Gaelic Football in Cleveland—A Timeline

The Shamrock Club formed in the mid-1920s. Managed by Frank Gallagher, they played Gaelic football on an exhibition basis and competed nationally in an amateur soccer league. The soccer team included players of various nationalities. Their home field was at W. 60th and Herman.

New Irish-born players arrived on the scene throughout the 1950s, as newspaper accounts of the day record. The 1952 all-star team (right) Back row, standing, L to R: Eddie Murphy, Marty Kilbane, Jack McDonough, Frank Moran, Tom Maher, John (Stonewall) Chambers, [Fr.] Jim O’Donnell, Jim Buddy, Eddie Campbell, Owen Lowry. Front row, kneeling, L to R: Mickey Prendergast, Brendan Morris, Mickey Cafferkey, Tom Finnegan, John Mannon, Martin Lowry, Mike McHugh.


In front: Des Kennedy.
1962

By 1962, the goal of fielding four local football teams had faded, in favor of focusing on one strong team—St. Pat's. Most of the players were recent immigrants. Coached by Fr. Liam Kitt, Cleveland St. Pat's captured five consecutive national titles from 1962-1966. Galway-born Fr. Kitt had played on three Irish national championship teams and instilled the GAA values of discipline and team work.


St. Jarlath’s have won the Midwest GAA championship 14 times since 1981, have appeared in the North American championship finals 4 times, and have won two National titles, back to back, in 2005 and 2006.


2006

Mindful of tradition, members of Cleveland St. Pat’s—the team that brought the national games to Cleveland—savor a hard-won victory. Fellowship and family are at the heart of why so many have labored so long to pass on their love of Gaelic football from generation to generation.


2013

Back Row, L to R: Kyle Holts, Noah Dixon, Kyle McIntyre, Sean Quinn, Steve Pepin, Martin Wall, Hannah Wall, Thomas "Mel" McNamara. Middle Row, L to R: Pat Hayes, Chris Weimer, Brian Royer, Robert Delia, Pat "Larry" Combs, Paul King, Todd Kaufmann, Mark Owens. Front Row, L to R: Nick Kohos, Max Laverty, Eamon Owens, Ambrose Beach, Bermuda Beach, Vincent Beach.
**Hurling**

There is no evidence for hurling activity in Cleveland before the reorganization of Gaelic sports here in the late 1940s. But at the 1951 Midwest GAA convention, Cleveland reported two hurling teams. Since Detroit, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and Rochester all confessed that they couldn’t field one, Chicago and Syracuse offered the only Midwest competition that year. GAA correspondence from the 1950s suggests one challenge: there was discussion about where to obtain hurling sticks. Newspaper accounts of inter-city games sometimes mention a hurling match taking place before a football match, suggesting that the two teams traveled together. Despite the challenges, Cleveland boasted avid hurlers, who sustained a team until the 1970s. Among them were John Ryan, Ted Gaffney, and, most notably, Al O’Leary, who also served as the GAA’s national board treasurer for a number of years. Raised in Tipperary, the birthplace of the GAA, O’Leary hearkened back to the organization’s nationalist origins by naming the Cleveland team after the 19th century Fenian, and Tipperary man, C. J. Kickham.


**Camogie**

Camogie was developed as a modified form of hurling for women in 1903. Like hurling, camogie was introduced in Cleveland when the GAA reorganized here in the late 1940s. GAA records from the early 1950s contain rosters for two camogie teams, but the sport does not seem to have flourished at that time. In the mid-1970s, however, interest in camogie revived. In Cleveland, a team formed under the auspices of St. Pat’s football club, and then organized independently as the Emerald Camogie Club. A North American Camogie Board formed at about the same time. Maire O’Leary Manning, who had watched her father’s Al O’Leary’s hurling matches from a young age, was a founding member of the Cleveland team and, like her father, a national officer. The women turned to such GAA stalwarts as John O’Brien and Jim Neligan for guidance. Nell Buckley, longtime President of the Cleveland Gaelic Society, had played the game in Ireland and was both a mentor and a player. The team flourished for about ten years.


**Ladies Football**

The next generation of young women decided that they would rather try their hand at football than be steered toward a game designed for women. Like many of the camogie players before them, these young women had fathers, brothers, or cousins who played Gaelic sports, and games on Sunday afternoons were part of their growing up. In the early 1990s, a group approached Sean Gannon about organizing a woman’s team under the auspices of Cleveland St. Pat’s. Ladies’ teams were forming in Pittsburgh and Detroit at that time as well. When possible, the women’s and men’s teams traveled together—to save on transportation and the cost of the field and referees. The women’s team lasted for about ten or fifteen years, six of them as a registered GAA team.


*Left: Maureen Mohney still travels to play on the Detroit team and hopes to reorganize a team in Cleveland soon.*

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