



### **Go Games – A new model of participation in Gaelic Games**

Traditionally in Gaelic games, there has been a tendency to nurture the perceived best and to the neglect of the rest. This has arisen from the adult training and adult conditions that we expose our young players to, and has led to a situation where many players who develop at a different rate to their peers - for a variety of reasons - drop out of Gaelic games due to a lack of confidence in their ability, a lack of playing time and lack of fun. In recent years, there has been a greater appreciation and increased recognition of the need to ensure that a child-centred approach is adopted where the promotion and development of Gaelic games is concerned. In other words, it should be a case of children first, winning second.

#### **What are the Go Games?**

The GAA has responded to this need by designing six individual skill development games, known as Go Games. Go Games are small-sided, modified rules games in both Hurling (Go Hurling) and Gaelic Football (Go Gaelic) called First Touch (under-8), Quick Touch (under-10) and Smart Touch (under-12).

Each of the games is accompanied by a series of coaching classes which provide coaches with the ability to develop the specific skills for each game. The games are progressive in terms of the Technical, Tactical and Team Play challenges they present as the children become more competent, while the physical demands are also increased as the children develop physically.

#### **Why are Go Games important?**

The Go Games are the first step in the Pathway to Elite Performance (PEP). The Pathway has been designed to ensure that all participants *Play to Learn, Learn to Compete* and, with time, *Compete to Win* as they progress through its four stages: the Recreation Stage (Fun Do), Talent Identification Stage (Can Do), the Talent Transfer Stage (Want To) and

the Elite Performance Stage (Will Do). In essence Go Games provide the fundamental playing opportunity for young Gaelic Games players.



Figure 1: The Pathway to Elite Performance (PEP) incorporating four stages – Fun Do, Can Do, Want To and Will Do

### Research on the Go Games

Small-sided games have been used for many years in a wide range of sports as a way of developing the tactical and technical abilities of players of all ages. However, to date there has been a distinct lack of scientific research to validate their use. Research conducted at DCU, under the guidance of Prof Niall Moyna has shed some light on this, and was a crucial reference in the development of the Go Games. The research, conducted by Mickey Whelan, was based on a number of hypotheses:

- The physical response would be greater during a 7-a-side game than a 15-a-side game.
- Individual involvement – in terms of intentional ball contacts – would be greater during a 7-a-side game than a 15-a-side game.
- Levels of enjoyment and perceived competence would be greater during a 7-a-side game than a 15-a-side game.

Modifying the playing area of the 7-a-side game to ensure that each player had the same playing area to ‘work’ in allowed researchers to negate any influence of a greater playing area on the physical or technical data. By tracking the same 7 players in a 15 and 7-a-side game (each of 30 minute duration) the data showed that the players were subjected to a greater physical demand in the small-sided game, while the number of intentional ball contacts, over a range of skills – including catches, kicks and scoring attempts, were significantly higher in the modified game.

Players also reported a greater level of enjoyment and had higher levels of perceived confidence playing the 7-a-side game than the 15-a-side game. Players worked harder,

got possession of the ball more often and had an increased number of opportunities to score in the small-sided game – who wouldn't enjoy it more!

### **Competition 'versus' Development**

In developing the philosophy and values which underpin Go Games we compared the key factors associated with the traditional competitive model of participation and an alternative developmental model of participation.

The competitive model is identified by its focus on the outcome, i.e. winning. The best way to ensure this outcome is to use the full compliment of the rules and to use the best players to exploit them. This in turn has a negative influence on the use of substitutes, as a substitute system is often used to keep the poorer players on the line and ensure that the best combination of players are on the field throughout a game. On the field the game itself is often dominated by the better players, particularly in juvenile competitions. Furthermore the 'win at all costs' competitive model is often marked by an environment of increased and inappropriate parent and mentor pressure on the players. Taking these factors into account one can safely assume that for many players such a model limits development.

By contrast a developmental model of participation focuses on development of the players, and as such can utilise modified rules and equipment to best suit their current level of ability. As winning is not the ultimate focus the model can cater for a variety of numbers and full participation can be assured making the idea of substitutes obsolete. Applied wisely the model can be used by coaches to help players set and achieve individual goals and focus on particular limits to their play. It can also be modified and adapted further to cater for the varying needs of the players as they develop in order to consistently set appropriate challenges and provide opportunity for achievement. In essence the developmental model is about fun, fair play and full participation.

### **Playing Go Games**

A summary of the Go Games playing rules is illustrated in figures 2 and 3. These playing rules are not necessarily set in stone – there is no reason why the rules cannot be modified to meet the varying needs and abilities that coaches meet 'on the ground'. However, the philosophy of the Go Games - to promote **full participation** and **fair play** while catering for the developmental needs of the participants – is central to their success, as is the principle of ensuring that each player gets to play the entire game and experiences a number of different playing positions during each game. These are the true value of Go Games.




## Summary of Go Hurling Rules








Age	Under-8	Under-10	Under-12
Players	7-a-Side	9-a-Side	11-a-Side
Pitch Dimensions	45m x 40m	65m x 40m	100m x 40m
Zones	3 Zones	3 Zones	No Zones
Duration	4 x 7mins	4 x 8mins	2 x 20mins
Slotar	Size 1	Size 2	Size 3
Outfield Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All on the Ground</li> <li>• No Solo</li> <li>• No Kicking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the Ground + Catch and Strike/ Lift, Catch and Strike</li> <li>• No Solo</li> <li>• No Kicking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catch and Strike</li> <li>• Lift and Strike</li> <li>• No Solo</li> <li>• No Kicking</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Summary of playing rule and playing equipment modifications in First, Quick and Smart Touch Hurling



## Summary of Go Gaelic Rules

Age	Under-8	Under-10	Under-12
Players	7-a-Side	9-a-Side	11-a-Side
Pitch Dimensions	45m x 30m	65m x 40m	90m x 40-50m
Zones	3 Zones	3 Zones	No Zones
Duration	4 x 7mins	4 x 8mins	2 x 20mins
Football	Size 1	Size 2	Size 3
Outfield Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Solo</li> <li>• No Fist/Hand Passing</li> <li>• Pick up allowed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited Solo</li> <li>• Pick up allowed</li> <li>• Non-Dominant Qrts 2,4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited Solo</li> <li>• Pick up allowed</li> </ul>

**Figure 3: Summary of playing rule and playing equipment modifications in First, Quick and Smart Touch Football**

### Refereeing Go Games

Go Games are not only about Fair Play in the sense that all participants should get the opportunity to participate fully in the games. They are about Fair Play in terms of developing sportsmanship and in terms of respecting the opposition, respecting the match officials and respecting the game and a number of rules have been included specifically to reinforce these elements

Go Games also provide an ideal opportunity to introduce young Referees to our games. It is recommended that children as young as 12 would referee Go Games and to this end a course has been developed to provide them with the knowledge and capabilities to do so. With positive support and mentoring there is no reason why they cannot!

### Implementing Go Games

The Go Games were launched nationally on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September at Croke Park, by Minister for Art, Sport and Tourism, John O'Donoghue along with GAA President Sean Kelly and Chief Executive of the Irish Sports Council, John Treacy.

Each County is currently in the process of appointing a Go Games Coordinator – one for Hurling and one for Gaelic Football, if needs be – and these, in turn, will have responsibility for training Go Games Coordinators in every Primary School and Underage Club.

Over 3,000 Primary Schools throughout the country will receive vouchers to redeem against Go Games equipment to aid with the promotion of the games. The national Primary Schools Gaelic games organisation – Cumann na mBunscol – will implement the Go Games as part of their series of initiatives in the coming school year. Other initiatives in the Fun Do stage of the Pathway to Elite Performance (PEP), including the ABC/Have-a-Ball Nursery Programmes, Coaching Classes, Ú Can Skill Awards and Summer Camps, provide focussed assistance in ensuring that dropout is reduced, participation is maximised and every player is given the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

### **Summary**

Fun, Fair Play, Full Participation and Achievement are the true values of Go Games, values that are at the heart of underage games development. By providing an environment for children that is centred on these values we ensure that our young players experience enjoyment and fulfilment through their participation in Gaelic Games.

The Go Games concept has been devised and developed by Pat Daly (GAA Head of Games), in conjunction with Jimmy D’Arcy (Coaching and Refereeing Coordinator) and Peter Horgan (National Projects Coordinator)

Go Games development by the Provincial Games Managers:

Hurling – Joey Carton (Munster), Noel Delaney (North Leinster), Lester Ryan (South Leinster) and Tom Fitzpatrick (St Patrick’s Teacher Training College, Drumcondra)

Football – John Tobin (Connacht), Ger O’Connor (Dublin), Terence McWilliams (Ulster) and Pat O’Shea (Munster)

More information on the Go Games is available on the GAA Games Development website – <http://gamesdevelopment.gaa.ie>

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