



North American GAA

CLUB FOCUS



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Gerard Magee talks to Denver's John Elliott about the unique challenges facing hurlers who play a mile above sea level.

Gaels take Rockies road to success

Denver Gaels face a unique problem in their endeavor to play Gaelic Games in the United States.

The Colorado club are not only very much on their own and have to be self-sufficient but they also face a problem when playing hurling because of the high altitude.

"We found very quickly upon inception of our hurling team in late 2004 that hurleys became brittle due to the extreme dryness of the Colorado climate," said club President and Chairman John Elliott.

"With humidity dropping into single digits during the summer months, our Torpeys and Stars were snapping like twigs.

"Considering there are no solid hurley manufacturers in the U.S., and the relatively high cost of equipment being constantly shipped over from Ireland, we sought an alternative.

"One of our founding hurlers, Dave 'Sarge' Wizniewski, came up with the idea of coating the bas and the lower part of the shaft of the stick with a thin layer of automotive fiberglass to help seal in moisture and to also toughen the stick against untoward breakage.

"It took a few months to get the balance between protection and playability right, but we have now pretty much perfected this and have provided instructions on how to 'glass' hurleys to many of

the major clubs in North America," said Elliott.

Title debate

Denver Gaels was founded in 1996 by Alan Murphy, Shay Dunne, Martin Concanon and Martin Canavan.

At its formation there was a debate about calling the club the Four Provinces or Denver Gaels and the latter won by a narrow margin.

"Prior to the founding of the club the GAA position in Colorado is a bit murky, although there are photos in the Colorado State archives showing Irish immigrants posed with hurleys around the turn of the 20th century," said the club Chairman

"Very little exists about any games that may have been played either here or in the mining communities, but with the vast number of Irish immigrants to Colorado from 1850 to 1970 there should be no doubt that both hurling and Gaelic football were played at some point in the region.

"The club started as is usual with Irish nationals living in Denver and struggled with match practice due to its isolation.

"It was 1,500 miles to the nearest other club. We finally broke through to win a Junior B Football title in 2000. We have also created our own competitions locally due to our isolation."



Denver's hurlers in 2007.

North American finals

The biggest accomplishment for Denver Gaels was hosting of the North American finals in 2004.

"For a small club to host the largest Irish sporting event outside of Ireland with such success was amazing," said Elliott.

"In all 5,000 players and supports descended on Colorado in September 2004 for games played under the Rocky Mountains at a mile above sea level."

Denver Gaels have no permanent facilities and the club uses the new complex of the Colorado Rapids (24 soccer fields) for their Sunday league.

Prior to that it had been difficult to obtain quality and consistent surfaces from the city of Denver

The club has had a youth football program since 2004 and has won North American titles at U12, U14 and U16 levels. The youth teams have also competed at the Continental Youth Championships.

"Youth development is crucial to the survival of Gaelic Games in the USA now that immigration has slowed," said Elliott. "This should have been the focus from the start for all clubs but there was too much short-term focus on winning games. Imagine US teams challenging Irish teams at some point in the future!"

"At Denver Gaels we saw this coming and redirected our recruitment to con-

centrate on American born players for ladies football, camogie, hurling and football.

"Our hurling/camogie has grown quickly since 2005 to incorporate 100 players with four teams in a local league in the spring and the autumn."

Last year the club won their first even North American hurling Championship at Junior C level and the U16 football team won a North American title for the first time at that grade

"This season we expect to enter men's football, ladies' football, camogie for the first time, two men's hurling teams at Junior C and Junior B (for the first time.

"We expect great things from our ladies football and mens hurling teams this year," said the club chairman.

"Our Jr. C. team won the North American (NACB) Finals in hurling over Labor Day weekend (first weekend in September) last year in Chicago. The trophy is the NACB Jr. C. Champions Cup."

Club:

Denver Gaels

Location:

Denver, Colorado

Committee:

John Elliott, Chairman

Tyler McNally, PRO



The women's football team in 2007.



Gaelic Athletic Association
of Greater New York



7-a-side Hurling Championship

Saturday May 3

Noon - 7:00 P.M.

**Galway, Kilkenny/NJ, Offaly, Tipperary - New York,
Fr. Toms, Cork, Galway, Wexford - Boston**

Sunday, May 11 • 3:00 P.M.

**Connacht Senior
Football Championship
New York v Leitrim**

**John Riordan
Chairman**

For all New York GAA information, visit our website: www.ny-gaa.org