

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	7 th May 2010
Location	Sligo IT
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Brian McCann
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1965 Home County: Sligo / Antrim
Education	Primary: Culranney PS, Cushendun, Co. Antrim Secondary: St MacNissis College, Garrontower, Carinlough, Co. Antrim Third Level: Queens University Belfast
Family	Siblings: 2 brothers Current Family if Different: Wife (Mairéad), 4 children
Club(s)	Ruairí Óg [Antrim]; Naomh Eoin [Sligo]
Occupation	Lecturer
Parents' Occupation	Electrician [Father]; Nurse [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	N/A

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Date of Report	18 th June 2012
Period Covered	1965 – 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Sligo, Antrim
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Commiserations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Education, Religion, Media, Emigration, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, Identity, Rivalries, Culture, Club History, County History, Irish, History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Politics, Northern Ireland, The Troubles, Opening of Croke Park, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Socialising, Economy / Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Brian talks about his youth spent in Antrim where hurling was prominent. His local club was Cushendall but an eye injury cut short his playing career. He was living through the Troubles but there was not a lot of tension in his area, although you had to be wary when in some of the bigger towns around Antrim. He later went to Queens University in Belfast where he became involved in student politics before later moving to Sligo. Brian's interest in GAA never wavered and in Sligo he became involved with his local club, Naomh Eoin, and with Sligo IT where he worked as a lecturer. He was soon training teams and trying to get other hurling people involved in the coaching side of things. He worked on putting better organisational structures in place and in time he became the manager of the Sligo hurling team. He describes his efforts to improve hurling in the county and his battles to secure more resources and encourage interest in hurling. Brian also shares his thoughts on the GPA and on the GAA itself.</p> <p>00:15 Born in 1965 in Hampshire, England. Moved to Cushendall Antrim when he was two.</p> <p>00:50 Father was originally from Belfast and used to cycle to Cushendall to visit his aunt as a teenager. He later went to sea as an engineer and ended up in England.</p> <p>01:46 Older brother was born in England and his younger in Cushendall.</p> <p>02:05 They moved back in 1967/1968 - right before the</p>

	<p>Troubles. Hurling was very big there.</p> <p>02:40 Gaelic games were not recognised in the bigger towns in North Antrim and you could not wear anything identifying you with the GAA in those places.</p> <p>03:20 The GAA gave people a great sense of identity in the small villages.</p> <p>03:30 Some people played soccer but not in the parish.</p> <p>03:55 It was a Catholic area but not strongly Republican as they had links with Scotland. But if you went to Ballymena or Larne you did get a sense that you were different.</p> <p>04:45 There were some bombings and shootings because of the hunger strikes and parades. Recalls a police officer being shot and Brian's mother was a nurse who helped.</p> <p>05:20 Gaelic culture and identity was important but there wasn't a siege mentality.</p> <p>06:05 Recalls going to Queens in Belfast for matches and they had to be careful where they went after games.</p> <p>06:40 Some matches took place in Unionist heartlands like Dunloy and Lough Giel and you had to be careful going there; you could be arrested for having a hurley in your car.</p> <p>07:25 Brian did not play a lot of hurling as he got hurt as an Under-10 with an eye injury. When going to games they kept things low-key.</p> <p>08:20 Now it is all very different and the acceptance of the GAA has improved.</p> <p>09:20 Cushendall was a holiday area and many used to visit from west Belfast. It was a more laid back environment.</p> <p>09:50 He went to primary school in Toher and there was no hurling there but they still had a puck around between themselves.</p> <p>10:30 Scór was prominent in the area and there were eight or nine other parishes in the area with similar interests.</p> <p>11:40 His father played football and hurling for St John's in Belfast. He also was involved in running and cycling with</p>
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	<p>Belfast Harriers.</p> <p>12:10 Recalls a story his father told about when Antrim made the All-Ireland hurling final against Christy Ring and Cork in 1941. His father's friend Danny McAllister was one of the best players on the Antrim team and Brian's father cycled from Belfast to Croke Park for the game. Antrim froze on the day and people used to say that the only person who made an effort on that day was Brian's father, Terry.</p> <p>12:15 Terry was going to stay the night in Dublin but was so disgusted that he cycled home again</p> <p>13:30 Brian's grandfather was from Balymoney and a fluent speaker of Antrim Gaelic. He encouraged his children to play sport.</p> <p>14:15 There was great rivalry in Belfast between the clubs and St John's, who played in Corrigan Park. Brian's aunt played camogie in Belfast.</p> <p>15:15 His father worked for the British and Swedish Merchant Navy and travelled the world.</p> <p>15:35 Brian played a little bit while at Queens and then when he moved to Sligo.</p> <p>16:15 When he got his eye injury at 10, there was glass in his eye and his mother told him not to play hurling any more. He tried to get a helmet but there were no sports shops in Cushendall. He looked for a helmet in Ballymena and asked for 'an ice hockey helmet'.</p> <p>17:50 Training was not as intense then and you weren't encouraged to play as much so it was easy to drift away from it.</p> <p>18:20 His club won a centenary competition in 1984 and that inspired them to further success. Ballycastle were their big rivals.</p> <p>19:00 After college he worked in Belfast and went to watch games in Casement Park.</p> <p>19:45 A Tyrone man, Eamon McIllduff, was involved in hurling in Queens and they used to puck around in Botanic Park. But Brian got more involved in student politics.</p>
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	<p>21:00 In primary school there were only 12 pupils in total. In secondary school there was a Gaelic football team and Brian was the sub goalkeeper on the McRory Cup team. He also played hurling but the team never lived up to their potential.</p> <p>22:40 GAA was strong in Queens and they made the Fitzgibbon Cup final while he was there, losing to UCC. Footballer Henry Downey of Derry was on that team, as was Joe Cunningham of Meath. Ciaran Barr the Antrim player was on the team.</p> <p>23:40 They had a football rivalry with Jordanstown.</p> <p>24:05 At Queens they were free to express their identity and the facilities were good.</p> <p>25:00 He went to all Antrim's National League games and had no interest in the politics of the GAA.</p> <p>25:40 He was involved in the students union and often had debates with Ian Paisley Jr. The student debates were very popular.</p> <p>26:10 Brian is primarily interested in social equality and for him there were not many differences between the different peoples in Northern Ireland. Mentions Jim McBride, a Unionist at Queens.</p> <p>27:30 Recalls going down south to protest when Ronald Reagan was getting a peace degree.</p> <p>28:30 They knew they could be searched when going to games in Casement Park but there were not too many problems, although sometimes helicopters landed on the pitch when Crossmaglen were playing.</p> <p>29:20 Sometimes GAA premises were attacked from a sectarian point of view and not a political one.</p> <p>30:00 They had to give southern friends advice on where to go, as they would have stood out with their accents.</p> <p>31:00 Brian feels that sport and politics should not be mixed. Religion should not be politicised either.</p> <p>32:25 He also did postgraduate work at Queens and made a lot of friends.</p>
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	<p>33:00 He worked for four years in Belfast and moved to Sligo as there was work in civil engineering lecturing available. His wife is from Tyrone so it was a big move for them. His son was born in August 1995 and they moved to Sligo that month.</p> <p>34:50 Pat Maguire gave him a call asking if he would like to get involved in hurling in Sligo.</p> <p>35:45 In 1997 he got involved with the Naomh Eoin club, helping from the sidelines.</p> <p>36:00 They had just one team but things expanded over the years.</p> <p>36:35 He got involved with the Sligo IT hurling team and they won the Ryan Cup in 1999 and 2005.</p> <p>37:20 He got a fitness coach involved with the team and organised things a lot</p> <p>38:55 Players will not respect you as a coach unless you've had a good inter-county or club career</p> <p>38:40 He managed the IT team in 2000 and 2001. Mick Burke and Johnny Mullins were involved in improving structures but Brian felt he had more to offer as an administrator.</p> <p>39:25 In the late 1990s there were four clubs playing hurling, including Naomh Eoin, Calry/St Joseph's, Craobh Rua, Tubbercurry, Tourlestrane.</p> <p>40:05 Gradually underage teams started to come through, like Western Gaels, Coolera/Strandhill.</p> <p>40:15 They have expanded to Geevagh and Shamrock Gaels, helped by people like Pat Maguire, Joe Kane, Stephen Whelan, Mick Burke, John Doyle.</p> <p>41:05 Tom Evans outlined the need for better structures and they got some money from Connacht which has led to success in the schools.</p> <p>41:50 In 2010 they had six clubs playing at adult level and eight at underage, with Easkey and Castleconnor getting involved and Drumcliffe-Rosses Point starting up.</p> <p>42:10 They lost some clubs along the way as it's hard to keep going due to the lack of coaches/mentors in hurling.</p>
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	<p>43:05 The senior county team were between Division 4 and 4 and Brian helped out as a selector.</p> <p>42:40 They got guys like Frank Brown and Mickey Galvin in and won the Rackard Cup in 2008, beating Louth handsomely. Keith Raymond played very well.</p> <p>44:15 Hurling is a family in Sligo and everyone knows each other. They have their own hurling board and fixtures committee.</p> <p>44:45 They are trying to expand the number of players and have success at county level similar to Mayo.</p> <p>45:40 Many of the people involved in hurling are not from Sligo - Cork, Limerick, Carlow, Kilkenny. David McVeigh and Stephen Whelan are local.</p> <p>46:00 People like Nick Burke, Henry Cox and Pat Maguire have been involved a long time.</p> <p>46:50 There are more local coaches involved in hurling now.</p> <p>47:10 Through his involvement with Sligo IT and Naomh Eoin he was asked to manage the county team.</p> <p>47:50 He had Ger Reilly from Westmeath involved as a coach with him, and former Antrim hurler Paul Seegers helped out with coaching, as did Fergus Hayes.</p> <p>49:00 They played in a Connacht junior league.</p> <p>50:00 The Rackard Cup and Christy Ring Cup has helped a lot.</p> <p>50:25 Not having the Christy Ring on before a semi-final in Croke Park and not televising it is a bad idea. Sligo reached the Rackard final in 2008 and the fact that it wasn't televised was disappointing.</p> <p>51:40 They got a chance to play before qualifier games and that was a bonus.</p> <p>52:00 Media coverage of hurling in Sligo has improved in local newspapers like The Sligo Champion, The Sligo Post and The Weekender. They have improved their website and that has taken off.</p>
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	<p>54:55 They have to adopt a professional approach in order to get people interested in playing; they must feel that they have a chance of winning something.</p> <p>56:25 The GAA are doing more to promote hurling in weaker counties than they were. Pat Daly, Paudie Butler and Damien Coleman are working hard but more could be done to encourage all clubs to have one hurling team.</p> <p>58:05 Finances are a problem because more teams cost more money and that can put clubs off.</p> <p>59:45 The hurling fixtures committee now meets with the football fixtures committee which is positive.</p> <p>01:00:20 Sligo does not have a large amount of active GAA clubs and soccer attracts many people.</p> <p>01:01:10 Soccer is popular in the rural areas which was a surprise to Brian.</p> <p>01:01:25 Tourlestrane does well with football and hurling.</p> <p>01:02:00 Soccer has declined a little in recent years and the GAA is slowly growing and teams might start forming again in areas where there has been a lot of amalgamation.</p> <p>01:02:45 Facilities and pitches have slowly improved and there is some more money coming from Croke Park and Connacht for coaching, which in turn benefits the schools.</p> <p>01:03:30 Coaching standards have improved a lot and attendances are up at inter-county games.</p> <p>01:04:30 Opening up Croke Park has resulted in more money filtering down to counties like Sligo</p> <p>01:04:50 Sligo won the Sigerson Cup and often won the Trench Cup in the 1970s and 1980s</p> <p>01:05:25 In 2001 -2005 they won three Sigersons with a lot of help from Mick Brosnan and Jim Lester</p> <p>01:05:40 Jim Lester started a hurling team in 1993. They were in Division 3 for a long time and needed to get more people involved as the IT was expanding.</p>
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	<p>01:06:25 In 2010 they had three hurling teams. Galway All Star hurler Ger Farragher has played with them, as has Keith Raymond and Keith Higgins from Mayo. Brian got great satisfaction from that.</p> <p>01:07:25 One year he was involved with the county team, the club team and the college team.</p> <p>01:07:40 They have 11 teams and have won the All-Ireland intermediate and junior and they have ladies teams, camogie teams and handball teams.</p> <p>01:08:00 They have had good support from the college who have put in good sports facilities.</p> <p>01:08:55 He sees himself as a facilitator.</p> <p>01:09:10 They get funds from the students union and they have 400 members.</p> <p>01:10:05 Sometimes people are tempted to drop out of college and the GAA keeps them going.</p> <p>01:10:40 One of the former players started a Facebook page for former Sligo IT players.</p> <p>01:11:15 The GAA is very good for people's social development.</p> <p>01:12:00 He doesn't like the talk of having the Sigerson and Fitzgibbon cups before Christmas.</p> <p>01:13:30 His GAA involvement has helped his relationship with students.</p> <p>01:15:50 As Sligo is a small college, when the GAA team wins it is a great boost to everybody - students and staff.</p> <p>01:16:35 Their playing also helps to promote the college nationally.</p> <p>01:16:45 Apprentice students are a big part of the hurling as many of them come from Galway.</p> <p>01:18:30 Recalls seeing someone on TG4's Underdogs show and he was wearing a Sligo IT shirt.</p> <p>01:20:30 Many people get involved with clubs because their</p>
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	<p>kids play but Brian's children don't have a huge interest in GAA.</p> <p>01:21:25 He is a big sports fanatic and has a life-long love of hurling.</p> <p>01:22:00 In a small community you are more inclined to stick with it as numbers are not huge.</p> <p>01:22:40 He likes the idea of a challenge and it does mean sacrificing a lot of your time but his wife is understanding and he used to go to Tyrone games with her father, Brian Faren.</p> <p>01:23:45 Brian Cody came up and gave them a talk in 2008.</p> <p>01:24:25 Sometimes you have to compromise and might not achieve something you wanted because you can't afford the time.</p> <p>01:25:25 Things can get political at county board and sub-committee level as some people have hidden agendas.</p> <p>01:26:20 Funding is always a problem as a lot of the big businesses don't support the GAA teams like in other counties; with less money involved there are not as many political battles.</p> <p>01:27:30 The GPA were helpful to the weaker counties in hurling but he thinks they would have been better off staying independent of the GAA and reaching out to all GAA players.</p> <p>01:28:50 Being part of the GAA might compromise them down the road.</p> <p>01:29:30 Being involved with the GAA has brought good friendships and a sense of achievement.</p> <p>01:30:05 Being involved with young players keeps you young.</p> <p>01:30:30 He attends most of the county training sessions and they have good crack there.</p> <p>01:31:30 His best memory is when the IT team won the Ryan Cup in 2005 because they beat teams from Leinster and Munster; he is involved more with the college team than the local club team.</p>
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	<p>01:32:50 With the college team it's like a small family, and Jimmy O'Brien has been a great help.</p> <p>01:33:30 In the Ryan Cup they beat teams like St Pat's, who had players like Richie Power of Kilkenny, and they beat Carlow IT easily in the final.</p> <p>01:34:40 Winning the Rackard Cup in Croke Park in 2008 was a great day.</p> <p>01:35:10 A big disappointment was the downgrading of the Rackard and Christy Ring cups; former President Sean Kelly had a better vision for them - to be played before All-Ireland semi-finals - but it never materialised.</p> <p>01:35:30 Lack of resources can be problematic as they are very constrained in Sligo.</p> <p>01:36:20 Not getting the full support of the GAA community is disappointing, as some clubs are reluctant to encourage hurling.</p> <p>01:37:00 Hurling needs to be restructured as what works for football doesn't always work for hurling.</p> <p>01:37:30 Sometimes strong football counties don't have respect for hurling, as is often the case in Ulster.</p> <p>01:38:40 All clubs in Galway have to have a hurling team and this is a good thing.</p> <p>01:39:10 Things have improved slowly over the years and they have a better relationship with the county board.</p> <p>01:40:10 Ensuring that more are involved in administration and coaching is a worry; there are problems getting people to stand for different administrative positions.</p> <p>01:41:10 The GAA is very important for the community and the culture; it is integral to one's sense of identity.</p> <p>01:41:50 It is a great interest which keeps people active; there are always targets to aim for.</p> <p>01:43:25 The fact that nobody is making money out of the GAA is important as Brian has socialist ideas; justice, fair play and a sense of community are vital components.</p>
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	<p>01:44:55 Recalls bringing his son to a Tommy Murphy Cup game and his son had both a Sligo and an Antrim jersey on.</p> <p>01:46:00 Even if they are playing Antrim he is very supportive of the Sligo football players as he knows a lot of them; the Sligo hurlers would have no hope against Antrim though.</p>
Involvement in GAA	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	<p>Played underage hurling with Ruairí Ógs. Won Sligo Junior Hurling Championship in 2005 playing with Naomh Eoin.</p>
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	<p>Sligo Hurling Board: Secretary (2008 – 2010); Chairperson (2007); PRO (2005).</p> <p>Sligo IT: Secretary (2005 – current); Sligo IT delegate to Sligo county board</p> <p>Connaught Hurling Board: Delegate (2005 – 2009)</p> <p>Secretary of GAA Higher Education Committee, Connaught</p> <p>Manages teams hurling in Sligo IT and Naomh Eoin GAA</p>
Format	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Audio <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p>
Duration	<p>Length of Interview: 01:47:37</p>
Language	<p>English</p>

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To be filled in by Interviewer:

I hereby assign the copyright of the content of the above to the GAA Oral History Project on the understanding that the content will not be used in a derogatory manner. I understand that I am giving the GAA Oral History Project the right to use and make available to the public the content of this interview.

Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 18th June 2012