

THE

PLAY BOOK

2026-2028



gpa 



**WE ARE 4,000
MALE AND
FEMALE HIGH-
PERFORMING
AMATEUR
ATHLETES**

**WE MAKE NO
APOLOGIES
FOR
STANDING
UP FOR
OURSELVES**

**WE ARE
PROUD OF
OUR PLACE
WITHIN
THE GAELIC
GAMES
ECOSYSTEM**

**WE MUST FIND
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**WE NEVER
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**WE ARE ROLE
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**WE WILL
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BETWEEN
US AND OUR
CLUBS**

WHO WE ARE

The Gaelic Players Association is an association of inter-county players.

From camogie squads to hurlers, to footballers, both male and female, we are united by a collective voice.

We are 4,000 male and female high-performing amateur athletes.

We were founded by players, we are led by players, and we take our direction from players.

We look after each other on and off the pitch. We speak up on issues that impact us, to ensure fairness for us all.

We make no apologies for standing up for ourselves.

We are the key marketing force and financial engine that drives Gaelic games forward.

We train and compete at the highest level, producing games that attract massive investment that is then distributed across all levels of Gaelic games.

We are proud of our place within the Gaelic games ecosystem.

We are people first and foremost; people who are also the top players in our games.

We give so much of our time and energy to sport that other areas of our lives can suffer.

We must find balance to ensure our relationships, professions, and studies are not neglected.

We love what we do. We know we are living out your and our dreams when we pull on the county jersey.

We celebrate our games and are ambitious for their future, both at home and further afield.

We never lose sight of how much our games add to our lives.

We will never take our place within our communities, our counties, or our country for granted.

We carry a responsibility, both on and off the field, and we take that responsibility seriously.

We are role models, and we strive to live up to that at all times.

We are your club mates. One hundred percent of players are club players.

We started our journeys with our clubs, and our clubs will carry us on our final journeys.

We will never allow anyone to drive a wedge between us and our clubs.

So, you know who we are, because you are with us every step of the way.

You are our families, friends, neighbours, teammates, and supporters; and we are yours.

We are also inter-county players.

**We are the Gaelic Players Association.
You See Players. We See People.**





MATCH PROGRAMME

7 **OUR PLAYBOOK**

8 **SET THE TONE**

10 **MATCH CONDITIONS**

13 **EARN THE RIGHT TO PLAY**

14 **THE GAMEPLAN & OUR TACTICS**

23 **GAME MANAGEMENT**

25 **NO PASSENGERS**

26 **HOW WE WILL KNOW WE ARE WINNING**





OUR PLAYBOOK

This Playbook sets out how we, as players, will shape the next three years from 2026 to 2028. It is written by players, for players, and is built on a simple truth: when we stand together, we are stronger.

The Gaelic Players Association is the officially recognised representative body for inter-county players. We represent over 4,000 male and female high-performing amateur athletes across all codes and counties.

Founded by players and led by players, we exist to look out for one another, to speak up on the issues that matter, and to ensure fairness, respect, and support for players on and off the pitch.

Inter-county life has never been more demanding. Training loads, fixture congestion, travel, and performance expectations continue to rise, while players balance work, study, family, and personal lives within an amateur system.

At the same time, Gaelic games are changing through integration, demographic shifts, a much-changed season structure, increased competition from other sports, and a fast-moving media landscape. These challenges affect every player, in every county.

This Playbook responds to that reality. It builds on the progress players have already made by acting collectively, across counties, codes, and genders, to deliver meaningful change.

It sets out a clear game plan for the next three years, focused on strengthening the player voice, improving standards and conditions, putting players at the centre of integration, growing and promoting our games, and supporting players as people during and beyond their playing careers.

This is our Playbook. Its success depends on us as players engaging, staying connected, backing one another, and using our collective voice to drive progress.

There can be no passengers.

If we show leadership, if we stay united, we can shape a better future for players and for Gaelic games.



SET THE TONE

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The GPA is the representative body for high-performance inter-county players. Founded by players in 1999 and strengthened by a merger with the Women's Gaelic Players Association in 2020, the GPA supports over 4,000 current male and female inter-county players and a growing number of former players across the four core pillars of Player Representation, Player Welfare, Player Development and Equality.

OUR VISION

To create an environment that upholds the brilliance of our inter-county players and games; allowing Gaelic players to excel as high performing athletes on the pitch and in their lives off the pitch; unprejudiced by team, tier, gender, or sport.

OUR MISSION

To enable players to balance the huge demands placed on them with the opportunities, support and investment required for them to be at their best, on and off the pitch.

OUR VALUES

We are Leaders.
We are Caring.
We are Ambitious.
We are Innovators.

OUR ROLE AND PURPOSE

We are the official representative body for inter-county players, working on behalf of men and women across all codes and counties. Our role is rooted in trust and credibility built through listening to players and standing up for their interests, both on and off the pitch.

We support players throughout their inter-county careers by providing practical help in areas such as welfare, education, career planning, and wellbeing. Alongside this, we represent players' views in discussions about the future of the games, always with a focus on fairness, sustainability, and respect for the people who play them.

WHAT WE BRING AS AN ORGANISATION

Our strength comes from our members. We represent a large, diverse group of inter-county players, reflecting the realities of modern inter-county life across different counties, competitions, and stages of career.

Over time, we have built strong relationships with various stakeholders, including our National Governing Bodies, by being consistent, informed, and focused on real issues that affect players. We use research and lived experience to back up what players are telling us, helping to ensure that their voices are heard and taken seriously in decision-making.

Most importantly, we aim to be a constructive and solutions-focused organisation, one that challenges when necessary, but always with the goal of improving the experience and welfare of players and strengthening the games as a whole.





MATCH CONDITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH PLAYERS ARE OPERATING

Inter-county players are facing increasing demands on their time and energy, while continuing to play within an amateur system. Balancing training, travel, work or study, and personal life has become more challenging, particularly as cost-of-living pressures continue to rise.

Fixture congestion and workload expectations add further pressure, and the experience of these challenges can differ widely depending on county, code, and personal circumstances. At the same time, players are operating in a space that attracts growing public and media attention.

These realities underline the need for strong representation, meaningful supports, and ongoing dialogue. Keeping player welfare at the centre of decisions is essential, not just for players themselves, but for the long-term health and sustainability of the games.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FACING GAELIC GAMES

Gaelic games continue to play a central role in communities across the country, but they are operating in a rapidly changing environment.

Integration presents one of the most significant moments in the history of Gaelic games. If approached positively and with ambition, it offers enormous potential to strengthen our games, broaden participation, and ensure equality across codes. While integration brings challenges, the GPA believes these are far outweighed by the opportunity created by uniting the three National Governing Bodies. Integration should not be viewed as a problem to be managed, but as a chance to build a stronger, fairer, and more sustainable future for Gaelic games.

Demographic change is also reshaping the landscape. Population growth in urban areas, declining numbers in some rural communities, and changing patterns of work, education, and migration all have an impact on participation levels, club sustainability, and traditional pathways into Gaelic games.



At the same time, Gaelic games face increasing **competition from other sports and activities**. Young people have more options than ever for how they spend their time, and retaining players through adolescence and into adulthood has become more challenging as sporting, educational, work, and social commitments overlap.

Finally, **the media landscape has changed significantly**. Audiences are consuming sport in new ways, with increased demand for digital content, on-demand access, and greater insight into the people behind the performances. While this creates new opportunities to connect with supporters, it also presents challenges in maintaining visibility, engaging younger audiences, and ensuring Gaelic games continue to cut through in a crowded media environment.

In some cases, trust between players and traditional media outlets has weakened. As established journalists move on and media structures change, long-standing relationships are lost. Increasingly, coverage is driven by short clips, social media commentary, or isolated quotes, often removed from their wider context.

This environment can leave players feeling exposed and misunderstood, leading many to limit engagement and avoid bringing their full selves to public conversations. At the same time, players often operate within tight controls around when and how they can speak, with management teams understandably cautious about unintended controversy or distraction.

The result is a more guarded media environment for players, at a time when authenticity and connection matter more than ever. Supporting players to engage confidently, safely, and on their own terms will be critical to strengthening relationships with supporters and ensuring players' voices are heard accurately and fairly.



EARN THE RIGHT TO PLAY

PREPARATION

The data and information used to inform this GPA Playbook has been drawn from a combination of quantitative and qualitative sources. These insights reflect both the lived experience of players and robust research gathered over time.

All findings were analysed to identify key themes and priorities. These were then reviewed and challenged through a structured process involving the National Executive Committee and the Squad Rep Network to ensure the playbook accurately reflects player needs across counties, codes, and cohorts.

The key data sources used to inform this playbook include:

DATA SOURCES





THE GAME PLAN & TACTICS

STRONGER TOGETHER

What has become clear in recent years is that when players stand together, real progress is made, not just for players, but for Gaelic games as a whole.

This has been demonstrated through:

- **Our motion on the Integration of the GAA, LGFA & Camogie Association, which initiated the integration process**
- **The United for Equality campaign, which delivered the female charter**
- **Successful lobbying for increased State investment in player grants**
- **Collective action that saved league participation for five inter-county hurling teams**
- **Advocacy on behalf of Munster football counties regarding championship seeding**
- **The campaign to secure choice between skorts and shorts**

In each case, players acted collectively, across counties, codes, and genders, to achieve outcomes that benefited the wider Gaelic games community.

Our game plan for the next three years will continue to harness the strength of this collective voice.

Five key areas of strategic focus have been identified to guide our work from 2026 to 2028. Under each of these objectives have been outlined. These have been intentionally left broad to ensure the strategy is adaptable within the ever-changing environment of Gaelic games and also to allow for creativity and innovation.

Each area of strategic focus will have an internal implementation plan on which progress will be gauged. Responsibility will be assigned to a GPA staff team, with regular reports back to our National Executive Committee.



**THE ELITE
PLAYER
EXPERIENCE**

**PLAYER
LED
MOVEMENT**

**PLAYERS
POWERING
INTEGRATION**

**PLAYERS
GROWING
THE GAMES**

**DEVELOPING
PLAYERS
BEYOND THE
GAMES**

AREA OF FOCUS #1

PLAYER LED MOVEMENT

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen the collective player voice
- Elevate the Squad Rep Network
- Align with international player movement
- Develop and empower future leaders

SUCCESS BY 2028

By 2028, inter-county players are more connected, more confident, and more influential, with a strong and trusted Squad Rep network and a new generation of player leaders shaping decisions that affect their lives and careers.



AREA OF FOCUS #2

THE ELITE PLAYER EXPERIENCE

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Work towards a sustainable playing season
- Advocate for a managed competition and training load
- Insist on high quality coaching and management standards
- Champion a balanced club and county relationship
- Advance formal recognition of 'Elite Amateur Players'
- Deliver baseline performance standards across all squads

SUCCESS BY 2028

By 2028, inter-county players experience clearer standards, fairer conditions, and a more balanced season, with welfare, workload, and quality of coaching treated as non-negotiables across all squads.



AREA OF FOCUS #3

PLAYERS POWERING INTEGRATION

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Work with all relevant organisations to promote opportunities of a united future
- Ensure NGBs maintain focus on integration commitments
- Ensure equality of investment, recognition and opportunity for players

SUCCESS BY 2028

By 2028 players will have been central to the delivery of integration, with clear progress on equality of investment, recognition and opportunity across codes and with accountability firmly embedded in how integration is implemented.



AREA OF FOCUS #4

PLAYERS GROWING THE GAMES

KEY OBJECTIVES

- **Unlock NILP opportunities to allow players to benefit fairly from their commercial value**
- **Increase player visibility to reconnect with Gaelic games supporters**
- **Encourage players to bring their personalities to media and supporter engagement**
- **Build and develop all codes nationally and internationally**
- **Deepen government support and strengthen constructive partnerships with the GAA, the LGFA and the Camogie Association**

SUCCESS BY 2028

By 2028, players are more visible, more supported, and more empowered to connect with supporters, grow the games, and benefit fairly from the value they help to create, at home and internationally.



AREA OF FOCUS #5

DEVELOPING PLAYERS BEYOND THE GAMES

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Support players with holistic professional and personal development at all stages of their playing careers
- Mitigate impact of inter-county activity on dual career development, especially post leaving inter-county panel
- Encourage players to invest in all aspects of their lives
- Protect players emotional and mental wellbeing
- Promote player role modelling and social impact initiatives

SUCCESS BY 2028

By 2028, players feel better supported as people, with stronger protection for wellbeing, clearer pathways for education and careers, and less long-term negative impact from inter-county commitments when their playing days end.

If we can look back in 2028 and say that life as an inter-county player is fairer, more balanced, and more sustainable, on and off the pitch, then this playbook will have done its job.

It will take us using our collective voice to achieve the actions set out in each area of strategic focus. That united voice will need to be leveraged on an ongoing basis with a laser like focus on:





GAME MANAGEMENT

TIMELINES & RESOURCES

This is a three-year Playbook that sets out the key areas of work to be delivered by the CEO and GPA staff team. A detailed implementation plan will be developed for each area of key strategic focus. This will include the composition of the team that is responsible for delivery.

As this Playbook represents the GPA's core priorities, resources and budgets will be aligned to support delivery. To ensure accountability, regular updates will be delivered to our National Executive Committee and our Board who will monitor progress. An annual review of what has been delivered and what has yet to be delivered will also take place.

GPA staff will be supported by Engagement and Development Officers, who play a vital role in maintaining strong two-way communication between players, Squad Reps, and the organisation.

Players can expect regular updates on progress and opportunities to engage, ensuring this Playbook remains a living document shaped by the collective voice of the membership.





NO PASSENGERS

No Playbook can succeed without buy-in from everyone involved. There can be no passengers.

While the GPA NEC, Board, staff, and Engagement and Development Officers all have key roles to play, the most important group in delivering this Playbook is us, the players.

WE NEED TO MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD.

WE NEED TO ENGAGE.

WE NEED TO LOBBY.

WE NEED TO FIGHT.

WE NEED TO LEAD.

Only by acting together can we drive meaningful change for players and for the future of Gaelic games.



HOW WE WILL KNOW WE ARE WINNING

PLAYER
LED MOVEMENT

WE WILL USE OUR
COLLECTIVE VOICE
TO ENHANCE OUR
EXPERIENCE ON AND
OFF THE PITCH

THE ELITE
PLAYER
EXPERIENCE

WE WILL DELIVER A
PLAYING EXPERIENCE
THAT ALLOWS US TO
DELIVER OUR BEST
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COUNTIES



PLAYERS
GROWING
THE GAMES

WE WILL BRING OUR
PERSONALITIES
TO THE FORE IN
PROMOTING OUR
GAMES

DEVELOPING
PLAYERS
BEYOND THE GAMES

WE WILL BRING A
BALANCE TO OUR LIVES,
NEVER NEGLECTING
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STUDIES AND
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PLAYERS
POWERING
INTEGRATION

WE WILL PLAY OUR
PART IN DELIVERING
INTEGRATION TO THE
BENEFIT OF ALL IN
GAELIC GAMES



“THE STRENGTH
OF THE TEAM
IS EACH
INDIVIDUAL
MEMBER. THE
STRENGTH OF
EACH MEMBER IS
THE TEAM.”

**PHIL JACKSON, 11-TIME NBA
CHAMPIONSHIP WINNING COACH**



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