

TOWN TATTTLER





Ciarán ‘Connie’ Conroy

This month, our own Laura Bergin caught up with her cousin Connie Conroy This is their interview.

Tell us about Ciarán Conroy.?

Most people don't know me as Ciarán; In Portlaoise, I'm Connie Conroy. When I was growing up, there were lots of nicknames - Budgie Keogh, Zulu Brown, Frog Harney, Skinny Roe, Rizzle Dunne, Birdie Conroy, Wogger Dunne, Ferdie Critchley. Connie was given to me in the school yard, and it stuck. At home, I've always been Ciarán, but in the club and town, it's Connie. Many people would not know my proper name.

Your family has a proud history with the club. Tell us about that.?

I was one of four children from the Ridge Road, Kevin, Margaret, Deirdre, and I, all of whom played with Portlaoise. Patrick, my son, played with the club also. My uncle Jack was Chairman of Laois GAA and of the Leinster GAA provincial council. He was in the running for president of the GAA before he passed away. My father, Christy, wrote the song 'The Portlaoise Queen' over 70 years ago. The ballad, synonymous with 'The Town', was sung after countless county finals, and it will be sung after many more. It tells the story of many of the town's characters going on a voyage on a boat called 'The Portlaoise Queen'. A few years back, we found an original audio tape of my father singing the song. It was so great to hear him singing it. My sister Margaret helped found the Portlaoise Ladies club, together with my cousin Laura Bergin and her father Billy, who played for Park and Laois. My mother, like many women of her time, was a proud member of the club's catering committee.

What are your earliest memories of the club?

I was seven, attending a county final when the Town faced Timahoe. I distinctly remember being down close to the pitch and that the players seemed like giants.

Teddy Fennelly Snr, Alfie Lewis and Pascal Delaney were on that team. I remember staring in awe at their size and strength; it left a lasting impression. I recall our first Leinster Football final win against Athlone (1971). About then, I began playing on juvenile teams under the remarkable Bill Phelan, who each year trained multiple club teams and was like a pied piper, literally going door to door, collecting players to ensure we fielded a full team. I went to CBS Primary School, and after school we played football or hurling. That was the daily routine. All very simple yet wonderful. It was what we knew and what we loved; we just did it and had great fun. Those early experiences weren't just about football and hurling; they were our way of life. Throughout the years, my greatest memories of the club are of the people, the characters of the town. There are many iconic games and wins in the history books, yet it's the people, the fun and the personalities that I most remember. I have great memories as a player, as a supporter, a coach, an administrator and all those memories have one thing in common – the people.



Christy Conroy who wrote "The Portlaoise Queen", which has become the anthem for "Town" teams.



Connie pictured with Sonny Keogh

What are your various involvements within the club?

As a young player, it began in the CBS with Brother Somers, who introduced us to football and hurling. I fondly remember the John Cole Street League, which was played on the pitch beside the swimming pool. Every road, street and estate competed fiercely each summer. These were epic games, instilling local rivalry and a pride in your place. The league was sponsored by a local supermarket that supplied Taylor Keith Orange and Taytos after each game. Sonny Keogh's father, Tommy and Andy Loughlin dispensed the goodies sitting on a wall on the Ridge Road. I moved through the juvenile ranks, and we won several county finals from under-12 through minor and under-21. We won an intermediate football title in the early 80's, which resulted in Portlaoise fielding two teams in the Laois Club Championship. Interestingly, both Portlaoise teams ended up in the same championship group. I served as Club PRO, and John Hanniffy got me to facilitate long-term planning sessions among club members some years back. Over the years, I have coached both juvenile and adult teams, hurling and football, men and ladies. I coached the Ladies team just after it was formed, and I enjoyed working with Ivan Byrne



when we coached the Ladies Senior team a few years back. I also valued working with Br Philly Ryan and the Senior Hurlers a while back. It was great to be involved with the Senior Men Footballers last year and see their commitment to bring back a championship to the club.

Can you recall one game from football and hurling, a win and a loss that you played in??

We beat Ballyroan in two back-to-back minor football finals in the late 70's, which were memorable, but an agonising loss came in the under-21 football championship game in '81. The Town was chasing eight in a row, but The Heath defeated us in Emo. They deserved it, but it was painful for us. The most thrilling win was the minor hurling county final in '80 against Rathdowney, who were going for five in a row. The excitement and sheer joy of winning that game by a point remain with me. These and many other experiences taught me that sport is about winning and losing, and that we need to be gracious in both.



Connie pictured with his son Paddy after a Town win.



Portlaoise manager Bill Phelan in Croke Park after the 1976 Leinster Final win against Cooley Kickhams

What are your best memories as a supporter?

Watching Portlaoise win its second Leinster football final against Cooley Kickham's at Croke Park in '76 is top of my football memories. Seeing the Town triumph on that stage was extraordinary. Some of that team then went on to win the All-Ireland club final in 1983, the highest accolade in club football. In hurling, the first of the 4 in a row, the 1981 county final in Rathdowney against Camross was magical, 38 years of waiting for the club - the excitement, the drama, the win and the celebrations that day are forever remembered. They're not just wins; they are stories, shared memories, and a sense of belonging that stays with you for a lifetime.

What were your most painful defeats as a supporter?

In Football: 2016, Stradbally beat us with a last-minute goal - ecstasy for them, devastating for us. In Hurling, it's the 1987 Leinster final against Rathnure in Kilkenny, we were

ahead with seconds to go, conceded a goal, and the rest is history. I went with my late mother, Mary, and the journey home was total silence - thirty miles, one hour, not a word spoken. Losses like that never leave you. It is etched into my memory as vividly as our great victories.

Who are your club heroes?

Over the years, I've had countless heroes on and off the pitch: It's a long list that includes Curly Pendergast, Colm and Gerry Brown, Atch Whelan, John Taylor, Cheddar, the Rigney's, the Bohane's, Tom Conroy, Zach, Bruno, Cahir Healy, Tommy Fitz, David Seale, and Kieran Lillis. Some club stalwarts behind the scenes, like Dick Sides, Jazz, Brian Delaney, Ollie Byrne, John Hanniffy, Seamie Smyth and Theresa O Reilly. I recall many years ago, Tommy Keogh arranged for the Gallowglass Ceili band to play in the old clubhouse to raise funds for the club. Peadar Molloy, who was Chairman at the time, asked Cheddar and me to come up to the clubhouse one Saturday afternoon to discuss getting some more modern live bands to complement what Tommy was doing. Cheddar and I arrived and called out for Peadar; he called back, we could hear him but couldn't see him. After a minute or so of calling him, we looked up and saw Peadar hanging from a rafter with one hand and painting the top of the wall with the other. There was nobody else about. Another hero. When Peadar got down, we chatted and agreed to launch the 'Mega Club', a monthly music venue that brought in much-needed funds for the club. The Mega Club gigs and the Wild Owl Night have gone down in folklore - Crazy, Chaotic and pure unadulterated Craic.

Two great friends are my two biggest heroes - Jimmy Keenan and Pat Critchley. I am so lucky to have soldiered with them. Both are truly unique. Jimmy is an all-rounder, a hurler, a track and field athlete, a footballer, a boxer, a hunter, a fisherman, a motorbiker, a boxer and of course a rock and roller. Every moment I spent with Jimmy was spent living in the moment, and it was just great fun. Jimmy's white Hiace van XCI - 701 could tell a few good stories. Pat Critchley is a legend. The most brilliant of sportsmen, 15



county titles across Hurling and Football, an excellent basketballer, Pat would have excelled in any sport. I remember him turning up unannounced one day and winning a Laois Novice cross-country championship. Laois's only hurling All-Star, he is recognised across the country as a top-class coach. His presentation at a recent national GAA conference, which I attended, was widely recognised as the best of the day. However, it's his love of the game, his enthusiasm, his humility, and his genuine interest in every single player lucky enough to be coached by him that stand out most to me. He is as enthusiastic today as he has ever been. I was lucky enough to work with Pat and the late great Lulu Carroll, coaching the Laois Ladies Senior Football team and also with Pat coaching the Laois Minor hurlers. The Ladies started in Division 2 - two senior Leinster final wins followed; it was the very best of times. The minor hurlers got to a Leinster final. Pats' contribution to Scoil Croist Ri, to Laois Gaa and to our club is incalculable.

What does the club mean to you now?

The club becomes part of you. My passion and pride are unchanged. I now see more of what the club has to offer beyond competition. It's also about community, wellbeing, and the joy it brings to hundreds of players, mentors, and families each week. Seeing a few hundred people on any given spring or summer evening in Rathleague, enjoying themselves, watching, playing, competing, and supporting each other, is a reminder of the club's broader impact. It's not just about trophies, even though they are important; it's also about belonging, friendships, and shared experiences. Portlaoise GAA continues to positively shape lives in ways far beyond the pitch.

What do you see when you stand on the sideline now?

The same things I always have: players, competition, atmosphere and the desire to win. But I also see the people behind the training and games, the friendships, families, mentors, and volunteers. I see the huge efforts put in by coaches to get players to be the best that they can be. The juvenile section is the bedrock of a club with great work

done to date and more still to do. I see the benefits of participation: physical fitness, mental health, and community connection. It is a feeling of belonging. It brings fulfilment and connection. Watching the next generation play, have fun and develop as people and players reminds me of why the club exists. We all love to win, and it's important to give your best, yet the club is bigger than winning and losing; it's far more important than that.

What are your hopes for the club over the next 50 years?

I see an incredibly bright future. The dedication of the club leadership team, the committed volunteers, the quality coaches, committed players and the excitement of seeing the construction of the new facilities. The town is expanding, and the club is growing; it is perfectly positioned to bring joy, identity, and opportunity to future generations. Growth needs to be carefully managed. Generations of great club people have got us to here. We need to pass on all the values that they previously instilled into the next generations. Seeing the talent of young players like DJ White, Susie Delaney, Darren Brennan, Ben, & Mark O' Connor and Conor O'Callaghan coming through is so encouraging. It is a super time to be a younger member of the club, and to see the opportunities that lie ahead. I believe that the club will continue to thrive, nurturing players, fostering community spirit and preparing teams to compete with fierce pride for 'the Town'.



Connie pictured in 2016 with Ger Brennan and Ciara Murphy (Captain) after UCD won their first O'Connor Cup in 10 years. UCD beat UoL 1-7 to 0-9.





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LAOIS MINOR 'A' FOOTBALL CHAMPIONS - 1978

Sunday, 17 September 1978 - O'Moore Park



Portlaoise 1-8 v 1-6 Ballyroan

Panel: P.J. Bunyan, Mick Rigney, Mark Kavanagh, Sean Dunne, Paddy Dunne (Capt.), Seamus Smith, Pat Rowe, George Phelan, Gerry O'Brien, Noel Prendergast, Pat Critchley, Michael Bohane, Declan Timmons, Johnny Carroll, Matt Keegan, Connie Conroy, Mickey Crossan, Tom Breen, John Seale, Liam Dollard, Ger Bracken, Declan Critchley, Enda Bracken;



CLG PHORT LAOISE

LAOIS MINOR 'A' FOOTBALL CHAMPIONS - 1979

Sunday, 9 September 1979 - O'Moore Park



Portlaoise 0-11 v 2-4 Ballyroan

Back (l. to r.): Con Dunne, Kevin Conroy, Jimmy Lewis, Enda Bracken, Pat Roe, Brendan Fitzsimons, Mick Rigney, Mark Kavanagh, John Carroll, Brian Rankin, P.J. Bunyan, Martin Dempsey, Michael Crossan, Niall Kavanagh, Ger Bracken, Sean Dunne (half hidden);

Front (l. to r.): Noel Rigney, John Kelly, Hughie Beere, Declan Critchley, Martin Conroy, Paddy Dunne, Connie Conroy, John Taylor, Ronan Farrell, Charlie Dunne, Dominic Connell, John Harney;



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LAOIS MINOR 'A' HURLING CHAMPIONS - 1980

Sunday, 5 October 1980 - O'Moore Park

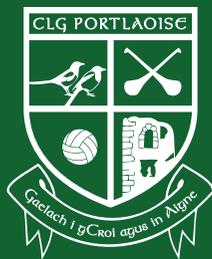


Portlaoise 4-7 v 5-3 Rathdowney

Back (l. to r.): Ger Bracken, Brian Rankin, Sean Dunne, David Keenan, Con Dunne, Martin Conroy, Denis Phelan, Declan Critchley, Mick O'Dwyer, Pat Roe (Capt.), Louis Byrne, John Fitzpatrick, Martin Dempsey, Noel Rigney, John O'Dwyer, John Harney, John Rogers;
Back (l. to r.): Denis Brennan, Declan Walsh, John Duggan, Pat Preston, Liam Bergin, Connie Conroy, Pat Crossan, Noel Roe, Ollie Dunne, Brendan Carroll, Dominic Connell, Brendan Fitzsimmons, Paddy Brennan;



2026



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As we gear up for another year of Gaelic games, we want to ensure that every member is fully covered.

Our 2026 Club Membership options for Adults, Juveniles and Families are now live and available for purchase through the club app.

Search 'Portlaoise GAA' wherever you get your apps or download from the Apple App Store [here](#) or the Google play store [here](#)

In the app go to the "Menu" at the bottom of the screen and from there select "Memberships". Then choose the membership option which applies to you.

When choosing your membership make sure to select the association which applies to you.

What your membership gets you:

Play and Train: Your membership covers you to play and train with CLG Phort Laoise, giving you access to our facilities at Rathleague including our new walking track.
Laois GAA All County Club Draws: All Full Adult club memberships automatically includes you in the 4 Laois GAA County Board Monster Draws valued at €130. It's your chance to be part of something big and potentially win fantastic prizes! Over €125k total prize money and €31.5k in Cash prizes to be won every 4 weeks.

Your support through membership directly contributes to the success and growth of our club.

If you would prefer to purchase through Foireann the link is [here](#).



Streets of Portlaoise



What an incredible St. Patrick's Day celebration the Streets of Portlaoise 5K turned out to be! And a very successful day for Portlaoise GAA as the club claimed the trophy as the first non-athletic club team home.

A special shoutout to our first four runners across the line, Oisín Fitzpatrick, Kieran Lillis, David Valainis, and Rory Conroy, whose outstanding performances secured the win for the Town. Absolutely tremendous running from all four.

Chairperson Eamon Fennelly and the driving force behind Fir Aclaí, Ed Dwyer, proudly accepted the trophy on behalf of the club. A proud moment on a special day

Well done to every single runner who took part. It was fantastic to see such a strong turnout from the club this year. A brilliant day full of community spirit, celebration, and a touch of Irish magic for Portlaoise GAA!





Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





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Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





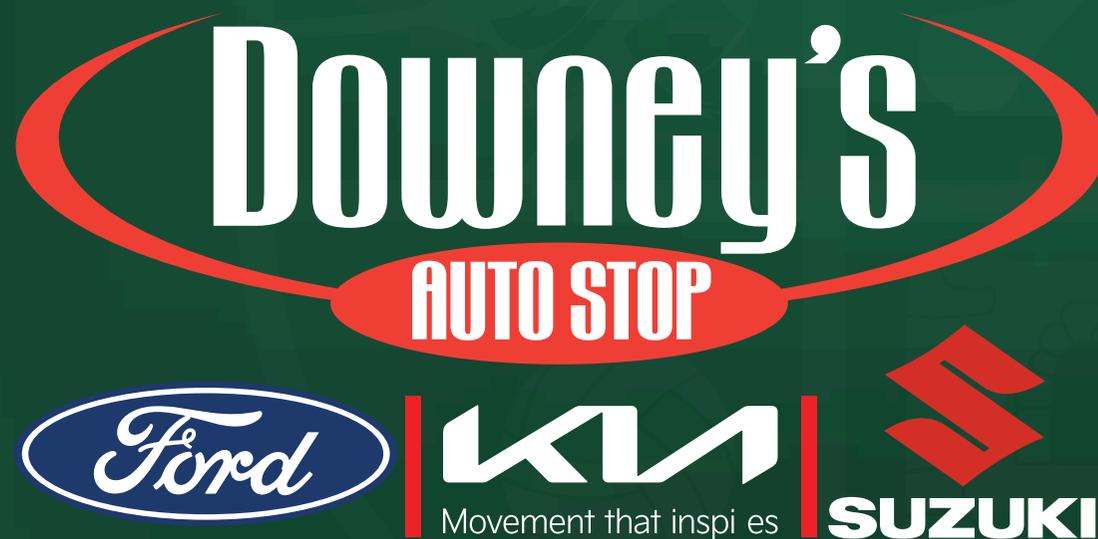
Paddy's Day Parade





Paddy's Day Parade





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GAA INJURY

Logging Through Foireann

As of **1 June 2025**, all players who sustain an injury while playing or training must self-report the injury through **Foireann**. This is a change from the previous system, which was managed by the **Club Injuries Officer**.

Important: It is the **responsibility** of the **injured player** to start the process on **Foireann**. For **underage players**, the **parent** or **guardian** must start the process. The **club cannot log injuries** anymore unless the player or the parent/guardian has begun the report in Foireann.

The **GAA** has published an in-depth **guide** showing how to complete this. The guide can be found **[here](#)**.

If you are struggling to find your Foireann login details, email the Club Secretary at **secretary.portlaoise.laois@gaa.ie**



Join Aclaí Fitness

Looking to get fitter, feel stronger and enjoy it while you're at it? Aclaí Fitness is up and running and it's open to all members who want to improve their health in a relaxed, supportive setting.

Whether you're starting from scratch, getting back into it after a break, or simply looking for a bit of structure and motivation, Aclaí is the ideal place to begin. There's no pressure, no egos, just a good group of people encouraging one another to be that little bit better each week.

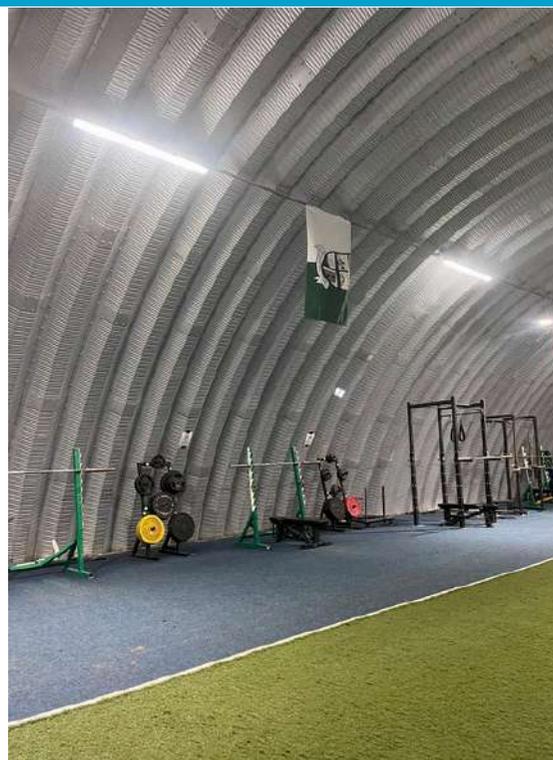
This isn't just about workouts. It's about confidence, connection and consistency. It's about turning up, having the craic, putting in the effort and leaving feeling better than when you arrived.

We're very fortunate to have experienced club members leading sessions, all of whom understand the value of creating a positive, welcoming environment. They're there to guide, encourage and make sure everyone feels comfortable, no matter their level. And the value? It's exceptional. For club members, Aclaí offers structured, coached fitness sessions at a fraction of what you'd pay elsewhere. You're getting quality training, community spirit and top class facilities, all within your own club.

The feedback so far has been brilliant. Strong numbers, great energy and real progress being made.

If you've been thinking about joining, take this as your sign. Come along, give it a go and see what Aclaí is all about. All it takes is one message. Reach out to any of the organisers (Karen Monaghan [087 636 8712](tel:0876368712), Claire O'Gorman [086 352 9806](tel:0863529806) or Ed O'Dwyer [087 653 6144](tel:0876536144)) or someone you know in the group and we'll add you to the WhatsApp list.

You won't regret it.



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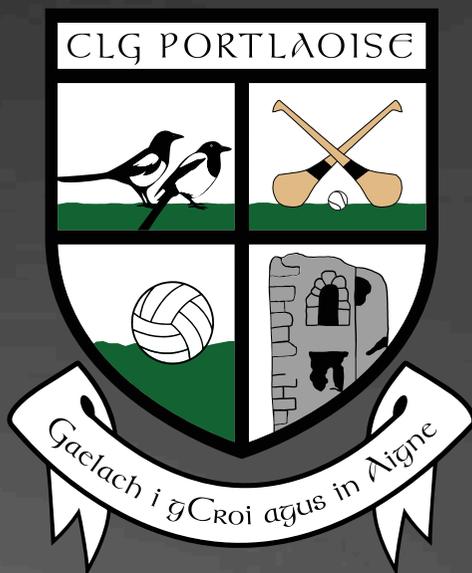


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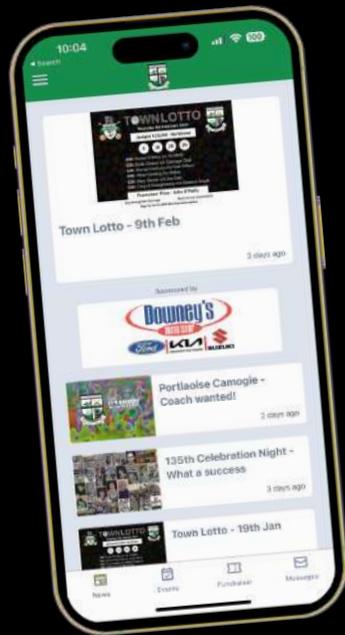


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Thanks to everyone who supports our fundraising efforts through the Town Lotto (day to day running costs), and Club Bingo (development). It is greatly appreciated.

If you have any feedback in relation to the newsletter, or if you would like to contribute to it, please contact info@portlaoisegaa.ie