

The school year is often perceived as a short year! However, we are no sooner putting one year's Cumann na mBunscol INTO GAA Mini 7's to bed than we are preparing for another season. After witnessing Limerick and Dublin claim their All Ireland Glory it was only a month before schools and county committees were back in action – preparing for the year ahead. Texts about Mini 7's games were featuring on social media before the September meeting was even held. Míle buíochas daoibh go léir!

Our exhibition games showcase just a small sample of the great work being done in primary schools by our teachers. The commitment to promoting Gaelic Games alongside an ever increasing workload is commendable. For some children this is the only time they play Gaelic games and it creates lasting memories. For some children it heralds the start of their playing career! Some children become coaches and guides on the pitch for those newer to the skills than themselves. Whatever the group the child falls into the coaching, participation, supporting and fun will hopefully lead to a lifelong learning for our National Games.

There are new initiatives in our schools every week and month presently. Rarely a week goes by when an email doesn't arrive with an idea for another flag, or another workshop, a showcase event or fundraiser. How wonderful that the Cumann na mBunscol Mini 7's has stood strong against the waves of initiatives. It is wonderful to see the baton being passed on to younger generations of teachers – to do what those before them have done – and to continue the promotion of Gaelic Games in our schools.

It is also wonderful that the INTO Cumann na mBunscol GAA Mini games still feature of some of the most important days in the GAA calendar. Winning the INTO Cumann na mBunscol Mini 7's is a great event for a school and a community. Getting selected to play in Croke Park on All Ireland Semi Final and Finals day is more than an honour. Who doesn't dream of walking out onto the pitch in Croke Park and looking around at a full stadium!

“We just wanted to send you a note to say thank you for Sunday.

Liam, Paul and myself had the best day, I know it was as good as Christmas day morning for Liam, he enjoyed everything about the day.

We appreciate it so much and would like to thank you and to everyone involved for making such a joyful occasion to all these boys and girls it was a dream come true for them.”

“I just wanted to message you to say how much we really enjoyed last Saturday. As for Tommy, he absolutely loved every single minute, from start to finish. It will be a memory that he will certainly treasure.”

“Just wanted to follow up after our fabulous day in Dublin last weekend. My daughter Beth had an absolutely fantastic day and this will no doubt spur her on to continue training, working and playing Camogie into the future.

It was a great experience and I know is likely always full of complications for yourselves but just wanted to follow up and say thanks – It was really appreciated by my us”

This great day wouldn't happen without so many people. Firstly, I would like to thank the teachers that co-ordinate the local blitz games in their counties and the county secretaries for all your working collecting information and returning the excel documents. The prompt and efficient work of the Cumann na mBunscol County secretary is a key role in the event. Míle buíochas!

To all of our colleagues who teach and coach in schools and allow our games to happen – you are providing children with great experiences. After all the children are organised into semi-finals and finals it is a great day to send out the information to schools. It has been lovely to have chats with delighted principals and teachers. I appreciate the extra work that they all take to contact families and ensure that the replies are all sent back to me. The care and interest that are shown for the pupils in their care is inspiring.

For the months around these exhibition games I develop a whole new group of friends – excited parents and teachers! Anxiety builds each week before games. Once the first semi-final game is played I get many texts from teachers, or parents – double checking I got the forms, checking did they miss the details. This day is historic in their families and in their schools and no one wants to miss it!

From the moment the children enter the Barbara Ward Centre their magical day begins. Thank you to the ladies in the Barbara Ward who provide tea/coffee and minerals to excited and tired families – travelling from as close as Drumcondra and as far as Passage West. The early team talks are delivered from all the interested parties – GAA , INTO and Cumann na mBunscol. Then the children meet their team for the day and brought across the road to Croke Park by the Dublin teachers and the Safeguarding Team. My thanks to Michelle Harte for all the work she does to support this initiative. Mile buiochas to the Dublin teachers for their help on the day with the teams and the goalposts. Thanks to my fellow officers who come to Croke Park on the day to enjoy the games and support the children.

This year I would like to especially thank Carmel Browne, INTO President. Her speeches were an inspiration to us all and her own love and talent shone through every week. Parents and teachers enjoyed her insights to playing in Croke Park and being part of a team. In an age where people love to travel she encouraged all our young people to keep up their games abroad – which would help them to make friends and have links to home.

Of course the high point for the children was getting presented with their kit. Then the thrill of getting your dressing room in Croke Park to change. They get to experience everything about a big game event from the Artane Band, to the food, the team buses and the press! Most of all they get the big team experience – team photographs on the pitch with all the Presidents, marching out at half time to entertain the crowd – and even when lucky seeing themselves on the big screen! Thanks to all those involved in the GAA that made this extra special on the day by joining the children for photographs – Carmel Browne, Jarlath Burns, Michael Naughton, Brian Molloy and Triona Murphy. Your time is greatly appreciated.

Lastly, to our sponsors. Without the support of the INTO and the GAA it would not be possible for these games to continue. On behalf of all the children, their families and teachers, their schools and communities I thank both organisations!

Preparations for this year's games are well on the way. The first excel documents have even arrived!

Best wishes to you all for the rest of the school year!

The Dates for this year's games are:

All Ireland Finals 20th July/27th July

Semi Finals 5th/6th July, 12/13 July

Return of excel forms no later than April 10th 2025