

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Arlene Crampsie
Date of Interview	11 th March 2010
Location	The Yacht Bar, Lanesborough, Co. Longford
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Martin Skelly
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1953 Home County: Longford
Education	Primary: Loretto Beaufort Rathfarnham (Infants) & St Mary's College, Rathmines Secondary: St Mary's College, Rathmines; St Mary's College, Ballyleague, Co. Roscommon; Convent / Vocational School in Lanesborough Third Level: St Patrick's Agricultural College, Monaghan
Family	Siblings: 1 sister Current Family if Different: Married to Gabrielle with 2 sons and 2 daughters
Club(s)	Cashel [Longford]; Ballyboden St Endas [Dublin]; Lattin-Cullen [Tipperary]; Ballyduff [Waterford]
Occupation	Farmer
Parents' Occupation	Farmers
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	Strong family tradition in Fine Gael, his grandfather was a Fine Gael councillor, but Martin was never involved.
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Chairman Longford Rose of Tralee, 6 years; Vice-chairman of Newtowncashel Tidy Towns; Longford Race Day Committee and he's been involved in various schools' committees through the years.

REFERENCE NO. LD/1/5

Date of Report	28 th May 2012
Period Covered	1960s – 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Longford
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Coaching, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Involvement in GAA abroad Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Irish History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Politics, Relationship with the Association, Socialising, Relationships, Economy / Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Martin has had a strong involvement with the GAA all his life. Born in Longford, he moved to Dublin as a baby after the death of his mother and ended up playing for Ballyboden. He was often taken to games at Croke Park and this left an impression on him. He returned to his native Newtowncashel as a teenager and played for the local club, Cashel. During this time he won various titles - championships, vocational schools' competitions, Under-21 trophies. He spent some time in Tipperary and played illegally for Lattin-Cullen, and did likewise in Waterford where he played for Ballyduff. Martin had been helping out his club on the administrative side and in the 1990s he got involved at county board level and eventually at Leinster Council level. He was involved in developing Pearse Park and in establishing Longford supporters' clubs overseas, and in setting up a race event at Punchestown in order to raise funds. Martin is passionate about the GAA and is fiercely committed to the Association. There is nothing he likes more than seeing that same level of commitment in those around him.</p> <p>00:20 His mother died when he was four months old and his aunt in Rathfarnham, Dublin, took him in. They were from his parish of Newtowncashel in Longford.</p> <p>01:00 Their son went to St Mary's, Rathmines - a rugby school. Martin started in Loretto Beaufort in Rathfarnham and went on to attend St Mary's.</p> <p>01:25 There was a lot of sports at St Mary's - soccer, rugby. He went to watch Shamrock Rovers in Milltown and often went to Croke Park.</p> <p>01:55 When he was 3 or 4 he went to a National League</p>

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	<p>semi-final between Leitrim and Derry and he was on the Canal End.</p> <p>02:20 His first All-Ireland was in 1960/1961 between Tipperary and Wexford and he was up on a man's shoulders. Wexford won and there was huge excitement.</p> <p>03:10 In St Mary's you had to play rugby and there was training every day. After Easter they would play cricket.</p> <p>03:40 He spent his summer holidays with his father in Longford. His sister was two when his mother died and had gone to live with an uncle nearby.</p> <p>04:05 His mother was 30 when she died and times were tough for his father.</p> <p>04:30 He played football in the summer and his street in Longford was by the clubhouse.</p> <p>04:45 Cashel was their club and his uncle Johnny Skelly, a cattle dealer, was very much involved.</p> <p>05:10 Teams travelled on a lorry to games.</p> <p>05:35 The club honoured his uncle as he had served for many years as chairman, secretary and chairman.</p> <p>05:55 When he was 12 the Rathfarnham St Enda's club was formed and Martin joined.</p> <p>06:30 The club soon joined with Ballyboden Wanderers and became Ballyboden St Enda's.</p> <p>06:40 When he was 14 his father remarried so Martin and his sister went back home and Martin was delighted.</p> <p>07:00 Longford had been successful in the 1960s so it was a good time to be involved in the GAA. The family in Rathfarnham was called the Bannons and they always took him to games in Croke Park.</p> <p>07:35 Recalls the League semi-final and final in 1966 when they beat Donegal and Galway. There were very emotional scenes after winning and Martin couldn't fully understand it.</p> <p>08:20 Recalls Longford in the 1968 National League final - the home final was against Galway in Pearse Park and the</p>
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	<p>return game was in Croke Park.</p> <p>08:40 Offaly had three Nolan players and their brother was refereeing. All hell broke loose and it was a nasty game - Martin had not seen that side of the game before. Longford lost the game but won the series.</p> <p>09:10 Martin went home in 1968 and played Under-16 and minor football.</p> <p>09:35 In 1969 he became minor secretary. Brendan Smith, another minor, became chairman.</p> <p>10:20 Martin played football at schools level and was on a Longford vocational schools team that won a Leinster title.</p> <p>10:35 In 1970 he played senior football and they won the Cashel Tournament, a huge occasion. It was an inter-provincial tournament but Cashel had never won it until then.</p> <p>11:30 Martin was a sub the day they won and arrived late as they had gone to collect his friend's sisters. He played the second half and marked Jack Brennan from Milltown in Galway, a one-armed man who was quite talented.</p> <p>12:30 The club won an Under-21 title in 1974 having lost out in 1972. The club went on to win four senior championships and five senior leagues between 1976 and 1986.</p> <p>13:15 He was involved in farm management and in 1972 was in Ballyduff Upper in Waterford and as he was far from Newtowncashel he played with Ballyduff illegally and won an intermediate championship.</p> <p>13:45 The following year he was in Tipperary and played for in a county semi-final with Lattin-Cullen. Babs Keating scored a match-winning point to beat them.</p> <p>14:25 He played with Ballyboden at times during the summer as well.</p> <p>14:40 In 1980/1981 he became secretary of the local club.</p> <p>15:05 He worked for Born na Móna and they used to have an All-Ireland of their own and Martin was in charge of running that.</p> <p>15:40 His family had always been heavily involved. One year</p>
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	<p>in Newtowncashel his uncle was chairman, he was treasurer and his sister was secretary.</p> <p>17:00 He played with Longford Masters for a while, Brendan Gilmore convinced him. He played in goals and played for five or six years.</p> <p>17:40 In 2000 they won an All-Ireland and he finished playing. He was 47 and it was a great feeling.</p> <p>18:00 The final was in Breffni Park and they beat Monaghan, who had some great players - Gerry McCarville, Nudie Hughes.</p> <p>18:55 In 1994 he was asked to run for a position on Longford County Board. Sean Casey, development officer at his club, was stepping down. Martin was elected development officer and did it for six years, developing squads around the county. Longford eventually won a Leinster minor title.</p> <p>20:15 He got to know people in every club and was responsible for coaching schemes and club education - 'The Comhairle Programme'.</p> <p>21:10 In 2000 the outgoing chairman of Longford County Board, TJ Ward, rang him and advised him to run for the position. Michael McCormack was training the senior team that night.</p> <p>22:00 Martin ran against one other person and won a tight contest against a man from his own club.</p> <p>22:45 He did that for seven years - 2001 - 2007 and it was hard work but he enjoyed it. He met great people like Seamus Flynn. Martin liked people who were committed.</p> <p>23:55 Shortly after he became chairman Longford went to Abu Dhabi after winning the O'Byrne Cup. They funded it themselves and it was a great trip. They had a local contact over there - PJ Kirwan.</p> <p>25:10 Irish people in Abu Dhabi worked hard to keep the community together and that made an impression on Martin.</p> <p>25:50 Martin helped set up supporters clubs in Dublin and London to try and reach out to Longford people there. The London branch have a fundraiser every year and bring in almost €10,000 every year. They have also had fundraising</p>
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	<p>dinners in New York and Martin was honoured there.</p> <p>27:10 In Dublin they started the Longford Corporate Race Day at the Punchestown races. They are close to having raised 1,000,000 euro in total from that venture.</p> <p>28:25 He has co-ordinated the race day with referee John Bannon for seven years.</p> <p>28:50 They also developed Pearse Park in his time. In 2001 Clonguish and Ballymahon played a replay and the spectators all got soaked in the rain, so it was decided that something had to be done about the facilities. They got 300,000 euro through the Leinster Council and Nicky Brennan, and set to work on Pearse Park.</p> <p>30:10 In 2006 they almost beat Dublin and had a great run in the qualifiers before losing to Kerry in Killarney. It was a huge occasion and Kerry Chairman Sean Walsh told him that he had to appeal to the Kerry people to attend the game as he was worried after hearing that a lot of Longford people would be coming down.</p> <p>31:00 Kerry unleashed Kieran Donaghy at full forward that day and he played very well.</p> <p>31:30 The players went on a trip to Cancun, Mexico, after giving the people of Longford an enjoyable year; if the players take Longford a little bit above respectability, it means a lot to the people.</p> <p>32:50 Wearing the provincial jersey is important to Longford players and competitions like the Railway Cup are important to Martin, as is the International Rules series. The players give a lot and they deserve something back.</p> <p>34:40 Martin loved to work with players who were willing to make sacrifices.</p> <p>35:05 He has worked with some great people within the GAA - his uncles, Eugene McGee who trained the Cashel team in 1977, Albert Fallon, TJ Ward, John Greene, Jimmy Fox, Seamus and Brendan Gilmore, John Donnellan.</p> <p>36:15 Martin admired John Donnellan a lot as a player; he was a hero.</p> <p>37:10 Martin ran for vice chairman of Leinster Council, as he</p>
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	<p>was already a delegate. Seamus Flynn and Mickey Lynch also ran for two positions. Mickey Lynch stood aside and there was no contest and Martin was a delegate.</p> <p>38:35 When he ran for vice chairman he got in by one vote, helped by Seamus Flynn, Albert Fallon and Pat Cahill the county chairman. He beat John Horan from Dublin, after Pat Toner from Louth had dropped out of the contest the night before the vote.</p> <p>40:05 An Offaly man, Michael Noel Byrne, got out of his sick bed in Offaly to vote for Martin.</p> <p>40:40 Martin is due to take over the chairman's job from Seamus Howlin in 2011.</p> <p>41:40 Martin worries about too many ultimatums coming from Croke Park to county boards.</p> <p>42:40 There is great volunteerism within the GAA.</p> <p>43:00 He does a bit of work with schoolboys as his son plays.</p> <p>43:45 Martin was a shy person but the Association brought him out of himself a bit over the years.</p> <p>45:30 He feels the 32-county system is not fair on every county - some have a better chance than others.</p> <p>46:00 Longford is a very passionate GAA county.</p> <p>46:30 Martin's uncle was not a great player and got involved in administration. Martin's father was a very good footballer.</p> <p>46:40 Martin's uncle in Dublin, Jimmy Bannon, was a secretary in his day. One time he had to cycle round to every player to inform them that a match had been postponed.</p> <p>47:30 There were times in the 1950s when they had no teams in the club due to emigration and had to amalgamate with Rathcline, which didn't work.</p> <p>47:55 The GAA was a Sunday thing back then. His aunt sewed the numbers onto the jerseys and also washed them.</p> <p>48:30 His father and uncle were never involved in the club together as one person needed to be at home.</p>
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	<p>49:20 His father was on a junior championship-winning side of 1943.</p> <p>49:40 If his father got hurt he couldn't go home and tell. One day he dislocated his collarbone and had to hide it under his coat and plough the next day.</p> <p>51:00 He played rugby for seven years at St Mary's and after a game he often went to play in a game for Ballyboden, though he kept this quiet.</p> <p>52:15 He felt more at home playing GAA.</p> <p>53:35 GAA is slightly more refined than rugby but they are both fantastic sports.</p>
<p>Involvement in GAA</p>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Manager <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coach <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Referee <input type="checkbox"/> None</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): _____</p>
<p>Record as a Player (Titles won; Length of time played)</p>	<p>He played from under 12s until he finished with the Longford Masters at 50. He won 3 Longford Schools Medals and one Leinster Vocational Title with Longford. At club level Martin won an U-21 championship, 4 senior championships, 5 senior leagues and a 9-A-Side Senior championship. At Masters level he won 2 All-Ireland Runner-Up Shields and he won an All-Ireland Intermediate championship with Ballyduff.</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Martin has been involved in administration since 1970.</p> <p>Club: Minor Secretary; Secretary; Vice-chairman; PRO; Registrar; County Board Delegate; 3 months as stand in Chairman.</p> <p>County: Development Officer; Coaching Officer; County Board Chairman; Delegate to Leinster Council.</p> <p>Leinster Council: Vice-chairman (chairman from February 2011); Chairman of Leinster Referees Committee and Fixtures Working Group.</p>

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Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 00:55:23
Language	English

To be filled in by Interviewer:

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Signed: ___Arlene Crampsie___

Date: ___28/05/12___