

The Consequences of Professionalism on the GAA

This Dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MBA (Part-time) at the National College of Ireland by Seamus Corbett.



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i Abstract

Founded in 1884, the GAA is the biggest sports body in Ireland. The organisation's amateur status has been one of the pillars on which it has flourished, but in recent times professionalism has crept in, partly in response to the rapidly changing environment.

The paper investigates the effects of the gradual introduction of professionalism in the GAA. By examining amateurism, professionalism and the drivers of change in sport, the research assesses if the GAA can afford some element of professionalism? The research looks at the introduction of professionalism in other sports such as boxing, rugby and even the Olympics to see what might happen in the GAA.

The researcher adopts a case study method to interview knowledgeable people involved in the GAA and other sports people on account of their positions, experience, and individual viewpoint. A purposeful sample is used to select key cases.

The findings of the study reveal that professionalism is being driven by the commercial and administrative demands of the GAA. These demands are changing the game in positive and negative ways but on balance professionalism has reached saturation point and no further professional influence is required. The bond between the GAA and the community is important and need not be eroded any further. This bond is the life blood of the GAA and what keeps its vast family together.

ii Declaration

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland

Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Seamus Corbett

Student Number: X12106798

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Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Declaration	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures	viii
List of Appendices	ix
 1. Introduction	
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Research focus	2
1.3 Research aims and objectives	2
 2. Literature Review	
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 History & amateur ethos of the GAA	4
2.3 Current status.....	7
2.4 Amateurism and professionalism	10
2.5 The development of professionalism in other sports.....	16
2.6 Change drivers.....	20
2.7 Key issues	23
 3. Research Question	
3.1 Research question.....	24

4. Research Method

4.1 Research philosophy	26
4.2 Research method.....	27
4.3 Data collection method	28
4.4 How the study will be conducted	30
4.5 Ethics, strengths, weaknesses, and limitations	34

5. Research Findings

5.1 Summary findings.....	36
5.2 Detailed findings	39
5.3 Brief analysis of findings	55

6. Evaluation & Conclusion

6.1 Expected consequences of professionalism	57
6.2 Where the research objectives met.....	58
6.3 What conclusions can be drawn	60
6.4 Overall comment and areas for further research	64

References**Appendices**

List of tables		Page
Table 1	Top Ten sports by club / Association membership	1
Table 2	Summary GAA Revenue Statement	8
Table 3	Olympic Revenue sources from Munich to Beijing	13
Table 4	Financial data for Top 14 & Premiership clubs	19
Table 5	Case Sample	31
Table 6	GAA Revenues	59

List of Figures		Page
Figure 1	GAA and amateurism through the Years	6
Figure 2	Maslow's Hierarchy of needs	11
Figure 3	Drop out by type of Sport	15
Figure 4	Complexity theory characteristics	22
Figure 5	Change cycle of Professionalism in the GAA	58
Figure 6	My Day comparison chart	61

List of Appendices

- Appendix 1 Affiliated GAA Clubs
- Appendix 2 GAA Timeline
- Appendix 3 Revenue Account for GAA for Y/E 31/10/12
- Appendix 4 GAA players who have moved to other codes
- Appendix 5 Interview Guide
- Appendix 6 Sample Interview

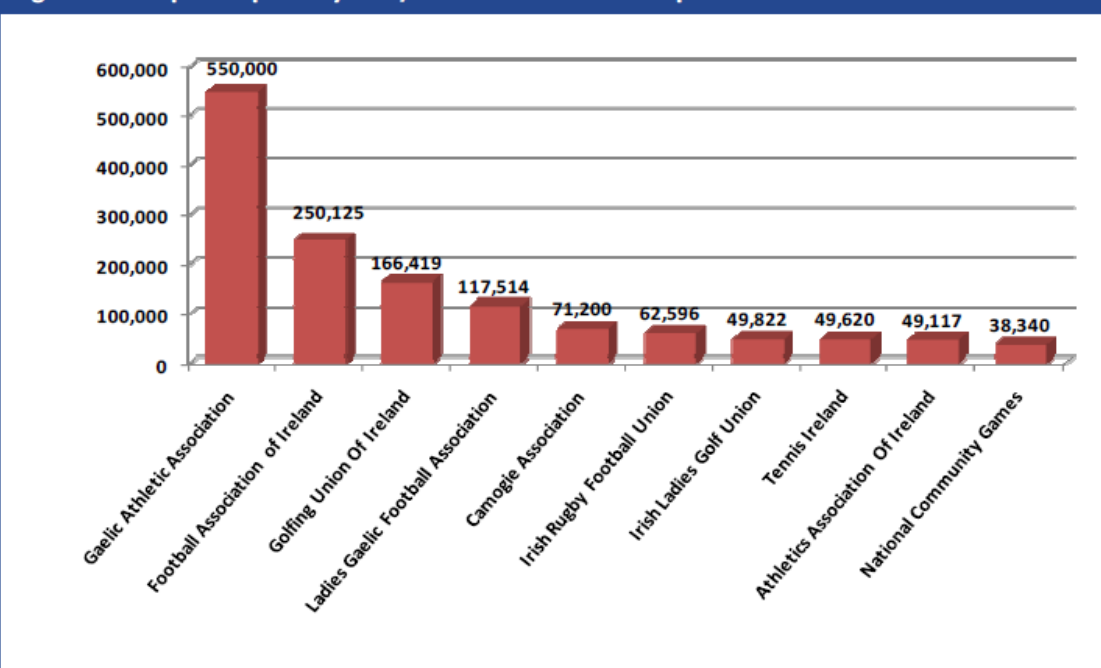
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

As a mass participation activity, sport is unrivalled as it touches the lives of almost everyone in Ireland (Lunn, 2007). Many people play, volunteer for and join sports clubs, or attend sporting fixtures. In recent years we have witnessed a remarkable series of performances at international and championship levels across many sports with Olympic, world, European and national success achieved by Irish sports people (Indecon International Economic consultants, 2010). Sport plays a central part in Irish life (Lunn, 2007).

The national governing bodies with the highest number of clubs in Ireland are the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Gaelic Athletics Association (GAA) as outlined in Table 1. The GAA is the biggest sports body in Ireland and is the strongest representative of a voluntary, community based model of sports organisation (Indecon International Economic consultants, 2010).

Figure 2.3: Top Ten Sports by Club/Association Membership*



Note: * Figures refer to National Governing Body data on club-association membership numbers
Source: Indecon analysis of Sports Council data on National Governing Bodies of sport

Table 1
Source: Indecon

It plays an important role in the lives of its 1 million members (Indecon International Economic consultants, 2010). In its 130 year history, the GAA has seen considerable growth and development and in recent years the preparation of the GAA's county teams has become more professional yet the games amateur ethos remains at its core (GAA, 2009). The dynamic of sport in Ireland has changed with the introduction of professionalism in soccer and rugby, and this has caused the validity of the amateur status of the GAA to be questioned (Keeler & Wright, 2013).

While other sports have trended towards professionalism, it has always been felt that the GAA did not have the ability to generate enough revenue due to the small size of the Irish population. Rugby has an international outlet and marketing strength that the GAA does not (Anderson, 2012). Notwithstanding this, the GAA is not strictly an amateur organisation as payments are being made to some of its participants.

1.2 Research Focus

The focus of this research is to examine the GAA's history and ethos; the current status of the GAA's philosophy; and the general shift from amateurism to professionalism occurring in sport and the consequences of these changes on the GAA. The benefit or justification for the research is that much of the current literature is not of an academic nature; rather it is based on the views of sports writers or anecdotal evidence from third parties. It is hoped this research will provide hard evidence from those involved in the GAA and qualified to substantiate or contest the views within the literature.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

The overall aim is to examine the effect of the gradual introduction of professionalism on the amateur ethos of the GAA. By examining what the primary and secondary research says about amateurism, professionalism and the drivers of change in sport, it will be possible to determine if the GAA can afford, financially but also in terms of its ethos, some element of professionalism at its elite level and if so, what this will look like? More specific sub-objectives are outlined below and detailed in section 3:

1. To identify the drivers of change for the introduction of professionalism in the GAA?
2. To identify obstacles to the introduction of professionalism in the GAA?
3. To explore the appetite for the introduction of professionalism amongst the players and supporters?
4. To determine if extrinsic motives would become more important than intrinsic motives to the players if professionalism is introduced to the GAA?
5. To determine the effect of the introduction of professionalism on the community-parish-club relationship?



*Tyrone GAA's new €8m GAA complex in Garvaghey. The 43-acre site includes five grass pitches under floodlights as well as a floodlit all-weather pitch and drills area. There are 10 dressing rooms, team support facilities, meeting and breakout rooms, a 200-seater auditorium and offices inside the 30,000 square feet of the main building. **Source:** TheJournal.ie*

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

It is useful to look at the transition occurring within the GAA in the context of the transition from amateurism to professionalism that occurred in other sports. This section will examine the literature for issues that arose in other sports and provide clues for what might happen with the GAA?

In order to give a better insight to the debate, the author has summarised the important points from the literature about the history of the GAA in the first part of the review. The second section outlines the current status of the GAA. Section three explores the amateur professional debate in general. The fourth section looks at the development of professionalism in other sports, particularly rugby and boxing. The focus on these areas is justified by the parallels they can provide the GAA. Finally the review looks at the drivers of change in sports organisations based on two particular studies. The areas discussed in the literature review will provide the context for the subsequent primary research.

2.2 History & amateur ethos of the GAA

Founded in 1884, the GAA's chief objective was for Ireland to take control of its own affairs in the field of athletics and games (Fullam, 2004). This was a significant landmark as the early part of the nineteenth century had seen a huge decline in the popularity of Gaelic sports as a result of the famine and its lasting effects (Keeler & Wright, 2013). According to Mullan, Victorian sport had become well established in Ireland under British rule with sports clubs and associations organised in athletics, boxing, cricket, rugby, football, tennis, rowing and swimming (Mullan, 1996).

The GAA provided a conduit for expressing Irish nationalism in ways that differed from the conventional model of national sports development (Mullan, 1996). The GAA underwent rapid evolution; just two years after its formation approximately 400 clubs had been established. This was remarkable given its two main rivals, the Irish Football Association and the Irish Rugby Football Union both founded earlier witnessed less spectacular rates of growth (Garnham, 2004).

The development of the GAA in its 130 year history is down to the bond it has developed with the Irish people (Indecon International Economic consultants, 2010) (Cronin, et al., 2009). The GAA has been able to access almost every parish in the country and further field by developing a core link between the community and the parish club (Keeler & Wright, 2013). See Appendix 1 for details. Apart from the Catholic Church and the government, no single body has impacted on Irish life as has the GAA (Keeler & Wright, 2013). Indeed the link between the State and the GAA are so closely entwined, the President and the Taoiseach always attend the GAA finals (Fulton & Bairner, 2007). The GAA is more than a sporting body; it is the country's most important cultural and social institution (McCourt, 2014). It acts as "Social glue" (McCourt, 2014).

The amateur ethos of the GAA has been one of the pillars on which it has flourished (Keeler & Wright, 2013). This is outlined in Rule 11:

- That players of GAA games are not paid for playing for a team;
- That the GAA functions essentially on the basis of the voluntary efforts of its members;
- That the GAA is a not-for-profit organisation; the revenues received are used exclusively for the development of its games and for the administration of its activities.

(Dufaigh, 2012)

The maintenance of the amateur status has not been easy and is something the organisation has struggled with, as Figure 1 illustrates.

GAA and Amateurism through the years



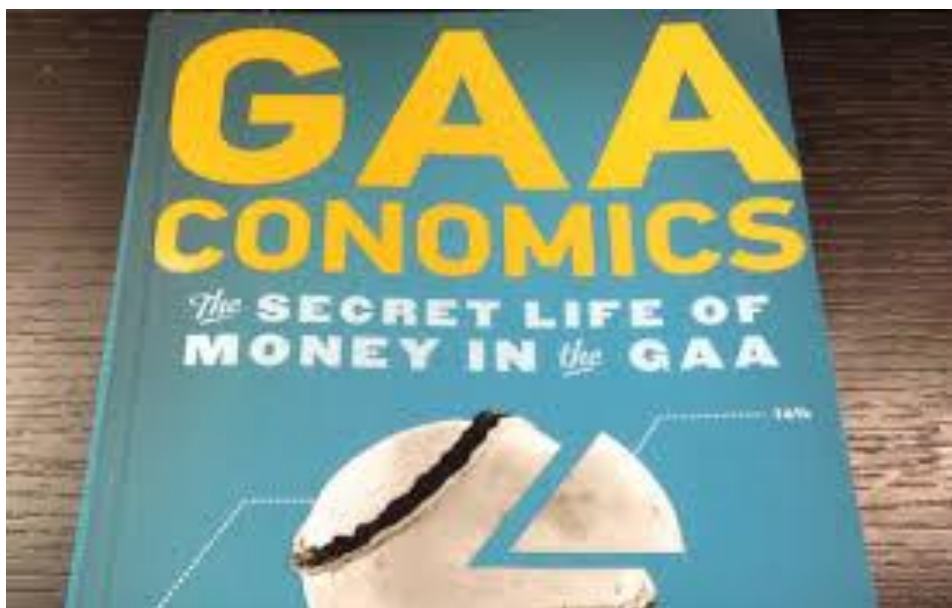
Figure 1

GAA Players are not paid to play despite the GAA embracing many attributes that exist in other professional sporting organisations. They are normal people with normal jobs who love the sport and play for pride (Kearney, 2012). According to former player and current TV panellist Joe Brolly, the GAA makes no sense in modern terms, *"It has stood against every pragmatic advance and stood apart from the rest of the world against the lure of the pound"* (Clerkin, 2014).

A timeline of major GAA events throughout its history is outlined in Appendix 2.

2.3 Current Status

McGee says the GAA takes pride in presenting itself as the greatest amateur sporting organisation on the world (McGee, 2008). However there is a growing prominence of managers and management teams getting fees/expenses which has a clear conflict for the GAA in the context of its core values of amateurism and volunteerism (Dufaigh, 2012). Under the counter payments to GAA managers around the country has been estimated at €20m (Whelan, 2014). This issue has come to represent the essential debate about the Associations amateur status. This “Shamateurism” or sham-amateurism is creating an unhealthy atmosphere in the GAA and needs to be addressed (Dufaigh, 2012), not dissimilar to what rugby went through in the 1980’s and early 1990’s (Anderson, 2012). In the words of 2011 Laois Captain, Colm Begley, “It is an amateur game played at a professional level” (Lennon, 2013).



Source: sport.ie.msn.com

Creeping professionalism is now a recurrent theme in the GAA (Fogarty, 2012). The debate around professionalism began in earnest following the creation of the GPA (Moynihan, 2013) seen as the players union (Anderson, 2012). It was set up by the players in the late 1990’s in response to rapidly changing environment in which they were playing, the growth of television coverage, and the commercialisation of the

GAA. Players felt there was an imbalance in terms of player welfare and wanted to influence their own changes (Moynihan, 2013).

There was tension in the early days between the GPA and the GAA but trust was built gradually. The GPA is now part of the GAA and they see eye to eye. In recognising the GPA, the GAA has put to bed any claims that the funding of the players body would be linked to any percentage claim on the GAA's overall income (Clifford, 2013)

There is general acceptance in the GAA and the GPA that amateurism is here to stay for financial reasons. According to GPA secretary Sean Potts, *"The bottom line is that there'd be no money for player development if the GAA went professional"* (Moynihan, 2013).

Likewise, in the opinion of Donegal Manager, Jim McGuinness, *"Personally I think it's a case of chimney pots – we don't have enough of them in Ireland to support two more professional games"* (O'Brien, 2013).

The Revenue statement for the GAA year-ended 31st December 2012 bears this out. There is no capacity to fund player's wages given all of the €52m in revenue is used to fund direct and indirect costs or grants as summarised below in Table 2. See Appendix 3 for the full revenue statement.

Summary GAA Revenue Statement

	2011 (€'m)	2012 (€'m)
Revenue	46.9	52.8
Direct Costs	9.3	10.2
Gross Profit	37.6	42.6
Indirect Costs	29.9	33.6
Operating Surplus	7.7	9
Funding Activities	7.6	9

Table 2

This may change somewhat with the introduction of Sky (Breheny, 2014). Only time will tell. Despite a long held position that it would not strike a deal with Sky for the rights to broadcast football and hurling, the GAA has struck a three-year deal with Sky in 2014 to broadcast 20 matches, some of which will be shared with the national

broadcaster, RTE, and others in the UK will be exclusive to Sky (McCourt, 2014). This has been received with mixed reaction.



Source: businessandleadership.com

On the positive side, Irish Diaspora can reconnect with home and it's a chance to sell the games overseas (McCourt, 2014). According to Sean Potts in the GPA, *"Any move that increases the exposure of the games and our players is very welcome"* (Clerkin, 2014).

According to Dick Clerkin, veteran Monaghan midfielder *"The exposure the games are going to get in terms of the UK and Australia and wherever else can only be overwhelmingly positive for the GAA"* (Clerkin, 2014). The GAA say it will plough the money back into the game. Kerry's Paul Geaney says *"Sky Sports is the way to go to showcase our game to the world"* (McCourt, 2014).

Others condemn the Sky deal saying it will result in professionalism and isolation of the community. According to Joe Brolly *"It's so very disappointing. It makes commercial sense and practical sense but it is damaging to the GAA's ethos. In the end, the GAA is about community and that volunteer spirit and Sky is about business"* (Clerkin, 2014).

Author Mark Duncan says the move is *“inconsistent with the values the GAA professes to hold.”* (McCourt, 2014) After all consideration needs to be given to the cultural or community aspect of the GAA. There is the selfless dedication of players who want only one thing, which stands at the heart of the GAA, success with team mates all of whom are neighbours and share the same dream (Burns, 2012).

2.4 Amateurism and Professionalism

“It is better that a game should be played badly, and that no one should go to see it, than that the price should have to be paid for professionalism” – Dave Gallaher, All Blacks Captain 1905 (Ryan, 1995)

This quote symbolises the feelings towards professionalism in sport at the turn of the last century. According to Watson, amateurism’s central idea is that people should not receive any material reward for taking part in sport; a professional on the other hand is someone who makes their living from sport (Watson, 2013). Similarly Gruneau describes an amateur as one who devotes himself to sport for sport’s sake without deriving from it directly or indirectly, the means of existence. A professional is one who derives the means of existence entirely or partly from sport (Gruneau, 2006)

2.4.1 Roots

Moynihan says that one of the GAA’s proudest boasts is the fact that the 30 men who draw 80,000 spectators to its headquarters, Croke Park on All-Ireland final day are amateurs who don’t get a penny for their efforts (Moynihan, 2013)



Source: RTE.ie

Amateurism in sport has its roots in the aristocracy and the English public school system which subscribed to the belief that sport formed an important part of education (Burns, 2012) (Rubio, 2013). Those who practiced it professionally were from the lower classes and needed to earn money from their pursuit of expertise (Burns, 2012). They were held in low esteem by the establishment despite their superior skills.

Amateur athletes are often seen as some of the most determined and hard-working. They have an unwavering focus to complete the performance of their lives, which gives them a certain grounding not found in the professional ranks (Rennie, 2010). Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be used to help demonstrate this point. Maslow claims that intrinsic motives such as feeling good, self-realisation, and enjoyment provide more powerful and sustaining sources of continued commitment than extrinsic motives like money and status. In other words, doing something for the sake of task, illustrated at the lower level of the hierarchy in Figure 2, rather than ego accomplishment at the apex of the hierarchy, is more positive (Kremer & Moran, 2008)

Maslow's Hierarchy of needs**Figure 2**

Source: Pure Sport Kremer & Moran

2.4.2 Purity of Competition

Nowhere has this amateur focus been shown more than at the Olympics, which according to Rennie is the ultimate global celebration of sport due to the purity of competition among athletes competing for their country (Rennie, 2010). Not surprisingly the business world likes to be associated with the Olympics and the attributes associated with it such as dedication, determination and excellence (Rennie, 2010). Each or any of these could be used to describe amateurism. For most of its history, one rule that governed the Olympic Games was that amateur athletes were permitted to compete; professional athletes were not (Greene, 2012). Despite the glamour of the Olympics, life wasn't easy for amateurs given there was no money in amateur sport. For example, Manuel Dos Santos, Olympic bronze medallist in the 100 metres freestyle swimming event in Rome 1960 broke the world record for the same event in 1961 at the tender age of 21 in Rio (Rubio, 2013). Concerned about his future profession and income, he turned to the family business and gave up swimming. There are countless examples like this.

Looking further back in history, athletes who accepted money for their performances might as well have been lepers, in the eyes of the International Olympic committee (IOC) (Greene, 2012). Famously Jim Thorpe, one of America's all time Olympics heroes

had his 1912 decathlon and pentathlon gold medals stripped from him because he once accepted small amounts of money for playing semi-pro baseball while in college (Greene, 2012).

2.4.3 Sport for Sale

As the imperial links with the British Empire dissolved in the second half of the 20th Century, so too did the seemingly unchallengeable position of amateurism (Ryan, 1995). By the 1970's sports such as athletics had become dominated by "shamateurism". Under the counter payments to elite athletes was commonplace (Watson, 2013). By the end of the 1980's, the move towards professionalism of the Olympics had gained full steam (Greene, 2012). After the international Olympic Committee's president Avery Brundage, a strong defender of amateurism, retired from the position, the IOC's attitude towards professional sport started to get warmer. Between the years 1981-1990 the IOC's approval of athlete allowances changed towards an open acceptance of professional athletes in the Olympics.

A new commercial order was established after the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984 as television entered the Olympic world in a big way and companies clamoured to have their brands associated with super-human athletes (Rubio, 2013). According to sports writer Alan Tomlinson, *"In LA 1984 everything was for sale"* (Paoanikolaou, 2012). The introduction of professional athletes actually occurred at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992, when the famous U.S basketball team "the Dream Team" took the court and also high profile cyclists and tennis players (Lamsa, 2004).

The Olympics is now truly a professional and commercial event. Twice as many people reported on the 2008 Beijing games as took part in the events (Adcroft & Teckman, 2009). The size and scope and riches of the 21st century Olympics, as illustrated by the 2013 London Olympics are a far cry from how the games began. Table 3 below demonstrates the increasing importance of TV and sponsorship to the finances of the Olympic movement. The proportion of revenue from Sponsorship and TV has increased from about 4% at the Munich Olympics in 1972 to 66% at the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

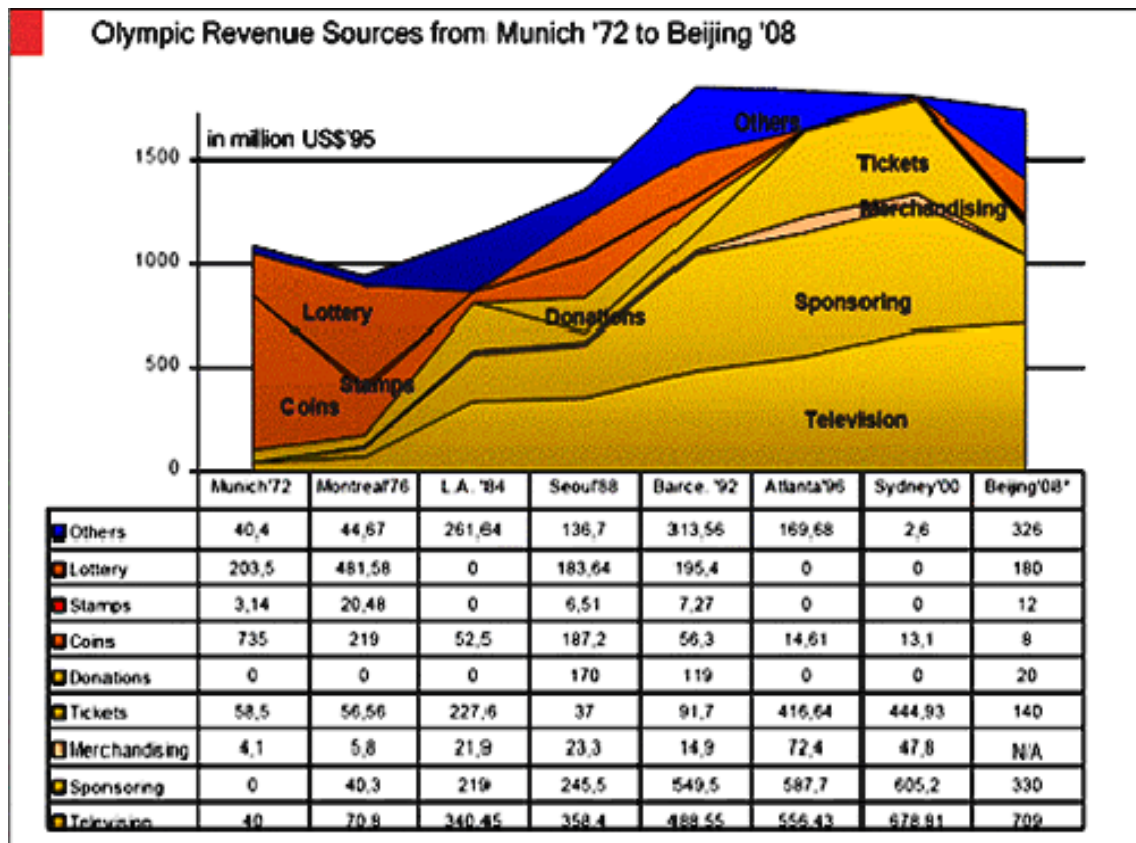


Table 3

Source: intrepidreport.com/archives

2.4.4 Abandonment of Amateurism

Contemporary society's competitiveness has led to the abandonment of amateurism. According to Keys, the notion of pure amateurism has long since departed (Keys, 2007). Sponsorship to athletes has introduced unfair competition to the Games, so much so the Olympic concept of fair play has been undermined (Paoanikolaou, 2012). There is no going back but few people seem to want to (Greene, 2012).

Amateur activities were performed for love, but now specialised activities require a professional structure from maximum expertise (Dunning, 1999). This professional approach can be traced to an increasing desire for success, higher standards, superior levels of fitness and performance, and the increasing level of sponsorship of sport and of teams (Dufaigh, 2012).

Sport is no longer just to demonstrate above average skills, it has become a coveted professional career, providing social mobility for those who can overcome the competitive career barriers (Rubio, 2013). Sport has become a "commodified" activity which both creates and consumes significant amounts of wealth (Adcroft & Teckman, 2009).

Young talented athletes are beginning to choose the discipline in which they can earn a salary (O'Neill, 2012). There have been several cases where possible young stars of the future have chosen other professional sports as a result of their financial rewards (McGurgan, 2001). Some examples of well-known defections from the GAA based on research completed by the author are outlined in Appendix 4.

Figure 3 below from a recent ESRI Report on take up of sports in Ireland illustrates the drop-out rate for major sports in Ireland, with the GAA accounting for one quarter of all drop-out events for participants aged over 16 (Lunn, et al., 2013).

Drop out by type of Sport expressed as a proportion of all drop out events (top) and of participants dropping out over a 3-4 year period (Bottom).

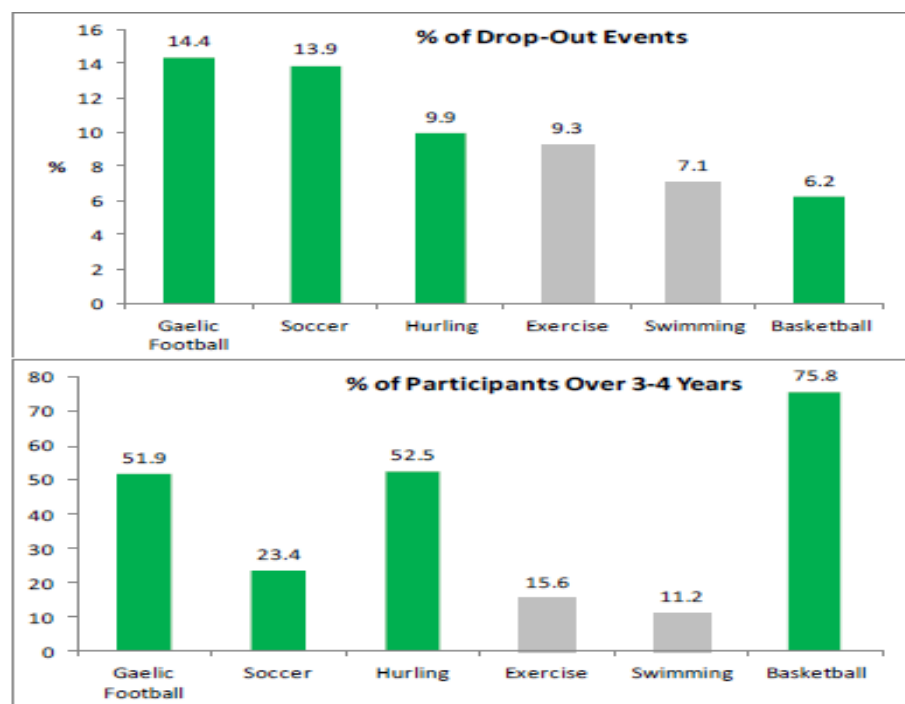


Figure 3
Source: ESRI

With Sports increasing dependence on television revenues has come a shift in paradigm from understanding sport as some sort of ideal activity based on non-commercial roots, towards increasingly viewing sport as purely an entertainment product (Iosifidis & Smith, 2011) (Madichie, 2009).

2.5 The development of Professionalism in other Sports

Ryan says that many sports took the leap to professionalism in the last century or earlier – cricket from the eighteenth century, soccer, rugby league, baseball, basketball and American Football during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century (Ryan, 1995). In the USA, most elite athletes in team sports such as football, basketball, baseball, ice-hockey and soccer, as well as in individual sports such as boxing, bowling, golf, tennis and horse racing are professionals since 1980 (Lobmeyer & Weidinger, 1992). While athletics, gymnastics and swimming were also recognised as amateur sports, the reality is that several athletes were professional. In the main, sport has shifted from a pastime to a business over the past two decades (Adcroft & Teckman, 2009). It is worth looking at the dynamic in boxing, particularly in Cuba where amateur rules still apply, and rugby given its relative recent conversion to professionalism to see if there are any lessons for the GAA?

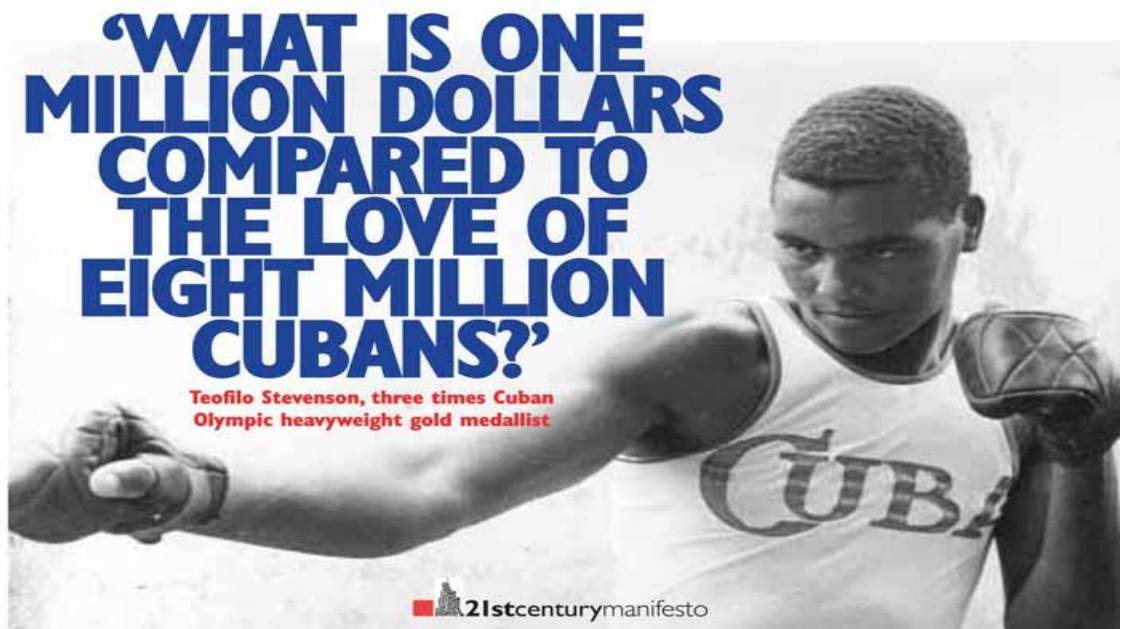
2.5.1 Boxing – Amateur or Professional?

The parallels between the GAA and boxing, specifically the situation which exists within Cuban boxing, are interesting.

Cuban boxers have been the most successful in the history of amateur boxing. The country has won 32 Olympic boxing gold medals since 1972, more than any other country, despite boycotting the 1984 and 1988 Olympics (McGuigan, 2013).

In 1962, professional boxing in Cuba was banned by Fidel Castro because he viewed it as corrupt (McGuigan, 2013). Castro said as recently as 2005, *"In our eyes, sport is not just another instrument of the market ... nor of profit for promoters, agents and all manner of parasites that feed off the athlete's hard work"* (France-Presse, 2013)

As a result of the ban, successful amateur boxers are seen as superstars in Cuba. In a country where resources are limited, good boxers are trained and educated and their families are well looked after. However it is becoming more difficult for Cuban boxers to follow the example of three time Olympic champion Teofilo Stevenson. He famously turned down the opportunity to become professional and earn a million dollars by fighting Muhammad Ali (McGuigan, 2013). He became an international standard bearer of the left with his eloquent declaration: *"What is one million dollar's compared to the love of eight million Cubans?"* (Mitchell, 2012)



Source: 21centurymanifesto.wordpress.com

If fighters want to pursue their dream of becoming world champion, they need to turn professional so have to make the heart-breaking decision to defect from Cuba. One such example is Cuban Boxer Guillermo Rigondeaux who defected in 2009. His decision has been vindicated by his success as a professional. Rigondeaux, who had an amateur record of nearly 400 fights, won the bantamweight gold medal in the 2000 and 2004 Olympics. He has enjoyed terrific success since turning professional and is the current WBA Super-bantamweight World Champion (McGuigan, 2013).

The lure of the dollar is proving too tempting for Cuban boxers as Cuba's amateur boxing system endures a steady trickle of defections. Since 1974, several boxers have

defected. At least half a dozen are currently prominent in the professional game (Mitchell, 2012). Low wages, decaying facilities and the lack of opportunities for athletes to test themselves against the best fighters on the professional circuit have all contributed to a long, slow decline of the sport (France-Presse, 2013).

As a result, Cuba is on verge of reducing the monopoly of amateur boxing by joining a semi-pro league in which athletes are paid by sponsors but retain the Olympic eligibility. (France-Presse, 2013).

This would offer Cuban boxers a chance to earn more money, gain more exposure in high-profile competitions and help stop the flow of defections that has robbed the country of Olympic medals in recent years. Fighters would be able to earn between \$1,000 to \$3,000 a month plus bonuses (France-Presse, 2013). This represents a big raise for Cuban fighters, the most successful of whom collect \$100-\$300 a month after winning Olympic or world medals. Others earn an amount closer to the national average salary of around \$20 per month (France-Presse, 2013).

It will be exciting to see what happens over the next few years in Cuba. The parallel with the GAA is interesting because while the two sports remain amateur for different reasons, they are both at somewhat at a crossroads and decisions taken in the near future will have far reaching consequences for changes in each sport for many years to come.

2.5.2 Rugby – Is Professionalism the answer?

Until the mid-90's rugby was seen as one of the last bastions of amateurism in the world of sport. The 1886 edict of rugby, "*no player shall profit materially from participation in the game*" became impossible to uphold as demands on elite players became too arduous (Ryan, 1995). More and more rugby players began accepting contracts with the professional code of rugby league or began accepting under the counter payments, particularly in continental Europe.

The Rugby Football Union (RFU) in England held out against professionalism for as long as possible as it was the wish of the majority in the game (Ryan, 1995). In some cases

almost 100 years of institutionalised amateur practice was being brought to an end (O'Brien & Slack, 1999). However amateurism was a hollow phrase in France, Italy and Japan where there was a huge influx of foreign players.

In June 1995, the Rugby Unions of New Zealand, Australia and South Africa signed a US\$500m contract with Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation (Ryan, 1995). Under pressure, the International Rugby Football Union (IRFU) announced that the principals upon which the game had been founded were to be repealed in August 1995. It was forced to make changes to its amateur status as players could now openly receive financial remuneration for their services to the game (Skinner, et al., 1999).

According to Richards the move to professionalism resulted in a major upheaval in English rugby (Richards, 1996). Van Esbeck said about professionalism "*it would put intolerable pressure on clubs and unions*" and that it "*would take several years for rugby to come to terms with the new order...*" (Van Esbeck, 1999).

Van Esbeck's claim is borne out by the following:

- In 2003/04 financial pressures in Wales led to restructuring in a number of clubs.
- Bitter disputes erupted between the RFU and the leading clubs over the release of players to play for the England Team and over the division of television revenues (Hogan, et al., 2011).
- In recent years a number of French clubs have experienced financial difficulties. Bourgoin only avoided bankruptcy in 2009 as players agreed to wage cuts, Brive had to cut their wage bill by 40% and Montauban were relegated in 2009/10 after filing for bankruptcy (Hogan, et al., 2011).
- Recently the future of the Heineken Cup was in doubt due to rows over money between the competing nations (Kitson, 2013).

Financial data is available in respect of the French Top 14 and the English Premiership. Table 4 compares the financial performance of the two leagues in the 2009/10 season (Hogan, et al., 2012). This is disturbing because after almost fifteen years of professionalism rugby, the game is still struggling financially. Only two clubs, Leicester and Northampton, recorded an operating profit in these years (Hogan, et al., 2012).

Aggregate Financial Data for Top 14 and Premiership Clubs 2009/10

	French Top 14 (€'m)	English Premiership (€'m)
Total Revenue	243	120-130
Operating Loss	25.4	22.3

Table 4**Source:** DNACG (2011) and Deloitte (2011).

Therefore professionalism is not necessarily the answer for amateur sport in need of change. Again to quote Van Esbeck on rugby, *"We would see much chaos before order was restored"* (Van Esbeck, 1999).

2.6 Change Drivers

The literature provides research on measuring change in organisations. Two studies have been chosen due to their focus on sport. The first of these studies uses Oliver's five forces model to demonstrate change in an English Rugby club, while the second study uses Complexity theory to analyse change in Australian rugby union.

2.6.1 – Oliver's Model

According to O'Brien and Slack, organisations seek to increase their legitimacy and probability of survival by conforming to the appropriate form and environment (O'Brien & Slack, 1999). Structural arrangements begin to resemble or become isomorphic with the wider environment.

Oliver identified five forces which influence the process of deinstitutionalisation – political, functional, social, entropic and inertial pressures (Oliver, 1992). She says the political force comes about as a result of an increase in the number of organisational members whose beliefs are inconsistent with the status quo. Changes in functional necessity occur due to intensified competition for resources. Social pressures occur due to changes in the collective values of beliefs. The interplay of inertia and entropy with these forces and can either slowdown or increase the deinstitutionalisation (Oliver, 1992).

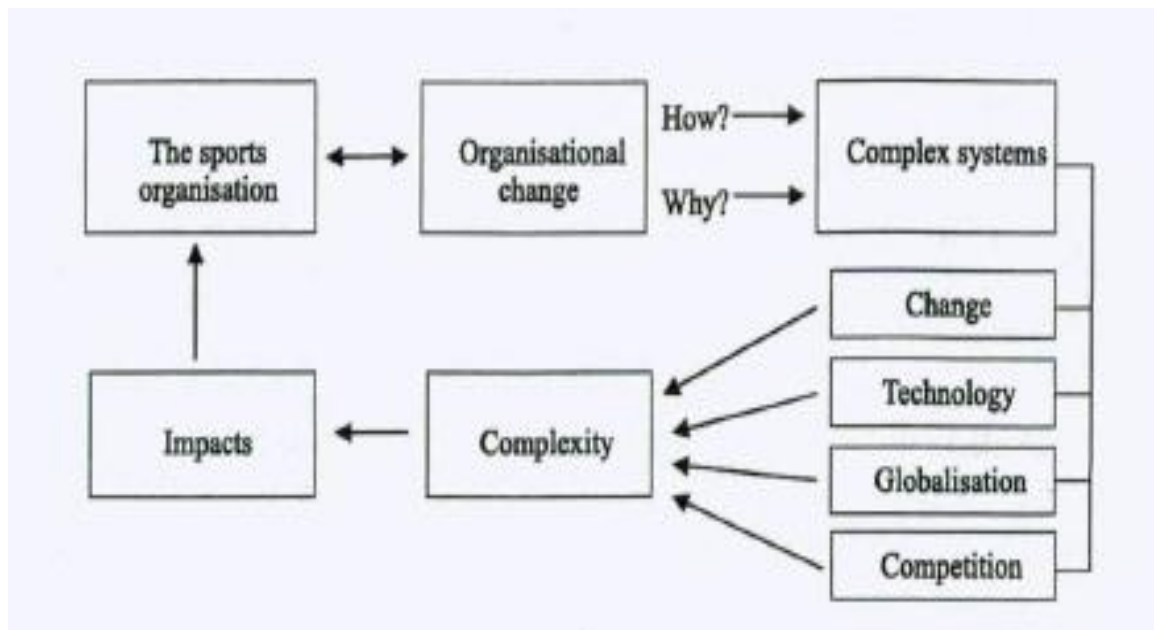
O'Brien and Slack 1999 analysed the conversion of an English Rugby club from amateurism to professionalism. The values and ideals of amateurism had become accepted within the club through customary, historical and traditional forces. They showed how these values were deinstitutionalised using Oliver's model. They suggest that a change in social consensus and the development of new values and ideals are necessary if a club is to develop an appropriate fit with its new environment (O'Brien & Slack, 1999).

In a similar way, Huber, Sutcliffe, Miller and Glick suggest that organisations must attain and maintain a satisfactory fit with their environment to ensure future success (O'Brien & Slack, 1999). Kikulis, Slack and Hinings found that institutionally specific organisations create their own set of values, rules, myths, and symbols, which strongly influence the way they respond to the demand of new environmental conditions (O'Brien & Slack, 1999). They then went beyond the club, focusing on the governing body, Queensland Rugby Union who are responsible for overseeing the development of rugby union in the region. They say change has to occur at all levels, not just at the top but dialogically, i.e. dialog about nature and purpose of the organisation, new possibilities for change, and the issues that expose the process for change.

In summary, O'Brien et al say it is how the political, functional and social forces in organisations react to environmental conditions that causes change throughout organisations.

2.6.2 Complexity Theory

A study carried out by Researchers at the University of Western Sydney used Complexity theory to investigate ongoing change in Australian rugby union, in particular the "how" and "why" of organisations change (O'Shea, et al., 2013). They found that in an age of growing commercialisation there is increasing pressure on sports organisations to compete with other sports and entertainment options. The pressure is felt in terms of financial stability, labour market issues and increasing marketplace rivalry. The researchers looked at the Complexity theory characteristics of change, technology, globalisation, and competition, illustrated below:

Complexity theory characteristics**Figure 4****Source:** (O'Shea, et al., 2013)

It was found that micro level components within these four characteristics contribute emergent phenomena which impact on organisations. Tangible examples of the phenomena from Australian rugby are outlined below:

Change

- A need to instil interest in sport among a wider audience.
- A need to make the sport appealing, entertaining and less predictable to fans.
- A requirement for financial stability.

Competition

- Highly contested and congested sports environment.
- Competition from other regions raising the bar in terms of audience requirements.
- Competition from other more popular sports for limited playing pool.

Globalisation

- Can benefit some sports like rugby, i.e. existing product to other markets. It is more difficult for sports such as Australian Rules which is trying to enter a market or start from scratch.
- TV broadcasting is now truly global, reaching 200 countries.

Technology

- New ideas such as pay TV, big screen plaza TV's helps ease of consumption for the consumer and flexibility.
- For satellite fans, geographic location doesn't matter.
- Social media, club websites, face book, twitter, and smart phones allow fans to verbally display thoughts so reactions are instantaneous.

Overall the study found that to continue operating in rapidly evolving environment, organisations have to co-evolve and adapt. They must embrace change, competition, globalisation and technology and maximise opportunities in order to benefit and achieve long term sustainability.

2.7 Key issues

The review of the literature has prompted the following key issues/questions:

- The GAA is 130 years old and has developed a strong bond with the Irish people.
- The GAA remains an amateur organisation but amateurism is difficult to sustain, especially when there is evidence of payments to managers.
- It is difficult for amateur players to maintain their determination and focus given the opportunities in professional sport despite Maslow's theory that intrinsic motives are more powerful than extrinsic motives.
- Sport is increasingly becoming solely a form of entertainment with the main focus being money. Even the Olympics are largely professional.
- Whilst most well-known sports have become professional, it has not been without difficulty.
- The drivers of change in sports organisations include political, functional, social, technical, competitive and global forces.

3. Research Question

The current position of the GAA as an amateur sporting organisation provides the major case study for the research. The research objective is to examine the effect of professionalism on the amateur ethos of the GAA? This research will focus on the key issues arising out of the Literature Review.

As outlined in the last section, there are questions and issues to be addressed. In addition there is a scarcity of academic writing in this area, so the opinions of sports writers and journalists need to be tested first hand. The major benefit of this research is that it does just that, the study responds to a gap in the literature.

Moynihan describes the GAA as either a vast, selfless family of likeminded individuals all working together for the greater good of the association as a whole or an organisation under a veil of “shamateurism” and hypocrisy (Moynihan, 2013). Which is it? The answer will hopefully be found in the course of the research.

This research will review some of the common themes and the backdrop for professionalism, namely the cultural status of the GAA and parallels with other sports. Over the past few years there has been much commentary in the media regarding pay for play for GAA players. However the commentary has been a critique of the Amateur status of the GAA rather than an analysis of a professional form of the GAA. The effect that professionalism would have on the GAA needs to be analysed, regardless of whether it is practical or not.

Taking into account the aforementioned, the following research objective and sub-objectives are designed to guide the study through to completion.

Primary Objective - Examine the effect the introduction of professionalism is having on the amateur ethos of the GAA?

Sub-Objectives:

1. To identify the drivers of change for the introduction of professionalism in the GAA? Some of the drivers of change in sports organisations have been identified as political, functional, social, technical, competitive and global forces. How do these drivers impact the GAA?
2. To identify obstacles to the introduction of professionalism in the GAA? There are financial and cultural impediments to professionalism. What are they? Can they be overcome?
3. To explore the collective appetite for the introduction of professionalism amongst the players and supporters? While recent amateur status reports have indicated there is no demand for a professional game, does the existence of “shamateurism” change this? What are the entropic and inertial forces?
4. To determine if extrinsic motives will become more important than intrinsic motives to the players if professionalism is introduced to the GAA? Maslow’s Hierarchy was used to outline amateur player’s motives in Section 2. Would ego or esteem become new motives?
5. To determine the effect of the introduction of professionalism on the community-parish-club relationship? Section 2 outlined the bond the GAA has developed with Irish people and its influence over parishes and communities throughout the country. Would professionalism affect the voluntary activities that are carried out, the fund-raisers and the support of the community on match day? Would it ruin the relationship between the GAA and the people in the wider environment being the supporters, volunteers, and general public? Would there be chaos?

4. Research Method

This section examines the research philosophy, the research method chosen, the rationale behind this choice and how the study was conducted.

4.1 Research Philosophy

Writers such as Guba and Lincoln argue that questions about research methods are of secondary importance when compared to questions about which paradigm is applicable to the research (Saunders, et al., 2012). The research philosophy adopted illustrates the way in which the researcher views the world (Saunders, et al., 2012).

Consideration needs to be given to the three main ways of thinking about research philosophy, being ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of social phenomena as entities (Saunders, et al., 2012). Ontology can be divided into objectivism and subjectivism (Saunders, et al., 2012). Objectivism represents the position that social entities exist in reality to social actors whereas subjectivism holds that social phenomena are created from perceptions and the consequent actions of social actors (Saunders, et al., 2012). This research philosophy is subjective by nature as it attempts to understand issues by analysing the views of the different cases on the research subject.

Epistemology concerns what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a field of study (Saunders, et al., 2012). Epistemology has three distinct positions, positivism, realism, and interpretivism. Positivism adopts the stance of the natural scientist which is that only phenomena that one can observe will lead to the production of credible data or law like generalisations (Saunders, et al., 2012). Realism contends that whatever the senses show us as reality is the truth; objects exist independently of the human mind (Saunders, et al., 2012). Interpretivism emphasises the difference between conducting research on people rather than objects (Saunders, et al., 2012). This study adopts an interpretivist perspective by entering the social world of the research subjects to understand the world from their point of view (Saunders, et al., 2012).

Axiology is a branch of philosophy that studies judgements about the role of value or the process of social enquiry (Saunders, et al., 2012). Heron explains that researchers can articulate their values as a basis for making judgements about the research they conduct and how they go about it, demonstrating an axiological skill (Saunders, et al., 2012). Researchers who hold this philosophy would be better off conducting interviews as part of their research because they feel they will be able to gain more insight to the subject opinions. This is particularly relevant to this research topic as the researcher will conduct interviews as part of their research in order to get the values and opinions of cases.

Lastly the approach to the study is more inductive than deductive in nature; there is no pre-formed theory, at least at the beginning of the analysis (Horn, 2009). A topic on which there is a wealth of literature to base a theoretical framework on lends itself to deduction, whereas a topic with little existing literature may be more suited to work on an inductive basis (Saunders, et al., 2012).

4.2 Research Method

It is important to determine if the research undertaken is best served by using quantitative or qualitative research. Saunders et al (2009) state there are three major differences between the two (Saunders, et al., 2012):

- (a) Quantitative data is based on meanings derived from numbers while qualitative data is based on meanings expressed through words.
- (b) Quantitative results are collected in numerical data while qualitative results are collected in non-standardised data.
- (c) Quantitative analysis is conducted through the use of diagrams and statistics while qualitative analysis is conducted through the use of conceptualisation.

The outputs from qualitative research tend to be rich accounts of participants views whereas quantitative research collects predominantly numerical data (Horn, 2009). In order to meet the objectives of this research, the author required opinions from cases involved at the heart of the issues, namely those within the GAA. For that reason, qualitative research was undertaken. Qualitative research is often used when the area being researched is not well defined or understood by current theory or research (Saunders, et al., 2012). A point made earlier in the report and indeed one of the reasons for the research topic being chosen in the first place is that much of the current literature on the topic is not of an academic nature. Therefore qualitative research is well suited for this purpose.

4.3 Data Collection Method

There are myriad possible methods than can be used in research for gathering data (Horn, 2009). The main methods include questionnaires, interviews, observation or case study analysis.

Questionnaires are an efficient way of collecting responses, especially web-based questions as they are relatively easy to complete (Horn, 2009). On the other hand it is harder to “produce a good questionnaire than you might think” (Saunders, et al., 2012). Other drawbacks with questionnaires are:

- The number of returns can be comparatively small, with attrition rates of between 66% & 75% not uncommon with postal questionnaires (Horn, 2009).
- Cases cannot get personal guidance on what a particular question means in relation to the study so might therefore give an inappropriate answer.

Questionnaires work best with standardised questions that will be interpreted in the same way by all cases (Saunders, et al., 2012).

Interviews may be structured, informal or somewhere in between, i.e. semi-structured and can be conducted on a one to one basis or in a group. Standardised interviews are normally used to gather data which is subject to quantitative analysis, whereas non-standardised interviews are used to gather data which is analysed qualitatively (Saunders, et al., 2012). The use of interviews ensures a deep understanding of the

attitudes and opinions of participants and in addition they generally get good response rates and are suited to complex issues (Barriball & While, 1994). According to Barriball & While, interviews as a method of data collection provide advantages such as:

1. They provide an opportunity to evaluate the validity of case's answers by observing non-verbal indicators.
2. They ensure the case is unable to receive assistance from others while formulating response.
3. Face to face contact with the researcher can motivate cases to participate who would otherwise not bother.
4. They allow the case time and scope to talk.
5. They help to build rapport and are thus less intrusive to those being interviewed as two-way communication is encouraged.

Observation is useful for research questions concerned with what people do, their behaviour, be it participant or structured observation (Saunders, et al., 2012). They are often conducted over long periods of time. Participants can be aware they are being observed or the research can be unobtrusive, whereby participants are unaware they are being observed (Horn, 2009). Where participants are aware they are being observed, the "observation effect" can result, which is non-typical behaviour due to the fact the participants know they are being observed. In unobtrusive observations, there is an important ethical dimension's to be considered (Horn, 2009).

According to Yin, the case study is *"An empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g. a case), set within its real world context – especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and contest are not clearly evident"* (Yin, 2012). According to Eisenhardt, the method is particularly well suited to new research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2010) or can add strength to what is already known through previous research (Soy, 1997).

The case study is an ideal method for asking the same questions to a number of participants and comparing them with each other to draw conclusions (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2010). It is also good for asking the "Why?" and "How?" questions (Yin,

2012). In a dissertation context, case studies most often involve research into a low number of cases that provide “rich”, thick and detailed data” relating to the area under study (Horn, 2009). It allows multiple perspectives of phenomena to be considered (Horn, 2009). For this reason the research study was implemented by way of a case study analysis.

Case study research nevertheless has not received widespread recognition as a method of choice. Some see its use limited to a prelude or exploratory phase for using other social science methods and question its credibility because it lacks rigor or has little basis for scientific generalisation (Yin, 2012). When case studies are done poorly, these and other challenges can come together in a negative way against the method.

In contrast, contemporary case study research calls for meeting these challenges by using more systematic data collection and analysis procedures with findings generalised to theoretical positions and not the population (Yin, 2012).

4.4 How the study was conducted

Case study research is not limited to a single source of data, as in the use of questionnaires for carrying out a survey. Common sources of evidence can include some of the other methods, i.e. direct observation, interviews, archival records, documents, and participant observation (Yin, 2012).

Case study research designs have not been codified (Yin, 2012) but in this study the following six step approach advocated by Soy was used (Soy, 1997):

1. Determine and define the research questions.
2. Select the cases.
3. Prepare to collect the data.
4. Collect data in the field
5. Evaluate and analyse the data. Outlined in section 6 of the Dissertation.
6. Prepare the findings. Outlined in section 5 of the Dissertation.

4.4.1 Determine and define the research questions.

Section 3 outlined the general research objective and sub-objectives. These sub-objectives were broken down further into questions which are summarised in Appendix 5. These questions were put to all of the cases to get their opinions on the various issues.

4.4.2 Select the cases

According to Baxter & Jack, the case is the unit of analysis and in this study the cases were individuals associated with the GAA (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The study used what Yin terms as a multiple case study (Yin, 2012). This enabled the researcher to explore differences within and between cases. It was important the cases were chosen carefully so comparisons and contrasts could be drawn (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Cases might be selected because they are highly effective, not effective, representative, typical or of special interest (Neale, et al., 2006). This case study sought to identify and question cases on account of their positions, experience, and individual viewpoint. The cases consisted of GAA players, officials, coaches, GPA, and other sports people who are at the heart of the research issues. A purposive sample was used to choose key cases based on the researcher's judgement (Tongco, 2007). This sample is outlined below:

Case Sample

Name	Brief Background
Case 1	Current Inter-county footballer
Case 2	Current Inter-county footballer
Case 3	Current Inter-county hurler
Case 4	Former Inter-county footballer
Case 5	Former Inter-county hurler
Case 6	Current Club footballer
Case 7	Current Club football manager
Case 8	Current Club hurling manager
Case 9	Former International Rugby player

Case 10	GPA Official
Case 11	Sports writer

Table 5

There is no upper or lower limit with regard to the number of cases included in the study (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2010). Because sampling logic is not used, typical criteria regarding sampling size is irrelevant (Yin, 2012). The number of cases was determined by the researcher, i.e. when it was felt all the relevant participants had been approached. The researcher was aided by advice from the participants in this regard (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2010). The initial list of cases was expanded on a snowball basis with other knowledgeable participants volunteered based on suggestions from cases until data saturation was reached, i.e. until the additional data collected provided limited, if any new information.

4.4.3 Prepare to collect the data

As outlined above the researcher identified the cases, prepared e-mails of introduction to these cases and established the rules of confidentiality, i.e. each were asked if they wished to keep their identity hidden? Most of the cases had no issue with confidentiality but two did. For that reason the author decided to keep all cases confidential. In addition the cases were asked if they had any issue with the interviews being recorded. None of them had an issue with this.

Due to the fact that the GAA season is probably at its busiest in the months of June and July when the cases were approached, completing some of the interviews proved tricky. Two of the cases identified by the author could not provide the time for an interview, so two more were chosen instead and access was secured with the help of friends within the game.

In order to anticipate problems, the researcher selected a pilot participant and conducted a test interview to improve technique and style of questioning. This ensured any problematic areas could be uncovered and corrected (Soy, 1997) and the interviewer had the opportunity to get comfortable with the technique prior to tackling the cases.

4.4.4 Collecting data in the field

The study involved recorded interviews to ensure:

- (a) An identical replication of the contents of each interview remained available (Yin, 2012).
- (b) The interviewer was able to focus on the conversation rather than taking notes (Yin, 2012).

As outlined earlier, the interviews were carried out in June and July 2014 and determined by the time that suited the cases. The cases were initially contacted by phone and by e-mail. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. Access to the cases was not a problem as the interviewer is involved with the GAA at a junior coaching level and has friends in the game.

The main objective for the researcher was to find out the cases perspective on the issues on one hand.

Semi-structured interviews were the means of data collection. These types of interviews are well suited for the exploration of the opinions of cases regarding complex issues and enable probing and clarification of answers rather than generalisations (Biggam, 2008). As it turned out, the interviews were more like guided conversations, all very fluid rather than rigid (Yin, 2012). The flexible format permitted open-ended interviews to reveal how the cases thought about situations, not just to provide answers to the researcher's specific questions.

The research questions in Appendix 5 were used as an interview guide (Yin, 2012). The majority of these questions were asked in every interview. Each of the 11 interviews were recorded on the author's mobile phone and then typed out in full. A sample interview script with answers is outlined in Appendix 6. The summary findings from all of the interviews are outlined in Section 5.

4.5 Ethics, strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of the research.

4.5.1 Ethics

Each of the cases was given a clear understanding of the research in advance of the study setting out the purpose of the study, why they were selected, the procedures, and how confidentiality would be maintained (Horn, 2009). The data was analysed honestly to ensure the integrity was not damaged (Horn, 2009). All interview recordings were stored on the researcher's phone, which is password protected and soft copy interview transcripts were saved on the researcher's laptop computer which again is password protected.

4.5.2 Strengths

The major strength of this research is the fact that the author is well versed in the research area so has great interest in the GAA and had good access to information and the relevant people in the GAA. As a result of this the author didn't suffer from fatigue or lack of interest at any stage. Hopefully this is demonstrated in the research.

4.5.3 Weaknesses

One weakness of the research has to be around validity. Qualitative research by its nature doesn't make use of statistical methods so reliability is open to question? The research is based on the opinion of the cases, therefore generalisations or misinterpretation of evidence can affect the results achieved. To provide comfort on this point, firstly all of the interviews were recorded so there is a permanent record to clarify any ambiguity and secondly the author represented findings to some of the cases by e-mail to ensure a correct interpretation of responses was recorded (Horn, 2009).

4.5.4 Limiting factors

The limiting factors are fourfold:

- (1) Dependency on the skill of the interviewer and articulacy of the cases. This is the first time the interviewer has completed a series of interviews for a research

project. Not surprisingly the researcher does not possess the skills of a seasoned researcher. For example the researcher may have given unconscious signals to guide some of the cases (Saunders, et al., 2012)?

- (2) Choice of and availability of cases. The researcher did not have unlimited access to the full population of players, ex-players, manager, officials, and other sports people within and outside the GAA. Therefore the researcher was limited to the population available to him based on personal contacts, friends and associates. As outlined earlier, two cases the author wanted to interview were unavailable due to GAA commitments. Whilst the researcher is satisfied with the final case sample, perhaps the findings could have been different had the author access to more people and those who were unavailable due to GAA commitments.
- (3) Again due to the inexperience of the researcher, certain questions may have been left out which may have greatly enhanced the research. The questions chosen helped to answer and achieve the research objectives; however in hindsight there are some questions the author could have asked to make the findings more robust. These are discussed in Section 6 on future research areas.
- (4) Lastly the Research method. Interviews were used solely and the researcher is satisfied this approach worked well. Perhaps the researcher could have used observation to meet some of the objectives. For example, question 2 in Section 5 could have been partly or fully answered by observing and comparing past GAA matches with present matches or visiting some of the training facilities of the inter-county or senior club teams?

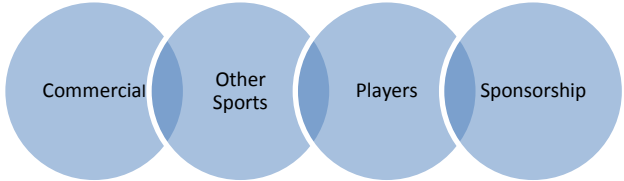

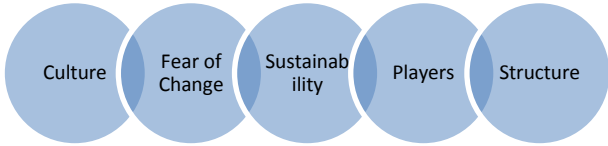
5. Research Findings

This chapter outlines the findings from the research conducted. The findings are set out in a question and answer format. The questions follow from the objectives and the selected narrative from the case interviews form the back-bone of the findings section.

The questions created a natural structure so analysing the data was not difficult. The volume of data was quite large but summarising the data was easy due to a certain amount of repetition. Any data excluded from the paper is retained by the researcher. Both the summary and detailed findings are set out below.

5.1 Summary Findings

A graphical summary of the findings is set out below.

<p>1. What in your view are the factors influencing the introduction of professionalism in the GAA?</p>	
<p>2. Do you feel the demand on GAA players has changed over the past 10 years? Are we already at a professional level without the financial recognition?</p>	<p>Demands changed in 10 years?</p> <p> yes 100%</p>
<p>3. What are the obstacles to the introduction of professionalism in the GAA?</p>	

4. Should GAA players be paid for playing? What would be a reasonable salary for a GAA player to become professional? Do you feel this is realistically achievable and sustainable?

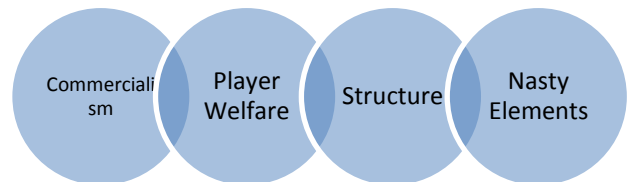
Should GAA players be paid?



5. What are the positive influences of professionalism on sport in general?



6. What are the negative influences of professionalism on sport?



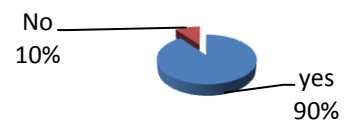
7. Would professionalism improve the quality of life for GAA players?

Improve Quality of Life?

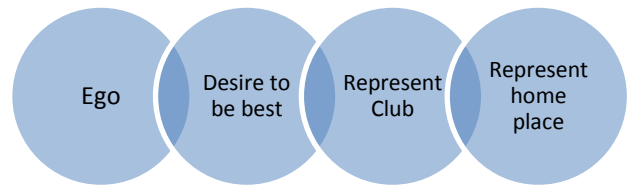


8. Would professionalism improve the performance of GAA players?

Improve performance?



9. What motivates GAA players to play the game at the highest level?



10. Would this change with the introduction of professionalism? If so, how?

Change with professionalism?



11. What effect would professionalism have on the relationship/bond between the GAA and the community?

Effect on bond with GAA?



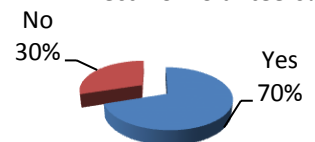
12. Would it affect the grass roots support?

Affect Grass Roots?



13. Would it affect the number of volunteers at club level (why should we do it for free if they get paid attitude)?

Affect No. volunteers?



5.2 Detailed Findings

The detailed findings with selected narrative from the case interviews are set out below.

1. What in your view are the factors influencing the introduction of professionalism in the GAA?

One case, an official in the GAA gave a “potted history” of the game and where it has got to in order to explain professionalism and what it is in the context of the GAA?

“In the 1980’s, live television came in. There was a very significant event when Dublin played Meath in the four game series. It was the first live game shown on a Saturday. Sponsors went on jerseys, there was a certain Rubicon crossed. The players were wearing sponsors logos on their jerseys, sponsorship deals were being struck around the championships and live television broadcast rights were being sold. The game was professionalised but the players were being harnessed commercially. The laws or rules around the amateur status were relaxed over 10 years ago so players were able to earn money from endorsements. Government funding was introduced in 2007, primarily because there was tax concession for professional Irish sports people. The GAA players again, because they were amateur were doubly exploited. They weren’t getting anything at all. And you had commercial entities starting to circle and work within the GAA and there was this idea that because the GAA player was amateur, they would do anything for nothing”.

“While there was live television, then the GAA introduced the back door, the qualifiers so there were more games. They’re all the factors that contributed to Professionalism becoming an issue within the game or with the potential for players to maybe look for payment”.

Some of the other cases saw the commercial element being the main driver. One case, a club manager summed up the situation at club level;

“The main factors are the costs of preparing teams. Everybody wants to win no matter if it’s club or county. To prepare an inter-county team requires huge work from training to analysis, from medical to dietician and it all costs money. So the more money clubs and county boards need the more commercial they have to become so they are pushed to be more professional and in time it will probably lead to a semi-professional set up.”

On a similar commercial theme, but at a more general level, two other cases commented;

“I think the GAA are becoming a more commercial brand and cash orientated organisation which is going from strength to strength. The recent Sky Deal, although it is apparently at the same level as TV3 adds a new more commercial element to the GAA which could lead to more lucrative sponsorship for the GAA. They are also involved

in events such as concerts for Garth Brooks and One Direction which again is purely to increase revenue for the organisation”.

“TV rights are a significant source of income for GAA – this is driving a more commercial approach/ethos comparable to professional organisations”.

Competition from other sports was also put forward as a reason by another case;

“Other sports that have moved to professional status e.g. rugby. The GAA will need to keep pace to attract /retain players”.

The demands from players were put forward by two cases as a factor influencing the introduction of professionalism. Ironically none were players;

“Considering the demands on top class players in terms of training and performance, there is an expectation of some reward. Players are effectively putting careers on hold while in the 20-30 age period. Many are missing out on career opportunities due to the sporting commitment. This may create expectation/demand for some type of reward”.

Player commitment, preparation and loss of earnings – for me the GAA inter county players are now *“full time athletes, playing an amateur game”.*

2. Do you feel the demand on GAA players has changed over the past 10 years? Are we already at a professional level without the financial recognition?

All the cases agreed the demands have increased on players. The responses from two current inter-county players are outlined below:

“Yes most definitely, the demands, dedication, commitment levels, fitness expectations etc. are already up there with any professional sport. Inter county teams all now have teams of professionals e.g. nutritionists, psychologist, physiotherapists etc. Players are now expected to be finely tuned athletes training 4-5 times a week. Some county teams are reported to train twice in one day early morning before work and late evening sessions”.

“Firstly, the training demands on players in relation to how physically demanding it is and how time consuming it is e.g. lads finishing work at 5 and having to travel across the city in rush hour traffic (taking an hour or so) and then only returning home at 21.30 after a hard session and having to get up for work the next day and sometimes spending the day in work physically (sore) and mentally fatigued from the session the night before. This is not to mention having to look after kids/family/household duties, etc. You hear of many young players being ‘sorted out’ with jobs that will be relatively easy going in order to give them the best chance of being able to play and train to the best of their ability”.

“Yes. To reference a quote from Johnny Pilkington of the Offaly 1998 team, in preparation for the All Ireland final he said how players were talking it seriously, “Some

of the lads have been off the beer since Tuesday". In the modern game, this is only one of the sacrifices made by players. Training can sometimes be 6 times a week, or twice in one day and this is on top of a 40 hour weeks work potentially".

Two other cases thought the level of professionalism had been reached;

"Performance levels of players appear to be at or beyond a professional standard".

"You have quasi-professionalism of the game at county level, and the amateur aspect of the game everywhere else".

Another case, a current club manager said these standards are necessary to retain talent;

"The cost of preparing inter-county teams is expensive particularly when you include development squads, minors and U21's. If you don't spend the money and prepare them properly, standards will drop and you will lose the best talent. You need to put money in preparing players to reach the standards they aspire to. That's what drives the success of the games".

Another case, a club manager put this in monetary terms;

"The level of investment in team preparation in counties is an indicator also. Tipp exceeded €1m p.a. in recent years on team preparation".

In contrast another current inter-county player thought the standards have been pushed too far;

"Personally I believe that the GAA culture has got carried away with teams believing that that the only way they can compete is by training harder, longer and more often than other teams in the country. This leads to a huge demand on the players with many managers expecting us to train 10 months a year 5 days a week with little or no thanks".

"The training which I have seen in the past few years is becoming more and more demanding. GAA teams now train probably harder than Premiership football teams. As an inter-county footballer my week would involve training Tue, Thurs and Sat, playing a match on Sunday and then going to the gym / yoga every other day. A lot of players feel that training like this is almost becoming like a job. This would lead to my belief that players need to either start getting paid to help them commit to this training or else that you will see a lot of players retiring early as they can't keep this up".

Furthermore two cases went on to give examples which sum it up for them;

"Shay Given recently watched an inter-county training session and believed that we train harder than any team he has ever seen before and are much fitter and stronger athletes. Compare an inter-county team to a Championship football team. If we train harder than they do, almost as often and probably for roughly the same amount of the

year how can you justify the difference in salary, i.e. £40k for an average Championship player and €0 for every inter-county player”.

“Brian O’Driscoll in an interview said he once attended a Dublin / Donegal game and spoke to a number of the players in the players’ lounge after. He couldn’t believe that the majority of the players were driving home to Donegal that evening and heading into work the next day. He explained that if he had played a game on the Sunday, he wouldn’t be expected back at training until the Tuesday, and would have a full day of recovery on the Monday. Meanwhile, these amateur athletes were getting up early the next morning to attend work – anytime off would be at their own expense”.

According to some of the cases, the consequences of these changes range from a change in team demographics to higher expectations of fans and media as outlined below:

“.....the time spent training and more importantly in recovery is huge....a lot of inter-county teams have gotten younger as older lads can’t commit as much time”.

“When you got to an inter-county championship game now, supporters and pundits expect to see top quality football / hurling. If they don’t they will give out about the lack of effort or ability in many cases”.

“Another huge factor which needs to be taken into consideration now is that the amount of pressure which is put on GAA players by fans shouting abuse at the players but also the press. I have seen various examples..... Where local media have criticised players and managers quite harshly. Players are recognised in nightclubs and gone are the days where a GAA player to go to the local bar for a pint”.

3. What are the obstacles to the introduction of professionalism in the GAA?

The obstacles put forward by the cases include culture, fear of change, sustainability/scale, players themselves and structure.

The responses of the various participants are outlined below.

Culture

“...would represent a massive cultural change, breaking from the volunteer / amateur ethos”.

“I think there is still many wanting the GAA to stay as an amateur organisation as they believe it has certain values and makes the organisation unique etc.”

“Many people place great value on the amateur status of the GAA and the thoughts of players getting paid would cause serious divides. For it to work, the GAA needs everyone to be on board”.

".....so in terms of the obstacles, scale, tradition, the ethos and strength of that Corinthian spirit".

Fear of change

"Fears that it may turn out like the English football league, greedy badly behaved players, clubs with no real identity or sense of belonging, the richest teams becoming the most successful etc."

"A certain lack of willingness from the GAA to want to take care of players (better insurance, expenses etc.) that could be perceived as greed?"

"Obstacles include the fear of becoming a commercialized sport. There was uproar in the early 90s when the GAA allowed sponsors on the front of jerseys that was a relatively small change compared to this. GAA sees itself as a family run organisation and a change to professionalism would be everything that is against the GAA. It would be against the deep rooted culture of the GAA. However, the Sky deal is another example, like sponsoring jerseys 20 years ago of the GAA modernizing".

Sustainability / scale

"Are we living in a big enough country to sustain any professional sports played purely on the island? The rugby teams here rely on revenue from European matches and big TV deals. We might not have a large enough pool of supporters to make it economically sustainable".

"A large obstacle would be having sufficient revenue to fund this. The way the GAA is structured, there are only really a few occasions a year when you get more than 40k – 50k people at a match".

"Currently, as I understand it, the GAA return apparently approx. 80% of the revenue back out to the clubs around the country. Professionalism would impact that due to funding"

"There is not enough money to make it professional in 32 counties and in two sports. It's just not on. County Boards are struggling to stay financially viable as it is and couldn't afford to pay the costs".

"Sustainability throughout the year is a big issue. The All Ireland series and the marquee events attract the big crowds, thousands to Croke Park. In winter and spring there is no appetite for the matches and the attendances are a token, i.e. in the 100's rather than 1,000's".

"Is there strong enough revenue that is not going to then drain the capital, but the capita reserves can be maintained and can generate regular recurring income to pay the players and not actually touch the capita reserve?"

"County Boards are already in debt – some counties could not afford to pay players. Begs the question of who would pay the players"?

Players themselves

"I am a player and I am opposed to professionalising the GAA, although I am unsure of what my peers would think. The only way I see it being professionalised is if players demand it. I do not see anyone else who would actively seek it".

Finally structure

"Likely to be confined to an elite group due to availability of funding".

"A large obstacle would be how the payments were actually structured. Do the best players on the best teams get the most money? If that was the case we would further increase the difference in quality between top teams and weaker teams. On the other hand is it fair that the Dubs who fill Croke several times a year would get the same as the Clare Footballers who would struggle to get more than a thousand at a game. These are the questions which would cause large obstacles".

"...it would bring imbalance to the GAA, you would be left with a few big teams and all of the others looking to be big. This would go against everything the GAA stands for.

"...players would look for a level playing field i.e. is a Leitrim footballer entitled to the same pay as a Dublin or Kerry footballer? If there is not a level playing field then this could open up a transfer market as the stronger players in the so called weaker counties, the best players in Leitrim for example would seek transfers to the stronger counties. If a transfer market developed, this would go against the ethos of the GAA that you play for your club and your county. The stronger counties could also claim that they are entitled to a greater share of TV, merchandise or sponsorship revenue that would generated from their players if they turned professional. This would again create a large gap between the top 6/7 counties and the rest of the country"

4. Should GAA players be paid for playing? What would be a reasonable salary for a GAA player to become professional? Do you feel this is realistically achievable and sustainable?

This question produced some interesting responses. A slim majority of cases believe players shouldn't be paid for playing but some thought they should be given more than they currently get due to the effort involved;

"...payment of some form is definitely needed for our inter-county stars, even an expenses claim procedure would help. If they are out of work due to injuries all loss of

earnings, costs should be covered through better insurance schemes supplied by the GAA F.O.C.”

“Even a small gesture to help them pay their bills or maybe even a monetary contribution to their employer to incentivise them to be more flexible with a player, less/more flexible working hours”.

“...a supplemental earning would be more appropriate to compliment the earnings from the day to day jobs”.

“I believe a salary of c5k - €10k after tax would be a reasonable salary for inter-county players”.

“I would be very interested to see a survey of the jobs which inter county players have now compared to maybe 10 – 15 years ago. It seems that it is becoming harder and harder for GAA players to build a good professional career given the amount of time that they require to put into the GAA. From a personal point of view I know there are less [county]¹ players based outside the county than any time in the past 20 years as the demands on GAA players mean that those based in the county are at a significant advantage. There are exceptions such as the Dublin GAA players who do have many jobs created as Brand ambassadors etc. but for how long will these jobs last after they retire and become less marketable. My point is that do players now need a supplemental income to compensate for the opportunities they may be missing out on due to the time & effort they put into the GAA.

Players also sacrifice time with families, friends, girlfriends etc., this can often cause difficulty in some relationships away from the pitch. If these players did not have to go to work every day as well as train it would allow for more time to build these relationships”.

Another reason put forward for players to receive something is the sense of inequality amongst players over the money the GAA are making;

“...if the GAA continue to act like a growing commercially minded organisation then they should give a share of the surplus directly to the players. Loosely used terms such as “investing in grass roots” are used too often. Ultimately the grass routes will look after itself if the clubs and counties are going well.

“Compare this (the commercial success of the GAA) to the other side, i.e. the product the GAA is selling - inter county football / hurling matches. The players are not seeing any changes from a commercial point of view in terms of payment and lifestyle etc... Granted you have a few players in Dublin and in one or two of the stronger counties who have sponsorship deals but by in large the majority of inter county players have seen no change in their rewards.

¹ Left blank intentionally for confidentiality

"There seems to be an increasing imbalance between the ways the GAA are trying to position themselves as a commercial organisation but at the same time the amateur players are treated like they have always been. Would somebody working for a company be happy to get paid the same salary even if the company was growing and becoming more commercial? If the GAA is a not for profit making organisation then why do they need the likes of Garth Brooks if some of this money does not go into "the product" which they sell and would be nowhere without".

Some progressive ideas were put forward for funding the additional expense;

"Maybe pay teams based on performance, the better the season the better the bonus?"

"I believe that commercially the only possibility would be to pick an elite group of say 12 counties, split the best of the rest into each of these teams and form a super league and hope that attendances would be sufficient to sustain a national professional league".

Some of the cases including past players, a current club player and manager firmly believed players shouldn't be paid anything at all;

"I don't believe players should be paid. We are all amateurs and give our time freely. Being a member of an inter-county panel opens doors for people in their careers and also in getting into university on scholarships etc. There are benefits for them".

"If you paid a panel of 36 a salary of €50k each including PRSI, that's €1.8m plus the costs of paying manager, physio, analysis. No county board could fund that so it's not sustainable."

"No way, it's a privilege to play the game".

Another reason for not paying players is the imbalance it would create;

"They shouldn't be paid because it would be unfair on club players, who make up the majority of players. Inter-county players shouldn't be paid as club players make every bit as much sacrifice as the inter-county players. They have to mind themselves every bit as much as they train 2/3 times a week and can't have a drink at the weekend. Their lives are on hold. There would be uproar if the county players were paid but the club players weren't".

"Another factor is that inter-county players are so well looked after. They are taken care of, their expenses are paid, and they get the best medical support"

Lastly and simply, according to one case it goes against what the GAA stands for;

"...for me this (pay) is not the answer and never will be. The All Ireland Football Championship is built on lads from 32 counties in Ireland getting the chance to play for

their county. This is the foundation on which the sport is built. Compare this to the Premiership in England which is purely built on Money and transfer fees”.

5. What are the positive influences of professionalism on sport in general?

The positive influences of professionalism include better welfare, increase in standards, and it can make the GAA more attractive to outsiders considering playing as outlined below.

Better player welfare was put forward by three cases, including a former player;

“Healthier, happier players with a better quality of life. Possibly longer playing careers by the elite”.

“Players would also have more time to rehab / prehab so this should lead to less injuries and longer playing careers”.

“The level of care and expertise in the game”....“You need this because at the end of your career you don’t want to be in bad shape. If you look at the lads who played in the 70’s, they are ban jacked. How many times did you see a player playing with a white bandage over his knee? In the 80’s, the situation was similar. In the 90’s it improved a bit, players including myself are in good nick. The players now are in better shape again”.....“The days of throwing the big slow lad in at full forward are gone. Professionalism has brought all of this”.

Increase in the standard of play and the games even further;

“Fitter, stronger and faster players who are also very skilful. The skill might increase particularly as many inter county managers concentrate on the physical side of the game as they have a limited timeframe for training at present”.

“So the benefits, I think it makes it better, better trained, better preparation, higher standards, more entertaining game”.

“Enables the elite players to really develop their talent to the pinnacle. They have the time and resources to do this”.

Lastly it would make the game a more attractive proposal for kids or non-players according to three cases;

“More kids might take the game up instead of rugby or soccer as they see a career in it. Also you might even see some foreigners, e.g. Australians coming to play in Ireland”.

“Players at club level would strive to play for their county. Recently Anthony Rainbow of Carlow in an interview claimed he knew 10 players in Carlow who were good enough to play for the county but would not. These players would surely be driven by the financial incentives to line out for their counties”.

6. What are the negative influences of professionalism on sport?

The negative influences of professionalism in sport are many and varied but fall into four main categories, being commercialism, player welfare, structure of the game and introduction of nasty elements.

According to four cases, there are the commercial aspects like the “rich get richer” mentality, rising ticket prices, and sponsors demands;

“The fear of players following the richer clubs/counties for more money, which happens in soccer. The best county/clubs will be the ones with the most money”.

“Player salaries usually have to be found somewhere meaning ticket prices would probably go through the roof”.

“.....more invasive press coverage, sponsors demands, some players are more commercially valuable than others so they get more money which leads to disharmony in the camp”.

“..The minority of players who are motivated solely by money. I do not feel this would be a problem if GAA ever went down this path as the GAA is far more grounded but it is definitely something worth keeping in mind. A player’s motivation should be one of enjoyable and to be successful. Not to cash cheques at the end of the week”.

There are the perceived negative effects on the players, which was put forward by all cases;

“The passion for the club / county where you grew up may diminish as salary will become more of an influence”.

“The honor of winning is somewhat diluted e.g. when compared with the amateur player winning an All-Ireland for their county”.

“The pressure increases on players as they are being paid and people expect them to perform”.

“Players would end up having more money and free time, a dangerous combination. Players could become reliant on this source of income, one injury and they could be finished playing”.

“Kids being left on the scrap heap when they don’t make it”.

“Players being immeasurably remote from their followers due to the large sums they earn”.

Some of the effects are not even known yet;

"The jury is out at the moment because it will take someone like Brian O'Driscoll to be 20 years into retirement to see what the impact has been on him and his personal well-being".

There are the possible negative effects on the structure of the game;

"You would end up with a model similar to the hurling model, a couple of strong counties and the rest would be fodder".

"Intensity of competition could be eroded".

"The game has become sanitised. The art of free taking has never been so important; the free taker is the most important fella on the team now. It used to be the lad who got you the 3 or 4 points from play week in week out, but no longer. Cluxton is one of the top scorers and he is a goal keeper!

Lastly, each of the cases made reference to the nasty aspects to sport like corruption, match fixing, cheating and exploitation by agents.

7. Would professionalism improve the quality of life for GAA players?

There was a full range of responses to this question with opinion firmly divided between cases.

Those who thought professionalism would improve the quality of lives of GAA players did so because it would lessen the current demands of players.

"They have to juggle demands and manage expectations between, employers, clubs, county teams, college etc."

"Due to the intensity and frequency of games most young players are now prone to injuries as they do not have proper rest periods, physiotherapy/ recovery sessions. Professionalism would improve this".

"They could train and recover without having to worry about working and studying".

"Being a professional would take the additional weight off the player's shoulders and allow them to concentrate one on thing at a time"

Those who thought the opposite to be true had compelling reasons for believing this. One case, a current inter-county footballer said;

"No I do not believe it would. I believe that GAA players are already alienated from society, for 9/10 months a year they have little or no social life. There are already serious issues amongst players of gambling addiction and depression. In my opinion this is due to players trying to recreate the thrill of playing GAA off the pitch. By turning

professional we would be increasing these factors whereby players would have even less interaction with society and would seriously struggle with life after playing days”.

This was backed up by with the following from another current player;

“If anything I believe that the sport should be less professionalised whereby players are given more time off every year and have an off season of four months at least to relax and enjoy life. The GAA has become pre occupied with the idea that we should train like professionals to the point that we now train harder than professionals”.

Another case commented on the rugby scene in Ireland to illustrate why professionalism wouldn’t make life much different;

“It dropped its amateur status a decade and a half ago. There are now only four fully professional squads in Ireland, perhaps 120 players making a living from the sport. They are not paid the same rate as our soccer players. The top rugby players in Ireland can make €300-€400k per year. The economics of professional rugby means that even at the top end, rugby players don’t make colossal amounts that top soccer players earn so when they retire they will have to get a job”.

Lastly another case put forward a similar argument;

“I think it would be the same as at present. It has killed the game in club rugby in Ireland and perhaps the Airtricity league. The GAA players wouldn’t be as well treated as they are now. There would be a limited pool of players if it went professional, 28 or 30 maximum. This would have a negative effect. There simply isn’t enough money”.

8. Would professionalism improve the performance of GAA players?

In the main the cases were of the view professionalism would improve performance.

According to one case, a current club manager;

“Based on the rugby experience, the answer is probably although the GAA player performance is already at a very high standard, not sure how much further scope exists”.

Other reasons provided included the fact that, *“players wouldn’t have to hold down jobs to pay bills so could train harder to improve performance”*. As it is, *“the fitness schedules, training programs and commitment players are expected to work in around their work lives is impossible”*.

“More time could be spent coaching the basic skills of the game”. A couple of examples were provided to back this up. In one instance, an inter-county footballer went on a training camp with the county this year, which concentrated on the skills of the game as opposed to pure fitness, *“There was a massive improvement in the quality of the kick passing in one week”*. *I can only imagine what full time training would do?”*

Another positive response from a former rugby player;

"No question, would improve in terms of preparation, skill, performance. It would definitely improve the performance of the GAA. It can't but".

Lastly one case, a current club player said it could improve the performance of the lesser teams;

"I believe the top counties are operating at a professional level and their performances may not increase dramatically. However, I believe the performances of the so called weaker counties would improve as players / management / county boards etc. would financially be able to compete at a higher level".

9. What motivates GAA players to play the game at the highest level?

All cases were in general agreement on this question. The main reason for playing is the "basic desire to be the best". It's about ego, individual motivation. This basic desire/challenge outweighs all else. *"It provides an opportunity to test themselves against the best under intense conditions".*

Pride goes hand in hand with this desire, representing your club and county and the place you grew up in. According to one current inter county player;

"Most sports people just want to get the best out of themselves and enjoy the feeling of doing that and physically pushing themselves to the limit. Furthermore, doing this while playing and having the honour and privilege of representing your club or county is very rewarding. It is also thoroughly enjoyable to be part of a group of players who want to achieve a goal and working together to set out and achieve that common goal".

One former inter-county hurler asks *"What other reason would there be to train on a cold winter night?"*

"The honor attached with playing for county and the lifelong recognition & respect when having won an All-Ireland".

"It differs from other professional sports in that the All Ireland winning captain could be a teammate of yours, or your teacher in school or a colleague. The recognition from playing for your county is immense, the pride in being one of only 15 players at a time who can wear your counties jersey".

10. Would this change with the introduction of professionalism? If so, how?

There was divided opinion on this question. Two cases thought money would become the chief motivator for success, chiefly because *"when you introduce money to any*

situation it always becomes a factor". Furthermore, "player's affiliation to their town/county could become less of a factor while earnings become more of a factor".

Another case said, *"Yes I think the honor/respect aspects would be diluted".*

Yet another thought it would change the experience for players;

"In many ways it would not. But what it would change is the feeling of being honoured to represent your club/county and that is what makes the GAA different to all other sporting associations. The camaraderie of soldiering on the field of play with others from the same community/county is what makes winning so special and if professionalism was introduced transfers would undoubtedly take place meaning that camaraderie would be loss to a great extent. "

Four cases thought it would make no difference. In their view there is no difference between what motivates GAA players and Premiership football players. It's the *"love of the game and the will to succeed"*. Money doesn't come into it. One of the officials quoted John Giles.

"He (JG) said that players take up the game at a young age because they love it, not because they want to be paid. This doesn't change".

A former rugby player commented;

"No, there is something innate and inherent in the sports person that drives them to play from age 7 you know through the under ages were they're not getting paid. It's not that a 12 year old says I want to be Brian O'Driscoll because I want his money. That's too abstract, it's because Brian O'Driscoll is his hero and it's a very, almost primeval innate thing that young players are inspired by the way someone plays, not necessary because I want to be the best paid rugby player in the world so I think that stays with him and all that emotion and pride is there to drive them to represent their country, it's still the same at the moment".

Lastly a current inter county player had a view that it would be positive for the game;

"I feel it would have a positive effect on players as they would not have to move to business hubs for employment, could stay living within their community, could give more back to the community (coaching, mentoring etc.) as more time on their hands".

11. What effect would professionalism have on the relationship/bond between the GAA and the community?

There was divided opinion on this question. Two cases thought it would have very little effect because the GAA is too deeply rooted, especially in a rural context;

"I am coaching with a rural team and we still churn out 20/25 players every Sunday. If the senior team was paid, it wouldn't stop this. People volunteer for the love of the game, to get their kids involved. People are very proud to play in Croke Park".

Another case thought that if anything people might view the GAA as a better organisation for taking care of the people that matter i.e. their players because *"without the players there will be no GAA"*.

Three cases, one a current player thought it would have a big impact on the relationship between the GAA and the community;

"I believe that you would effectively have two separate sports, one professional sport played by the elite and one amateur sport played by everyone else. I believe this would cause divisions and county players would no longer be seen lining out for their local clubs".

"It would fly in the face of all the GAA stands for and would be disrespectful to the thousands of volunteers who do more time consuming and harder work than the players themselves. Those who volunteer to maintain pitches, cook food, make sandwiches, run the club shop, coach kids, etc. etc. etc. would be undermined if players then got paid."

"The GAA is within the fabric of the community. The whole sense of belonging to our club/county regardless of where one travels to. This would gradually deteriorate".

Another case illustrated how the bond would be diminished using rugby as an example;

"I think it would damage it and put a distance between player and community, similar to what happened in rugby. In GAA the man you cheer on Sunday is teaching your kids the next day or delivering your post or is training them. This is not happening in rugby anymore".

Lastly one case, a former inter county hurler said it would depend where the money was coming from? If it was coming from some central pot, i.e. Sky, it would be "happy days" and there would be no effect on the bond between the GAA and the community. However if it was coming from a "levy on teams" it would be a different story, and it would lead to change.

12. Would it affect the grass roots support?

This question produced another split in opinion. Half of the cases agreed it would affect grass roots support. In their view this support would either disappear or go elsewhere;

"I think it would, as you could see a flight to successful teams rather than the local team".

"Yes I believe that the grass roots would no longer support the county teams like they used to. They would see them just like another premiership club in England".

"Young players would still play the game, but they would be looking for fame and fortune rather than for pride in the parish / county".

"Yes I believe so..... the sense of togetherness that comes from knowing that everyone involved, is doing it based on their love of the sport. This could become eroded".

The other cases didn't think professionalism would affect grass roots support apart from perhaps, *"some of the older generation that are slow to accept change".*

"I don't believe it would, people have been attending games in Ireland since the organisation was founded and people will continue to follow their counties, albeit with greater expectations".

Another view on the contrary was that it would be positive for grass roots support;

"You might see more kids taking up the game and more effort put into coaching them with the hope that the kids could become professional".

13. Would it affect the number of volunteers at club level (why should we do it for free if they get paid attitude)?

In the main the cases thought it would affect the number of volunteers at club level due to various reasons including jealousy, diminished desire, and imbalance. The following quotes from the cases point this out;

"Yes as Irish people, we have a great tradition of jealousy and I believe that those who previously volunteered might withdraw their services as they believe that they also deserve payment".

"I believe it would I know it would diminish my desire to be involved. How do I and my club get rewarded for coaching a player to be a successful professional?"

"The GAA is based on the ethos that every member is as important as the next and some would believe that if the players start getting paid then too deserves reward".

"I believe over time this would likely occur. It could take a generation or so, but it would erode over time".

Two cases had a different view. They didn't think professionalism would affect the work of volunteers at all;

"I don't see why it should impact club level; rugby is played at both levels in Ireland and is not short of volunteers and support at club levels. If you are good enough to be at the top level you deserve to get rewarded. Most volunteers I know are motivated by the love of the game".

"Again, I don't believe it would. For example, soccer is the biggest sport in the world and the players are paid professionally. However, all around Ireland on Saturday mornings etc. underage and amateur games take place, with the support and help of volunteers. If the GAA turned professional, the volunteers at this level would still remain".

Another case commented that he hoped it wouldn't affect the volunteers because it is the volunteers that keep the existing spirit within the GAA;

"Every time one is reluctant to do something, they are reminded that everything is done on a voluntary basis which often compels people to help out and partake as opposed to the opposite".

5.3 Brief Analysis of Findings

Each of the questions were analysed across all of the cases with the researcher looking for patterns or differences to create outcomes (Horn, 2009). The researcher used a cross case analysis technique (Horn, 2009). The findings are briefly analysed below.

Question one provided four factors for the introduction of professionalism. Five of the cases put it down to commercialism, while other sports, player demands and sponsorship were put forward by two each of the remaining respondents.

Questions two and eight on the changing demands of players and the impact of professionalism provided almost unanimous responses from all cases. This is hardly a surprise based on what we see on a day to day basis in the GAA.

The obstacles for professionalism put forward in question three are probably no different to obstacles for any change process, i.e. culture, fear of change, sustainability, attitude of players or participants themselves and question marks over structure.

Question four regarding payment to players provided the researcher with the most data out of all of the questions because of the emotions it stirred in the cases. Good

arguments were provided for and against paying players, and all agreed it is not realistically achievable or sustainable at present.

Taking questions five and six together on the positive and negative influences of professionalism is interesting because player welfare appears in both. On one hand the players are healthier and happier with a more professional approach but on the other they are expected to perform to a higher standard.

Professionalism may or may not improve the quality of life for players according to the responses to question seven. It's a balance between juggling the various demands of an amateur with having too much time on ones hands as a professional.

Questions nine and ten look at the motivation of amateurs and how this might change with professionalism and on balance the motivation would change slightly due to the influence of money.

Lastly questions eleven to thirteen concentrate on the bond between the GAA and the community, grass roots and volunteerism. The majority of the cases were of the opinion professionalism would affect this bond because this is the very fabric of the GAA and professionalism flies in the face of the ethos of the GAA. This and the other findings are discussed in more detail in Section 6.

6. Evaluation & Conclusion

The first section outlines the expectations of the author prior to completing the research. Section two looks at the research objectives and see if they have been answered in the research. The third section takes the findings and asks what conclusions can be drawn from same? Finally suggestions for future research are outlined.

6.1 Expected consequences of Professionalism for the GAA

Prior to the research being completed but after a review of the literature, the following outcomes were expected by the researcher.

From a positive viewpoint the researcher expected that professionalism would be viewed as bringing much needed funding for players, proper welfare, higher standards and techniques, and detailed financial acumen. On the flip side, the negative aspects of professionalism could include the introduction of unfair competition, the marginalisation of club players, classifying sport as an entertainment product solely, the temptation to enhance performance with drugs, the introduction of selfishness and greed, and lastly the fear of taking the fun from sport.

Interestingly on the points above, Ed Smith, former England Cricket batsman and Cambridge scholar asked if professionalism is killing sport and if the top stars actually enjoy what they are doing? He quotes Champion jockey Tony McCoy who said, *“I’ve been practically crying after getting out of a hot bath, being that exhausted trying to get down to a really low weight”*.

Likewise, Colin Montgomery tells a story of friends staying overnight with golfer Tiger Woods who were awoken at 4am by the sound of the world’s number one golfer working out in his gym.

Smith says the pursuit of perfection has strangled the joy out of his game and life. According to Smith, *“When you make a living from the game, it starts to matter, and the mattering gets in the way of the playing”* (Fordyce, 2010).

Therefore in summary, the researcher expected professionalism to be seen as both positive and negative for the GAA, but unlike Smith above the researcher had no strong views on which side of the amateur-professional debate the cases would fall.

6.2 Were the Objectives of the research met?

In summary the individual sub-objectives as outlined in Section 5.3 were met as outlined below.

Sub-objective One looked to identify the drivers of change for the introduction of professionalism in the GAA? Professionalism is being driven by the commercial and administrative demands of the sport, especially the annual cost of preparing teams. These demands were outlined as functional forces in Oliver's model in section 2.6 of this report. Given the nature of the game, inter-county teams and some of the top club teams require what seems like an army of support to turn out the teams on a regular basis. In addition, competition from other sports and the wishes of the players themselves are adding to these demands. These equate to Oliver's political and social forces. The pressure from other sports is not surprising given the GAA is the biggest sports body in the state, but on the flipside it also has the biggest drop out rates as illustrated in Figure 3, section 2.4 of the report. These forces are necessitating deals such as the recent Sky deal with the GAA or Dublin's sponsorship with AIG, which ties back into the commercial demands providing an ongoing cycle of change. The author's interpretation of this cycle is illustrated in Figure 5 below.

Change Cycle of professionalism in GAA



Figure 5

The GAA's financials support these findings. If we compare the last two years revenues with those from 2001 and 2002 we can see how the growth of Commercial and other revenues have contributed to the growth in revenues. The relevant figures are illustrated in Table 6. This trend mirrors the financials for the Olympics in Table 3.

GAA Revenues

	2001	2002		2012	2013
Total	25,015,591	26,338,457		52,769,321	54,586,188
Gate Receipts	16,398,609	19,128,431		26,781,105	29,350,692
Commercial	6,862,429	5,470,613		17,541,301	17,321,278
State Funding	1,516,067	1,270,000		3,069,182	2,927,200
Other	238,486	469,413		5,377,733	4,987,018

Table 6

Source: GAA.ie

Sub-objective Two sought to identify obstacles to the introduction of professionalism in the GAA? While revenue is the major obstacle to professionalism, other impediments include the massive cultural changes, the fear of change or the unknown, and the belief of the players. None of this is surprising. The revenue obstacle does not look like it can be overcome.

Sub-objective Three sought to explore the collective appetite for the introduction of professionalism amongst the players and supporters? The appetite for professionalism amongst players and supporters is lower than the researcher would have thought. A majority of cases thought players should not be paid but recognised their enormous commitment. In general the negative influences appear to outweigh the positive influences of professionalism and while it is seen as something that would increase the performance of players, it wouldn't necessarily improve the quality of their lives.

Sub-objective Four sought to determine if extrinsic motives will become more important than intrinsic motives to the players if professionalism is introduced. GAA players are currently motivated by a basic desire to be the best, which is an intrinsic motive. Professionalism might change this somewhat because money does become a factor. It can dilute the intrinsic motives, but in practice budding sports stars set out to be exactly that, sports stars and are not motivated by extrinsic factors. In general this doesn't change.

Lastly, Sub-objective Five looked to determine the effect of the introduction of professionalism on the community-parish-club relationship? There is a view is that it has no effect as the GAA is deeply rooted and people will continue as they have always done, regardless. The view of the majority though is that professionalism would have a big effect on the bond between the GAA and the community. This is evidenced by rugby where the player is no longer the person teaching your kids on a Monday morning after a hard game on Sunday. He is now a step removed, separated from the fans and volunteers, something that would undermine the work of volunteers because members of the GAA would no longer be treated equally.

6.3 What conclusions can be drawn?

According to Baxter & Jack, there is “no cookbook for analysing data” (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The author has taken the main research findings from the last section and looked at them in the context of the wider sports world to draw conclusions.

Does this cycle of change illustrated in Figure 5 above show any sign of slowing down? The demands numbered 1 to 3 in Figure 5 show no signs of reducing or slowing down but there is a finite limit on demand number 4, sponsorship. It is the dependent variable. As we have seen, commercial revenue is an increasing part of the GAA’s revenue and as there is a limited supply of sponsorship and deals, it is safe to state that the GAA will continue on an amateur basis, i.e. players will have to continue to play unpaid, for the foreseeable future. This is certainly the case if the structure continues in its current guise but if a smaller more select group of the bigger or more successful teams took part in some form of “Super league”, there might be scope. However this goes against the very grain of the GAA as it would alienate some members. Therefore it is not realistic in the short-term.

In other respects, the game is all but professional, which is increasing the demands on players. This is certainly the case at inter-county level where commitment and fitness levels are now at or above the level of sports which are fully professional. Teams are training many times a week overseen by a team of dieticians and physiotherapists. We are told that these levels are required to retain talent to enable them reach the

standards they aspire to. This is believable give the number of drop-outs and defections to other sports.

It is interesting to compare how those who play in the GAA compare to sports stars from professional sports around the world. Ray Boyne, who worked with the Dublin footballer's, has come up with a comparison between the GAA and other sports. He analysed the daily routine of Dublin hurler Conal Keaney and Dublin ladies' footballer Niamh McEvoy alongside the routines followed by Tom Brady, Serena Williams, Dwayne Wade, Dan Carter and Yaya Toure on a daily basis (Boyne, 2014).

Figure 6 below makes for very interesting reading. It illustrates the dedication of our top GAA players when compared to other sports professionals. According to GPA National Development Officer Tomás Colton, the graph would be more revealing if the gaps under the GAA players were filled in with the work from their day jobs (Boyne, 2014). This would give a true picture of the demands they face.



Figure 6
Source: Joe.ie

The demands mean it is difficult for players to give the requisite commitment to their jobs, certainly as they get older. This in turn is leading to demographic changes in the sport. Teams appear to be getting younger. The average age of the Clare Team that won the All-Ireland Hurling final in 2013 was 23 (O'Flynn, 2013) and the Mayo Squad defeated by Dublin in the football in the same year had the same average age, with Alan Dillon being the oldest player at 28 (Murphy, 2013).

Perhaps the standards have been pushed too far, training five days a week and ten months a year for what? To meet the often unrealistic expectations of the media and abuse from the fans. What is the benefit of winning an All-Ireland title if you can't enjoy a pint in your local pub without unnecessary interruption from an aggrieved fan? One thing which is emerging is that long term GAA careers may be a thing of the past because of (a) burn-out and (b) the need to make an alternative career for financial reasons. Perhaps there should be a cap put on the amount of training that is carried out, certainly at juvenile levels?

Whilst the perceived positive influences of professionalism include better welfare for players, increased standards and a wider audience, some of these are questionable. For example, a recent survey of 500 ex-NFL players by The Washington Post found that nine out of ten suffered from daily aches and pains with 90% of that number affirming that their physical difficulties were as a direct result of their playing careers (O'Brien, 2013). In addition, GAA players would still have to get jobs after they finish playing, similar to rugby players in Ireland so overall professionalism wouldn't make a big difference to the quality of their lives.

Therefore the perceived positives of professionalism may not be as they appear and coupled with the negative aspects of professionalism like TV & sponsor demands, dilution of passion, nasty elements like corruption, Shamateurism, and match fixing means on balance the GAA is probably better off without any further professional influence.



Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson stripped of his Olympic 100m title after failing a drugs test

Source: CNN

The bond between the GAA and the community is important and need not be eroded further or “the glue” could be undone. Whilst the GAA is deeply rooted, it would almost certainly lead to pressures, similar to what has occurred in rugby. There is simply not enough room in the GAA to have a distance between the player and the fan. Grass roots support and volunteerism are the lifeblood of the GAA. Further professionalism is not needed in the mix. The basic motivator for GAA players is the desire to be the best and to represent the place, fans, county, and friends they grew up with.

This is unique in team sports and the reason why the GAA should continue as a vast, selfless family rather than an organisation under a veil of hypocrisy, to pick up on Moynihan’s quote earlier in the paper. This idea is mirrored in former Meath footballer and journalist Liam Hayes biography of Kevin Heffernan, where he quotes the former Dublin Manager;

“..and like all homes and like all families, you have squabbles and arguments, but it’s when some outside influence tries to upset things that you really see unity and purpose”(Hayes, 2014).

6.4 Overall comment and areas for further research?

The researcher has been unable to find similar research on the GAA so overall the content of the research has advanced theory in this area, certainly around perceptions of professionalism in the GAA. The researcher didn't have a firm view on professionalism in the GAA prior completing the research. Having interviewed those at the heart of the issue, the researcher firmly believes the professional influence has been good in many respects but has probably reached a natural limit, or perhaps exceeded this limit marginally at this time. Certainly it shouldn't be allowed to influence the game any further.

Some questions that came to mind after the cases were interviewed around the medium term structure of the GAA as outlined below.

- Where do you see the GAA in five year's time?
- What alternative structure would work which would allow pay for play?

Perhaps these could be seen as areas for future research, certainly if professionalism is allowed to reach further into the heart of what is truly an outstanding amateur game, these questions need to be answered?

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Appendix 1 – Affiliated GAA Clubs

Clubs Affiliated in 2013

Affiliated clubs: **2,518****685** Laighean**645** Mumha**212** Connacht**584** Uladh**84** An Bhreatain**308** Timpeall
na Cruinne**Laighean**

Ceatharlach	33
Loch Garman	93
Cill Chainnigh	41
An Mhí	59
Áth Cliath	134
Laois	46
Iar Mhí	47
Longfort	27
Uíbh Fhailí	61
An Lú	42
Cill Dara	57
Cill Mhantáin	45

Mumha

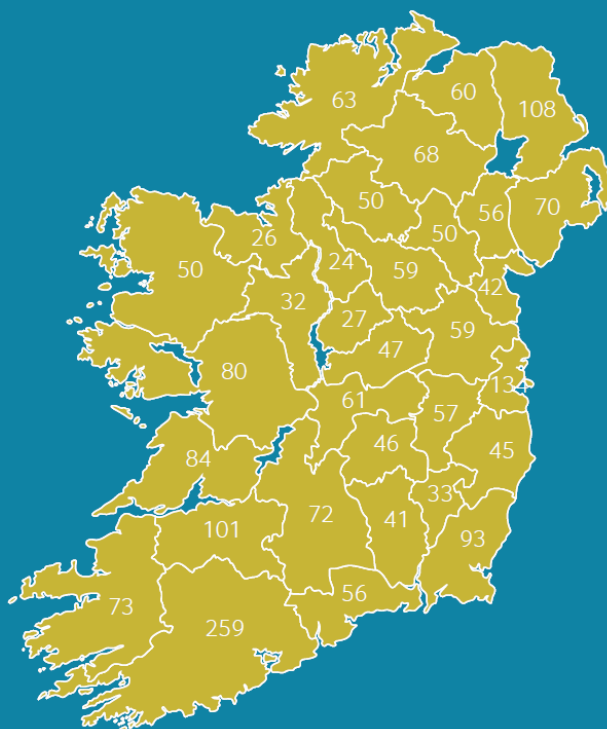
An Clár	84
Corcaigh	259
Ciarraí	73
Luimneach	101
Tiobraid Árann	72
Port Láirge	56

Connacht

Gaillimh	80
Maigh Eo	50
Roscomáin	32
Liatroim	24
Sligeach	26

Uladh

Aontroim	108
An Dún	70
Tír Eoghain	68
Dún na nGall	63
Doire	60
An Cabhán	59
Ard Mhacha	56
Fear Manach	50
Muineachán	50



Source: GAA Annual Congress Final Report 2014



Source: GAA Annual Congress Final Report 2014

The spread of the GAA is illustrated above detailing the number of clubs in every Ireland and around the world.

The maps detail that there are well over 100 affiliated GAA clubs in the United States, 40 of which are in New York alone, 64 in Australia, 22 in Asia and 71 in Europe, excluding the UK and Ireland.

In the UK, there are 83 clubs, over a third of which are based in London.

In Ireland, Cork has the most GAA clubs with 259, ahead of Dublin (134), Antrim (108) and Limerick (101). Leitrim and Longford have the smallest representation with 24 and 27 clubs respectively.

Appendix 2 - GAA Timeline

1884 Foundation of the GAA - At the behest of Michael Cusack seven men met in Hayes Hotel, Thurles on November 1 1884 and founded the Gaelic Athletic Association for the Preservation and Cultivation of our National Pastimes. Maurice Davin was elected President, Michael Cusack, John Wyse Power and John McKay elected Secretaries and Archbishop Thomas William Croke, Charles Stewart Parnell and Michael Davitt were asked to become patrons.

1887 Split and Reconstruction - The GAA split along political lines with one faction supporting the physical force IRB and the other the Irish Parliamentary Party. Matters came to a head at the 1887 Annual Congress when the IRB candidate, Edward Bennett, defeated Maurice Davin for the Presidency. Scanlon, (who favoured the Home Rule faction), left the Annual Congress and announced his intention to form a rival athletic association-one that would pledge allegiance to the National League. Archbishop Croke brought both sides together and at a Special Congress, in January 1888, Maurice Davin was re-elected as President of the GAA.

1888 American Invasion Tour - One of the main ideas considered by the founders of the GAA was the revival of the ancient Tailteann Games, An Aonach Tailteann. The GAA decided to host the games in Dublin in 1889 and estimated that £5,000 would be required for such a venture. To raise the capital a group of 50 Irish athletes embarked on a fundraising tour of Irish centres in America staging displays of hurling and athletics and international contests between Ireland and America. However terrible weather and infighting between the two athletic organisations in America resulted in low attendances and gate receipts. The GAA had to borrow £450 from Michael Davitt to bring the party home and up to 17 members remained in America. While the tour was a financial failure it did arouse interest in Gaelic Games amongst the Irish and Irish-Americans.

1913 Purchase of Croke Park - At the G.A.A.'s 1905 Annual Convention the decision was taken to erect a memorial in honour of Archbishop Thomas William Croke, First Patron of the GAA, who died in 1902. Between 1905 and 1913 fund-raising for this memorial was sporadic at best but in 1913 a 'Croke Memorial Tournament' (Hurling and Football) was held which resulted in a profit of £1,872, to be used for the memorial. Using these funds the GAA decided to purchase Jones Road Sports Ground from Frank Dineen for £3,500. They re-named the grounds 'Croke Park' in honour of Archbishop Croke.

1916 GAA Involvement - Although not officially involved, many members of the GAA took part in the Rising. GAA activities throughout the country came to a halt as many of the association's members were imprisoned. In 1916 the GAA entered the 'political arena' when it agreed to send a delegation to a Dublin Corporation conference for the purpose of forming a Political Prisoners Amnesty Association. After the 1916 Rising the British Authorities severely curtailed the movement of traffic throughout Ireland and this included trains taking people to Croke Park. The finances of the GAA suffered severely as a result.

1918 Gaelic Sunday - In 1918 the British Authorities informed Luke O'Toole that no hurling or football games would be allowed unless a permit was obtained from Dublin Castle. The GAA, at their meeting of July 20 1918, unanimously agreed that no such permit be applied for under any conditions and that any person applying for a permit, or any player playing in a match in which a permit had been obtained, would be automatically suspended from the Association. In a further act of defiance the Council organised a series of matches throughout the country for Sunday August 4 1918. Matches were openly played throughout the country with an estimated 54,000 members taking part. This became known as Gaelic Sunday.

1920 Bloody Sunday - The Dublin football team was scheduled to play Tipperary, in Croke Park, on November 21 1920 and the proceeds of this 'great challenge match' were to be donated to the Irish Republican Prisoners' Fund. The night before Michael Collins sent his 'Squad' out to assassinate the 'Cairo Gang', a team of undercover British agents working and living in Dublin. A series of shootings took place throughout the night which left 14 members of the British Forces dead. In reprisal the British Military entered Croke Park and opened fire killing 14 people.

1924 Tailteann Games - With the end of the Civil War the Irish Provisional Government decided to stage the Tailteann Games (due to take place in 1922 but postponed due to the outbreak of the Civil War) with Croke Park as the main centre of activity. The GAA was given a grant of £10,000 to refurbish Croke Park for the event, out of which they purchased a new stand, The Hogan Stand. Although the Tailteann Games were staged again in 1928 and 1932, the 1924 games are considered the most successful.

1929 Death of Luke O'Toole - Luke O'Toole, General Secretary, died of influenza on the 17th of July 1929. In November he was succeeded by Pádraig Ó Caoimh.

1938 Removal of Dr Hyde as President of Ireland - In December 1938 the GAA removed Douglas Hyde, President of Ireland, as a Patron of the Association. Hyde had broken the GAA's "exclusion/foreign games rule" by attending (in an official capacity) the Ireland v Poland International soccer match in Dalymount Park, Dublin.

1939-1945 The GAA and World War II - Travel and fuel restrictions during World War II severely curtailed the playing of Gaelic games. The GAA in Britain continued to play their championships against all the odds.

1947 Polo Grounds Final - The 1947 All-Ireland Senior Football Final, between Cavan and Kerry, was played in the Polo Grounds, New York, to stimulate interest in Gaelic Games amongst the Irish-American population there. The final, with Cavan victorious, was a resounding success with new clubs formed throughout America and a profit of close to £10,000 recorded.

1958 Wembley at Whit - The British GAA rent Wembley Stadium for the hosting of an exhibition of Gaelic Games. This venture was so successful that 'Wembley at Whit' became an annual date on the British GAA's calendar until 1975; in 1962 over 40,000 spectators attended the challenge game.

1961 GAA and the advent of Telefís Éireann - With the establishment of Telefís Éireann television became a reality for a large section of the Irish population. Gaelic Games were televised live for the first time and initial worries that the televising of games would result in a serious drop in attendances proved unfounded.

1964 Seán Ó Síocháin succeeds Pádraig Ó Caoimh as Secretary General - In May 1964 Pádraig Ó Caoimh, General Secretary of the Association, passed away; he was succeeded by Seán Ó Síocháin.

1966 - "1916" 50 Years On - The GAA marks the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Rising by staging a pageant 'Seachtar Fear: Seachtar Lá' in Croke Park. The GAA also commissioned an extended essay on the GAA's role in 1916. Veterans of the 1916 Rising were guests of honour at the 1966 All-Ireland Hurling Final.

1971 Rule 27 is rescinded - At a landmark Annual Congress, held in Ulster for the first time, the GAA deleted 'Rule 27' from its Official Guide. Members of the GAA were now permitted to play and attend previously banned sports.

1972 The Report of the Commission on the GAA is published - In 1972 the Commission on the Affairs of the Association, which was established in 1969 to 'investigate all aspects of the affairs of the Association', published its report. This report was far reaching and upon its adoption radically changed the administrative structures of the Association.

1979 Appointment of Liam Mulvihill

1981 The H-Block Hunger-Strikes - In 1981 Republican prisoners in the H Blocks embarked upon a hunger strike in an effort to get political status re-instated in the prisons. The issue of hunger strikers caused serious friction within the GAA with some members hoping that the GAA would actively support the prisoners while others believed the GAA should remain completely neutral. Once the prisoners entered the political arena (with some standing for election) the GAA took the decision to remove itself completely from the issue, in accordance with Rule 7 of the Official Guide.

1983 Dublin's 12 man All-Ireland final success - The 1983 All-Ireland Football Final, between Dublin and Galway, is best remembered for ill-temperers on the pitch with Dublin ending the game with 12 players. An incident at the Hill 16 End of the stadium played a part in convincing Liam Mulvihill of the need for a complete revamp of Croke Park.

1984: GAA Centenary Year – All Ireland hurling final played in Thurles

1991: Jersey Sponsorship is introduced - the Leinster Championship First Round game between Dublin and Meath involves a marathon series of four games, which attracts 237,000 supporters.

1993: The Redevelopment of Croke Park commences

2001: The GAA's Rule 21 - which prevents members of the British Security forces from becoming members of the Association, is abolished.

2003: The New Croke Park - is opened with a capacity of 82,300. The world Special Olympics are staged at the venue

2005: The GAA's Rule 42 - which prevents sports other than Gaelic Games from being played at GAA venues, is temporarily set aside to allow the Ireland Rugby team and the Republic of Ireland soccer team to play games at Croke Park while Lansdowne Road rugby grounds are being redeveloped. Over 80,000 people attend the All Ireland Hurling finals for the first time since 1956

2007: The first Rugby game - staged at Croke Park is between Ireland and France in the Six Nations championship. The first soccer game at the venue is played between Ireland and Wales.

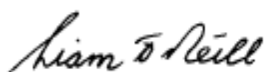
2009: 125th Anniversary - the GAA celebrates its 125th year in existence with an array of events to mark the year. Visit our [Celebrating 125 page](#) for more information.

Source: GAA Website (www.gaa.ie)

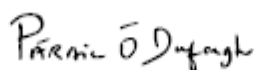
Appendix 3 – Revenue Account for Y/E 31/10/12

Revenue Account for the year ended 31 October 2012

	Schedule	12 months 2012 €	10 months 2011 €
Revenue			
Gate Receipts	A	26,781,105	24,211,963
Commercial Revenue	B	17,541,301	15,210,228
State Funding	C	3,069,182	2,755,443
Other Funding	D	5,377,733	4,684,978
Total Revenue		52,769,321	46,862,612
Direct Costs			
Match Day Costs	E	9,584,759	8,567,226
Competition Costs	F	573,141	685,500
Total Direct Costs		10,157,900	9,252,726
Gross Profit		42,611,421	37,609,886
Indirect Costs			
Team Costs	G	2,440,522	2,020,019
County & Provincial Distributions	H	8,810,087	8,881,782
Games Development	I	9,929,181	9,006,582
Organisational Development	J	544,349	426,466
Player Welfare	K	3,561,691	2,897,464
Administration Costs	L	8,334,966	6,669,854
Total Indirect Costs		33,620,796	29,902,167
Operating Surplus		8,990,625	7,707,719
Funding Activities			
Operating Grants Payable	M	2,485,798	2,229,536
Capital Grants Payable	N	6,468,083	5,376,022
Total Funding Outlay		8,953,881	7,605,558
Retained Surplus for the year / period		36,744	102,161



Liam Ó Néill
UACHTARÁN



Páirc Ó Dufáigh
ARD STIÚRTHÓIR

11 December 2012

Appendix 4 – GAA players who have move to other codes

From Gaelic Football to Soccer

Name	Gaelic Football Team	Soccer Club
Con Martin	Dublin GAA	Leeds United
Kevin Moran	Dublin GAA	Manchester United F.C.
Niall Quinn	Dublin GAA (Minor)	Arsenal F.C.
Kevin Doyle	Wexford (Minor)	Reading F.C.
Shane Long	Tipperary (Minor)	Reading F.C.
Martin O'Neill	Derry (Minor)	Nottingham Forest
Neil Lennon	Armagh (Minor)	Celtic F.C.
Cillian Sheridan	Cavan (Minor)	Celtic F.C.

From Gaelic football to Australian Rules football

Name	Gaelic Football Team	Aussie Rules level
Paul Earley	GAA	VFL
Dermot McNicholl	Derry	AFL
Brian Stynes	Dublin	AFL
Jim Stynes	Dublin	AFL
Tadhg Kennelly	Kerry	AFL
Colm Begley	GAA	AFL
Martin Clarke	Down	AFL
Pearce Hanley	Mayo	AFL
Michael Quinn	GAA	AFL
Kevin Dyas	GAA	AFL
Jamie O'Reilly	GAA	AFL
Zach Tuohy	GAA	AFL
Caolan Mooney	Down	AFL

Gaelic Football to Rugby Union

Name	Gaelic Football Team	Rugby Union Team
David Beggy	Meath	Leinster
Tommy Bowe	Monaghan (Minor)	Ulster Rugby
Shane Byrne	Minor	Leinster
Mick Galwey	Kerry	Munster
Brian Rigney	Laois	Leinster
Brian Carney	Local team	Munster
Tomás O'Leary	Cork (Minor)	Munster
Moss Keane	Kerry (under-21)	Munster
Gavin Duffy	Mayo (minor)	Connacht
Shane Horgan	Meath (Minor)	Leinster
Geordan Murphy	Kildare (Minor)	Leicester
Rob Kearney	Louth (Minor)	Leinster
Dick Spring	Kerry	Munster

Appendix 5 - Interview Guide

Section 3 Research Objectives	Questions	Prompts*
<p>1. To identify the drivers of change for the introduction of professionalism in the GAA? Some of the drivers of change in sports organisations have been identified as political, functional, social, technical, competitive and global forces. How do these drivers impact the GAA?</p>	<p>What in your view are the factors influencing the introduction of professionalism in the GAA?</p> <p>How are these factors impacting the GAA?</p> <p>Do you feel the demand on GAA players has changed over the past 10 years? Are we already at a professional level without the financial recognition?</p>	<p>Player welfare, improved financial performance of GAA, Media pressure, TV, Technology, Influence of other sports, Hidden payments to Managers.</p>
<p>2. To identify obstacles to the introduction of professionalism in the GAA? There are financial and cultural impediments to professionalism. What are they? Can they be overcome?</p>	<p>What are the obstacles for the introduction of professionalism in the GAA?</p> <p>Are these obstacles becoming weaker with time? Can they be overcome?</p> <p>What would be a reasonable salary for a GAA player to become professional? Do you feel this is realistically achievable and sustainable?</p>	
<p>3. To explore the collective appetite for the introduction of professionalism amongst the players and supporters? While recent amateur status reports have indicated there is no demand for a professional game, does the existence of "shamateurism" change this? What are the entropic and inertial forces?</p>	<p>Should GAA players be paid for playing?</p> <p>Is Sky good for the GAA?</p> <p>What are the positive influences of professionalism on sport in general?</p> <p>What are the negative influences of professionalism</p>	<p>Increased funding, Player welfare, Higher standard of sport, Better technology, access to financial acumen.</p> <p>Unfair competition, Marginalisation of</p>

	<p>in sport?</p> <p>Would professionalism improve the performance of the players?</p> <p>Would professionalism improve the quality of life for players? There is a campaign from GPA out at the moment “we wear more than our county colours” which you could refer to – basically highlighting there a people behind the shirts.</p> <p>(There is already a serious culture of gambling amongst GAA players and would this be worth raising given the fact more money and more time could lead to increase in problems in personal lives. There have also been several high profile depression cases of late and it would be interesting to hear if people think professionalism would effect this positively or negatively).</p>	<p>clubs, becomes too serious, Threat of drugs, Greed, Entertainment value alone</p>
<p>4. To determine if extrinsic motives will become more important than intrinsic motives to the players if professionalism is introduced to the GAA? Maslow’s Hierarchy was used to outline amateur player’s motives in Section 2. Would ego or esteem become new motives?</p>	<p>What motivates GAA players to play the game at the highest level?</p> <p>Would this change with the introduction of professionalism? If so, how?</p> <p>Would a transfer market scenario become common whereby players will be attracted to move counties</p>	<p>Love of game, Feeling good, Money, Status, Esteem, Competitive nature</p>

	<p>based on who can pay the best salaries?</p> <p>Do people think that all GAA players should get the same salary or top players get more money?</p>	
<p>5. To determine the effect of the introduction of professionalism on the community-parish-club relationship? Section 2 outlined the bond the GAA has developed with Irish people and its influence over parishes and communities throughout the country. Would professionalism affect the voluntary activities that are carried out, the fund-raisers and the support of the community on match day? Would it ruin the relationship between the GAA and the people in the wider environment being the supporters, volunteers, and general public? Would there be chaos?</p>	<p>What effect would professionalism have on the relationship/bond between the GAA and the community?</p> <p>Would it affect the grass roots support?</p> <p>Would the sport become very elitist with those not on county teams being left behind and forgotten about?</p> <p>Would inter – county senior players be allowed to play for their club if they effectively were contracted to county boards? E.g. Irish Provincial Rugby Players</p> <p>Would it effect the number of volunteers at club level (why should we do it for free if they get paid attitude)</p>	

Appendix 6 – Sample Interview

What in your view are the factors influencing the introduction of professionalism in the GAA?

Money

I think the GAA are becoming a more commercial brand and cash orientated organisation which is going from strength to strength. The recent Sky Deal, although it is apparently at the same level as TV3 adds a new more commercial element to the GAA which could lead to more lucrative sponsorship etc. for the GAA. They are also involved in events such as concerts for Garth Brooks and One Direction which again is purely to increase revenue for the organisation.

Compare this to the other side, i.e. the product the GAA is selling - inter county football / hurling matches. The players are not seeing any changes from a commercial point of view in terms of payment and lifestyle etc... Granted you have a few players in Dublin and in one or two of the stronger counties who have sponsorship deals but by in large the majority of inter county players have seen no change in their rewards.

There seems to be an increasing imbalance between the ways the GAA are trying to position themselves as a commercial organisation but at the same time the amateur players are treated like they have always been. Would somebody working for a company be happy to get paid the same salary even if the company was growing and becoming more commercial? If the GAA is a not for profit making organisation then why do they need the likes of Garth Brooks if some of this money does not go into "the product" which they sell and would be nowhere without.

Time & Effort

I would be very interested to see a survey of the jobs which inter county players have now compared to maybe 10 – 15 years ago. It seems that it is becoming harder and harder for GAA players to build a good professional career given the amount of time that they require to put into the GAA. From a personal point of view I know there are less Donegal players based outside the county than any time in the past 20 years as the demands on GAA players mean that those based in the county are at a significant advantage. There are exceptions such as the Dublin GAA players who do have many jobs created as Brand ambassadors etc. but for how long will these jobs last after they retire and become less marketable. My point is that do players now need a supplemental income to compensate for the opportunities they may be missing out on due to the time & effort they put into the GAA.

Players also sacrifice time with families, friends, girlfriends etc.; this can often cause difficulty in some relationships away from the pitch. If these players did not have to go to work every day as well as train it would allow for more time to build these relationships.

The Training

The training which I have seen in the past few years is becoming more and more demanding. GAA teams now train probably harder than Premiership football teams. As

a Donegal footballer my week would involve training Tue, Thurs and Sat, playing a match on Sunday and then going to the gym / yoga every other day. A lot of players feel that training like this is almost becoming like a job. This would lead to my belief that players need to either start getting paid to help them commit to this training or else that you will see a lot of players retiring early as they can't keep this up.

The Pressure / Public Scrutiny –

Another huge factor which needs to be taken into consideration now is that the amount of pressure which is put on GAA players by fans shouting abuse at the players but also the press. I have seen various examples in Donegal where local media have criticised players and managers quite harshly. Players are recognised in nightclubs and gone are the days where a GAA player to go to the local bar for a pint.

Do you feel the demand on GAA players has changed over the past 10 years? Are we already at a professional level without the financial recognition?

Yes there is no doubt that the demand on GAA players has changed over the past 10 years. Personally I believe that the GAA culture has got carried away with teams believing that that the only way they can compete is by training harder, longer and more often than other teams in the country. This leads to a huge demand on the players with many managers expecting us to train 10 months a year 5 days a week with little or no thanks.

Shay Given recently watched a Donegal training session and believed that we train harder than any team he has ever seen before and are much fitter and stronger athletes. Compare the Donegal team to the Newcastle United football team. If we train harder than they do, almost as often and probably for roughly the same amount of the year how can you justify the difference in salary, i.e. £40k for an average Newcastle player and €0 for every Donegal player. When you got to an inter-county championship game now, supporters and pundits expect to see top quality football / hurling. If they don't they will give out about the lack of effort or ability in many cases.

What are the obstacles to the introduction of professionalism in the GAA?

Irish Attitude – Many people place great value on the amateur status of the GAA and the thoughts of players getting paid would cause serious divides. For it to work, the GAA needs everyone to be on board.

Sustainability – Are we living in a big enough country to sustain any professional sports played purely on the island? The rugby teams here rely on revenue from European matches and big TV deals. We might not have a large enough pool of supporters to make it economically sustainable.

Revenue – A large obstacle would be having sufficient revenue to fund this. The way the GAA is structured, there are only really a few occasions a year when you get more than 40k – 50k people at a match.

Equality – A large obstacle would be how the payments were actually structured. Do the best players on the best teams get the most money? If that was the case we would further increase the difference in quality between top teams and weaker teams. On the other hand is it fair that the Dubs who fill Croker several times a year would get the same as the Clare Footballers who would struggle to get more than a thousand at a game. These are the questions which would cause large obstacles.

Should GAA players be paid for playing? What would be a reasonable salary for a GAA player to become professional? Do you feel this is realistically achievable and sustainable?

Yes although this should not be designed as a full time salary. A supplemental earning would be more appropriate to compliment the earnings from the day to day jobs.

I do not believe that we have a large enough country / sports to sustain inter county players on a full time salary in its current format. I believe that commercially the only possibility would be to pick an elite group of say 12 counties, split the best of the rest into each of these teams and form a super league and hope that attendances would be sufficient to sustain a national professional league. Realistically we will never have a big enough demand for 32 professional teams in the country.

But for me this is not the answer and never will be. The All Ireland Football Championship is built on lads from 32 counties in Ireland getting the chance to play for their county. This is the foundation on which the sport is built. Compare this to the Premiership in England which is purely built on Money and transfer fees etc.

However I believe that if the GAA continue to act like a growing commercially minded organisation then they should give a share of the surplus directly to the players. Loosely used terms such as “investing in grass roots” are used too often. Ultimately the grass routes will look after itself if the clubs and counties are going performing well.

I believe a salary of c5k - €10k after tax would be a reasonable salary for inter-county players.

What are the positive influences of professionalism on sport in general?

There should obviously be a huge increase in the standard of the sport with fitter, stronger and faster players who are also very skilful. The skill might increase particularly as many inter county managers concentrate on the physical side of the game as they have a limited timeframe for training.

Players would also have more time to rehab / prehab so this should lead to less injuries and longer playing careers.

More kids might take the game up instead of rugby or soccer as they see a career in it. Also you might even see some foreigners, e.g. Australians coming to play in Ireland.

What are the negative influences of professionalism on sport?

The passion for the club / county where you grew up may diminish as salary will become more of an influence.

The pressure increases on players as they are being paid and people expect them to perform.

Players would end up having more money and free time – a dangerous combination.

Players could become reliant on this source of income – one injury and they could be finished playing.

Would professionalism improve the quality of life for GAA players?

No I do not believe it would. I believe that GAA players are already alienated from society - for 9/10 months a year they have little or no social life. There are already serious issues amongst players of gambling addiction and depression. In my opinion this is due to players trying to recreate the thrill of playing GAA off the pitch. By turning professional we would be increasing these factors whereby players would have even less interaction with society and would seriously struggle with life after playing days.

If anything I believe that the sport should be less professionalised whereby players are given more time off every year and have an off season of 4 months at least to relax and enjoy life. The GAA has become pre occupied with the idea that we should train like professionals to the point that we now train harder than professionals.

Would professionalism improve the performance of GAA players?

Yes I believe it would improve performance.

I am a firm believer in practise and the more you practise something, the better you will get.

More time could be spent coaching the basic skills of the game.

An example is we went on a training camp with Donegal this year and concentrate on the skills of the game, there was a massive improvement in the quality of the kick passing in one week so one can only imagine what full time training could do.

What motivates GAA players to play the game at the highest level?

Pride – representing your club and county, the place you were born and grew up.

Social aspects – team mates

Recognition – The esteem people hold you in and how those in your local area look up to you as a role model.

Challenge – The chance to put yourself against the best teams in Ireland

Chance to be the best - The chance to perform at the very highest level of your sport; this is the fact that should drive all sports people in my opinion.

Would this change with the introduction of professionalism? If so, how?

It is very hard to know, but when you introduce money to any situation it will always become a factor.

Unless you had a set wage for players around the county, you could see a transfer market open up with players looking for more money elsewhere.

Your affiliation to your local town / county could become less of a factor while your earning becomes the main factor.

What effect would professionalism have on the relationship/bond between the GAA and the community?

I believe that you would effectively have 2 separate sports, 1 professional sport played by the elite and 1 amateur sport played by everyone else.

I believe this would cause divisions and county players would no longer be seen lining out for their local clubs.

Would it affect the grass roots support?

Yes I believe that the grass roots would no longer support the county teams like they used to. They would see them just like another premiership club in England.

Young players would still play the game, but they would be looking for fame and fortune rather than for pride in the parish / county.

You might indeed see more kids taking up the game and more effort put into coaching them with the hope that the kids could become professional.

Would it affect the number of volunteers at club level, (why should we do it for free if they get paid attitude)?

Yes as Irish people, we have a great tradition of jealousy and I believe that those who previously volunteered might withdraw their services as they believe that they also deserve payment.

The GAA is based on the ethos that every member is as important as the next and some would believe that if the players start getting paid then too deserves reward.