

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	14 th June 2010
Location	Seamus's office, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Seamus Downes
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1936 Home County: Westmeath
Education	Primary: Drumraney NS, Co. Westmeath Secondary: Marist Brothers, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
Family	Siblings: 1 sister & 1 brother Current Family if Different: Wife (Brid); 2 sons & 1 daughter
Club(s)	Maryland GAA [Westmeath]; Athlone GAA [Westmeath]
Occupation	Auctioneer
Parents' Occupation	Farmers
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	Fine Gael
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Fine Gael Party

REFERENCE NO. WH/1/12

Date of Report	25 th June 2012
Period Covered	1936 – 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Westmeath
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Material Culture, Education, Media, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, Identity, Rivalries, Irish Language, All-Ireland, Club History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Politics, Relationship w I th the Association, Socialising, Relationships, Economy / Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Seamus talks about his GAA experiences over the years. Originally from Drumraney, he played football at school and with the local club, Maryland. He later went to Marist College in Athlone and played there when he wasn't needed at home to do farm work. At 14 he umpired his first game, and soon he was officiating all the time along with referees that he knew. Seamus also trained as an auctioneer and moved to Athlone where he became involved with Athlone GAA, eventually becoming president. He talks about how the role of the umpire has changed over the years and outlines some of the problems he faced starting out, such as crowd control. He also has definite views on refereeing in the GAA today, giving his opinions on issues such as video refereeing, the selection process for referees, and changes in the rules governing how Gaelic games are played. Seamus has spent his whole life involved with the Association but he still has great enthusiasm for it, and there's nothing he enjoys more than a good seat in the Hogan Stand on All-Ireland final day.</p> <p>00:15 Born in 1936 and originally from Drumraney. Football team there joined with Tang and became Maryland, before Tang went out on their own.</p> <p>01:05 How they got the name Maryland. Prominence of GAA in the area - hurlers on the Walderstown side, footballers on the other side.</p> <p>02:05 Underage hurling. Joining up with Athlone and calling the team Southern Gaels.</p> <p>02:35 GAA in the family. Training and playing every week. Playing football at school. His mother sewing a rag ball for</p>

	<p>him. Process of making it. Difficulty in affording and tracking down footballs. Watching the senior players train. Drumraney and Tubberclair playing and putting up posts for the game. Acting as an umpire in 1950.</p> <p>07:50 Travelling to attend games. Sports days and the events that were held there. His father pigeon shooting. Children playing pitch n toss. Sports days in most parishes.</p> <p>10:30 Music festival, Aeidhríocht held in Drumraney. Seeing Leo Russell playing in Walderstown. Use of Irish at those events.</p> <p>12:35 Travelling to a game in Grace Park in Athlone with Ted Casey in 1950. Meath playing Roscommon and being an umpire at the age of 14. Going to Tyrrellspass with referee Peter Daly to officiate at an intermediate game in 2010. Athlone ground moving to Páirc Ciarán. Being nervous his first evening as an umpire. Type of ball they used.</p> <p>15:55 Playing football with Drumraney, at school and with Marist College Athlone. Reverend Brother Gerrard - PJ Cahill from Tuam - principal of the college. Playing with PJ Kenney from Kiltoom. Having to stay at home as his father was ill. Prominence of GAA in the Marist College. Brother Hubert's involvement in training teams. Playing other schools and travelling on a bus to play Mel's in Longford. Playing Mullingar Fenians. Training after school and cycling home afterwards.</p> <p>19:05 Popularity of tug-of-war. Killiney a successful team and travelling on a lorry. Rahara from Roscommon were also good, as were Rahan in Offaly. Crowds watching them compete and train.</p> <p>21:40 Training for football and how demands of farm work affected this. Going to the fair in Ballymahon. Going to Sweeney's hardware shop with a horse to sell. Horse damaging some of the goods at the shop. Sale yards coming in in the 1950s. Sale yard widespread in the west of Ireland. Roscommon, Elfin, Elford, Portumna, Ballinasloe, Tuam all had sale yards.</p> <p>25:25 Training in Tuam to be an auctioneer. Selling cattle and sheep. Finishing in Dublin, getting papers from Ganley's. Difficulty in breaking into the profession. Farming at the same time. Health problems in 1992. Man from Ballaghaderreen treating him in Galway.</p>
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	<p>31:30 Technological advances transforming farming. Changes in making financial transactions. Electricity introduced to Drumraney.</p> <p>34:00 His cousin Fr Paddy Reilly killed in the Korean War in 1950. He was with the Columban Fathers.</p> <p>35:30 Hurling with Frank Young. Getting used to being an umpire. Gerry Kinneavy the referee from Galway based in St.Aloysius College Athlone nearby. Attire required for umpires. Doing games with referee Ted Lynn officiating at colleges football games and Galway championship games.</p> <p>38:15 Being at Croke Park for the 1960 All-Ireland. Meeting girls with an orange box. Trying to get out of Croke Park afterwards. Going to the 1950 All-Ireland with Ted Casey and to most All-Irelands since. Missing the 1992 All-Ireland.</p> <p>41:00 Opinions of Croke Park. Parking problems. Need to move the stadium elsewhere. Need to move pitch in Mullingar. Changes he has seen in Croke Park. Travel time from Drumraney to Croke Park. Getting a puncture in 1962.</p> <p>44:55 Changes in umpiring over the years. Footballs improving. Crowd control issues. Lack of seats and stands at games. Introduction of fences. Being briefed by referees. Administrative aspect of the work. Difficulties with hand-pass rules. Spectators complaining about consistency.</p> <p>54:50 Working with different referees through the years. Ted Casey, Frank Hume, Frank McCormack have passed away. Eight referees he has worked with alive in 2010. Different refereeing styles. Going to Salthill to officiate and Gerry Kinneavy asking questions about incidents in the game. Incorrect decisions being made. Seeing a mistake in a Meath-Laois game in Croke Park in 2010 on television. Importance of good eyesight.</p> <p>01:00:00 Working under floodlights in the evenings. Umpiring hurling matches. Video refereeing and his opinions on that.</p> <p>01:01:40 Refereeing games. Enjoying a Munster and Leinster game with Gerry Kinneavy in Cork. Talking to the goalkeeper during the game. Players' attitudes to officials. Being at a game in Tuam and having an exchange with a player. Importance of looking at an incoming ball from behind the post. Talking to people who disagree with decisions made in a game. Being under scrutiny in a big game. Opinion on</p>
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	<p>changing one's mind on a decision. Women arguing about a chair when he was an auctioneer. Being unsure about a score at a game in Mullingar.</p> <p>01:10:00 Rule changes that he would like to see.</p> <p>01:11:40 Enjoyment he gets from the GAA.</p> <p>01:13:10 Problems for players to play games on a Saturday.</p> <p>01:14:50 Cutting the grass on a pitch. Putting out sand and spreading it.</p> <p>01:16:30 Helping to take a hill out of a pitch in Drumraney in the 1960s.</p> <p>01:17:15 Joining Athlone club in 1970. Being asked by Gerry Kinneavy to officiate in a game between Maryland and a Cork team. Reaction of Maryland people. Umpiring at an Athlone challenge match in Kiltoom. Number of matches he officiates at each week.</p> <p>01:19:50 Reasons for staying involved. Being president of the Athlone club in 2010. Attending functions of other sports clubs.</p> <p>01:22:20 Effect of his GAA involvement on his business. Being a commissioner for oaths. Making contacts. Doing auctions for the county board.</p> <p>01:24:45 The GAA as a sporting organisation.</p> <p>01:27:00 Enjoying watching games when he is not acting as an umpire. Meeting people at games.</p> <p>01:28:55 Being chased by a man with an umbrella. Problem of crowds on the pitches.</p> <p>01:30:05 Rules he would change. Yellow cards. Having your performance monitored by officials in the stands at a game. Pay levels for referees.</p> <p>01:35:10 Getting a good ticket to an All-Ireland and enjoying it.</p>
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Involvement in GAA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Steward <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person <input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____
Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)	Played with Maryland GAA for a few years.
Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)	Athlone Delegate to Westmeath County Board for 30-35 yrs; Chairman of Athlone GAA Minor Board 1980; Has chaired several club committees within Athlone GAA; Managed local minor and U16 teams; has been umpiring for 60 years.
Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 01:37:24
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 25th June 2012