

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

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| Name of Interviewer | Seán Kearns |
| Date of Interview | 19 th Aug 2009 |
| Location | New York Irish Centre, Long Island City, New York |
| Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname) | Joseph Taylor |
| <u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u> | |
| Gender | Male |
| Born | Year Born: 1937 Home County: Leitrim |
| Education | Primary: Cartron N.S. Secondary: Keshcarrigan Vocational School |
| Family | Siblings: Youngest of four boys and five girls. Current Family if Different: Married with children |
| Club(s) | Eslin GAA [Leitrim]; Leitrim New York [America] |
| Occupation | Retired from working in the Bar business in New York, especially the Liffey Bar in Jackson Heights |
| Parents' Occupation | Farmers |
| Religion | Roman Catholic |
| Political Affiliation / Membership | N/A |

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| Date of Report | 19 th Aug 2009 |
| Period Covered | 1940 – 2009 |
| Counties/Countries Covered | Leitrim, New York |
| Key Themes Covered | Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Media, Emigration, Involvement in GAA abroad, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Opening of Croke Park, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Food and Drink, Socialising |
| Interview Summary | <p>Joseph Taylor is a Leitrim man who migrated to New York via Dublin in the 1960s and is a regular patron of Gaelic Park. He gives an insight into the GAA in Leitrim in the 1940s and 1950s, as well as the GAA scene in Dublin when he lived there in the mid-1950s. He moved to New York in 1959 and quickly became involved with the NY Leitrim club, both as a player and socially. Although he plays down his talent in the interview, his contemporaries suggest he was a fine footballer. He describes how strong the GAA scene was in New York in the 1950s and 1960s, despite the lack of pitches and the poor state of the Gaelic Park pitch. Visiting teams from Ireland were a big deal and he gives a great insight into how NY GAA people kept in touch with the GAA at home, and the difficulties faced by clubs in keeping going as players came and went. He is also very interesting on the development of the ‘weekenders’ phenomenon, saying that for him and many fans it was a great way to see top-quality players in action. He is also interesting on the Irish-American relationship with the GAA. He is open-minded on the modernisation of the GAA, and says the game is better now and had no problems with soccer in Croke Park, although not sure on the idea of professionalism.</p> <p>0.20 Earliest GAA memory is about 1940 when he was about three. There was always a football in his house as his older brothers were on local club’s minor team.</p> <p>0.35 There weren’t too many footballs around so boys came from all around to play at their house. Every Sunday there would be a game in the field in front of their house.</p> <p>0.50 His father was a big GAA fan and would go to matches</p> |

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| | <p>when he could, if he could get a lift to them. No cars so he remembers transport to games in pony and trap or side car.</p> <p>1.10 Eslin was his local club. An Uncle had been involved in the founding of a club around 1890.</p> <p>2.00 Only football played locally, no hurling really. There was Camogie in Leitrim then, introduced by national school teachers from hurling counties who came to teach in Leitrim. But that disappeared.</p> <p>2.40 Doesn't remember who taught him to play football – no coaching or training then. He does remember a teacher giving him a pound to go and buy the first football in town, but “a teacher wouldn't come near us at all.”</p> <p>3.10 The style of football then was 'Catch and Kick' and on the ground. People rarely picked up the football of the ground.</p> <p>3.30 Not many opportunities for young players to play competitively for local club. Lucky to have a minor team, and maybe a few games against other schools as a challenge game.</p> <p>4.00 Eslin Club had no facilities – a different field every Sunday. Club was junior and only a few individuals in the community kept the club going.</p> <p>6.00 Moved to Dublin when he was 17 (1954) and played club football there for a few years with St Callans – a Leitrim based junior club in Dublin. These county based clubs were common then and a big part of your social life was to get in with one of these clubs when you moved to Dublin.</p> <p>6.30 The 15 acres was where they played, on Sunday mornings. Sometimes when you came home to Leitrim on holiday you could get away with playing for the local club by not saying you were playing in Dublin.</p> <p>7.00 Every Sunday in Dublin he'd go to matches in Croke Park or club games in Inchicore.</p> <p>7.30 Club football in Dublin at that time was pretty strong. Inter-county men played for all the big clubs. Men from all over Ireland but living in Dublin. Many still declared for their home County though. Few people lived in Dublin but went</p> |
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| | <p>home to play with local club.</p> <p>8.00 GAA in Dublin not really a good way to get work though.</p> <p>8.30 You could get in to Croke Park for sixpence or a shilling at that time. He went to the Cusack stand, never was in the Hogan Stand. Rarely Hill 16 or Canal End.</p> <p>9.25 He saw his first big hurling games in Croke Park. He saw the 1954 and 1956 Hurling All-Irelands. No problem getting tickets then. You could walk in off the street.</p> <p>10.22 Remembers Christy Ring going in to shake hands with Wexford keeper, Art Foley, after Foley stopped Ring's shot to win the 1956 final.</p> <p>On Ring:</p> <p>"One man was picked out to keep a close eye on him, but nobody could watch him for the full hour – that's for sure. He'd break through in the last ten minutes and he could swing a game."</p> <p>11.20 There was a lot of excitement and big crowds for the Railway Cup at that time.</p> <p>11.45 He'd go down to see Leitrim but they were usually put out in the first round. His brother had a car and would drive them down.</p> <p>"Twas easy to follow them – I got down for most of the games."</p> <p>12.10 Came to USA in 1959. A couple of weeks after he arrived he went to the Leitrim football dance. He met a lot of men there he'd known in Leitrim.</p> <p>13.00 He went training with the Leitrim footballers and made the team. They had a good team then and won a Championship.</p> <p>13.20 He was playing with bigger stars in New York than he'd experienced at home. Most had inter-county experience which was great for him.</p> <p>13.30 The Leitrim team was mainly made up of Leitrim men, with a small number from other counties. They were real</p> |
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| | <p>emigrants – not brought over to play football.</p> <p>14.10 The only place for matches was Gaelic Park. Didn't train that much:</p> <p>"Anybody who lived out in Queens would play out in Flushing Meadows where Shea Stadium or Citifield is now. We used to go out there to kick a ball around. There wasn't much training – you had nobody to coach you or anything like that – just get a football and kick it."</p> <p>15.00 Gaelic Park around 1960 got much bigger crowds than it did today but the surface of the pitch was very poor.</p> <p>"Now there wasn't too much grass in the Summertime – a lot of sand (laughs). In around the goal mouth you would have seen no grass."</p> <p>15.30 Four and five thousand at some of the games then. You get four or five hundred now.</p> <p>15.45 Refereeing wasn't high standard. "You got away with murder. Big tough men had the advantage of course...The class player still stood out and most of the spectators appreciated the classy player. Regardless of what club you were from – if you were brilliant, they appreciated you."</p> <p>16.40 Social life of Gaelic Park was important. People met their future wife and a lot of fellas got jobs there, although that wasn't his experience. The GAA were good that way.</p> <p>18.50 Remembers October 1959, All-Ireland champions Kerry came to New York. New York had a strong team – Denis Bernard of Cork, Sean Brennan of Kildare, and New York could give them a pretty good game on the small Gaelic Park pitch.</p> <p>19.00 Those games were in Gaelic Park. He just missed the last big game in the Polo Grounds, when All-Ireland Champions Louth played there in 1957.</p> <p>19.30 Visits by champion teams from home drew big crowds to Gaelic Park.</p> <p>20.02 It was hard to keep in touch with the GAA back home from New York – didn't get papers at that time – nobody made phone calls.</p> |
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| | <p>20.40 The All-Ireland was broadcast on the radio. They'd put in on in clubs and people paid \$5 to hear it. Then games were shown live in Movie houses which drew big crowds. He went to the Triborough Movie House, Astoria, Queens to see finals and there were huge crowds. He saw Offaly Kerry and Kerry-Roscommon at those showings.</p> <p>23.00 When he arrived the club didn't do too much in terms of fundraising – maybe a dance once a year and a trip up to Connecticut to play New Haven in the Spring.</p> <p>23.44 In terms of organisation:</p> <p>“No women at all”</p> <p>24.20 GAA was not the main component of the Irish in America's social life. Only a small proportion of Irish emigrants got involved with the GAA in New York.</p> <p>“You'd only have a few to continue. When fellas stopped playing football a lot of them didn't bother going to games anymore. I know quite a few never even went back to Gaelic Park again.”</p> <p>25.40 Every couple of years the whole team would be new faces as the old timers packed it in.</p> <p>26.10 At first it was easy to get new blood but then emigration changed and it was harder to keep the team going. Mid 1950s to about 1970 there was a good supply of inter-county men from home, and they weren't going out of their way to bring players over to play.</p> <p>27.10 Not until late 1960 did they start doing that.</p> <p>27.20 He played for about 5 years but when he stopped playing he still went to see all the games in Gaelic Park. He's also go to the Leitrim Convention and the dance but never too active in actually running the club.</p> <p>28.00 He did have different positions within the club when somebody would nominate him and nobody objected but didn't mean that much. You could hold a job like that for years.</p> <p>“That's how bad it got - you've no new blood coming in to run the club, you had to beg a guy to run it.”</p> |
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28.50 Very good extended quote here saying a lot of people and old players were unhappy when teams started to bring over players from Ireland just to play games, but he enjoyed seeing those quality players. "Would do you the world of good to see class players."

29.40 Some clubs started the bringing over of players and once one did it they all had to follow.

30.00 Every club had somebody who kind of took over making contact with players back in Ireland and bringing them over. Clubs really needed someone like that.

30.40 "I saw Colm O'Rourke and Kevin Moran playing for Leitrim in a final or a semi-final. Anton O'Toole of Dublin, Brian Mullins, Barney Rock, Billy Morgan, playing for Leitrim only now, not other clubs."

32.00 The rules on how many players you could bring over varied over the years, sometimes three, sometimes five or six maybe.

32.30 "That didn't go down too well in a lot of clubs and it broke up a lot of clubs."

Players who trained hard with the club were left on the sideline to accommodate the influx from Ireland for finals.

33.25 In his opinion it was right to get players who came over to play for you set up with jobs . But he never had any information on actual payments of players and thinks a lot of the talk about payments was exaggerated.

"Some of the players came over just for the trip, and were quite happy with it – and I hear stories of players who refused money – wouldn't take it."

34.30 Cardinal Cushing games at Gaelic Park were good games to go and see – they brought over guest star players from Ireland. He played for Leitrim in one of those games and they had Gerry O'Malley of Roscommon as their visiting player.

Two of the visiting players, Packy McGarrity of Leitrim and Charlie Gallagher scored all of the scores on both sides in that game versus Cavan. He and his marker didn't touch the ball hardly in the game and were wondering what they were

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| | <p>there for.</p> <p>36.30 One of John Kerry O'Donnell's sons played for Leitrim.</p> <p>37.00 In the early 1940s there were a few minor teams in the Bronx because there weren't enough players coming from Ireland and good players would get their sons playing.</p> <p>38.10 Kerry and Cork were Leitrim's big rivals in New York. They were strong teams with inter county players. Kerry and Cork were strong in the 1950s, then Sligo, Monaghan and Tyrone got good teams later. Cavan and Offaly once in a while.</p> <p>39.00 In some families the GAA would be passed on to the next generation. Geelan who played for Leitrim and his son played for them too.</p> <p>39.30 There was no real overlap between the GAA clubs in New York and the County Associations there.</p> <p>40.40 In terms of getting money to bring players over, each county had their own money guys they could go back to.</p> <p>41.20 Not too many Irish-Americans noticed the GAA was there, so very few Americans would. There were kids of Irish descent who never came to Gaelic Park.</p> <p>41.50 He never got interested in any American sports although lots of Irish people liked them, like hockey. His sons did.</p> <p>42.30 The GAA have an annual banquet with a table from each county where they honour a Guest, which gets a big crowd.</p> <p>44.00 He has no problem with the way football is played today and the changed rules, but he thinks a lot of old timers don't like the hand passing in modern football.</p> <p>45.00 The modern game is faster and better. They bunched a lot in his day.</p> <p>45.45 He's not sure about professionalism – he does think players should get travel expenses, and the GAA could have treated players better down through the years.</p> <p>46.20 In his day, when players got hurt, there was no</p> |
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| | <p>coverage at all for them. They'd run a benefit for them maybe.</p> <p>47.30 In terms of best GAA memories, he wouldn't get too carried away with what happened in New York. Maybe his best GAA memory would be Leitrim winning the Connacht championship in 1994. He was home in Ireland for that.</p> <p>48.50 The playing of soccer or rugby in Croke Park didn't bother him at all. There were lots of Irish in America against it but not him. He went to see soccer games in Dublin, back when the Ban made it illegal. The Ban never materialised in the USA.</p> <p>49.50 He thinks the GAA in New York is better off now it's affiliated with Dublin, although some other people would say the opposite. He goes every year to see NY play in the Connacht championship and Leitrim were the second team to come out and play.</p> <p>50.30 It gets a big turnout. The GAA in New York combine to put up the visitors as the Leitrim club in New York wouldn't be able to cope on its own putting up Leitrim.</p> <p>50.50 New York not really good enough to compete though – yards behind their opponents.</p> <p>52.00 His best game would probably be one of the Dublin-Kerry battles from the 1970s.</p> <p>52.20 When Kerry won their four in a row, the rest of the teams in Ireland weren't as strong. Now Ulster is very strong.</p> <p>53.00 In the bar he worked in, fellas would come in every evening and would talk about football every evening. They all thought Pat Spillane was the best player ever.</p> <p>53.50 He thought Sean Purcell was the best player he ever saw. He played every position, an all-rounder. A big, heavy man but he carried himself well.</p> <p>54.40 He's proud of the GAA because it's so strong in every county, down to club level. An amateur organisation that has survived 125 years and still gets 80,000 people to Croke Park. Somebody's doing something right although we give out about them.</p> <p>55.40 They just opened their first football pitch at his home</p> |
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| | <p>club in Eslin.</p> <p>56.40 He is disappointed sometimes with old players who never got much appreciation or can't get tickets or something like that.</p> <p>On what the GAA means to him:</p> <p>"It's friendship, it's loyalty and goodwill all round, both at club level, whether you're winning games or you never won a game, in a county or here in New York – you still have that great spirit."</p> |
| <p>Involvement in GAA</p> | <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Supporter <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Player <input type="checkbox"/> Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Steward</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Chairperson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committee Member <input type="checkbox"/> Grounds-person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Caterer <input type="checkbox"/> Jersey Washer <input 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>Won Championship medal with NY Leitrim around 1959 (This may have been the delayed 1958 Championship)</p> |
| <p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p> | <p>He was Vice President of Leitrim GAA in New York at one point but says he didn't take a very active role.</p> |
| <p>Format</p> | <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual</p> |
| <p>Duration</p> | <p>Length of Interview: 00:58:00</p> |
| <p>Language</p> | <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: Seán Kearns

Date: 28th Oct 2009

