



**THE
CAMOGIE
ASSOCIATION**
An Cumann Camógaíochta

Camogie Coaching Corner

By Peter Casey

www.camogie.ie

Inspire to play, empower to stay

People form a lot of their opinions from the world of professional sports. They often become fascinated with the idea of finding the next Rory McIlroy, Tiger Woods, Lionel Messi, Angela Downey and Gemma O'Connor. In my job – coaching in primary schools – we are often asked “who the next superstar is going to be?” or “I bet you can really spot the talented children”. The truth is that there is no way of predicting the future. Not alone is it a wasted exercise it is also a dangerous exercise. It leads to two things – elitism and exclusion.

A lot of papers and books have been written on the idea of nature versus nurture. While some can argue the point that good genetics are important, most articles suggest that opportunity is far more important. When we coach we shouldn't discriminate between children. The primary school curriculum states that all activities must involve 100% of the children 100% of the time. This enables every child to participate in all classes including Physical Education, where they play and learn. In a Primary school all children should get an equal opportunity. That could happen but there are always ways of causing exclusion – competitions, teams, captains etc.

The things that cause exclusion to happen are usually really worthwhile activities that also cause so much good to happen. They often reward effort and hard work, promote practice and devotion to improvement and help a group of children to feel part of something special. In small schools, a team can often consist of everyone in 5th and 6th class. That can be a really special where everyone is needed. However in larger schools, a team may only consist of a tiny percentage of the class. A lot of children are omitted because they are perceived not good enough.

Fear plays a big role in the growth of elitism. People are often afraid that their talented players won't develop properly if they are allowed to play with the “not so good ones”. Somehow, they feel it would be better to group these best players together so that they might improve at a faster rate. There is a logic in that opinion especially for



a sport like Gymnastics where they peak around 16 years of age. Camogie players should still be improving in their mid to late 20's so there shouldn't be a hurry. So many other sports plan their futures around the goal of winning an Olympic medal. They set up high performance training programmes for an elite few in the hope that it may result in some success. Their values are based on winning.

The mission statement of the Camogie Association is **“To provide opportunities to enjoy and play Camogie as a vibrant part of the Gaelic Games Family.”** One of the main values of the Association is to “maximise participation”. We are an amateur organisation. We don't need to find the next superstar because that isn't part of our values system. Of all the children who join a GAA club an average 10% of those go on to play on their clubs first team. Of that 10%, 3% play senior inter county. It is a very

**CAMOGIE HAS HUGE POTENTIAL
FOR GROWTH AND WHILE THERE ARE
VIBRANT CAMOGIE AREAS, THERE ARE
ALSO VAST REGIONS WHERE LITTLE OR
NO HURLING OR CAMOGIE IS PLAYED.
IT DOESN'T HAVE TO REMAIN THAT WAY.**



FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK, TWITTER, YOUTUBE AND INSTAGRAM

small number and it will continue to be. If our main focus is on senior inter county, we exclude the vast majority of players. However when we commit ourselves to the development of the games in every school and club and endeavour to provide a games programme for all people who wish to play then we will fill our pitches the games will be healthier as a result.

Camogie has huge potential for growth and while there are vibrant Camogie areas, there are also vast regions where little or no hurling or camogie is played. It doesn't have to remain that way. In Co. Clare where I work a couple of new clubs like Kilkee/Belaha have established. While it is everyones dream in these clubs that one day they would become like Slaughtneil or Milford, there is a far bigger story being told because of the opportunity young children get from the existence of the club.

Young people need to belong more today than ever before in the worlds history. There is so much emphasis on the need to be famous in youth culture. Many teenagers don't care what they are famous for as long as they are noticed. Most sporting organisations only target the most talented players. In the USA nearly all people give up sport –American football, basketball, baseball, ice hockey– when they fail to reach a high level. The Camogie Association can offer an opportunity to all young people to belong, to be part of a group and to gain recognition by wearing the colours of a club or school. Many clubs are playing their part in reducing exclusion by fielding extra

teams in competitions. The youth of today need more of these outlets where they can feel comfortable playing without the pressure of having to be at the highest standard.

The Swedish Football Association have come up with the slogan “as many as possible for as long as possible”. They, according to the head of one of their regions, have taken the decision to abolish their “district elite” teams. “When we took this decision for the sake of the children, it was a very easy decision. Our mission is not to exclude children and young people”. They discovered that bringing players into elite squads at an early age wasn't always beneficial for that player. The same often applies to the GAA. Making a big deal about a 13 or 14 year old boy or girl, who still has a long way to go – physically, mentally and socially is a dangerous exercise. These players shouldn't be put up on a pedestal. We cannot predict what the future will hold for them.

Player develop at different rates. Development is non-linear. That is why we see so many players emerging in their 20's who may have missed out on county minor or county under 21. Kilkenny's Shane Prendergast got his first start in the 2015 All-Ireland final at the age of 29. Unfortunately many others have setbacks along the way, predict their own future and drop out from Sport completely. That is a choice that they are entitled to make. However as coaches we have a duty to minimise dropout by promoting inclusion wherever possible.



FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK, TWITTER, YOUTUBE AND INSTAGRAM