
The Gaelic Athletic Association, Violence and the Criminal Law:

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Synopsis:

This paper will look at how the criminal law in Ireland has dealt with incidents of sporting violence occurring during GAA matches in recent years

Abstract:

Over the last decade, there has been an increased state re-action to violence in sport in Ireland. In particular, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) has seen a steady stream of its participants coming before the criminal courts of Ireland for excessive violence above and beyond what could be reasonably expected to occur during Gaelic matches. These acts were traditionally dealt with in-house by the GAA authorities but more recently they are being resolved before the criminal courts. The question must then arise as to why acts that occur on the pitch are now being subject to the criminal prosecutions?

The use of the criminal law to regulate sports is quite a blunt instrument. Is this the most appropriate method of dealing with violence in sport? No it is not the most appropriate or most suitable method. It should be seen as a last resort, only to be used in the most extreme cases or where justice may not have been served by other methods such as internal disciplinary measures.

This paper will examine recent instances of violence within the GAA that have gone beyond the traditional jurisdiction of the GAA and into the realms of criminality. It will also examine the internal disciplinary system of the GAA and expose its flaws. There is an ever increasing amount of cases coming before the criminal courts and it is up to the GAA to stem this tide. One of the most effective ways of limiting the incursion of the criminal law is to improve its internal disciplinary system and make it more transparent and robust. If players see justice being served by the governing body then they will be less likely to resort to the criminal authorities.

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