and solemnity'. Irish culture has been explained in detail within the literature review and it is quite apparent that the GAA has a long standing significance in terms of the formation of Ireland's identity. Both at home and abroad the GAA is an emblem of our culture thus it is important for this writer to air the views and opinions of the interviewees on the matter of culture, identity and the GAA. The first question under this specific theme put forward was the following:

Would you agree that the GAA is distinctively Irish and do you think Irish people are proud of the fact the GAA is unique?

This question was emphatically answered in a similar sequence by all candidates who were interviewed. One striking theme that appeared in the majority of the interviews was the fact that the Irish people who have moved abroad especially are very proud of the GAA and the degree of heritage it brings with it. All interviewees appeared to convey that emigrants from Ireland see the GAA almost as an emblem they like to carry to showcase their Irishness. One

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interviewee drew reference to the fact that the GAA heritage was based on all that was Irish and not foreign. The following were some quotations each interviewee gave on the noted question:

- *“Irish people love to speak about the GAA, especially to those who know very little about it. It is almost in Irish people's blood I feel and is definitely part of our history.” (SM)*
- *“...No matter where Irish people go in the world they'll always keep an eye on their county in the championship and are proud of their roots... It was always been something people agreed England couldn't touch.” (WD)*
- *“It's funny that no matter where a person goes or travels they'll always keep an eye on their county team...I suppose if you asked any Irish person what were the things that made Ireland unique the GAA would have to be mentioned.” (AD)*
- *“I think there is no doubt about it that Irish people are very proud of the GAA. I mean there are people visiting this country who can't believe the stadia and interest there is in the games...you see people in Australia and New York cheering on their teams you get a sense of the GAA Irishness and I would definitely agree people are very proud of their heritage.” (AMH)*

All candidates appear to speak about the degree and notion of Irishness in close context with the GAA. It was very interesting to find all candidates drew reference to the fact that the GAA is very important to those who have left Ireland and it is seen as a token of their home and heritage when they move away. This is the circumstances perhaps even more so in hard economic times such as the present when people have no choice but to move away. One interviewee brought reference to the political heritage behind the GAA. It is not surprising to this writer that the GAA was mentioned in reference to politics by one of the older candidates who may be more in tune with the history of the GAA's foundations. This candidate deemed

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it necessary to state that the GAA was everything that our neighbours Great Britain was not and that the organisation was always fundamentally Irish and he was proud of this uniqueness.

The second question asked by this researcher under the theme of culture and Irish identity was:

Do you think that the GAA is important to Irish people in terms of our culture and identity?

Although relatively similar to the previous question the writer had the intention of focusing the interviewee’s attention on the link between our national identity and the GAA more so than the feelings ie pride behind the GAA and its significance. This was explained to the interviewee’s upon beginning the explanation behind this question.

The candidates all drew reference to the other cultures Ireland would appear to be famous for. Candidates mentioned the farming culture in Ireland along with deep feelings behind politics both in the past and present. Also mentioned by the interviewees was the significance of the church in Ireland down through the years, the green countryside identity and even the alcohol culture. All were mentioned as distinct identities of Ireland. Yet it was interesting to note candidates were firm in their beliefs that the GAA was an emblem of the Irish identity. Again it was noted that emigrants were referred to as possibly holding the GAA close at heart as part of their Irish identity. Candidates drew reference again to Irish heritage and how they were brought up from childhood and compared an Irish upbringing alongside the GAA. Thus the following are some of the quotations and answers that the interviewees had on this particular question regarding culture and identity:

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- *“...Their two things I’d identify with Ireland and culture - The church and the land...Rugby, soccer, golf have all been well represented by Ireland but the GAA is still more of an identity to Irish people than any other sport. It’s more homely and unique maybe.” (SM)*
- *“...I’d have to say politics, the church, the land and family...There is always talk outside mass or in the shop or pub about how the team is going or will they win or not. That’s part of Irish identity.” (WD)*
- *“Yeah I’d agree the GAA is definitely part of Irish culture...But I think the GAA is always there in the background and is important to Irish people. I think it’d be even more important if there was a threat to it or controversy like banning games or festivals. Something like that.” (AC)*
- *“Well there are always going to be the usual things thought about when Ireland is mentioned, the church, farming or the land and the likes of Fianna Fail etc. But I do think GAA separates us from our neighbours. Outsiders don’t know about this part of our heritage and maybe that’s what makes the GAA so important and special to Irish people...”(AMH)*

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4.5 Professionalism

Manders (2005) described sport as in his opinion and in terms of professionalism. “Sport is more than a business, it is also a social and political activity which has developed a rule book to enhance competition rather than restrict it. This is in acknowledgement that pure market competition based on the desire by participants to achieve a position of monopoly / oligopoly serves no one’s interest.” Basically it would appear this writer is saying that sport would not attract public interest if it was to be merely a business and the heart / soul was not present within the sport. Perhaps this is the pivotal area of the research in terms of gaining a true perspective of how the interviewees react to the questions this writer poses on professionalism. The reader will have seen a clear emphasis made by the interviewees on the importance of the GAA to Irish peoples cultural identity previously in the interview sequence thus results regarding the topic of professionalism should be quite fascinating.

The first question regarding the theme of professionalism and the notion of professionalism within the GAA is the following –

How would you describe, in your opinion, the lifestyle of a current GAA athlete playing at the highest level?

The question was chosen and phrased in a manner that would hopefully allow the interviewees to give their reactions and opinions into what is required to play at the highest possible level of the GAA. This question was placed at this point of the interview merely to sequence the interviewees back onto the topic of the evolution of the GAA and the requirements that now go with playing at the top levels.

This question provoked differing opinions and suggestions by each interviewee. A degree of the answers given were expected by this researcher while others were quite unforeseen. The following are some of the answers and quotations taken from the interviewees regarding this question.

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- *“I have played hurling and football at Senior club level for many years and now that I am involved in coaching the changes involved in the games are startling. In my time, we trained hard fair enough but gyms, nutritionists, the likes of chiropractors were not heard of... I suppose it wouldn’t be far off professional standards.” (SM)*
- *Work, train, work, train – there wouldn’t be much of a lifestyle I’d say. Social scene is non-existent I would imagine. There is that expectancy then to deliver on the big day, there are such high expectations of supporters nowadays. I would imagine in the past there wasn’t as much emphasis on training – it was probably a case of train two nights a week and do your best on Sunday. The changes have been massive. (WD)*
- *“...if you know other lads and other teams are training on their own and minding themselves you have to do the same to have any chance. I don’t mind it because I’ve always loved a professional approach but I’d say there’s probably others who feel we’re mad... But that’s their opinion, if you lose on the big day then supporters complain. That’s sport. (AC)*
- *“...You watch what you eat, you mind yourself at the weekend, you train hard and hope it’ll happen on the big day then. But we wouldn’t do it if we didn’t get a kick out of it. I think we do train like professionals now but players love that, you feel like your doing very utmost to win and then you can have no complaints if your beaten. (AMH)*

This researcher had in some ways expected and anticipated the answers on this question from the current players who are playing at the highest levels. They were very honest and forthright in their opinions and explained that every team looking to succeed or reach their goals have similar attitudes nowadays. The writer was slightly surprised that both of the other candidates agreed and were knowledgeable on the requirements of training and lifestyles of the players today. It was clear they were very accurate and precise in their analysis on the pressure and expectations of today’s players thus it was slightly surprising for this interviewer.

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The second question that was put forward regarding the theme of professionalism was used to delve further into the opinions and reactions of the interviewees regarding the argument of payment and the hence the effects money has on a players pride and passion. The following were some of the quotations taken from the interview.

Do you believe that a sense of pride and parochialism could be lost if players were to be payed to play within the GAA?

- *“Firstly I think there would be a major problem as to who would get paid and who wouldn’t. Players come and go from county panels so it’d be a tricky one in that sense...alot of money coming in from tv and sponsorship maybe players would lose sight of where they are from and what a jersey stands for. Would players then move around in transfers? Now I don’t think anyone would like to see something like that happen.”*
- *“...Definitely. I believe the old adage “pride in the parish colours” is still important to supporters and many players. Money has a funny affect on people and I think it would ruin the GAA.” (WD)*
- *“I think any player involved would love if there full time job was to play hurling or football for a living. Would we lose sight of the passion and drive for the club or county. I don’t know. Look at rugby and the likes of Munster. There’s a deep pride down there in the jersey and anyone who plays for them knows the supporters passion and pride in the jersey and province. These guys are professional so it’s not so easy to say just because we would get paid we’d lose sight of the passion in the jersey.” (AC)*
- *“...I love camoige and would love to say it was my job. Maybe not so much my generation but the next one or two might lose sight of what the GAA is about. I think my generation all know the heritage and pride in an area but if money came in it might affect player’s vision... I don’t think it’s fair for people to say just because player’s get paid they don’t care about the jersey anymore. I wouldn’t agree with that at all.” (AMH)*

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The analysis and opinions on this particular question were very interesting and appealing. There were many suggestions and reactions to player payment and the subsequent perceived lack of passion and pride. Suggestions such as a player transfer system ruining the GAA along with too much money leading to the destruction of the GAA were mentioned. The two current players did mention that it wasn’t fair to come to a hasty conclusion that players would automatically lose their identity should they get paid to play and one interviewee drew reference to the pride and passion seen in other sports.

4.6 Ethics – “right and wrong”

Chakraborty (2006) defined unethical or unfair behaviour in sport as “one entity intentionally trying to gain at the expense of another, or just to cause loss to another, without any gain, while the other entity is unaware of such intention or is powerless to defend itself against it.” Basically the reason this definition was used is to highlight the differences that seem to appear in the administration of the GAA and the degree of rewards the GAA’s players receive for providing the entertainment for supporters.

Again the writer decided to pose two questions to the four interviewees on the matter of ethics and right versus wrong behaviour.

The first question was posed to the interviewees as a method of drawing reaction on the money others, including the GAA, are making while the players are not paid to play. It is hoped interviewees will have a number of opinions and suggestions on the topic and what could be perceived as being unfair hence the question is placed under the theme of ethics. The following are some of the quotations from each interviewee:

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What is your opinion on the cost of entrance to the GAA's biggest games and the fact that, directly or indirectly people make money off the entertainment provided by players?

- *"I do think the GAA is very exaggerated in costs. It is very expensive for families to go to watch their county now...I've often thought alright when your passing Croke Park all the lads selling flags and chips and papers are making a few pound whereas the players are spilling their guts inside just to win. But I wouldn't blame anyone for making money, the GAA is greedy though especially in these economic times." (SM)*
- *"...The cost is a bit high but the facilities provided are so good now that has to be taken into consideration. The day is gone when you stand on a dirty hill side or where you can't see the game from a viewing point so people are probably prepared to pay that little bit more for comfort. It's probably not fair on the players but that's life, if there's going to be a crowd then people will try make money." (WD)*
- *"... I mean 40 or 50 euro is alot of money to watch maybe 2 hours of hurling or football. I think it's too much really but then again the facilities are state of the art nowadays... No, I wouldn't blame anyone from trying to make money by selling pints, or food or whatever. The GAA has always been like that and players know that, we all grew up buying flags. We do it to win but I do feel strongly about the price people have to pay to watch games. It's too high." (AC)*
- *I'd have to say it's a very expensive day out for anyone going to see a GAA match especially in these times when the country is going bad...people are going to make money where there's a crowd so I wouldn't have any problem on shops or pubs or that doing well... I mean it could 10 euro into a club match at home and families going to watch their club have to fork this out is a disgrace in many ways." (AMH)*

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It was interesting that only one candidate stated that he believed it was relatively fair with what the GAA are charging supporters to view games nowadays. It was mentioned that there now is state of the art facilities and it was indirectly suggested that the GAA may be correct in what they can charge as every other sport is doing the same. Candidates appeared to have little problem with people indirectly making money off the GAA games and all appeared to agree that people were entitled to make money when there are big crowds. Three candidates felt very strongly on the prices the GAA can charge for big games and candidates drew reference to the fact it is now an expensive day for families, especially in the economic downturn.

The final question of the interview was the following statement made by Gaelic Players Association chairman Donal Og Cusack, who is also the current Cork hurling goalkeeper – **“The GAA can’t have it both ways: amateur games, but professional expectations.”** (Will GAA pay price of progress?” – 2006)

What is your opinion on the following statement in relation to the GAA – “The GAA can’t have it both ways: amateur games, but professional expectations.”

The reasoning behind this question is due to the fact this writer has heard this expression mentioned before yet was eager to gain the interviewees opinions and reactions to it. The question was also chosen as a method to finish the interview and possibly close the door on a subject that could most certainly be researched in further in a future context.

- *“...I think they ARE having it both ways though. Players are getting paid but they live like professionals nowadays in the way they train, the way they look after themselves, their attitudes. I think the GAA can certainly loosen the strings on player sponsorship and let them make money that way. That’s good for the sports, youngsters enjoy seeing the top stars on adverts and it drives them on even more from what I can see.” (SM)*

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- *“I think the GAA could be under more pressure down the road – a way round this could be to provide more expenses for milage and gear etc... They won’t settle for old-fashioned approach. Look what happened in Cork with their strike, they felt they weren’t treated right and they let everyone know – there is still a lot of player power. Yet they are still amateur. Who knows what the future holds.” (WD)*
- *“... We only prepare the best we can if that’s seen as being professional then we’re preparing to the best of our ability I suppose. Personally I can’t see it happening there’s just too much red tape and history there but if you want to win a top trophy these days professional commitment is required. I think most genuine supporters know what goes in though so it’s accepted we put in a big effort.” (AC)*
- *“Yeah professional expectations is true but that’s from the players really more so then the supporters I think. It’s just so hard to win at the top these days that it’s a given that you prepare to the very best of your ability to have a chance. If you don’t and you lose then you’ve only yourself to blame. I don’t think there’ll be enough money around for the GAA to go professional though. It’s not like rugby, we just don’t have a big enough fan base really.” (AMH)*

The analysis on this question was possibly the most interesting out of all the interview questions. The two current inter-county representatives, although playing at the highest level and thus training and playing at arguably a professional standard both agreed that the GAA would not in the future turn professional. Red tape, history and heritage along with a lack of money and funds were all mentioned as possible hindrances’ to the progression of evolution in the GAA. The remaining interviewees did pose alternatives to full professionalism however, with sponsorship deals being allowed in full for players along with further better treatment in terms of training with mileage payments increased.

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4.7 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter the writer presented the findings from the four interviews that were conducted as part of the primary research. Quotations were used from the interviews in order to give the reader a perspective of the answers the interviewees gave and thus give the reader a clearer insight into where the writer has gained his conclusions on Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

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5.0 Discussion & Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to give conclusions on the research findings obtained by the researcher, discuss the writer’s own personal opinion on the research question matter and give a judgement of where the GAA may be going in the future in terms of its evolution. The research findings have been presented in the previous chapter in response to the research objectives outlined in the research methodology. This chapter will begin summarising the research methodology before moving onto a summary and conclusions from the findings, followed by practical implications before concluding with implications for future research.

5.2 Summary of Research Methodology

The complete research methodology process that was followed by the writer was outlined in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. The writer first examined the secondary data in detail on the topic of the GAA, culture and professionalism. The relatively comprehensive review of the literature enlightened the writer on the topic and also illuminated the area of the topic which is, in this writer’s opinion, under researched. The researcher began by establishing objectives for the research project and the design of the research was then decided upon based on what was needed to meet these objectives.

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The primary objective of this thesis was to explore various individual reactions to the possibility of a professional GAA and investigate the various circumstances that have hindered this development. In order to meet this objective the writer organised unstructured interviews with 4 individuals, all with various backgrounds in the GAA with two candidates both currently involved at the highest level of their sports. The interviews were conducted under the structure of four themes in keeping with the overall objectives of research:

- The inherited GAA
- Culture
- Professionalism
- Ethics – “Right & Wrong”

The research can be defined as a deductive approach and the research itself can be described as exploratory in nature. Interviews were electronically recorded to ensure reliability during the collection and analysis stages of research but interpretation of the content collected from in depth interviews is under threat from observer bias due to the researchers own personalised opinion on the overall research matter. As a result there is a threat to the validity of the results.

5.3 Summary of Findings

The following section will summarise the main findings of the primary research as presented in chapter 4. This section follows the same layout of the findings of chapter 4 in which the primary objective is split into four themes.

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5.3.1 Primary Objective

The primary objective of this dissertation was to develop a comprehensive literary review, explore various individual reactions to the possibility of a professional GAA and thus investigate the various circumstances that have hindered this development. To decipher this, the writer categorised what he felt were the defining themes behind the objectives – an inherited GAA, culture and identity, professionalism and finally ethics.

5.3.2 An inherited GAA

Upon interviewing the four candidates who have been, and are still heavily involved within the GAA it was apparent that the notion that the GAA is inherited is very relevant. The interviewees mentioned the fact that the GAA is part of Irish people’s heritage and part of a community’s spirit and soul. Some mentioned the fact their families had been involved in the GAA for years, playing the games thus it was encouraged that they become involved as well.

Some however mentioned their worries at how the standards have increased so heavily over the years and the reliance now on training has taken away from what many believe is the soul of the GAA, the club. With the ever increasing demands now being placed on those playing at the highest level there is perhaps less time to spend within a players club, thus they are arguably slightly isolated from where their “roots” began. Candidates spoke about fathers, grandfathers and uncles all having a big impact on them, the next generation, thus the interest and traditions have led them into playing the games. Interviewees also mentioned the increasing interests and pressures from other sports also as being a problem or issue that may decrease the popularity of the GAA and thus in effect slow down the numbers playing the sports at a young age.

It is this writer’s opinion that the GAA will continue to be inherited in the future and years to come and this will in effect hinder any developments towards a professional GAA. There are traditions in this country and legacy’s that may never be broken and this writer believes the

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GAA may be one of them. One interviewee mentioned the legacy of two past players who are still spoken about to this day. This writer believes it is in young people’s blood to try to emulate their heroes and build their own legacy. One thinks of the traditions in successful counties, the sheer drive to win silverware and defeat ones greatest rivals and neighbours. This lives on year after year. One thinks of the battles between Cork and Kerry in Gaelic Football or Tipperary and Kilkenny in hurling. Supporters are thrust into argument and debate every year as to who will prevail.

The blood lines and interest levels are thus passed on by bringing children and infants to these games and appetites are developed. Certain teams and counties develop folklore and heritage that demands success thus it is inevitable that young players will do their very best to provide this. This is some of the reasoning behind the writer’s opinion as to why the GAA will not lose heritage and degree of inheritance hence the reasoning behind any move behind a professional body being hindered.

There is no doubt that there is and will be increasing pressures from alternative sports and activities but with the careful management and initiatives in place the GAA should be passed down from one generation to come for a number of years to come.

It was also interesting to assess the majority of candidates believed that the true values behind the GAA were the level of voluntarism and amateurism. Interviewees drew reference to people helping and giving their free time to help out in the club with children or the day/day running of the club. Others compared the difference between professional sports desire to win to that of the GAA and how the amateur organisation was based on sheer love of the games. It also noted that the interviewees were all emphatic that GAA players are normal people, there are not celebrities. Candidates believed it was another strong value behind the GAA where the players and supporters can interact so freely. The sense of community and passion were also mentioned as the true values.

The writer would have to agree with the majority of answers given in the interviews and was enlightened by the interviewees passion behind what the GAA really means to each person individually. It was interesting to note that the current inter-county players, thus playing at the highest possible level, both drew reference to the fact that amateurism is still possibly the GAA’s greatest value. It gives no grounds for player ego, players and supporters are alike, top

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players are role models for youngsters and the value that they give to interacting with youngsters cannot be underestimated.

In all, the future would seem difficult to determine and estimate in terms of where the GAA will go but this writer is certain that it will be difficult to lose the sense GAA’s sense of inheritance and heritage thus the concept of a professional GAA appears unlikely in this sense.

5.3.3 Culture

The idea of culture and national identity was the second theme behind which the interview was based. This writer was interested to assess the opinions and reactions of the interviewees to the concept that the GAA is part of Irish people’s image and identity. All interviewees were insistent in their answers that the GAA is most definitely part of Irish people’s identity.

It was interesting to note, perhaps because of the economic times we are in and the level of emigration, that all the interviewees paid some reference to the fact that the GAA is even more of a national emblem when you are away from home. County colours are worn to help identify people’s roots and a number of interviewees referenced the pride that it felt from displaying this manner of one’s own heritage.

In terms of assessing the interviewees opinions on the importance of the GAA to Irish culture, some interesting reactions were made. Candidates mentioned other factors and examples of Irish culture and identity namely – politics, the church & religion, St. Patricks Day, the importance of family, land & farming. All were mentioned as being distinctively associated with Ireland. Yet the GAA was also mentioned as being a firm emblem behind “Irishness.” Candidates drew reference again to the community – speaking about how the local team is performing in the local shops etc. Others agreed the GAA is what separates Ireland in terms of sport from other nations. It is uniquely played only by Irish people whether that is at in Ireland or by Irish people abroad.

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It is this writer's opinion that culture and Irish culture cannot be spoken about without mentioning the GAA. Culture is an extremely vast area of study and thus it is quite simple to move away from the facts and areas that can be defined as national identity. Although the examples and opinions of Irish culture were all very relevant ie Politics and the church, Irish people are inherently associated with sport worldwide. We, as a people for our geographical size, have achieved marvellous results over the years in different sports thus we are known as a sports “hungry” nation. This is why sport must be associated with our culture and thus the GAA is the bedrock from which our sports love has been derived. Irish people will automatically know, at least a majority will, that September will mean the pinnacle in the GAA calendar and that the greatest honours will be fought for. One interviewee drew reference to tourists surprise and dismay at the standard of stadia around the country and the degree of media coverage the GAA gets every year.

The GAA is part of Irish people's identity and any association with Irish culture must mention the GAA in this writer's opinion hence the organization and emblem is close to Irish hearts, again reasoning behind the hindrance of a professional GAA not being embraced.

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5.3.4 Professionalism

This was possibly the most pivotal theme in terms on the interview findings. It was important for the researcher to gain a perspective at where the interviewee’s opinions were on matters such as the lifestyles of the modern era GAA player and what effects they believe money could have on the sense of pride and parochialism. The answers and opinions were very interesting when assessed by the researcher. The researcher was surprised in essence by some of the opinions from differing candidates.

For example the researcher was not expecting the two non-playing individuals to be so accurate and in tune with the sacrifices and commitments of the modern day county players. They both stated there is little or no social life playing at the top level and it is a matter of working and training continuously to retrieve the highest results. It was also interesting to note how honest and realistic both of the current inter-county players were on the matter of player lifestyle. It was thought by this researcher that there may be a scent of resentment and perhaps frustration at the fact they are engulfed in such a lifestyle, year in year out, but this was certainly not the case. Both interviewees agreed that the training regime and lifestyle is partaken in by all players who have the motivation of achieving the most from their individual sports. They agree that the lack of a social life is not easy yet they also agree that they, along with the majority of players, enjoy the professional approach to how teams are prepared and the resources provided.

A previous interview with one of the non-playing candidates mentioned the evolution of the GAA and how there is now a need to assess nutrition, assess players bodies whether that is through chiropractors for example. This is what is needed nowadays with the levels of commitment needed exceptionally high.

The answers regarding the introduction of player payments for playing and how this will affect player’s passion for the game as well as the level of parochialism gave very differing opinions from the interviewees. The researcher was interested by suggestions that were made by all candidates. One interviewee was adamant that money would ruin the GAA as it may

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take away the true passion and loyalty to the games. It was mentioned by another candidate that it be difficult to keep the ethos of the GAA and asked the question of player contracts and thus a possible transfer system for players. This individual said this would completely go against what the GAA stands for.

It was also interesting however to hear the current player's reaction to the notion of player payment and how this would hinder their passion for the games and history. They agreed that it was far too easy to say this and used to strong examples to build their case. One interviewee drew reference to rugby union. It was mentioned that the Munster rugby union players are paid to play their sport yet they hold great pride in their jersey and the supporters appreciate the passion that they show for the area where they are from. This interviewee suggested that just because payments are brought into the GAA it does not mean that a sense of pride and parochialism will be lost.

It was also mentioned that it may not effect this generation or even the next but planning for the future would have to be managed diligently should the GAA move to a professional era in order to keep players and youngsters in the realisation of the history of the organisation.

In this writer's opinion the GAA will not move into the professional era any time in the near future. There are a number of issues and reasons as to why. Although players receive a limited amount of sponsorship deals at this current point in time, realistically there will not be enough money and payments in the organisation to fund a professional body. The entire structure of the GAA would need to be assessed and ultimately changed to allow more games to be played every year and probably all year around. This may open the doors to further television broadcasting rights which would build a certain degree of revenue but certainly not enough to fund player payments.

There then is the issue as to what player's (county or club) exactly are paid. A new system of recruitment would have to be developed as players would, one would imagine, be contracted to their county teams. The present system of player's being released from the county squad would have to be evaluated. There then is the club versus county battle. Clubs find it difficult in the present day era to have their county players available thus with what would effectively be an All Ireland league it is difficult to see how the club championship would survive, which as had been mentioned throughout the course of this dissertation, is the bedrock on which the

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GAA was founded. Thus it is for these reasons that this writer has the opinion that the GAA is not in the position at the current time to consider moving the organisation into the professional era.

5.3.5 Ethics

The writer decided to conclude this interview by introducing the area of ethics and coined two specific questions to gain opinions from the interviewees on whether the GAA is treating players in a proper manner. The belief that the GAA has, and is charging large sums of money was also spoken about and the question was put forward as to whether it was fair that the GAA along with others are indirectly benefiting while the players are effectively providing the entertainment.

The majority of interviewees agreed that the GAA is charging high sums of money when it comes to viewing games and it was referenced that it is now a very expensive day for families to see the top players in action. One interviewee however made the point that the GAA has provided tremendous facilities around the country, in comparison to those in the past. This interviewee mentioned how other sports charge similar prices because of the amenities they have provided and suggests the GAA is entitled to the attendance fees.

All interviewees did agree however that the people who are indirectly making money from the GAA’s biggest games are entitled to it. This was slightly surprising for the researcher as it was believed, especially the two current players, would resent the fact that many others make money while they provide the entertainment. It was agreed that people are entitled to make money where there is a crowd and this was the way the world in effect works.

The final question in the interview was a clever quote made by the present Cork hurling goalkeeper, Donal Óg Cusack, who referenced the expectations of supporters and mentors in the current era – “amateur games with professional expectations.”

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The current players agreed with the statement but were quick to point out that it is essentially the players who have the professional expectations and believe that these are necessary if they are to achieve the pinnacle in their careers. These interviewees also made the point that they find it difficult to imagine a professional GAA for various reasons such as a degree of red tape and lack of funding.

The remaining interviewees suggested alternatives to moving the GAA fully professional such as greater levels of sponsorship deals and better treatment of players such as more money for driving to training etc.

It is this writer's opinion that the GAA has developed a certain amount of greed and hypocrisy over the last number of years when it comes to the money supporters must pay to attend games in the modern era. It must be said that especially in these difficult economic times the GAA should be much more lenient to their “customers” and certainly offer better prices to families who wish to attend games. This writer believes a level of hypocrisy has become apparent over the years regarding the GAA and its management. The GAA is prepared to market its games and charge large sums of money yet there are major issues when players seek certain sponsorship deals. It appears unethical to this writer and it appears a trend that should be looked at in the future.

5.4 Implications for Future Research & Conclusion

This writer is confident that the proverbial door has now been opened on the matter of the GAA moving into the professional era and how its substantial history and culture may hinder this occurring. It has been mentioned that the academic literature was relatively vague as there has been very little research on this topic before.

It has to be mentioned yet again that this dissertation has been based largely on opinion and in particular the findings have been reactions rather than factual based. Because the structure of the GAA is still amateur, it is merely hypothetical to mention an alternative thus it was the researchers objective to gain opinions on the matter under a list of headings that were mentioned.

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The GAA has evolved at an incredible rate throughout its existence thus it is largely unknown where it will move to in the future. There were very few people who ever thought it would be possible for the GAA to open its most coveted and politically sacred ground, Croke Park, to alternative sports yet this occurred and has been highly successful.

There may be a possibility for future changes whether they are incremental changes or more radical. Yet it is hoped the writer has begun the process of research on a personally passionate matter and it is hoped the findings and opinions will be of some use for researchers in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Letter sent to Interviewees

Dear _____,

I am writing to you in relation to possibly doing a short interview with you regarding a dissertation I am currently conducting through my college course – Master in Strategy and Innovation Management. The title of my dissertation is – “An investigation into whether the GAA’s embrace of professionalism is being hindered by its’ inherited culture.” I have in total eight general questions all regarding the GAA in some nature yet I am merely investigating your opinions and reactions on certain matters thus there is certainly no pressure on what possible answers you may give me. I feel the research I am conducting is relevant and that you may be interested in the area of study which I have partaken in.

I would greatly appreciate your time and commitment to the interview and I would also like to assure you that should you require any area of the possible interview to be confidential and sensitive in any way I will respect that to the best of my ability. I would like to add that I intend to record the possible interview via dictophone, thus I hope this would not be an issue for you. I would also like to contact you by phone in the near future to possibly arrange a time and date for the interview should you agree to go ahead with it. I will discuss the layout then and ask for your permission to use your name as an interviewee in my dissertation. I hope you will agree to my request. Thank you in advance.

Kindest Regards,

Niall Horan

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Appendix B – List of interview questions

Inherited GAA

Q1. Do you believe the history and values of the GAA are past down from one generation to the next and are these values important to supporters?

Q2. What do you believe are the most important values behind the GAA?

Culture

Q3. Would you agree that the GAA is distinctively Irish and do you think Irish people are proud of the fact the GAA is unique?

Q4. Do you think that the GAA is important to Irish people in terms of our culture and identity?

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Professionalism

Q5. How would you describe, in your opinion, the lifestyle of a current GAA athlete playing at the highest level?

Q6. Do you believe that a sense of pride and parochialism could be lost if players were to be paid to play within the GAA?

Ethics – “right and wrong”

Q7. What is your opinion on the cost of entrance to the GAA’s biggest games and the fact that, directly or indirectly people make money off the entertainment provided by players?

Q8. What is your opinion on the following statement in relation to the GAA – “The GAA can’t have it both ways: amateur games, but professional expectations.”

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Appendix C – Interview Responses in Full

Do you believe the history and values of the GAA are past down from one generation to the next and are these values important to supporters & players?

- ❖ *I believe history and tradition are what really make the GAA unique in terms of the legacy players and counties have built for themselves. Youngsters of today here about legends of the past from their fathers or grandfathers and become fixed on the games. My father had the same effect on me thus there is a level of inheritance from one generation to the next I suppose. (Sean McKeigue)*

- ❖ *I have seen a lot of changes throughout the years in the GAA. I suppose they have done their best to show young players and supporter’s clips of the sixties and seventies of great names like Eddie Keher of Kilkenny and Mick O’ Connell of Kerry. I have my doubts if the values of the GAA are still as strong though. Years ago playing for the local club was the most important thing and having the supporters there with you when winning was the highlight. Youngsters these days seem to have been influenced by other sports maybe because of television and money and I don’t think the GAA is doing enough to change this. There is talk supporters won’t even be allowed into the pitch anymore to celebrate with the players on All Ireland day and I don’t think this will help the GAA either (William Dervan)*

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- ❖ *One of the reasons I started playing the game of hurling was hearing stories about the game and players in the club and county when I was very young. Friends and neighbours would be around the house talking about the weekend matches so I suppose that’s where it began for me. I inherited a love for the game in that sense. The more you enjoy the game the better you want to become then. I would think the values aren’t as strong as they were once, playing at county level doesn’t give you the time you would like to spend at home with your club and I think that’s what the GAA was really based on, the club. In that sense the values have diminished as a result of the time and effort required for the county set up. (Adrian Cullinane)*

- ❖ *I’d have to say I inherited hurling and camoige from my family for definite. My father and uncles played a lot of hurling and football for as long as I can remember so there was something wrong I guess if I didn’t pick it up. They have always instilled in me that club comes first so in that sense playing with that county team is great but I always love getting back to where I started my career. I try to hold those values in that sense. I think supporters respect players who give their all for the club and take pride in its heritage. (AnnMarie Hayes)*

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What do you believe are the most important values behind the GAA?

- ❖ *I suppose the real values I see in the GAA are when the club side, of any age group is involved and particularly if they win, the interaction of the supporters with the players is very special. Clapping players on the back and speaking to them in the dressing room is unheard of in many quarters. Perhaps this is down mainly to the fact that this is the GAA’s way; there is a level of innocence even about it. That’s where the amateurism comes in, players are just normal people. I don’t think you’d see that in soccer. (Sean McKeigue)*

- ❖ *I think the main value I’ve seen is the fact there is no real money in the GAA. The players play the games to win, fair enough, but they play the games because they love them. There is crazy money in other sports that have gone professional. Look at soccer how it’s gone. There is far more pride in the jersey in the GAA and more respect for a parish. Players are no different to supporters and they can speak to each other whether it is in the local pub or outside mass on a Sunday. That’s always been the way of the GAA and I think that’s the real strength and value behind it. (William Dervan)*

- ❖ *The GAA has always been special to Irish people because only we play it. I think because anyone can pick up a hurl or play football that’s the most special value. It is a real community thing, where everyone can get involved. Other sports have so much crazy money now; the GAA has always stood strong as being amateur. That’s its greatest value in my opinion. (Adrian Cullinane)*

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- ❖ *Definitely the real value is the community spirit within the GAA. It is so voluntary, the local AGM every year isn’t begging people to show up yet people give their time and efforts to help every year. People coach youngsters for no money just sheer enjoyment. I suppose that’s the beauty behind the GAA being amateur. (AnnMarie Hayes)*

Would you agree that the GAA is distinctively Irish and do you think Irish people are proud of the fact the GAA is unique?

I think all Irish people would agree that the GAA is very Irish, especially for those who have moved abroad. There are no games like it, especially hurling as Aussie Rules is slightly similar to Gaelic Football. Irish people love to speak about the GAA, especially to those who know very little about it. It is almost in Irish people’s blood I feel and is definitely part of our history. (Sean McKeigue)

I think Irish people have always been proud that the GAA is unique to Ireland. All the way back through history the GAA has survived with the changes seen in other sports. It was always been something people agreed England couldn’t touch. No matter where Irish people go in the world they’ll always keep an eye on their county in the championship and are proud of their roots. (William Dervan)

It’s funny that no matter where a person goes or travels they’ll always keep an eye on their county team. That’s what makes the GAA, pride in a parish or place. It’s hard to believe any other sports having the same pride. I suppose if you asked any Irish person what were the things that made Ireland unique the GAA would have to be mentioned. (Adrian Culliane)

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I think there is no doubt about it that Irish people are very proud of the GAA. I mean there are people visiting this country who can’t believe the stadia and interest there is in the games. The media coverage is also hard for people to understand. When you see clips of people in Australia and New York cheering on their teams you get a sense of the GAA Irishness and I would definitely agree people are very proud of their heritage. (AnnMarie Hayes)

Do you think that the GAA is important to Irish people in terms of our culture and identity?

“As far back as I can remember my parents have always stressed the importance of going to mass on a Sunday and things like working hard on the farm. Their two things I’d identify with Ireland and culture - The church and the land. I suppose Ireland is known on a global scale for our supposed love for drink but we are famous around the world for our strength in sport. Rugby, soccer, golf have all been well represented by Ireland but the GAA is still more of an identity with Ireland. It’s more homely maybe.” (Sean McKeigue)

“Well I think if you asked me what was important to Irish people down through the years I’d have to say politics, the church, the land and family. Family has always been important to Irish people I think. Yet no matter who you are or what sport you follow the GAA will play some part in your life or the next generation to you. There is always talk outside mass or in the shop or pub about how the team is going or will they win or not. That’s part of Irish identity, every year is the same thing and there’s no denying it.” I think we appreciate it even more because we’re the only country we play these games.” (William Dervan)

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“Yeah I’d agree the GAA is definitely part of Irish culture. People will always associate Ireland with the green countryside and St. Patrick’s day I suppose. And there is the drinking culture too I suppose. But I think the GAA is always there in the background and is important to Irish people. I think it’d be even more important if there was a threat to it or controversy like banning games or festivals. Something like that.” (Adrian Cullinane)

Well there are always going to be the usual generalisations made about Ireland, the “cead mile failte”, the church and Fianna Fail etc. But I do think GAA separates us from our neighbours. People outside of Ireland don’t know about this part of our heritage and maybe that’s what makes the GAA so important and special to Irish people. It’s hard to know but I definitely agree that it is part of our culture and an important part of our identity.”

(AnnMarie Hayes)

How would you describe, in your opinion, the lifestyle of a current GAA athlete playing at the highest level?

“I have played hurling and football at Senior club level for many years and now that I am involved in coaching the changes involved in the games are startling. In my time, we trained hard fair enough but gyms, nutritionists, the likes of chiropractors were not heard of. The games have trained dramatically over the years. I suppose it wouldn’t be far off professional standards.” (Sean McKeigue)

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Work, train, work, train – there wouldn't be much of a lifestyle I'd say. Social scene is non-existent I would imagine. There is that expectancy then to deliver on the big day, there are such high expectations of supporters nowadays. I would imagine in the past there wasn't as much emphasis on training – it was probably a case of train two nights a week and do your best on Sunday. The changes have been massive. (William Dervan)

Well I suppose after Christmas every year there wouldn't be a whole lot of socialising or messing. That's the way it's gone really, if you know other lads and other teams are training on their own and minding themselves you have to do the same to have any chance. I don't mind it because I've always loved a professional approach but I'd say there's probably others who feel we're mad and that we should be out drinking every weekend enjoying ourselves. But that's their opinion, if you lose on the big day then supporters complain. That's sport. (Adrian Cullinane)

Well it is a tough enough lifestyle really but that's the way it's gone. That's what is required to be successful. You watch what you eat, you mind yourself at the weekend, you train hard and hope it'll happen on the big day then. But we wouldn't do it if we didn't get a kick out of it. I think we do train like professionals now but players love that, you feel like you're doing very utmost to win and then you can have no complaints if your beaten. (AnnMarie Hayes)

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Do you believe that a sense of pride and parochialism could be lost if players were to be paid to play within the GAA?

“Firstly I think there would be a major problem as to who would get paid and who wouldn’t. Players come and go from county panels so it’d be a tricky one in that sense. But yes, if the games became very very popular and there was alot of money coming in from tv and sponsorship maybe players would lose sight of where they are from and what a jersey stands for. Would players then move around in transfers? Now I don’t think anyone would like to see something like that happen.” (Sean McKeigue)

“Defiantly. I believe the old adage “pride in the parish colours” is still important to supporters and many players. Money has a funny affect on people and I think it would ruin the GAA.” (William Dervan)

“I think any player involved would love if there full time job was to play hurling or football for a living. Would we lose sight of the passion and drive for the club or county. I don’t know. Look at rugby and the likes of Munster. There’s a deep pride down there in the jersey and anyone who plays for them knows the supporters passion and pride in the jersey and province. These guys are professional so it’s not so easy to say just because we would get paid we’d lose sight of the passion in the jersey.” (Adrian Cullinane)

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“I think there could be more resentment from supporters and even more pressure to perform. I love camogie and would love to say it was my job. Maybe not so much my generation but the next one or two might lose sight of what the GAA is about. I think my generation all know the heritage and pride in an area but if money came in it might affect player’s vision. It’s not a case of black and white though. I don’t think it’s fair for people to say just because player’s get paid they don’t care about the jersey anymore. I wouldn’t agree with that at all.”

(AnnMarie Hayes)

What is your opinion on the cost of entrance to the GAA’s biggest games and the fact that, directly or indirectly people make money off the entertainment provided by players?

“I do think the GAA is very exaggerated in costs. It is very expensive for families to go to watch their county now. Even club games can be expensive. You’d wonder at times where the money goes to. I’ve often thought alright when your passing Croke Park all the lads selling flags and chips and papers are making a few pound whereas the players are spilling their guts inside just to win. But I wouldn’t blame anyone for making money, the GAA is greedy though especially in these economic times.” (Sean McKeigue)

“No matter what sport you play people have to pay to watch entertainment – Golf, Soccer they all have entrance fees. The cost is a bit high but the facilities provided are so good now that has to be taken into consideration. The day is gone when you stand on a dirty hill side or where you can’t see the game from a viewing point so people are probably prepared to pay that little bit more for comfort. It’s probably not fair on the players but that’s life, if there’s going to be a crowd then people will try make money.” (William Dervan)

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“I hear people giving out all the time about how much tickets cost nowadays and how much a day out in croke park is. I mean 40 or 50 euro is alot of money to watch maybe 2 hours of hurling or football. I think it’s too much really but then again the facilities are state of the art nowadays. It’s tough on families all the same. No, I wouldn’t blame anyone from trying to make money by selling pints, or food or whatever. The GAA has always been like that and players know that, we all grew up buying flags. We do it to win but I do feel strongly about the price people have to pay to watch games. It’s too high.” (Adrian Cullinane)

I’d have to say it’s a very expensive day out for anyone going to see a GAA match especially in these times when the country is going bad. I think we all know people are going to make money where there’s a crowd so I wouldn’t have any problem on shops or pubs or that doing well. We often talk about the club scene as well. I mean it could 10 euro into a club match at home and families going to watch their club have to fork this out is a disgrace in many ways.” (AnnMarie Hayes)

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What is your opinion on the following statement in relation to the GAA – “The GAA can’t have it both ways: amateur games, but professional expectations.”

“It’s an interesting one I suppose. I think they ARE having it both ways though. Players are getting paid but they live like professionals nowadays in the way they train, the way they look after themselves, their attitudes. I think the GAA can certainly loosen the strings on player sponsorship and let them make money that way. That’s good for the sports, youngsters enjoy seeing the top stars on adverts and it drives them on even more from what I can see.” (Sean McKeigue)

“I think the GAA could be under more pressure down the road – a way round this could be to provide more expenses for mileage and gear etc. Players generally like a professional approach from what I can see although they are amateurs. They won’t settle for old-fashioned approach. Look what happened in Cork with their strike, they felt they weren’t treated right and they let everyone know – there is still a lot of player power. Yet they are still amateur. Who knows what the future holds.” (William Dervan)

“Who knows in the future? We only prepare the best we can if that’s seen as being professional then we’re preparing to the best of our ability I suppose. Personally I can’t see it happening there’s just too much red tape and history there but if you want to win a top trophy these days professional commitment is required. I think most genuine supporters know what goes in though so it’s accepted we put in a big effort.” (Adrian Cullinane)

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"Yeah professional expectations are true but that's from the players really more so than the supporters I think. It's just so hard to win at the top these days that it's a given that you prepare to the very best of your ability to have a chance. If you don't and you lose then you've only yourself to blame. I don't think there'll be enough money around for the GAA to go professional though. It's not like rugby, we just don't have a big enough fan base really."

(AnnMarie Hayes)

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