

**THIS IS**  
**“GAA STORY”**  
**CAVAN!**



# HURLING IOMÁNAÍOCHT

Anecdotaly hurling was played in almost every parish in Cavan before the establishment of the GAA yet it is nearly 25 years after its foundation before there is a record of a game under official rules. In 1908 The Anglo-Celt carried a report of a game which was played on 20 April (Easter Monday), in O'Rourke's field Killymooney (Cavan town) between Belturbet Rory O'Moores and the Cavan town team. Belturbet won by 2-4 to 1-3 and according to The Anglo-Celt:

The game was not of course a finished display; the teams are yet young, but there were some brilliant individual touches, and play all round was fast and exciting.

In addition to the Belturbet Rorys and the Slashers, other clubs which fielded teams in the early years included Arva, Kilnaleck, Ballinagh, Ballyhaise, Corlough, Kildallan, Ballyconnell, Cornafean, Virginia, Killann, Bailieborough, Ballyjamesduff and Ballymachugh. There was also an active

hurling team in St Patrick's College and students helped to promote the game in their native areas when they returned on holidays.

In 1908 Cavan were nominated to represent Ulster in the All-Ireland semi-final because the provincial championship was unfinished. Dublin were their opponents and Cavan were well beaten. Between 1909 and 1919 there were occasional challenge matches played but there were no organised competitions. In the 1920s and 1930s there were some competitive championship games played, with titles going to Belturbet, Cavan Slashers, Ballyhaise Shamrocks, Kill and Cootehill.

During the War years there was little or no hurling and this continued during much of the later 1940s and 1950s. During those two decades the Cavan football team was consistently among the top few teams in the country and hurling rarely got a mention! There was a revival in the 1960s chiefly at underage level but it did not last and it was not until the 1980s that the game began to grow again.

In this decade hurling underwent a significant revival in Cavan due chiefly to an influx of army personnel from Kilkenny, Clare, Cork, Wexford and other southern counties who were stationed

along the border during the troubles. Club competition was keen with Cavan Gaels, Bailieborough and Woodford Gaels the dominant teams. This helped the growth of the county team and Cavan won the Ulster junior championship in 1983 and were beaten narrowly in the All-Ireland semi-final by Galway. In 1985 Cavan won the Ulster championship again and they played Tipperary in the All-Ireland semi-final in Semple stadium. Though well beaten it was a memorable day for Cavan hurling with the team taking on the might of Tipperary, albeit their junior team, in the iconic stadium. Cavan also won a Division 4 National Hurling League in 1984.



Despite a great passion for the sport amongst many, hurling always struggled to get a strong foothold in the county. The difficulty of finding suitable pitches, the dominance of football, the apathy of most clubs and the cost (hurleys were always relatively expensive, while sliotars needed constant replacing), all contributed to discouraging those with an interest in playing.

Since 1990 Mullahoran St Joseph's have been the dominant club team and they have won the bulk of the county championships up to the present day. Their closest rivals have been Cootehill Celtics who have provided good opposition and they also have won a few championships. In 2011 Cavan withdrew from the National League, preferring to concentrate on the growth of the game at underage level.

Since re-entering competitions in 2017 hurling has undergone a mini revival with active clubs in Mullahoran St Joseph's, Cootehill Celtic, East Cavan Gaels and Pearse Ógs. This has helped the county team and history was made in 2021 when Cavan qualified for the Lory Meagher final for the first time. The hope is that the game will continue to grow and develop in Cavan in the years ahead.