

THIS IS
“GAA STORY”
CAVAN!



HANDBALL LIATHRÓID LÁIMHE

Handball, which is one of the oldest ball games known, was one of the sports Michael Cusack wanted to include when the GAA was founded in 1884. Though promoted from the outset, the game was slow to take off in Cavan, giving way to the growing popularity of football. During the 1890s The Anglo-Celt carried requests from individuals looking for opponents to compete against in competitive handball games.

In 1898 there were examples of challenge games between individuals from Belturbet, Bawnboy, Ballyconnell and Cavan town in particular. In the first decade of the new century this pattern continued with exhibition games often taking place at tournaments, sports' days and festivals.

It was not until 1920 that handball was established on a proper footing in Cavan. In that year the county board organised a

tournament and individuals from Cavan town, Belturbet, Drumbo, Templeport and Kilnaleck entered. Soon more wanted to play, and in early 1921 the county board established a separate sub-committee to run the game. During the 1920s the game flourished with active handball clubs in Ballyhaise, Cavan, Maudabawn, Ballyjamesduff, Lacken, Killydoon and Virginia.



The great handballer of the time was John Molloy, a native of county Leitrim, who was working and living in Cavan. In addition to

being an All-Ireland football medal winner with Cavan John won the Ulster senior soft ball title on nine occasions and he represented Cavan in the Tailteann Games in 1928 and 1932. In 1930, John in partnership with the legendary Hughie Smyth, won Cavan's first All-Ireland junior soft ball doubles title.

Their successes sparked further interest in the game but it continued to be sporadic. The scarcity of rubber during the war years had a detrimental effect on the game and very little handball was played anywhere. Cavan had to wait until 1949 for further success when another star-footballer Victor Sherlock won an All-Ireland junior softball title.

In the 1960s Kingscourt native Kit Finnegan, an excellent handballer himself, began working tirelessly promoting the game at every opportunity in his native club and throughout Cavan. Kit introduced many to the skills of the game and he was for years a wonderful ambassador for handball in Cavan.

In 1963 the Gilmore brothers, John and Louie from Kingscourt, won All-Ireland junior softball doubles. This achievement was repeated by Greg and Dominic Sheridan from Cavan Gaels in 1976 and by Pat Donagh and Patsy Hand from Kingscourt in 1985. Cavan handballers continued their

good record in junior softball doubles when James Brady and Patrick Clerkin won the All-Ireland in 2013.

For years the Kingscourt club has led the way for handball in Cavan. In the early years of the millennium the club opened world-class facilities for handball and racquetball and the venue was chosen to host the World Handball championships in 2003. Since then many young men and women have been afforded an opportunity to hone their handball skills in this magnificent complex.

Since the beginning of the millennium Cavan has had great success on the national and international stage due mainly to the achievements of two of the county's most renowned handballers, Michael Finnegan and Paul Brady. Michael Finnegan from Kingscourt was perhaps the greatest underage handballer our country has ever seen and he went on to win an impressive 11 All-Ireland 40x20 doubles titles.

Paul Brady, a member of the legendary 'Gunner' Brady family from Mullahoran, was first introduced to the game of handball in St Patrick's College, Cavan by his coach Fr John Gilhooley. Paul has won numerous championships and tournaments both nationally and internationally and he is

the most decorated player in the history of the game His numerous victories include eleven All-Ireland 40×20 senior singles championships, eleven All-Ireland senior doubles championships five World senior singles championships one World senior doubles championship, ten United States national championships . He has been a magnificent ambassador for his county and his country on the national and international handball stage.

Inspired by the achievements of Finnegan and Brady in particular many handballers, male and female, have achieved success on the national stage at different levels. Cavan now has a strong handball base with many young players playing the game.

The introduction of One-Wall competitions has popularised the game as has the spread of the game in some schools.

Hopefully this wonderful game will continue to spread and flourish among more clubs and Cavan handballers will continue to achieve on the national and international stage.