

## Simply the Best

### Kate McGann, Glenamaddy Community School, Co. Galway

As 2017 draws to a close, one might look back and reflect on what a prosperous year it was. Joe Canning certainly can. At 29 years of age, the Portumna and Galway hurler finally got his hands on the Liam McCarthy Cup, bridging a 29-year famine for the Tribesman. As well as doing extraordinary things on the pitch, like getting that point against Tipperary, he has been doing remarkable things off the pitch also.

Born in Portumna, but living in Oranmore, Joe divides his time between making hurleys for the family business on weekdays and managing his own Thai restaurant in Limerick on weekends, while also, offering his loyal services to the Galway Senior Hurling Team. Coming from a strong hurling background, it was no surprise that Canning would go on to play for his club and county. Representing Galway at all levels, Joe's glittering career began in the summer of 2008. Since then, he has claimed 2 Leinster Titles, 2 National Hurling Leagues, 1 All-Ireland, 4 All Stars, Young Hurler of the Year 2008 and Hurler of the Year 2017. At a local level, he has also won 4 All-Ireland medals with his club Portumna. With Joe's skill and passion, he deserves every accolade that comes his way.

The line between the GAA going professional or remaining as an amateur sport is getting finer each day. In a recent appearance on the Late Late Show, Canning admitted that he would love to be professional, but alas he wouldn't change it, "To be honest I wouldn't change it. I wouldn't like to see it going down that road." He continued by saying we would lose a part of our heritage if GAA was to go professional. "It wouldn't sit right with me. It (the game) would lose the community spirit." This statement sums up all that is good about Joe. It shows that he plays for the love of the game and that he values how important the GAA is to communities all over Ireland.

Joe is also a Unicef Ireland goodwill ambassador. This duty has taken him to war torn areas. Joe has recently returned from Aleppo in Syria. There is a civil war raging in this city, leaving many with no choice but to flee their homes to neighbouring Turkey. No one knows exactly how many people have died. Unicef have built a school there, which means up to 380 children are receiving an education. This school has brought some sort of normality to the children, many of whom have been out of education for five years. Joe visited the school, equipped with hurleys and sliotars, teaching them the basics of hurling. Although living in daily fear, the children enjoyed their precious few minutes of happiness, courtesy of Joe. His generosity has touched the lives of the children in more ways than we could ever imagine.

I admire Joe Canning because not only is he a warrior on the pitch, he is a leader off the pitch too. He shows passion in every game he plays. He has not let fame go to his head. He is very reserved and is very close to his family, despite his full workload. Through his charity work, he is bringing positivity to negative situations. Hopefully, he will continue to hit wonder points on the field and change lives through his charity work for many more years to come.

