

THIS IS
“GAA STORY”
CAVAN!



CAMOGIE IOMÁNAÍOCHT

It is generally accepted that a form of hurling was played in every county in Ireland for years before the founding of the GAA but it is less commented upon that ladies took up similar sticks and played a version of the game too. In the early years of the last century the game we know today as camogie was commonly known as ladies' hurling and often as 'camoguidheacht' before taking the more popular name camogie. In general the history of camogie in Cavan in the last century was one of birth, growth, decline and rebirth interspersed by periods during which it was moribund.

Camogie in Cavan, similar to other counties, faced the challenges of trying to survive in a man's world of Gaelic sport and it was hampered over the years by the fact that the county never had a serious hurling tradition. It was therefore deprived of its natural ally and this made the work of fostering the game more difficult than in counties where there

was a hurling tradition. Yet, there were always plenty of enthusiasts in different eras, who were keen to take up the challenge and promote the game in Cavan.

Ladies' hurling was first mentioned in Cavan in November 1908 when *The Anglo-Celt* carried an article informing readers that 'a ladies' hurling club has been formed in Cavan by the cailíní óg [sic] of the town' and that 'the first practice will come off on Sunday 15 November.



In 1909 The Anglo-Celt reported on a game between Cavan town and Belturbet in conjunction with a hurling match between the same clubs. During the 1910s there were occasional challenge games played in conjunction with hurling fixtures but there was no organised competition and it was not until 1921 that the decision was taken at a Cavan camogie convention to run a championship for the first time.

Teams from Belturbet, Ballinagh, Ballyhaise, Alacken and Tullyco entered with Belturbet and Lavey reaching the final. Despite atrocious weather conditions the final, which was played in Ballyhaise, attracted a large crowd with many attending out of curiosity. Belturbet won narrowly in a low-scoring game by 0-1 to 0-0 and they became inaugural Cavan camogie champions. The Anglo-Celt was complimentary and described the game as:

A sparkling contest from start to finish – played throughout with remarkable dash and speed and brimful of exciting passages.

At club level in the late 1920s, and especially during the 1930s, there were many exciting championship games. In 1935 there were 25 clubs registered which was a reflection of the sporting euphoria that was sweeping the county at the time. In the second half of the 1930s teams from Cavan town,

Maghera, Drumlane, Gowna, Crubany and Laragh in particular sought to dethrone the all-powerful Killygarry team which went unbeaten from 1935 to 1945. Other clubs that had successes in the later 1940s and 1950s included Belturbet, Stradone, Laragh and Ballinagh.

There was no camogie during much of the 1950s and 1960s but the game was revived again in 1967. In the 1970s Kill were the dominant club and they won a number of titles.

The highpoint in the history of camogie at county level was Cavan's Ulster final victories of 1940 and 1941. In 1940 Cavan defeated Derry in the Ulster final but they were beaten by Galway in the All-Ireland semi-final. Cavan retained their title in 1941 beating Antrim and they drew with Dublin in the All-Ireland semi-final in Breffni Park but they lost the replay. Another highlight worthy of note occurred in the GAA Centenary year [1984] when Cavan reached the All-Ireland junior final but they lost heavily to Cork in Croke Park.

Despite many challenges camogie in Cavan has managed to survive and prosper. Ladies' football with its growing popularity was initially seen as a threat, but now

the opposite is the case and the codes complement each other with many playing both games. Great work with development squads during the first decade of the millennium is beginning to bear fruit and Cavan camogie teams have made good progress recently with the senior team reaching the All-Ireland junior final in 2020. The future of the game in Cavan looks secure.