

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Noel Byrne
Date of Interview	14 th May 2009
Location	Community Radio Castlebar
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Seán Rice
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1937 Home County: Mayo
Education	Primary: St Patrick's National School, Castlebar, Co. Mayo. Secondary: St Gerald's College, Castlebar, Co. Mayo. Third Level: University College Galway
Family	Siblings: 5 brothers; 4 sisters
Club(s)	Breaffy GAA Club [Mayo]; Castlebar Mitchels GAA Club [Mayo]
Occupation	Sport journalist
Parents' Occupation	Town Foreman [Father]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	N/A

Date of Report	16 th July 2012
Period Covered	1937 – 2009
Counties/Countries Covered	Mayo
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Officials, Administration, Fundraising, Sponsorship, Material Culture, Education, Religion, Media, Emigration, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of Women, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, , Career, Challenges, Violence, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Retirement, Socialising, Purchase of Grounds, Relationships, Economy/ Economics
Interview Summary	<p>Sean Rice grew up in the 1940s and 1950s on the outskirts of Castlebar, a time when Mayo county teams were enjoying unprecedented success in All-Ireland competitions. Rice recalls the informality of the games played in the fields prior to the establishment by the De La Salle brothers of street leagues in the Castlebar area. As a popular pastime, Gaelic football was unchallenged and reasons for this are suggested. Rice began playing junior football for the new Breaffy club in the early 1950s, lining out, with notable success, at minor level for a combined Castlebar team. The toughness of junior football in Mayo is discussed as are the efforts used to fundraise. Rice speaks in stark terms about the impact of emigration on Mayo in the 1950s and how this deprived the county of many talented footballers. However, the 1950s were also a decade when McHale Park in Castlebar underwent renovation and Rice recalls the volunteer effort to bring it about.</p> <p>With his move into journalism in the mid 1960s, Rice's working life would also overlap with the GAA. He reflects on the working life of the journalist, the unsociable hours and manner in which impacted on his volunteer involvement in GAA activity. Over the following decades, Rice would cover Gaelic games in Mayo and Connacht and he discusses the changes in how the game of football has been played in closing years of the 20th century and the opening years of the 21st. As well styles of play, he considers the question of why Mayo have failed to win more All-Ireland titles, He concludes with observations on the issues of amateurism versus professionalism and the future of volunteerism in the GAA, as well as the benefits that accrue to individuals from</p>

	<p>participation in Gaelic games.</p> <p>00:00:02 Interview with Sean Rice takes place at Community Radio, Castlebar. Rice, born 1937, is from Castlebar.</p> <p>00:00:27 Earliest memories of the GAA: talks about growing up in the 1940s, lack of money and the GAA as a vital social outlet.</p> <p>00:01:10 Discusses how Mayo county teams were performing in the late 1940s.</p> <p>00:01:25 Living in a village of 10 houses on outskirts of Castlebar, playing with sponge ball, lack of traffic on road. Mentions putting together a team to challenge neighbouring villages with sticks and a ball on the road.</p> <p>00:02:44 Talks about St. Mary's hospital farm adjacent to them and taking over a corner of the ground to play. Moneen versus Kilkenny, the two neighbouring villages would meet every Sunday for much of the</p> <p>00:04:10 Efforts to regularise these informal games – for example, introduction of solo run, use of an alarm clock to monitor time etc.</p> <p>00:05:23 Talks about the role of the De La Salle brothers in organising street leagues in the town for teenagers. Mentions the various teams, the Pearses, Davitts, McHales, the Emmets. Recalls playing for the Davitts and beating the McHales in a final, after which a mother of one of the McHales players took swipes at them.</p> <p>00:06:35 Talks about the Mayo players of the early 1950s - Eamon Mongey and Tom Langan and Sean Flanagan – and how they were idolised.</p> <p>00:07:29 'There nothing else'. Comments on the lack of television, or spare money or drugs etc.</p> <p>00:07:40 Recalls one radio in village and everyone gathered around it for 1948 All-Ireland final.</p> <p>00:08:49 Breaffy starting off in the early 1950s and the standing of Castlebar in the county in the 1950s. Refers to Breaffy's place on the edge of the town and getting the opportunity to play with them.</p> <p>00:10:00 Recalls being approx 16 years old when he played on Breaffy junior team; says they won 3 West Mayo junior medals. Describes junior football as 'tough' at the time.</p>
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	<p>00:10:30 Talks about the lack of young people in Castlebar, leading to Breaffy joining Castlebar for minor competitions, with whom they won 2 county minor championships. Tells story of a minor semi-final in Claremorris and being followed down the streets of Claremorris by an 'angry mob', necessitating the intervention of county secretary. Story suggests tensions between rural and urban areas.</p> <p>00:12:33 Refers to the playing gear worn in the informal games in Breaffy. Mentions absence of boots and tells story of one player wearing one football boot.</p> <p>00:13:30 Talks about selling jam jars to purchase a 'windball' and saving again to purchase a Size 5 football.</p> <p>00:15:14 Transport by games: cycling to local games with Breaffy and cars to away games. Stories of togging out at the back of car, under hedge, rolling up clothes and placing stone on top. Mentions that McHale Park was the 'only place' with showers.</p> <p>00:16:50 Talks about toughness of junior football and the choices were minor, junior and senior, Describes playing a game near Westport where a 'fight broke out'.</p> <p>00:18:00 Talks about emphasis on running in training.</p> <p>00:18:35 Discusses the quality of footballers on Castlebar minor team and the difficulty of progressing to Mayo senior team. Suggests that selectors looked after players from their own area.</p> <p>00:19:26 Comments on the impact of emigration on the Castlebar minor team. Says the 'lifeblood of the whole bloody county flowed away...' Says he never saw some of those minor players again.</p> <p>00:19:55 Comments on lack of work in Breaffy and Castlebar in the 1950s. Recalls voluntary work picking stones out of McHale Park.</p> <p>00:20:28 Reflects on loss of contact with county when many of his Castlebar minor team emigrated.</p> <p>00:20:52 Remarks on the 'bit of soccer' being played in Castlebar Celtic in the 1950s and general attitude towards playing soccer.</p> <p>00:21:28 Mentions the leadership role they began to play in Breaffy and getting Castlebar soccer players to play with them, despite objections. Refers also to the use of Irish</p>
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	<p>watermark paper.</p> <p>00:22:20 Communicating with players, reliance on 'word of mouth' or the written word.</p> <p>00:22:35 Tells story of helping organise a carnival to raise funds for Breaffy GAA in the 1950s and what the carnival involved, including a marquee. Mentions bands, dancing and making money from 'selling ice creams' and minerals.</p> <p>00:24:20 Talks about the lack of practical input from clergy in the Breaffy club. Emphasises instead the role of the De La Salle brothers in getting the street leagues going. Says the leagues were stopped by the Brothers because of 'ugly' rows.</p> <p>00:25:20 Recalls cycling to other venues to play 7 a side tournaments.</p> <p>00:25:45 Recalls the redevelopment of McHale Park in the early 1950s and 'picking stones' from field. Mentions certain regret at recent sale of ground by Castlebar Mitchels to county board. Recalls selling sweeps tickets to Irish people all over world to raise money for renovation of McHale Park – remarks also on the involvement of specific priests in that project.</p> <p>00:27:10 Comments on the absence of 'local people' involved in McHale Park in recent times; believes 'outsiders' didn't have the same feel for it.</p> <p>00:28:10 Working in Josie Burke's garage for summer job and not returning to school. Remained for 12 years.</p> <p>00:30:12 Moving from Breaffy to play football with Castlebar. Says the latter began to organise Castlebar's junior team in early 1960s.</p> <p>00:30:40 Describes Castlebar as the 'biggest club in the county' at the time and recalls their senior record in the 1950s.</p> <p>00:31:00 Talks about the influx of 'strangers' into the town and their integration into the senior team at the expense of younger home-grown players. Because they began to lose players they re-organised junior football.</p> <p>00:32:04 Comments on the lack of facilities. Says meetings would be held in one of the hotels. Tells of the type of notification that would be received regarding upcoming games.</p> <p>00:33:00 Mentions the role of women, wives and mothers, in</p>
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	<p>doing the laundry.</p> <p>00:33:35 Reflects on the influence of club secretary Gerry McDonnell, the man 'who ran Castlebar'. Recalls his ability to get people to work for him.</p> <p>00:34:04 Reflects on the role of Gerry McDonnell in getting him a job in journalism. Says it originated in complaints about lack of publicity in newspaper and getting the interviewee to begin writing notes on the club for the paper. Remarks on how this role expanded over time to the point, in 1964-5, he began full-time with Connacht Telegraph. Says he worked there for 8 years before joining Connacht Tribune.</p> <p>00:36:16 Mentions doing other courses at the same time as he was working in journalism.</p> <p>00:36:45 Reflects on the life of a sports journalist in the 1960s. Mentions the unsocial hours and the impact this had on his voluntary GAA work; recalls waiting for GAA fixtures to be put in the newspaper.</p> <p>00:38:14 Talks about use of shorthand, typewriters and 'hot metal'.</p> <p>00:38:44 Reflects on the development of Gaelic football, in particular the speed and break with players remaining in set positions.</p> <p>00:39:40 Recalls playing midfield on junior team in the 1950s and moving all over the field.</p> <p>00:40:20 Remarks also on the use of cards etc.</p> <p>00:40:50 Attitude of GAA officials and players to journalists.</p> <p>00:41:52 Reflects on standout games: mentions Mayo winning National League in 1981 and offers an explanation for lack of Mayo success. Describes Mayo as being in the 'doldrums', the fact that Mayo players weren't 'hard enough' relative to other teams.</p> <p>00:43:33 Players who stood out: mentions John Morley, a 'terrific fielder', Willie Joe Padden, Willie McGee. Comments on the many 'great minors' who never blossomed and considers the lack of underage success.</p> <p>00:45:52 Talks about colleges and club successes and how it never translated to inter-county. Refers to lack of coaching and physique and finds 'hope' in the introduction of some big players into the existing county team. Considers other</p>
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	<p>positive signs in existing Mayo county team.</p> <p>00:48:00 Discusses the superiority of the modern game over that of previous eras. Refers to its professionalism and expresses concern about the importation of 'diving' from English soccer.</p> <p>00:49:35 Voices complete opposition to profession on the grounds that it would signal the death of the GAA.</p> <p>00:50:10 Objects also to the Government grant to inter-county players and reflects on concerns over 'underhand money' to GAA players.</p> <p>00:51:00 Considers the enjoyment that younger players get from Gaelic football over soccer and considers the challenges to the GAA from it and rugby.</p> <p>00:53:25 Reflects on the changes in the GAA over time and considers the impact of rural decline and the growth of towns and cities and financial pressures on clubs.</p> <p>00:55:00 Remarks on the two clubs in the Castlebar area – Breaffy and Castlebar Mitchels – and relative strengths of each.</p> <p>00:55:33 Talks about volunteerism, the pressures on time, the linkage of adult commitment to their children's participation.</p> <p>00:56:22 Concluding remarks. Refers to the GAA 'moulding characters', instilling discipline and the opportunities presented by the downturn in the economy.</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>Town Leagues, seven a side medals; two county minor football medals; three county West Mayo Junior medals.</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Club Secretary</p>

REFERENCE NO. MO/1/2

Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 00:58:00
Language	English

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: Noel Byrne

Date: 14th May 2009