

GAA Oral History Project

Interview Report Form

Name of Interviewer	Regina Fitzpatrick
Date of Interview	9 th June 2010
Location	Michael's home, near Kilpatrick, Co. Westmeath
Name of Interviewee (Maiden name / Nickname)	Michael 'Spike' Fagan
<u>Biographical Summary of Interviewee</u>	
Gender	Male
Born	Year Born: 1960 Home County: Westmeath
Education	Primary: CBS Mullingar, Co. Westmeath Secondary: CBS Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
Family	Siblings: 4 brothers & 2 sisters Current Family if Different: Wife (Carol), 1 daughter & 1 son
Club(s)	Mullingar Shamrocks [Westmeath]
Occupation	Sales Director
Parents' Occupation	Newsagent [Father]; Postmistress [Mother]
Religion	Roman Catholic
Political Affiliation / Membership	N/A
Other Club/Society Membership(s)	Mullingar Rugby Club; Mullingar Soccer Club; Mullingar Chamber of Commerce

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Date of Report	21 st June 2012
Period Covered	1960 - 2010
Counties/Countries Covered	Westmeath, Australia, Australasia
Key Themes Covered	Travel, Supporting, Grounds, Facilities, Playing, Training, Managing, Coaching, Refereeing, Officials, Administration, Celebrations, Education, Media, Emigration, Role of Clergy, Role of Teachers, Role of the Club in the Community, Volunteers, GAA Abroad, Identity, Rivalries, All-Ireland, Club History, County History, Earliest Memories, Family Involvement, Childhood, Impact on Life, Career, Challenges, Sacrifices, Alcohol, Politics, Ban on Foreign Games and Dances, Opening of Croke Park, Relationship with the Association, Professionalism, Retirement, Socialising, Relationships
Interview Summary	<p>Michael talks about his colourful GAA career, which started when he was a boy playing hurling and then football in Westmeath. When he was older he played with Mullingar Shamrocks, the Westmeath county team and the Irish Compromise Rules team, travelling to Australia and being named man of the match in one of the games. A dedicated and ambitious footballer, he talks about his preparation for games - abstaining from alcohol, using mental exercises in order to maintain his concentration levels and working hard to figure out his opponents and then gain the psychological advantage over them. Michael recalls how he dealt with the competing demands being placed on him by his club team, the county side and the Compromise Rules coaches. He talks about his experiences in Australia and the relationship he had with Compromise Rules manager Kevin Heffernan, and gives his opinions on issues such as fixture congestion in the GAA, problems with officiating and the prospect of professionalism. Michael has had a long and fruitful GAA career for which he is grateful, and his enthusiasm for the Association remains as strong in 2010 as it ever was.</p> <p>00:15 Born in Virginia, Cavan, in 1960. GAA in his family. Father and uncle, Jimmy and Paddy, playing hurling in Westmeath.</p> <p>00:45 Brought up in Archerstown, Westmeath before moving to Ballinagore near Mullingar when he was 5. Playing hurling in Ballinagore National School. Playing hurling and football in Mullingar. Brother Maguire in Mullingar CBS promoting hurling and bringing them to Dublin to play other schools.</p>

	<p>Brother Maguire leaving the area.</p> <p>02:25 Playing football at school. Trying other sports. Terry Dowd training Mullingar Shamrocks. Successes they had over the years. Playing on a team with his brothers. Father's involvement in local GAA. Mick Gay also involved. Father banning him from playing soccer.</p> <p>05:00 Playing football with Westmeath. Losing regularly and his father advising him. Going to Australia in 1986 and 1990 with Ireland. Stories of his father's hurling playing days. Michael's son playing sports.</p> <p>06:40 All-Ireland final day and going to the Lake County to watch the minor and senior games. Watching Dublin playing Kerry and Paddy Cullen in goals. Father watching him playing games. Playing against Australia in Croke Park in 1987. Father's enthusiasm for the GAA.</p> <p>08:20 Father's opinion on other sports and on the Ban. What his father might have thought of changes in the GAA, such as the opening of Croke Park.</p> <p>10:55 Father socialising with others through his GAA involvement and making contacts.</p> <p>12:10 Michael first playing hurling. Using a broken hurl. Learning football in Mullingar. Playing in a school league. Decline in hurling when Brother Maguire left. Being tempted to play hurling again in his late teens.</p> <p>17:05 Training they did with Terry O'Dowd. Emphasis on kick-passing. Practicing at home. Underage structure in Mullingar. Playing in his neighbourhood of Millmount. Street leagues. Playing with Ned Moore and Paddy Dunne through the years. Losing an Under-16 final.</p> <p>20:25 Terry O'Dowd's GAA involvement. Coaching Michael's children. Amount of training they did when Michael was young. Seán Cleary training at the CBS school. Being put on the senior team by him.</p> <p>22:50 Role of GAA in school life. Winning schools competitions. Seánie Hynes winning a senior colleges title.</p> <p>23:35 Equipment they had when they were young. His mother making football togs from flour bags. Significance of getting on the senior team. Being determined to do well. Studying</p>
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	<p>opponents. Wearing them down.</p> <p>27:25 Playing Longford in a challenge game in Maryland when county chairman Tom Farrell's pitch was being opened. Marking Speedy McCormack having been out the night before. Gaining the psychological advantage.</p> <p>29:50 Getting on the Irish team to play Australia in 1986. Talking to his friend Paul Raleigh and resolving to make the team. Getting a trial to make the team. Realising he was good enough to compete at the top level.</p> <p>32:20 Being targeted in club games as the 'county man'. Working to improve on his weak points.</p> <p>34:35 Playing as a back and his philosophy on approaching the game. Richie Donoghue playing him in different positions with Mullingar Shamrocks. Playing midfield with Tom Morsley for Mullingar Shamrocks and enjoying it. Playing in the forwards with club and county.</p> <p>38:40 Preparing for games mentally. Watching opponents and sizing them up. Importance of concentration and mental exercises he used to maintain it. Marking Dermot McNicholl in training for Compromise Rules. Playing Derry in Irvinestown, Fermanagh in 1994 and marking him. His club mate Dermot Ryan telling him he did a good job.</p> <p>43:55 Match day nerves. Telling jokes to alleviate stress. Playing for Ireland in Australia under Kevin Heffernan. Being named man of the match. Playing well for Westmeath under Mattie Kerrigan against Meath in a League semi-final in Croke Park. How he felt on the bus to the game. Playing a county junior final for Mullingar Shamrocks and feeling much more nervous.</p> <p>46:50 Going off alcohol six weeks before a campaign with Westmeath. Seánie Hynes giving up alcohol for Lent but going on it again afterwards and his performances suffering.</p> <p>49:00 Playing rugby and being able to drink the night before a game. Slowness of rugby. Playing soccer and GAA at the same time. Going to the opening of a pitch at Ballymahon and playing for the rugby seconds team. Games in different sports clashing. Missing out on playing in a rugby final.</p> <p>53:40 Girl playing football with St Loman's and camogie asking him for advice on competing demands of different</p>
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	<p>sports.</p> <p>55:15 Being picked for Westmeath at 19. Going to training sessions. Attending a game against Meath in Tullamore and not being asked to play the following year. Being asked again when he was 22 and relishing the challenge. Going to training with Paddy Collins. Making friends like Stephen Hanratty from Castletown Geoghegan.</p> <p>59:00 Richie Donoghue training the Mullingar Shamrocks team in 1986 and feeling that county training was affecting club training. Coming back from county duty to play for the club. Clubmate Mick Greene having a bad game for Westmeath and being criticised afterwards. Being told not to train under Kevin Heffernan when a county semi-final was coming up. Pat Baker from Wicklow being in the same situation. Approaching Kevin Heffernan. Making the county final and it clashing with Compromise Rules training and a scheduled attendance at a wedding with a girl. Trying to find a solution. Injuring himself in the county final and going to Dr Meenihan in Mullingar.</p> <p>01:15 Training under Kevin Heffernan. Opinion of him as a manager. Playing in different positions. Mick Lyons not achieving what was asked of him in training. Being picked on the final squad to go to Australia. Send-off for him in Westmeath.</p> <p>01:10:30 Warm-up game in Australia. Rooming with Dermot McNicholl. Being accused of breaking hotel rules late at night. Playing in the first game. Awarded man of the match in the second game. Getting injured in the third. His experience of the trip to Australia. John Newton from Roscommon not being able to make training before the trip to Australia. Hearing about Kevin Heffernan on Dublin Disputes Board. Learning from Heffernan. Pat Spillane, Colm O'Rourke, Joe McNally all on he trip to Australia.</p> <p>01:15:00 Camaraderie in Australia. Going to functions. Entertaining themselves. Importance of showing up on time for training. Irish support at the games. Meeting somebody from Athlone. Being in Sydney with a Murphy player from Monaghan and meeting a man from Monaghan and socialising with him. Murphy arriving late for a team meeting that evening.</p> <p>01:19:10 Playing against Australia under Eugene McGee in Ireland in 1987. Differences with 1986 Compromise Rules.</p>
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	<p>Being taken care of by the GAA. Enjoying the experience. Doing more training in 1990 than in 1987. Arriving home in 1986 and being interviewed by television crews. Being in a pub in Rochfortbridge three years later with Paddy Garvan and somebody asking Paddy how he knew Michael.</p> <p>01:22:25 Experience of playing against professionals. Training hard. Advising younger players on sprinting techniques.</p> <p>01:24:25 International Rules over the years and problems with physical nature of the games. Role of referees. Players bending the rules. Back door system in GAA affecting International Rules. Need to abandon Railway Cup.</p> <p>01:27:40 Sacrifices he had to make due to different sporting commitments. Missing social events. Being tempted to go out drinking when he was trying to stay disciplined. Training programme he had for himself in 1990. Getting married late in life.</p> <p>01:31:40 GAA involvement having a positive effect on his life. Knowing a lot of people. Making contacts in business.</p> <p>01:33:40 Retiring from the game in 2004. Breaking a bone in his leg in 2000. Playing in four different decades. Missing the game after retiring. Getting involved in coaching at club level and county level with Brendan Hackett.</p> <p>01:38:20 Difficulties with Westmeath panel over Brendan Hackett's position. Troubles in the League campaign. How he felt about it. Opinion of Pat Flanagan. Playing for Westmeath and feeling the need to train harder. Players' having opinions on what makes a suitable manager. Whether or not Mickey Harte or Seán Boylan would have been accepted as managers if the players had greater influence.</p> <p>01:43:40 Danger of a two-tier system in the GAA. What needs to be done about it. Competing club and county demands for players.</p> <p>01:45:05 Prospect of professionalism and his opinions on that. Knock-on effect on volunteers. Issue of players switching clubs.</p> <p>01:46:40 What the Australian players thought of them as amateurs. Being invited to Australia for a trial.</p>
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	<p>01:47:30 Proudest moment of his GAA career. Pressure on children of famous GAA players. Encouraging his own children when they take up sports.</p> <p>01:49:35 What the GAA has meant to him in his life. What he might have done without it.</p> <p>01:51:10 Where his nickname - 'Spike' - comes from. Nicknaming his friend 'Chernobyl'.</p> <p>01:52:45 Writing a GAA article every week in the local newspaper and issues that he covers in that. Problem of too many rules in the GAA. Opinion on hand-passing in football. Need to grade referees.</p> <p>01:59:25 Future of the GAA in Westmeath. Areas that could be improved upon.</p> <p>02:00:20 Mick Gay giving out to referees during games. Tom Farrell, Westmeath county chairman in 2010, refereeing a game and having an exchange with Mick.</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 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 U16, Minor and U21 football medals playing with Mullingar Shamrocks. Won 8 Westmeath Senior Football Championships. Played for Westmeath, won 1 Byrne Cup medal. Played on Leinster Football Railway Cup team (1982); Played on 3 International Rules teams, 1986, 87, 90.</p>
<p>Record as an Administrator (Positions held; how long for)</p>	<p>Mullingar Shamrocks: member of the committee for many years held various roles including assistant secretary and assistant treasurer.</p>

REFERENCE NO. WH/1/3

Format	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-Visual
Duration	Length of Interview: 2:02:34
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: Regina Fitzpatrick

Date: 21st June 2012