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GAA. *'The heart and soul of Ireland.'*

The sport that brings everyone together, whether you like it or not. Even if you have no interest in football or hurling, you're probably going to be dragged into it in one way or another. Whether it be as a player, a player's partner, a mother, brother or simply the barman at the local pub. You're probably going to be hearing *a lot* about it. GAA, although it is the centre of a lot of Irish people's happiness, is often full of critics, self-absorbed and close-minded people. People who make being part of a team that little harder.

"I could have made county if it wasn't for my knee."

Ah, the classic. The junior B unwilling to admit that maybe the reason he didn't make the senior team was because he hasn't played decent football since he was u14. Let's call him Pat. Pat comes to every club game just to roll his eyes and shake his head, pointing out every mistake the full forward (or the man in 'Pat's position') makes - even though he's scored 1-6. Zip it Pat, just because you scored the winning point in the u12 division final doesn't make you the saviour of this club.

"It wasn't our year lads. We had a bad finish this season but let's make next year a good one. Let's have pride in the jersey and come back stronger than ever in January." **(Sent via Whatsapp)**

The overenthusiastic, painfully dedicated player whose sole purpose in life is GAA. Michael isn't an evil soul. Michael is the player who sends a text like the one above into the Whatsapp group two hours after we've lost the County final. The night which the last thing anyone wants to think about is training next year and putting in all that work again just to lose. Not Michael though, single man, no kids, Michael's out for a run the following morning. Michael sends the texts that everyone reads and cringes, but can't not reply to because Michael isn't a bad man. He's just excruciatingly enthusiastic.

"I'm finished with it. I won't be back next year."

A very common statement, or *lie*, told usually after being knocked out of championship. The older man, having trained a few teams, sat as chairperson and often has refereed for a few years. Dan is the man everyone knows. Dan is a passionate member of the GAA who has been thrown outside the wire more than once in his lifetime. He usually states the above after having an argument with a fellow middle aged man who is also heavily involved in the club. Dan doesn't work well with others. It's probably best if Dan is left to his own devices for a few weeks to cool down. Whatever you say, Dan, we'll see you next year.

“I told you this team would never win anything.”

The voice every player loves to hear after a big loss (note the sarcasm). Jim hasn't been seen at a club game since 1990, since he was on the team but always makes sure to be in the village afterwards to tell everyone how he knew this would be the outcome, or how this team couldn't win an u14 game. Jim was part of the club team with a winning streak in the 1980's and believes no one - *no one* - will outdo them. Nor does he want anyone to. Jim, despite his lack of dedication to the club since his own playing days, believes the club owes him everything. If you haven't gathered already, Jim is a little bitter.

“Ah swap Kevin and Denis. Run with the ball, Connor!”

Barry is always heard on the sideline, spewing ludicrous instructions and unhelpful advice. For instance, Connor is the goalie. Connor, should most definitely *not* run with the ball. Barry will often tell everyone where the players' *real* position is. ‘Why don't you get involved training them, Barry?’ ‘Oh no, no, I wouldn't have the time.’ Barry is the dreaded hurler on the ditch.

“If they'd have only passed it to John, we would have won.”

The defensive mammy who never lost her competitive streak. For the purpose of this piece, let's call her Mary. Mary was a competitive kid, every race, every test, every single thing Mary did, she had to be the best. Unfortunately, when Mary got older and had children, her competitive streak was put on John. John is her youngest son, the older boy and girl both moved away. That left John to believe everything his mother said. ‘John, you are the best full forward this club has ever seen.’ John played full forward only the one time, when they were short ten players. In all honesty, everyone knows John couldn't tell the goalposts from the ESB poles.

There will always be another Pat, another Michael, Mary, Dan, Jim or Barry. The funny thing is: there wouldn't be a GAA without them.