



GPA Annual Report 2024

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – BEO360

The Gaelic Players Association (GPA) remains unwavering in its commitment to supporting inter-county players in their development both on and off the field. In 2024, the GPA's flagship Player Development Programme, BEO360, made significant strides in empowering players to excel personally and professionally while proudly representing their counties.

Throughout the year, the GPA expanded and deepened the impact of its core initiatives, providing tailored support in areas such as:



**Career
guidance**

**Educational
advancement**

**Business
development
mentorship**

**Personal and
leadership
development**

These supports highlighted and reinforced the transferable skills that inter-county players inherently possess as dual-career athletes—leadership, communication, teamwork, and resilience.

A major milestone in 2024 was the launch of Phase 2 of the Movember Ahead of the Game (MAOTG) programme, developed in partnership with Movember and the GAA. This mental health literacy initiative—delivered by GPA members—has already made a powerful impact in Phase 1:

- 176 workshops delivered in GAA clubs across Ireland
- Reached 2,729 young people and 1,863 parents and coaches

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – BEO360

These sessions are designed to raise awareness and promote positive mental health across the GAA community.

As we look to the year ahead, our focus is on expanding the reach and impact of BEO360, ensuring that more male and female inter-county players—both current and former—can access the support they need to thrive on and off the field.

We aim to:

- Deepen engagement with our player membership
- Build stronger partnerships with educational institutions and external organisations
- Continue to champion a holistic approach to player development

Through these efforts, we remain committed to helping every inter-county player realise their full potential—during their playing careers and long after they step away from the game.

You See Players, We See People.

Jennie, Arron and Stephen
GPA Player Development Team



GPA PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (BEO360) ENGAGEMENTS 2024

PROGRAMME	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT	
Enhanced Scholarships	53
GPA 3rd Level Student Scholarships	900
Education and Training Fund	131
EVENTS	
Rookie Camp	374
GPA Business Forum	37
Beyond the Blackboard Teacher's Event	50
GPA Breakfast Bite Webinar	40
Levelling Up (Connacht Players Event)	21
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES	
Jim Madden Leadership Programme	28
Business Development Mentorship	30
Sport to Start-up LEO Programme	12
Beyond the Field Transition Programme	10
AOTG Movember Programme - Workshops delivered to clubs	269
AOTG Movember Programme - Total No. of Young People	3992
AOTG Movember Programme - Total No. of Parents & Coaches	2827
AOTG Movember Programme - Total No. of Participants	6819

GPA PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (BEO360) ENGAGEMENTS 2024

PROGRAMME	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS
COACHING SUPPORT	
BEO360 Coaching Sessions	1048
Interview Preparation Sessions	63
CV Development Support	70
Educational & Career Guidance Support	24
PDM College Visits	7
PDM College Visits - No. of Students	48
WELLBEING SUPPORT	
Counselling Service - New Referrals	119
No. of Counselling Sessions Scheduled	730
Residential Care Support	4
Benevolent Fund	5
Past Player Surgical Fund	9

GPA ROOKIE CAMP SERIES – SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION

In December 2023 and January 2024, the GPA hosted its most expansive Rookie Camp Series to date, with a total of 374 players in attendance. For the first time, four Rookie Camps were held across the four provinces, ensuring greater accessibility and regional reach for new GPA members beginning their inter-county journeys. The breakdown of attendance was as follows:

- **Belfast** – 96 players
- **Cork** – 79 players
- **Dublin** – 155 players
- **Sligo** – 44 players

Targeted at players aged 18–23, the Rookie Camp is designed to support a smooth transition into the demands of adult inter-county Gaelic games. The series featured a range of expert-led workshops focused on key topics such as:

- Financial Literacy
- Social Media Awareness
- The Power of Journalling
- Building Resilience Through Adversity



A standout element of the series was the “A Day in the Life” Q&A panel discussion, where current leading inter-county players shared personal insights and practical advice. These honest and relatable discussions provided invaluable guidance and inspiration for the next generation of inter-county athletes.



BEYOND THE FIELD – SUPPORTING LIFE AFTER INTER-COUNTY SPORT

In 2024, the GPA hosted the Beyond the Field Transition Programme for the second consecutive year at the serene setting of Kylemore Abbey, Co. Galway. This unique, bespoke retreat was attended by 10 GPA members who had recently retired from the inter-county game.

The programme is specifically designed to honour the dedication and commitment each participant gave to their sporting careers, while offering the space and support to reflect on their journey and begin to plan the next chapter of their lives.

Held in an intimate and private environment, Beyond the Field focused on:

- Personal reflection and self-discovery
- Exploration of identity beyond sport
- Clarifying purpose, passions, and post-sport aspirations

Through guided discussions, contemplative practices, and peer support, the programme empowered former players to embrace life beyond inter-county competition with renewed clarity and confidence. The GPA remains deeply committed to supporting members during key life transitions, and Beyond the Field continues to play a vital role in that mission.

BEYOND THE BLACKBOARD – EXPLORING CAREER PATHWAYS IN EDUCATIONS

In August 2024, the GPA hosted the inaugural 'Beyond the Blackboard' event in partnership with LinkedIn, welcoming 50 GPA members working in or transitioning from careers in education.

This first-of-its-kind initiative was designed to support teachers and educators within the GPA membership as they explored alternative or complementary career opportunities. The event offered inspiration, practical guidance, and peer support for those considering a shift in their professional path.

Highlights included:

- **Keynote Speaker:** Carol Keenan, Career & Performance Life Skills Consultant at the Sport Ireland Institute, who shared insights on career transition pathways and the evolving landscape of opportunities for those with teaching backgrounds.
- **Player Panel Discussion:** Featuring GPA members Conor Shaw (Westmeath Hurling), Julia White (Cork Camogie), John Keegan (Longford Football), and Clodagh O'Connor (Kerry Football). Each panellist shared their personal journey of transitioning into new roles—either part-time or full-time—outside traditional teaching careers.

Attendees gained valuable perspective on career mobility, identity beyond the classroom, and the skills that teachers bring to a wide range of industries. Beyond the Blackboard is a prime example of the GPA's commitment to providing meaningful, sector-specific development opportunities for players beyond their sporting lives.



GPA BUSINESS FORUM – FOSTERING NETWORKING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In September 2024, the GPA hosted the 2nd annual GPA Business Forum, which brought together 37 players for an invaluable opportunity to network, collaborate, and forge new business connections across a wide range of industries.

The event provided a platform for inter-county players to explore business opportunities, share insights, and build relationships that can help them succeed in their post-sport careers.

Key highlights of the event included:

- **Keynote Speaker:** Seán O'Connor, Chief Operating Officer & Co-founder of StatsSports, who shared his inspiring career journey with the world-leading player analysis and GPS tracking company, offering attendees valuable lessons on innovation and success in the tech and sports industries.
- **Player Panel Discussion:** Featuring former inter-county players Richard Donnelly (Tyrone Football), Una Leonard (Westmeath Camogie), and Bernard Brogan (Dublin Football). The panellists shared their entrepreneurial journeys, providing honest insights into the challenges of running their own businesses while managing life after inter-county sport.

The forum continues to serve as a vital resource for players interested in entrepreneurship and business development, supporting them as they transition from their sporting careers to the professional world.



GPA BREAKFAST BITE – EXPLORING FOOD & BEVERAGE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

In September 2024, 40 players attended the 'GPA Breakfast Bite' webinar, an informative online session designed to guide GPA members interested in launching and operating their own food and beverage businesses within the hospitality sector. The session offered invaluable insights into the key aspects of starting a business in the food industry, covering topics such as:

- Financing the setup
- Selecting and securing premises
- Sourcing suppliers and managing overheads

The webinar was hosted in partnership with Carmel Connaire, a seasoned food and beverage expert with over 30 years of experience in the hospitality sector, food safety, and business mentorship. Carmel shared her extensive knowledge, providing participants with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in running a food business. This session was a valuable resource for members considering a transition into the food and beverage industry, equipping them with the tools and confidence to explore this exciting business avenue.



GPA AND GAA PARTNER WITH MOVEMBER AHEAD OF THE GAME – EXPANDING MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY ACROSS GAA COMMUNITIES

Movember Ahead of The Game (MAOTG) is an evidence-based Mental Health Literacy Programme aimed at supporting young people, parents, and coaches through targeted workshops delivered in GAA clubs across the island of Ireland.

Phase 2 of the programme commenced in 2024, with an expanded focus on reaching even more communities nationwide. This year saw key developments in the delivery model:

- 4 existing facilitators were promoted to Lead Facilitator roles and received advanced training to mentor and train others.
- 9 new facilitators were successfully recruited, trained, and onboarded to support the Phase 2 rollout.
- The MAOTG facilitator team grew significantly, with 30 GPA members now employed as part-time MAOTG facilitators.

This expansion marks a continued commitment to enhancing mental health awareness and resilience within the GAA community, supported by the collaborative efforts of Movember, the GAA and the GPA.

Key delivery Numbers for 2024 are as follows:

- **269** = Total no. of workshops delivered in clubs to date
- **3992** = Total no. of young people
- **2827** = Total no. of parents and coaches
- **6819** = Total no. of programme participants to date



LEVELLING UP (CONNACHT PLAYERS EVENT)

In 2024, the GPA hosted the inaugural 'Levelling Up' event, specifically designed for players based in Connacht. The event saw 21 players from 15 out of 18 Connacht squads come together for a day of personal and professional development. The GPA Player Development Team facilitated a Spotlight Workshop that focused on exploring players' Mindset and Behavioural Styles, aiming to increase self-awareness and enhance adaptability, both on and off the field. The workshop offered players practical tools to build on their strengths and improve their approach to challenges.

A key feature of the event was the player panel discussion, which included GPA National Executive Committee (NEC) members and current players Lisa Cafferky (Mayo Football) and Shane Cooney (Galway Hurling) along with Sarah Tierney (former Mayo Football). The panellists shared their sporting journeys, as well as the reasons behind their involvement with the GPA NEC, offering valuable insights into leadership and player advocacy. This event was an important step in fostering stronger connections and empowering players in the Connacht region to further their development within the sport and beyond.



SMART MONEY HABITS – A FINANCIAL LITERACY PROGRAMME FOR GPA MEMBERS

Smart Money Habits is a dedicated financial literacy programme developed exclusively for members of the Gaelic Players Association (GPA). Designed with flexibility in mind, the programme offers valuable financial education content that is available online and accessible to players at their own convenience.

This initiative was created by former inter-county players—Podge Collins, Sean Cavanagh, and Darach Honan—who are now qualified professionals within the financial services industry. They have developed bespoke content tailored specifically for GPA members, covering key areas such as:

- Budgeting
- Mortgages
- Investment
- Tax
- Debt Management
- Income Protection

The programme was created in partnership with The LIA, a well-respected financial education provider that has previously collaborated with organisations such as Rugby Players Ireland and Sport Ireland on similar initiatives. Smart Money Habits had a soft launch in September 2024, with the full formal launch scheduled for early 2025.



GPA STUDENT SESSIONS

In November, the GPA Player Development Team visited seven leading third-level institutions across Ireland, engaging directly with 48 student GPA members through one-on-one meetings.

The universities visited included:

- Queen's University Belfast
- Ulster University
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Atlantic Technological University Sligo
- University of Limerick
- Dublin City University
- University College Dublin

These personalised sessions focused on key areas of personal and professional development, including:

- CV preparation
- Interview skills
- Career planning
- Educational support
- Time management strategies

We extend our sincere thanks to all the universities and colleges who welcomed us and supported this valuable initiative aimed at empowering student-athletes to thrive both on and off the field.



JIM MADDEN GPA LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME – 10TH ANNIVERSARY

2024 marked the 10th anniversary of the Jim Madden GPA Leadership Programme, with 28 inter-county players from Hurling, Camogie, and Gaelic Football participating in this milestone year. Since its launch in 2015, the programme has played a central role in developing the next generation of leaders within Gaelic games.

The programme is designed to equip players with the skills, confidence, and self-awareness required to lead effectively across sport, work, and community life. Each participant is paired with a professional life coach to support their individual development across personal, professional, and athletic domains. This impactful

initiative was made possible through the generous support of Michael Madden and his family, in memory of their late father, Jim, to whom the programme is dedicated.



The full list of 2024 graduates is as follows:

Stephen Henry	Sligo
Dan Morrissey	Limerick
Aisling Maher	Dublin
Niamh Carr	Donegal
Grainne Kenneally	Kildare
Kayleigh Cronin	Kerry
Brian Howard	Dublin
Aaron Kenny	Monaghan
Maria Curley	Tipperary
Niall O'Muineacháin	Kildare
Ciaran Burke	Offaly
Ailbhe Davoren	Galway
Laura Hayes	Cork
Karen Hegarty	Westmeath
Muireann Kelleher	Dublin
Martin Feeney	Leitrim
Ronan Daly	Roscommon
Marian Quaid	Limerick
Shauna Ennis	Meath
Brian Byrne	Kildare
Conor Bohane	Kerry
Niamh Hegarty	Kildare
Matthew Donnelly	Antrim
Barry Heffernan	Tipperary
Sinead Hughes	Louth
Aidan Devaney	Sligo
Barry Hogan	Tipperary
Lisa Cafferky	Mayo

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING – SUPPORTING WELLBEING IN HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORT

In November 2024, the GPA hosted a Mental Health First Aid Training session for staff members, in collaboration with colleagues from Rugby Players Ireland, the Irish Jockeys Association, and Sport Ireland.

The two-day training, delivered by Mental Health First Aid Ireland and funded by the HSE, equipped participants with the skills to:

- Recognise the signs and symptoms of emerging mental health issues
- Respond appropriately and confidently in crisis situations
- Promote a supportive, stigma-free environment within high performance sport

This initiative reflects the GPA's continued commitment to fostering mental health awareness and resilience—not just among players, but within the wider network of people who support them.





EDUCATION FUNDING

With students representing 1/3rd of GPA members, it is a significant priority to support these players balance their inter-county, academic and financial demands. In 2024, the GPA provided:

- €1m in Third-Level student scholarship funding for 900 players
- €185,000 in Enhanced Scholarships for 53 players in 16 universities and colleges across the country. This funding is matched by the educational institutions
- €95,194 in Education and Training funding for 131 players.