

# BLACK & WHITE

ISSUE 3

A NEWSLETTER FROM CLUB SLIGO

## Our new alternative jersey for 2024



INSIDE

### STEPHEN SHEIL

Sligo's new senior hurling manager  
on his ambitions for the team

### PLAYER WATCH

with Finnian Cawley

for all the latest news see [sligogaa.ie/ClubSligo](https://sligogaa.ie/ClubSligo)

 **Club  
Sligo**  
Supporting Club,  
Supporting County





# Sean Boyle

Games Performance Development Administrator / Senior Strength and Conditioning Coach

## S&C: *making Sligo players compete better for longer*

In recent years, a year-round strength and conditioning programme for all teams has become integral to the culture of football and hurling in Sligo. Club Sligo caught up with Sean Boyle, Head of Athletic Development for Sligo GAA, to discuss the programme.

Sean Boyle, a native of Mayo, joined the Sligo set-up in 2018, and he oversees the delivery of the S&C programme for all teams. Sean got into strength and conditioning in a roundabout way, having initially studied Biopharmaceutical Science. "I discovered very quickly that road wasn't for me. I wasn't a great footballer, but I was a good athlete, and I knew that I wanted to be involved in sport at some level," he says.

Initially, he became a gym instructor, personal trainer and swim coach before joining the National Athletics Development Academy in Dublin and completing an MSc in Strength & Conditioning at St Mary's University in England.

Prior to joining Sligo, Sean also worked for AXSOM Sports, Mayo GAA and Connacht Rugby.

"With Sligo, I'm pretty much involved in everything from the S&C, the medical, the coaching right through from our seniors to the work of our Games Development Officers in the national schools," he says.

"I have a great team with me and without them Sligo couldn't achieve what we hope to.

"Sean Taylor and Iarlaith Cox look after the U20 footballers and senior hurlers. Iarlaith is also leading the U16 squad with Aidan Rooney. Gary O'Hehir is with the minor U17 squad and, last season, I was very lucky to have Tourlestrane clubman Kenny Gavigan with the U17 squad.

In addition, interns and volunteers help to run the underage set-up. "We get support from ATU Sligo and Connacht GAA and take on placements of six to eight months. This year we have Eoghan Donaghy

joining us from University of Limerick. At the end of it we might give them jobs or provide other opportunities for them to further their education or coaching careers," he says.

"I have a very simple mantra: do simple things, but do them really, really well. Where I think I have probably provided the most benefit for Sligo is not the programmes I've designed or what we've done in the gym - it's putting simple structures, a better culture and education in place."

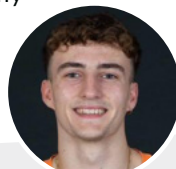
When Sean first joined Sligo GAA, not many senior players were doing gym work. Now everyone from U14 up has a tailored year-round programme.

"For example, once our senior squad finish, they have three weeks off, they go back to their clubs, but we look after their strength and conditioning and provide medical and nutritional support while they are playing with their clubs. When they finish with their clubs, they get three weeks off, and then they're back in with us. So, we have now developed a full-year athletic development project for everyone from U14 all the way to seniors. We don't do it in blocks. We do year-round, and we're hands-on all year," he says.

The approach has benefited both established and emerging senior players. "When an athlete comes into our senior squad, it doesn't take them two or three years to get physically ready to play at that level. Our U20 footballers, who have been really competitive in the last two or three years, are being conditioned for senior football. That's probably our biggest benefit from it - we can keep a conveyor belt coming through," he says.

"For the established players, it has enabled them to compete better for longer. They are fitter, faster, stronger and bigger. On average, they're four or five kilos heavier than they were three years ago, but their sprint speeds are higher, they're covering more ground."

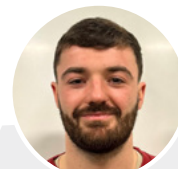
### SEAN'S TEAM >>>



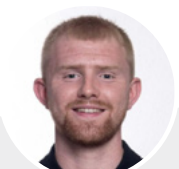
EOGHAN DONAGHY



GARY O'HEHIR



IARLAITH COX



SEAN TAYLOR

# NEW JERSEY FOR 2024



Check out our new alternate jersey, which got its first run out in Markievicz Park in the league game against Wicklow on February 4th. Modelled here by Kevin O'Kennedy, senior hurling captain, and on the front page by senior footballer Luke Towey, the O'Neills jersey is available to buy in **John Kent Sports** and **Elverys** in Sligo town or online at [www.oneills.com](http://www.oneills.com) and [www.elverys.ie](http://www.elverys.ie).

## MEMBER DRAW RESULTS



*Terry Clark, the winner of the top prize of €5,000 in our December draw, is pictured with her husband Paul Clark as she is presented with her cheque by Sligo GAA Treasurer Cormac Kearns.*

### OCTOBER

Prize	Name	Address
€500	Jennings O'Donovan	Sligo
€100	Padraig & Annette Henry	Keash
€100	Bart Barrins & Michael O'Donnell	Castleconnor
€100	Gerry Tuohy	Calry
€100	Bluebird Care	Sligo
€100	Cummins Accounting & Advisory	Sligo

### NOVEMBER

Prize	Name	Address
€500	Terry McCann	Drumcliffe
€100	Bernard Rafter	Easkey
€100	Mary Finn	Ballintogher
€100	Eddie & Eileen Carr	Calry
€100	Richard Brennan Syndicate	Bunninadden
€100	Darragh Healy	Strandhill Road

### DECEMBER

Prize	Name	Address
€5,000	Terry Clark	Ballisodare
€500	Michael Kilcoyne	Drumcliffe
€100	Bernadine McGurran	Calry
€100	David Quinn	Riverstown
€100	Francis & Ann Taaffe	Ballintogher
€100	John & Ailish Murphy	Tubbercurry



*Breda with her son Johnny and his godchild Cameron*

## My Club Sligo

**NAME:** Breda Martyn

**CLUB:** St. Mary's

**CLUB SLIGO MEMBER:** 3 years



### WHY DID YOU BECOME A MEMBER?

*I have always been a Sligo and a GAA supporter and I was very happy to join Club Sligo to try and support the county in some way. Myself and my family go to all Sligo games and my son has been involved with Sligo at underage level. Joining Club Sligo was my way of supporting all the work that goes on with development at underage level.*

### FAVOURITE CLUB/COUNTY GAA MOMENT?

*My favourite club moment was winning the County Final in 2001. Johnny won his first Senior Championship and was awarded Man of the Match. (Proud Mammy)*

It is your support of Club Sligo that allows us to develop both players and infrastructure across the county. **This is Your Club Sligo.**

To renew your membership:

go to [sligogaa.ie](http://sligogaa.ie)

email [administrator.sligo@gaa.ie](mailto:administrator.sligo@gaa.ie)

call 071 9168750

# GETTING SLIGO HURLERS BACK WHERE THEY BELONG



We speak with **Stephen Sheil** as he embarks on his first National Hurling League campaign as an inter-county manager

**I**n his first foray as an inter-county manager, Stephen Sheil is clear on his ambitions for Sligo's senior hurlers. He wants to get them back where they belong, which he says is two divisions higher than their current level in Division 3A of the National Hurling League.

At the time of going to print, Stephen had overseen two matches in Division 3A – a win at home against Cavan (4-19 to 3-18) and a draw away to Armagh (Armagh 1-15 Sligo 2-12) – and says he now has a clear idea of what he needs to work on with the squad.

"With Cavan, we built up a big lead but took our foot off the pedal and were lucky to hold on, but I was happy with the scoring. We lost our formation and shape in the second half and had to work on that for the Armagh game," Stephen says.

"In that game Armagh came back at us, but we weathered the storm better than we did against Cavan. We knew Armagh would be big, strong and tough, and they were, but we dealt with that well, so there were positives there."

Speaking to *Black & White* two weeks ahead of their game away to Louth on February 25th, Stephen says they need to work on their technical skills. "What we're seeing is that we're behind a bit on ball handling, ball control, passing, striking, so we'll work on that, but that will also improve as the weather gets better and the ground gets

firmer," he says.

"If we can go game by game and pick them off one by one we will be doing well. The league is the priority at this stage," he says.

Since his appointment – for a two-year term with the possibility of a third – Stephen and his backroom team have been getting to know the players and whittling down the panel.

Before the league began, they had one competitive outing – a narrow defeat to Roscommon in the Connacht League on New Year's Day when they conceded a couple of goals late on.

**"If we can go game by game and pick them off one by one we will be doing well"**

That match did give Stephen a chance to blood a few of the U20s at senior level, and it was also notable for the history that was made when the five O'Kelly-Lynch brothers got on the field together.

After Sligo's Connacht League outing, the Easkey hurlers returned to the fold following their All-Ireland

club run. The panel was then cut from 48 to the 34 that Stephen will rely on to achieve his goals.

The panel that is contesting the league and hoping to make its mark on the Christy Ring Cup has a good spread across all the clubs in Sligo, with Calry, Coolera, Easkey, Naomh Eoin, Oranmore (Galway), Tourlestrane and Western Gaels all represented.

A native of Carlow who now lives in Westmeath with his wife and two children, Stephen, his brothers and his father before them all played hurling for Carlow and their club Kildavin Clonegal. At club level, Stephen was Carlow's Intermediate Hurler of the Year in 1997.

Stephen retired from the intercounty scene when he took his first job after college, and his coaching and management career began after he and his family moved to Westmeath.

An IT consultant by profession, Stephen had worked for Intel and Kepak before setting up his own business in 2019. Being self-employed has allowed him to spend more time with his family and more time coaching!

He started coaching underage with his local club, St Joseph's in Streamstown, before being asked to get involved with coaching the Westmeath U14 development squad. Stephen and three other ex-county hurlers, Westmeath's Ian Corrigan and Barry Kennedy and Offaly's Johnny Dooley, brought that group up the age ranks. Stephen also got



involved in coaching the senior squads at a number of clubs in his locality.

In 2021, he was asked to take on the college team at TUS Athlone, and he is still involved there though he has relinquished a lot of the responsibilities since taking the Sligo job. "The progression has been from club to college to county. That's the way it panned out," he says.

Other counties were also advertising vacancies when Stephen saw the ad for the Sligo job, but it was clear to him that it was the one he wanted. "The Sligo one enticed me more because of being from Carlow, one of the so-called weaker counties. It just seemed to be more appealing. I thought I could do a little bit more, put my own stamp on things in terms of the hurling and the tactical and the technical side of things," he says.

"I had 90 percent of the backroom team organised before the interview. I had done my homework on Sligo as well, so I knew who I wanted to be there and who I wanted to bring with me."

**"I had done my homework on Sligo...I knew who I wanted to be there and who I wanted to bring with me"**

Stephen's coaching staff includes Seamus Qualter from Turloughmore in Galway, who previously managed Roscommon and Westmeath and won two Keogh Cups and two Christy Ring Cups, and Donal

# Stephen: the early years



Growing up just outside the village of Kildavin, near Tullow in Co Carlow, Stephen played football and hurling for his club, Kildavin Clonegal, from an early age all the way up to senior level.

Initially called into the county hurling set-up at U14, Stephen and most of the same core players he started out with graduated to join Carlow's senior hurling squad and hurling then took precedence over football for him. "I would have played most games in the same half-back line all the way up from U14 to U21. I'd say it was unique. Carlow is a small county so it was a small pool of players," he says.

"There was always a hurling background in our house when I was growing up. Dad was mad into it. He played for Carlow as well and so did my two older brothers. So, it's in the blood."

Stephen played senior hurling for Carlow for six years but retired from playing relatively early when he got a job with Intel in Leixlip. "It was my first job out of college, and I wanted to make an impression. It's probably a regret that I didn't try a little bit harder to hang around, but public transport wasn't ideal back then. I used to get a bus from Leixlip into the city centre to get a train to Carlow and then get a bus out to Dr Cullen Park," he says.

Stephen cut his teeth in coaching at club and college level before taking on the Sligo role as his first intercounty job.

O'Brien, originally from Tipperary but living in Ballyhaunis in Mayo, who managed the Mayo U21 team.

"Seamus and I worked together with the college as well and we work well together. It was kind of a no-brainer for me to ask him. His experience and knowledge is second to none. Donal is very meticulous, very knowledgeable in terms of tactics and game plays. He was definitely top of the list for me. We're on the same wavelength. We have the same way of thinking," Stephen says.

Stephen put together a three-year plan to get up to Division 2 (under the new league format coming in next year), win the Christy Ring Cup and qualify for the Joe McDonagh Cup.

"This year, we would like to give the Christy Ring a really good rattle. The lads have plenty of hurling in them and I think they can do it," he says.

## BACKROOM TEAM

*Seamus Qualter: Coach*

*Donal O'Brien: Coach*

*Sean Taylor: Lead S&C*

*Iarlaith Cox: S&C*

*Dara Cox: Team Liaison - U20*

*Noel Gallagher: Team Liaison*

*Oisín Ó Slatarra: Team Physio*

*Deborah Sherlock: Sports Nutritionist*

*Paul Riordan: Sports Psychologist*

*Darren Norman: Kitman*

*Bernard Jackman: High Performance Consultant*



# DEVELOPMENT SQUADS

## INSIGHT



### HOW CLUBS NOMINATE PLAYERS:

Clubs can nominate players to participate in the development squad programme if the players meet the following criteria:

- ✓ Players must be in their final year at U13 level, meaning they must have been born between January 1st and December 31st of the qualifying year.
- ✓ Players must be active members of the nominating club and have demonstrated their potential at club level.
- ✓ They must be enthusiastic and committed to participating in this one-year programme.
- ✓ Players must possess the ability to develop within a challenging environment.

**“I have been involved in development squads since U13 level.**

**Professional coaching at county level has helped me develop and learn good habits that I’ve been able to bring back to my club.”**

**James Cronin** St Mary’s/Sligo U17



**“I enjoyed every minute of underage football with Sligo and got to be part of some great teams.”**

**Luke Casserly**

Saint Molaise Gaels/Sligo U20



## OUR SQUAD STRUCTURES:

This table sets out the current development squad structure in operation:

Squad	Type	Access	Location	Squad Size	Development Places*
U13	Development	Open	Divisional	35	(*4)
U14	Development	Restricted	Summerhill	100	
U15	Development	Restricted	Scarden	50	
	Extended			30	
U16	Development	Restricted	Scarden	35	
	Extended			25	
U17	Competitive	Restricted	Scarden	32	3
U19	Development	Open	Scarden	35	
U20	Competitive	Restricted	Scarden	35	5



\*\* Development places are dedicated places that are set aside purely for player development purposes and would be allocated to players who will progress to the squad in the following year.



# AWARDS NIGHT FOR SENIOR AND U20 FOOTBALLERS



Senior Football Panel



Cathal Mullaney interviews Tony McEntee and Noel McGuire



U20 Football Panel



Austin O'Callaghan interviews Paul Henry and Enda Mitchell



Player Watch

**NAME:** Finnian Cawley **AGE:** 26  
**POSITION:** Midfield/Half forward  
**CLUB:** Football: St Farnan's | Hurling: Easkey

After helping the Sligo football team win promotion to Division 3 last year, Finnian Cawley, a dual star who plays football for St Farnan's and plays hurling with Easkey, has thrown his hat in with the county's hurlers again this season as they too seek to achieve promotion.

Since 2018, Finnian has alternated between football and hurling for the county while continuing to play both at club level. "At senior intercounty level the demands are too great to play both simultaneously. With the commitment required, with video analysis sessions, with training, with your recovery, it would be very difficult to keep it all going," he says.

Finnian, who is a teacher at Colaiste Iascaigh, first played for the county footballers in 2018, then had a few seasons with the hurlers, another year with the footballers, and he is now back with the hurlers under new manager Stephen Sheil.

"I don't have a preference for either game being honest. I really enjoy playing both! I find playing both sports at different stages throughout a given season actually helps keeps me fresh as a player because they're both different sports that require different skillsets. Switching between the two like that provides new challenges and opportunities, which is good because it helps me develop numerous areas of my game. In my view, that can only be a good thing as it enables me to be the best overall player that I can be," he says.

"I'm in a very fortunate position to have played both at senior intercounty level. To be wanted to play both at that level is something I'm very grateful for. When I retire, if I look back on my career and say I did my very best for both codes and for Sligo as a whole, then that's something I can be happy about and live with."

Finnian credits his underage club coaches – Peter Downes, Kieran O'Connor, Martin Mulligan in football and Michael Gordon, Pdraig Hallinan and Johnny Mullins in hurling – for guiding him on the path to his achievements for club and county. "They would have been a huge influence on me, and my family – they have been very supportive," he says.

**Favourite Book:** The Compound Effect by Darren Hardy.

**Favourite Movie:** The Shawshank Redemption.



# CENTURIONS HONOURED

At the recent medal ceremony in Sligo's Radisson Blu hotel, we were delighted to mark two significant milestones as Coolera Strandhill clubmates Keelan Cawley and Niall Murphy both celebrated 100 competitive appearances for the Sligo senior football team.



**Presentation to Keelan Cawley with Chairperson Sligo GAA Séan Carroll and former All Star Barnes Murphy.**

## Keelan Cawley

Keelan Cawley is Sligo's longest serving player of the modern era. He made his first appearance in a senior shirt on March 7th, 2010, when he came on as a late sub in an Allianz Football League Division 3 game away to Wexford. He then started for the first time three weeks later away to Fermanagh at Brewster Park in the same competition. He went on to start a further seven games that year including the successful Division 3 final at Croke Park, on the day before his 21st birthday, and the Connacht final against Roscommon at MacHale Park.

Keelan has been a mainstay of the Sligo side in each of the 13 seasons since then and, in a strange twist, made his 100th appearance on the same ground as his first - Wexford Park - on the February 29th, 2020, the day also that Ireland had its first confirmed Covid case which may explain why the achievement went somewhat under the radar.

When he started the final game of last year's regular league campaign against Leitrim in Carrick-on-Shannon, it was his 100th time to line up as a starter for Sligo and he

has now worn the black and white 131 times, 104 times as a starter, and has scored 0-24.

## Niall Murphy

In 2023, his 11th season of intercounty football, Niall Murphy reached the milestone of 100 games for Sligo in the third round Allianz League game against Waterford in Markievicz Park on February 19th. He scored 0-2 in that game and was ever-present for the remainder of Sligo's season, bringing his overall total of appearances to date to 111, to which he had added two more this year as we go to print.

The then 18-year-old Niall made his first appearance in the FBD Connacht League against London at Kent Park on January 8th, 2012, scoring three points.

He became a regular first team starter three years later and has since gone on to become one of the top marksmen in intercounty football nationally. In fact, in the 79 games that he has played since becoming a regular at the beginning of 2015, he has only failed to score on six occasions. In that time also, he has been selected to play for Connacht and, in 2017, he was selected to represent Ireland in the International Rules Series tour to Australia.

Across his career to date, Niall has scored 16 goals and 310 points, a huge contribution that will mark him out as one of the most prolific forwards in Sligo's history.



**Presentation to Niall Murphy with Chairperson Sligo GAA Séan Carroll and former All Star Barnes Murphy.**



FANTASTIC

5

*The five O'Kelly-Lynch brothers Fergal, Robert, Tony, Gerard and Liam who made history by lining out for Sligo in the Connacht Senior Hurling League against Roscommon in January.*

**NEXT ISSUE**



*We speak to Liam Óg Gormley about his role as Sligo GAA Coaching and Games Manager as well as coaching development across the county.*