

# Volunteers suffer in three-tier GAA

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When we think of our country men and women who have been so badly affected in the past few months the response from one body in particular is truly mind boggling. No, I am not making reference to the Government but I am making direct reference to the GAA. Their response, to say the least, has been the greatest insult to the people of Ireland in the 125 year history of the GAA.

How ironic is it that at the same time we celebrate 125 years of the GAA, an organisation that has been born and driven by volunteers, men and women who gave of their lives to their clubs and counties.

I am reminded of the late Paddy Donohoe, a Cavan man, who came to work with Bord na Mona in my town of Lanesboro. Paddy made Lanesboro his home for himself and his family but Paddy also made the parish GAA club of Rathcline his home too where he spent all his free time in helping to develop a bigger and better club. Paddy was extremely proud of his new club and continued to work to make it so much better, and he did, to the extent that while putting up goalposts on the new Rathcline club grounds in Clonbonny he collapsed and died. That was the ultimate sacrifice of a man who came to a new town to earn his living but also volunteer himself to his newly found club. Paddy's deeds are the deeds of many men and women throughout the country that gave their lives for their clubs. Paddy epitomised the spirit that prevailed and that is so vital to the survival and growth of good GAA clubs. These volunteers were there then and those volunteers are there still and we can all identify them and are grateful to their continued volunteerism.

Today, when I look at the reports of the floods I also see the faces of the huge number of people and there is no doubt a huge percentage of them are or have been volunteers with their local GAA clubs. In the future they will be giving of their time to their clubs and truth be told while in the face of adversity their thoughts are still with their clubs and communities – true volunteers. The GAA in recent weeks have made a deal with the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) – a non GAA body- to the tune of €1.6million. This seems at face value to be strange to say the least. They are giving of that vast amount of money to a group that worked in direct opposition to the GAA. This agreement was negotiated by those that are financially insulated within the GAA, to appease those that want to benefit financially from Gaelic Games on the back of the club player and

volunteer. The GAA hierarchy seemingly sees that there are different levels within the body of GAA members; we have a financially insulated group within Croke Park, we have a non GAA group who according to their President Donal Óg Cusack "want to retain their independence from the GAA" despite receiving €1.6million of GAA money and we have club players and volunteers who now it seems are the lesser and practically ignored at the last level.

I ask the question from those that have 'done the deal'. Have your thoughts not gone towards those that are suffering from the effects of the flooding? Would the monies that you are preparing to hand over to the non GAA body, GPA, not have been better spent in handing it over to other and much, much more deserving non GAA bodies such as Vincent De Paul, Red Cross and the many other agencies who are continuing to raise funds for the support of the people of our country who are so badly in need of assistance? These are the bodies we should be supporting and ensuring that the people are assisted back on their feet just as these people continue to ensure through their volunteerism that the GAA remains on its feet. Think of the people who will not be in their homes for Christmas, the farmers that have lost all their fodder, the old aged who live in the fear of being flooded again. By and large the vast majority of the people affected are volunteers within the GAA and who will again; I have no doubt, be the lifeblood of an organisation that celebrated 125 years anniversary. Our founding fathers would be ashamed, as I am, of the response of the GAA hierarchy. It is sad that that the GAA hierarchy and this non GAA body it now supports are so totally driven by money and not the volunteers that they would lead you to believe is so important to them. Compare the actions of our leadership in the flooding crisis with those of the IFA. Which one is more in touch with and more interested in its grassroots?

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