

The situation with sport

Before Industrial Revolution

Informal, between parishes or towns, no rules, riots common

Traditional games had a bad name and were in decline

Industrial Revolution

Difficult to play traditional games in cities, also less time

Had to have something to do with free time though

Factory owners and philanthropists began to set up clubs. Led to:

- Set rules

- Organised matches

Modern games began in England, spread from there (the Empire)

In Ireland, these new games such as football, rugby and cricket took over

Problems with the Amateur Athletics Association in Ireland

Only 'gentlemen' could compete – ruled out the working class

No Sunday games – only time working class and farmers had to play

Nationalists disliked English interference

The start of the GAA

Michael Cusack and Maurice Davin joined together after Davin saw Cusack's article in a newspaper saying that an Irish athletics body was needed

Foundation of GAA

Cusack published a notice with details of the foundation meeting

7 men showed up at Hayes Hotel on the 1st November 1884

Invited Parnell, Davitt, and Archbishop Croke of Cashel to be patrons

Second meeting:

Rules drawn up for Gaelic football and hurling, then printed on leaflets and distributed by Davin and Cusack

Rough, flawed, imprecise

Only one GAA club allowed in each parish

Members of GAA forbidden to compete at meeting of rival athletics associations

This rule abolished by Archbishop Croke later

Rapid spread – 600 clubs after 2 years, matches reported in newspapers, inter-county matches

Disorganised – matches often late or cancelled, fighting over rules

The GAA and politics

IRB infiltrate the GAA

Although GAA was a moderate nationalist organisation, at least 2 founding members were members of the IRB

IRB used GAA as source of fit, young men to recruit as soldiers

We know about IRB and takeover because there were British spies in IRB and GAA

IRB takeover

Cusack first casualty of takeover, he was asked to resign

Quarrelsome and a poor administrator – lost money, didn't answer letters

Second annual convention

IRB formed majority of delegates

New Central Council elected – all except Davin were IRB

Central Council met without Davin, takeover now complete

Members of RIC now banned from taking part in GAA

Central Council now automatically members of County Committees – so IRB control every Country Committee

Began to interfere in the running of matches

Hostility to IRB takeover

Many GAA members annoyed by IRB's interference, priests worried at their power – opposition grew

1887 convention:

IRB planned to go to great lengths to fill it with their supporters

Opponents, mainly Catholics priests, prepared for a showdown

At meeting, Fr Scanlan challenged IRB man running the meeting

Meeting descended into chaos, shouting and fights

Scanlan walked out with 200 delegates, IRB man Bennett elected president

Croke resigned as patron

GAA reunited

Over 250 rival groups then splintered off, on the suggestion of Davin. Many priest-run.

IRB forced to compromise so that the GAA didn't collapse

New convention, at which Davin was elected president and IRB reduced to minority

Problems with the reunited GAA

IRB didn't give up, kept working to control County Councils – this alienated priests

Major financial problems (incompetence, possible dishonesty)

America

Davin went to America with 50 athletes to fundraise using exhibition matches

Badly organised, no one showed up. Athletes could not afford hotels and had to be bailed out

Only 28 athletes returned home

Ended up more in debt, Davin blamed and he retired. IRB quietly took control

Decline

Parnell split – IRB and so the GAA backed him, people disapproved of this

At 1891 convention, only 6 counties represented

GAA survives but it was tiny, but kept going. Became a non-political and non-sectarian organisation

GAA grows again

Rules changed, the games became more interesting, became very popular to watch

Became part of wider cultural nationalist movement

Created strong sense of pride, organisational skills, training in democracy

GAA said to have trained independence soldiers after 1916