

## What are GAA Go Games?

GAA Go Games are small-sided games with modified rules in both Hurling (Go Hurling) and Gaelic Football (Go Gaelic). They form a central element of GAA policy on games for children up to and including the Under-12 age grade. An Ghaeltacht CLG follows the following principles in organizing and participating in Go Games.

### 'Under-12 and Younger Age Groups

Games in Under 12 and Younger Age Groups shall be organized on the “Go Games” model with teams being a maximum of 11-a-side and structured to ensure that all participants get to play in the full game.

At Under-12 level and Under-11 level, Competitions may also be organized on a mini-league format on the basis that the teams are a maximum of 11-a-side and that provision is made for all members of the team panel to participate in the game.'

Essentially, games for all age groups up to and including under-10 will be organised exclusively on the Go Games model.

An Ghaeltacht CLG Go Games Model is defined by the following criteria:

- **There is meaningful playing time for all players in every game**
- **Games are organised in a non competitive way i.e. results are not recorded**
- **Games are small-sided**
- **Playing rules are modified to suit the developmental stages of the children**
- **Playing area is modified**
- **Playing equipment is modified**

At Under-12 and Under-11 level, Mini-League Competitions are organised to provide and support a gradual exposure to the challenges of competitively organised games programmes.

These mini-league competitions can be introduced in parallel to Go Games. The mini-league system is a competitive games programme built on the philosophy of Go Games, that is, a) it is small-sided, and b) provision must be made for all players to get meaningful playing time.

### ***What is the philosophy of Go Games?***

The underlying philosophy where Go Games are concerned is one of full participation and fair play where each player gets to play the entire game (no subs where practical) and plays in a number of different playing positions during the course of each game. The games are small sided and the emphasis is on participation rather than the result. 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 also revolve around the core values enshrined in the GAA Respect Initiative.

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

There are a numerous advantages to this approach by An Ghaeltacht CLG, but the most obvious are:

- **Games are small-sided and all participants get to play**
- **Games are played in a fun environment with emphasis on improving skills**
- **Children are not subject to the “win at all costs” approach**

### ***Is there any research to support this approach?***

Research conducted at DCU, under the guidance of Prof Niall Moyna and Dublin football coach Mickey Whelan was crucial in the development of the Go Games. By tracking the same 7 players in a 15 a-side and 7-a-side game (each of 30 minute duration) the data indicated the following benefits of the small sided game;

- **Players worked harder therefore increasing fitness levels**
- **Players had more contact with the ball leading to increased opportunities to score, make decisions, develop skills**
- **The children also reported a greater level of enjoyment and had higher levels of perceived competence (self esteem)**
- 

Go Games are also in line with the Primary School PE curriculum and have recently been endorsed by Cumann na mBunscol at their national AGM. The approach is further endorsed by outgoing INTO president, Máire ní Chuinneagáin; "I fully indorse the sport for all approach adopted by the GAA and Cumann na mBunscol. The maximum participation of all children in sporting activities is at the heart of the primary school curriculum. Participation must never be sacrificed for competition, the success of the few must not be promoted over the opportunity for all children to take part, enjoy and develop to the best of their ability."

### ***How will Under 12 and Under 11 be affected by this rule?***

Mini leagues will be organised which act as an introduction to competition. These leagues would be small sided and would ensure that there is provision for participation for all players. Where possible clubs would field multiple teams to facilitate all players playing to avoid children sitting on sidelines. It is important for clubs to be aware that all competitions or tournaments must be sanctioned by county board for insurance purposes.

### ***What is the aim of this policy?***

The ultimate aim is to ensure a quality introduction to Gaelic games for all children and to build a mass of players to progress and continue to play with their club. The provision of formal competition for children is a relatively recent development. However, with the passage of time, these competitions have in some cases become more serious and naturally when this occurs a culture of 'keep the best and neglect the rest' develops. While those in charge may be well intentioned, there is no justification for placing adult-type demands on young children e.g. where winning is the over-riding concern, where they play in 15-a-side games, on over sized pitches, and have minimal involvement in the game.

This has led to a situation where many players who - for a variety of reasons – mature at a slower rate, finish up dropping out of Gaelic games due to a lack of confidence in their own ability, a lack of playing time, a lack of fun and the absence of any real sense of achievement. 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. This in no way rules out competition, but contextualises it, firstly through Go Games as the intrinsic motivation inherent to sport and secondly through mini-league competitions within a framework which ensures that all children get a fair opportunity to participate and provides greater opportunity for skill development and enjoyment.