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Sport - 1st Place

Hero to Some, Legend to All.

An interview with Andy Moran

Andy Moran, Mayo senior team player and former Mayo captain, represents all that is honourable about the GAA - positivity, health, fitness, ability and determination.

At 34 years of age Andy Moran balances being a club and county footballer for Ballaghaderreen and Mayo, a husband, a father to a 2 year old daughter and the co-owner of a gym, Castlebar HealthQuarters. Previously attending St Nathy's secondary school in Ballaghaderreen his love of football was nurtured by teacher and coach John O'Mahony. He later went on to study business and marketing at college and became a sales-rep before opening his gym. I spoke to him about GAA in the modern era.

In his local GAA club of Ballaghderreen, young Moran's skills were encouraged and developed by well recognised coaches like Brian Tansey and John Gaffney.

When I asked him what he thought was the most valuable skill that a young player should learn his answer was resilience. Moran believes that we live in a society where young players give up too easily. "Young people need to learn how to lose. They take setbacks too personally and you need to get up and go again in life and in football."

Originally playing soccer for Longford Town, it was quite a difficult decision to choose between it and Gaelic football. However, a phone call from John Maughan, Mayo under 21 manager at the time, made the decision easy to pick GAA.

His opinion of the mark coming into play in the GAA is not one of hope. "The mark is being taken from Australian Rules, which is a completely different game. It will make the game more negative instead of positive."

Many people have opinions on whether the GAA should go professional or not. Moran's stance on it is that it should remain amateur, however in the next ten years he believes we will see some sort of professionalism in the GAA as there is a certain element of the GAA making a lot of money however it is not the players reaping these benefits.

Although not one to dwell on the past Moran admits he regrets certain things throughout his career. One of those regrets being, of course, not having an All-Ireland senior medal for Mayo in his back pocket. Another would be not allowing his body to recover fully after he broke his leg during training for the International Rules series in 2011, which he believes led to his cruciate injury in 2012. "I firmly believe that I have put everything into the game that I possibly could have. I don't think I was the most naturally gifted footballer in the world but I think I've really maximised the capabilities that I had"

When asked if he was given the opportunity to change anything in the GAA, Moran would bring in a 50 yard penalty for negative play in a game, meaning the ball

should be moved up 50 yards instead of 13 metres. It would also be very important to him that in underage football there would be no designated free-taker. "If you win the free you should be the one taking the free."

I mooted the possibility of him entering the world of punditry or management in the future but it is not an aspiration of Moran's. "My dream after football is to become a coach. I'm half training to be a coach at the minute. If I were to become the manager of a team I would be more coach than manager."

In my opinion Andy Moran is the epitome of everything that is right with the GAA. He is tenacious, hard-working and an example to young players everywhere. I for one was left inspired by his aura of positivity and determination. I hope the GAA learn how to hold onto key figures like Moran and weave them into the future fabric of the GAA.

Judges' Citation:

So much of Mayo's recent football history is of what might have been; tantalisingly close but never managing to bridge the gap to All-Ireland glory that now stretches back to 1951. Andy Moran is one of those who knows the heartache of near misses and narrow defeats more than most - but this time he's with a winner.

Because this interview with the former Mayo captain is both captivating and insightful, covering a lot of ground - from his upbringing to his career; from the tough choices along the way, his own future and the future for his sport, to the changes he'd like to see in the game he has served so well.

For her piece on 'Andy Moran, Hero to Some, Legend to All', the winner of this year's Press Pass Sports Category is Emma McGoey from Mean Scoil Mhuire, Longford.