

The Beginning: Looking Back with Cathy Gallagher



Club/County: Originally from Donaghmore, Co. Tyrone and played for both club and county. I transferred to Bredagh, Co. Down, and also represented both club and county.

What did you study at Queen's?

BSc Finance and MSc Finance.

As one of the founders, you'll know that Queen's Ladies' Gaelic Football celebrated an important milestone, 30 years, last year. Take us back to the establishment of the first LGF team at Queen's. Who were the founders, was there a pivotal moment or catalyst, did you face any obstacles?

I love your optimism that my memory can stretch back that far! There were so many people involved in the establishment of Queen's LGF, but it was led by Maura McCabe (Enniskillen) and supported by myself and Maura McArdle (RIP, Killeavy). As we weren't a constituted club in 1993/94, we weren't entitled to a stall at the annual Freshers' Bazaar, but that didn't stop us. We took to the steps of the Students' Union on the day of the Bazaar and used our vocal powers and a few (sharpie designed!) leaflets to kick start the recruitment. From there, we convened a meeting in the Chaplaincy, followed all the processes to constitute the club, elected a Committee and the rest is history. We didn't win many matches in our first season (or second!), but we laid solid foundations for the club and set standards for others to maintain.

The University were hugely supportive of our endeavours and the Physical Education Officer at the time, Bill Gardner, was fantastic in his guidance, counsel and encouragement. As the 'new kid on the GAA block' within Queen's, we faced the odd challenge in respect of pitches, facilities etc, but along with the other codes, we always figured out a solution and any cross words dissipated very quickly over a pint in the Dub!

What are some of your highlights from your involvement in Queen's GAA and the O'Connor Cup?

I think I could write a dissertation on highlights from my time in Queen's LGF (there's a thought!) and the many memories which ensued. I always default to one headline though...friendship. Sport at university is a lynchpin of the student experience and I am eternally grateful for the amazing friends I met in Queen's LGF and who are still my best friends to this day. The football was important...we were competitive...we celebrated in style when we won...but the lasting legacy is the people I met and the role they played in my life going forward. This has been particularly pertinent in the last couple of years as we lost one of the Queen's LGF legends, Maura McArdle, who was sadly taken from us in 2023. Our grief, sadness and heartache has been helped by the tsunami of happy memories we have of our great friend and supporting each other along the way.

Ladies' Gaelic Football at HE level was still in its infancy in the formative years of Queen's LGF and we were more invested in the Dowd Cup (Ulster Colleges Championship) at that time. I have two abiding memories of the O'Connor Cup...one of which may get a lot of people in trouble, but it is shared within the context of 'early days'!

- I actually played in the O'Connor Cup for University of Ulster Jordanstown! I was at the Basketball Intervarsities in Limerick (competing legally for Queen's!) and bumped into a few of the UUJ gang on the morning of their Shield Final. They were a few players short (!!) and pleaded with myself and Martina McCafferty (also Queen's) if we would tog out. So, after finding size 6 boots, shorts and socks, I boarded the UUJ bus and off we went. I missed a penalty and we lost!

- We hosted the O'Connor Cup in the late nineties and we left no stone unturned in our levels of organising. Maura McCabe took to the Yellow Pages to reach out to potential sponsors – probably not a robust strategy, but it still yielded a few pounds. We had a sandwich production line in the Chaplaincy to then sell at the matches and we operated a tuck shop out of the boot of a car...our entrepreneurial skills knew no limits! The weekend was an overwhelming success and whilst showcasing the best ladies Gaelic football talent at HE level, the camaraderie off the pitch amongst all the competing teams, was a definite highlight.

How do you feel the opportunities for women in sport have changed since your time at university?

Immensely...and that is a great thing! The rise in Ladies' Gaelic Football at HE level reflects the increased levels of focus, professionalism and application at all tiers of the sport. My amplification of friendship and fun during our Queen's LGF days should not be misinterpreted as laissez faire or amateur...we were proud Queen's LGF members who wanted to win. The sport has developed organically with society, but I would make a polite plea to current players, club officers and management teams: never lose sight of ambition and drive, but don't forget to lean into the unique experience that university sport offers.

Wishing all participating teams well in the competition and undoubtedly, Queen's will host a superb event...with or without a tuck shop!