

Sported

Helping community groups survive,
to help young people thrive



Celebrating the impact of sport on **Our Community**

Celebrating the impact of sport on Our Community



Sport, wrapped up in being part of a local grassroots club, has provided purpose, hope, joy and life for individuals and communities across Northern Ireland. This collection of reflections give insight into sport's incredible power and impact, shaping communities over many years.



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Heritage is the present use of the past

– Dallen Timothy
(Cultural Heritage and Tourism, 2011)

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The process

Sport resonates in different ways with each of us. The adrenaline rush of a last-minute goal. The camaraderie of a close-knit group of teammates. The throw of a defence-splitting pass. The agony of defeat. The awkwardness of falling over in a competitive primary school sack race.

What does sport mean to you?

That's the question that Sported asked throughout this journey. The interviews, reading and analysis showed that whatever the answer was, it came from myriad historical and contextual factors – the effect of which is possibly not even known, or understood, by each person.

Throughout the research, there was a clear reflection that sport, however, had most definitely made an impact. As Padraig Coyle writes in his article, "our sporting heritage, in its many forms, is something to be cherished and appreciated."

"While we are fortunate to enjoy the digital, interactive experiences on offer from visiting the Croke Park Museum, the Irish FA's Education and Heritage Centre at the International Stadium or Ulster Rugby's Nevin Spence Centre", he goes on to say, "those venues are not equipped to collect and record all the smaller stories of victories and defeats from across the village fields and parks, parishes and counties where we have participated in sport for centuries."

Sported embarked on a mission to tell that story adequately and powerfully. Our conclusion however is, in spite of the quantity of research, conversations and investigation, any story will only scratch the surface of the true impact of sport on our communities. We can only hope that the personal reflections help shine a light on the bigger impression sport has left behind on Northern Ireland – with lives dramatically changed and fractured communities brought together. The story would be never-ending; with new chapters being written every day on sports fields, at youth clubs, leisure centres and houses across the country.

This impactful scope of sport is worth sharing, even in its incomplete and insufficient nature. What Sported have encountered along the way has been the legacy of individuals who have led groups and shaped people and local communities. It is these figureheads who have carried the weight of community transformation. They have passionately and wholeheartedly pioneered new methods, strategies, and operations.



It is exciting to see that the legacy of these local heroes isn't only in the direct actions they developed generations ago. The culture that they inspired that has led to current changemakers who continue to transform local communities in the present day. The legacy of the impact of sport on communities has been seen most prominently in four key areas.

1. Women's value and participation
2. Mental Wellbeing
3. Peace & Reconciliation
4. Inclusivity for all

Sport has seen its fair share of difficulty. Many people recalled times of hurt, pain and struggle – and these are as key to the overall story as the successes and joys. Without these times, the picture wouldn't be as clear, colourful or captivating.

Sported sought out a range of voices. We interviewed 20 individuals to gain specific insights. We brought 80 people together through focus groups and surveys, and connected over 200 local clubs; we constantly heard stories that emotively shared their joy at what sport had done, is doing and what it can do in the future.

We noticed that through these interviews, focus groups and reports that the four areas we will focus on have seen dramatic change over time. While these stories are real and inspirational, they are also unfinished.

More effort, support, encouragement and opportunities are needed in order to make them sustainable. While major steps have been taken over time across an ever-changing country, many more still need to be taken as we look to the future.

More effort, support, encouragement and opportunities are needed in order to make them sustainable. While major steps have been taken over time across an ever-changing country, many more still need to be taken as we look to the future.

While participation in sport and physical activity has increased in recent years, engagement rates among women, people with a disability, or those living in the most deprived areas, are still relatively low. We hope to share our learnings around these four areas in order to provide the bigger picture of the impact of each unique theme. To help showcase this impact, we will then provide a focused case study of a community group which has powerfully witnessed sport change people's lives.

These community groups, as Sported members, showcase the importance of sport in transforming lives both on and off the pitch. Through holistic views and distinct case studies, we witness a transformation occurring throughout history, thoughts and perspectives evolving over time. And a legacy left long after a final whistle has been blown.

The overall reflections covered in this project do seem to give answers to the one asked at the beginning: "What does sport mean to you?"

Sport, wrapped up in being part of a local grassroots club, has provided purpose, hope, joy and life for individuals and communities. These reflections give insight into sport's incredible power. Through the research and stories within this project, we can truly evaluate celebrate the impact of sport on communities.





Sported
Theme One

Women's Value & Participation



Women's Value & Participation

"The greatest thing has been the development of the female side of the game."

- Brian McAvoy, Ulster GAA



The growth of women in sport has been unmistakable

From over 56,000 people at the September 2019 Ladies Gaelic Football All-Ireland final featuring Dublin and Cork at Croke Park, to the excitement of the UEFA Women's Euros in the summer of 2022, the change is obvious.

Scenes like these would not have been possible a decade ago. The 2012 LGFA final had just less than 17,000 spectators. This is a growth of around 230% in a decade, giving credence to Brian McAvoy's quote. Although the successful growth on the field is easier to quantify, the impact off it tells an even more powerful story.

According to Sport NI's recent Corporate Plan, sport and physical activity "makes an invaluable contribution to individual emotional, mental and physical wellbeing" and by "changing many individual lives, the power of sport can be realised societally."

It is clear the benefits of sport are hugely significant to individuals and, through that, society. That impact is being evidenced, witnessed and documented now more than ever.

Previously, when female participation wasn't as high and the opportunities afforded to women weren't as common, a conclusion could be drawn that females did not obtain the same personal development as their male counterparts.

It needed a change of culture, igniting structural changes to sport and physical activity and a desire to see that change.



Gold Medal 50th Anniversary



Over the years, these have been sporadic. One of the significant times came 50 years ago when local sportswoman Mary Peters inspired an undervalued section of local sport – by being hugely successful on a worldwide scale. Mary (who was appointed a Dame in 2000, and then a Lady Companion of the Order of the Garter in 2019) became the first athlete from Northern Ireland, of any gender, to win an Olympic gold medal.

In 1972, she placed first in the pentathlon in Munich. It offered hope to people across the country. For women, an aspirational figure was born. Female sport has had a long history of key moments that have both catalysed participation and transformed perceptions. Katie Taylor won Olympic gold for Ireland in London 2012, the same year that women were first allowed to box competitively at the Games. Males had been boxing as part of the Olympics since 1904, but the gender play gap has been slow to close.

The ban of women playing football was lifted in 1971, after being only briefly allowed during World War I. The perception of women in sport was highlighted heavily in the United States of America in the build up to the 1973 'Battle of the Sexes' tennis match between women's star Billie Jean King and former Wimbledon male champion Bobby Riggs. During the pre-match hype, Riggs stated that "the best way to handle women is to keep them pregnant and barefoot". That reflected the societal state of the value of women, and their equality in sports participation, at the time when Mary Peters struck gold. Five decades later, the imprint of Peters is evident today.

Athletes can train, grow and develop at the Mary Peters Track located in Belfast. People are financially supported through the charitable trust she set up in 1975.

A 2014 House of Commons Inquiry called 'Women and Sport' addressed why fewer female sporting role models are represented in the media and in the boardroom, compared with men. The Culture, Media and Sport Committee identified these gender disparities as challenges to be tackled by Sports Councils and governing bodies.

Role models and inspirational, visible, heroes were still needed to instil further progression than what we witnessed in the 1970's. Even eight years ago, the inspiration offered by Gaelic football and soccer would have been hard to imagine. Gender inequality was evident, and actions needed. Society had echoed sport throughout time, and sport has spoken loudly to correct societal misconceptions, provide inspirational heroes, and leave a rich heritage in the value and recognition of women. Sported carried out a research piece across the UK looking to identify barriers to teenage girls' participation in sports and physical activity, especially within a school setting. Top barriers included their periods, people watching them play, and changing rooms not being private.

As a culture, we still have a lot to do about tackling aspect like body image. One of our interviewees stated that the increased visibility of sport has "shown teenagers and adult women that sport can promote positive body confidence" There is no doubt that the value and participation of women in their community has seen significant change in the last century. Sport has played a dramatic role in provoking that much-needed development. Further opportunities can be unearthed. Greater visibility and awareness can be achieved. A closer parity of resources is possible. While many barriers still exist and need to be overcome, there is great joy in seeing how sport has spoken loudly and acted decisively into culture throughout our history.



CASE STUDY – BALLYCLARE COMRADES LADIES FC

The growth of female participation, and the societal and personal impact that comes through that, is seen extremely positively through the fantastic Sported member, Ballyclare Comrades Ladies FC.

The local club was formed in August 2011 as Carnmoney Ladies FC with two teams: an Under-11 team and an Under-13 team. Their coaching set-up consisted of only four coaches. The dedication and commitment of volunteers started 11 years ago in their formation and has remained constant throughout the growth over the next decade. Whilst the dedication has stayed the same, their name has been the one thing that has changed – courtesy of an amalgamation with Ballyclare Comrades to form a new club.

The individuals associated with it, be that players, coaches or parents, remain as its heart. The positive impacts it seeks to have on people's lives are as vital as the training sessions. Having spent time with the club, and with their players and coaches, it is clear to see the numerical growth, but also the determination to benefit lives and invest in their community.

A key timeframe for the numerical growth and the community impact was around the COVID-19 lockdown. Head coach Steven Lowry confirmed: "pre-lockdown we had around 120 registered members and approximately 13 coaches. But post-lockdown our membership rocketed! Now, since the move to Ballyclare in January 2022 we have 200 members and 30 volunteer coaches."

Although the impact of sport and physical activity had on people's wellbeing was heavily known and documented at that time, it also presented the opportunity to invest in the needs of players and a struggling and isolated community.

They took all their sessions online, including helping the families of team members cook and eat healthily. Coaches were instructed to bring these Zoom meetings to the group three times every week. They also partnered with Action Cancer, hosting monthly donation drives where they raised over £4,000 of clothing and goods for the charity. These are only a small selection of ways that the club walk alongside individuals and empower people in the community. A key focus of Ballyclare Comrades Ladies is to develop their resources off the field as well as on the field. The final whistle of a match does not end their involvement in the lives of the young girls, in fact it acts as a catalyst for ideas.

BALLYCLARE COMRADES LADIES FC





Their Young Leaders Programme which aims to develop the young girls and give them life skills that are usable both inside and outside the club. Steven Lowry stated: "Our Young Leaders Programme has been very successful. We encourage girls aged 14-18 to assist with coaching and mentoring of our younger players - to create positive role models who are accessible and visible around our club, and help them realise they are also role models in our community."

The girls are assigned to various age-groups to help build relationships with those younger. They also educate the girls to become qualified football coaches and empower them through developing their leadership skills and growing their self-confidence. They currently have 15 teenagers involved in this project. One has since moved into university education and another two are going in September. One teenager has also gained employment within the football sector because of her involvement in this programme. These are only a few examples of the power that a sports club has on their participants, and how that power can be used to change lives, situations and communities.

Education is something Ballyclare Comrades Ladies hold highly in their ethos. They know that, with girls aged 5-21 being connected to their club, that school education must not fall away with the excitement and dedication to the twice-weekly training and the weekend matches. They have a 'time out' written into their programmes that gives the girls flexibility and ensure they don't have to attend every session and every match. This provides a peaceful method of ensuring that families, and the girls themselves, do not get over stressed by workload and can have a way of dealing with other pressures, including school homework.

The committee also know that education within the club is also crucial for the teams to progress. They now fully fund all coach education courses, with 12 coaches completing their Grassroots Intro Award this past summer, and 14 soon to become accredited Irish FA Level 1 coaches. This investment in education they hope will see both individuals and the club flourish for years to come.

That is the legacy of grassroots clubs like Ballyclare Comrades Ladies FC.

The investment in structures, individuals, and the club itself results in people and communities flourishing for years to come. That is the impact of one of many local clubs, and a rich heritage of local sport and physical activity. With this case study focusing on female participation, it gives a fresh perspective on impact and for greater hope of involvement and equality.

Ballyclare Comrades Ladies made history in 2015/16 when they became the first girls team to play in the South Belfast Boys League. The growth, vision and determination embedded into their fabric will undoubtedly see many other "firsts" being made in the future.

A future that hopefully will continue to tell the impactful story of amateur sport on culture and community.

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Case study

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Theme Two

Mental Health & Wellbeing



Mental Health and Wellbeing

One in five adults in Northern Ireland has experienced a mental health problem. It is also reported that Northern Ireland has a 25% higher overall prevalence of mental health problems than England.

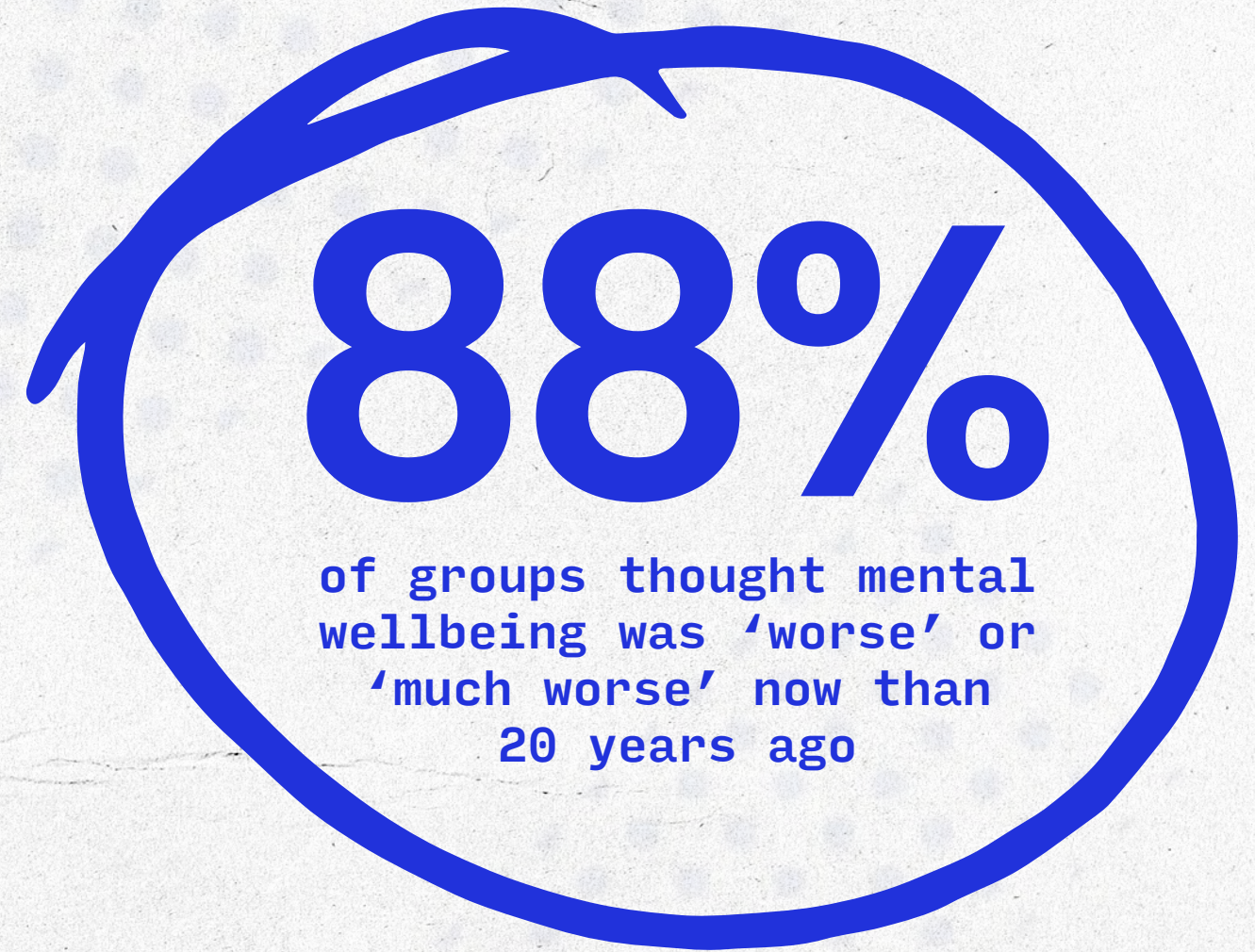


A 2019 co-produced research project looked at the effects of physical activity on the mental wellbeing of people within Northern Ireland. The findings showed that the participants reported both physical and mental health benefits, including improved sleep, energy, improvements in mood and lower stress. Whilst known and communicated, the impact of sport on mental health over history is harder to reflect upon as mental wellbeing itself was only defined in 2010.

The major reflection we have analysed however is that, even though the reporting on the influence of physical activity on mental health is only new, recently sport has made an incredible difference to the lives of people struggling in their mental health. As the nation became more aware of their own needs, and the desire to take personal strides in having better mental health was taken seriously, community sport has become a literal lifeline for many individuals.

For this project Sported conducted a survey to hear from our members around the theme of mental health. When answering the question 'on a scale of 1-10 (1 being least valuable, 10 being most valuable), how valuable is sport and physical activity in improving mental wellbeing?',

100% of the groups scored it either 8, 9, or 10 out of 10. 71% thought it was the most valuable.



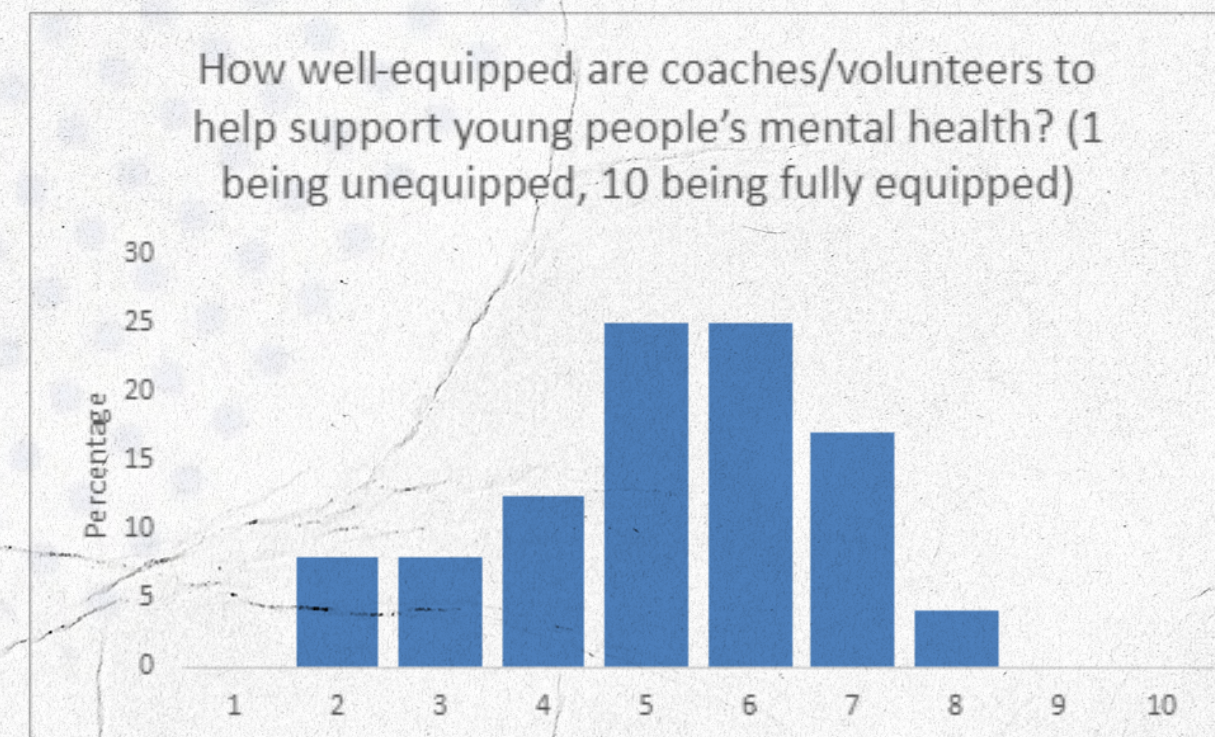
Theme 2

They also shared, from their lived experience, that they believed mental wellbeing to be in a worse place now than it was in the past two decades. 88% of the groups interviewed felt that the average mental wellbeing of people has either got 'worse' or 'much worse' than 20 years ago. If that is true, and with a great acceptance of the benefit that sport and physical activity can have on mental wellbeing, then the current time is crucial in giving people the support they need through their engagement in community sport.

As part of our wider 'Community Pulse' surveys carried out in March 2022 by Sported, our members again stated that the most significant key challenge facing young people in the community is their mental health. Being placed in key communities across the country we have gained fantastic insight into the depth of the issue and their struggle with being able to sufficiently address it.

This was further developed through the focus groups and surveys we carried out in this project which highlighted a couple of stumbling blocks in supporting mental wellbeing through community sport. As you can see from the graph, there is still little confidence in how equipped clubs, staff and volunteers are in supporting their participants mental health. We can draw a conclusion here that there is evidence to support clubs being more aware now than ever of the mental wellbeing of people in communities, but the training and upskilling of the coaches and management hasn't been adequate in dealing with it.

On one focus group session, Desy Jones from West Wellbeing said one key factor in working with sports groups in a community is to reduce the stigma around mental health. West Wellbeing are a group set up in West Belfast to provide therapy, befriending and wraparound services for those struggling with their mental health. Having only opened their centre in November 2021, they are experiencing an incredible demand for their array of services and are looking to develop their centre to accommodate more people, especially younger children. Through their network with local sports clubs, this has again shown the scope of sport. Sports clubs and groups have now become central to community action, becoming foodbanks, contact centres and also helping with mental health maintenance. Sports clubs are bigger than a match, offer more than a pitch and cater for more than physical activity.



Both West Wellbeing and the football governing body, The IFA, described to us the importance of education in the legacy of sporting heritage for mental health. They know that there is real need for all clubs from all sports to buy in to enable coaches to be trained and educated around the whole area of mental health.

In 2017, The IFA circulated a mental health awareness toolkit around clubs – with the process resulting in mental health champions being appointed across the sport. This education, as noted in our research, is both needed on the grassroots level and known at the strategic level.

Hopefully as the years roll on, the heritage of sport's impact on mental health will move from being known individually to being evidenced across the country – as people from the youngest to the oldest feel free and able to talk through their mental wellbeing, and clubs are equipped to support personally and signpost on. Having heard the heart of many groups around this area, we are more than confident that community sports clubs will again step up to get alongside their participants, shape communities and quite literally save lives.

CASE STUDY – TAMHI

TAMHI is a mental health charity that works with group leaders in sports clubs to develop their understanding and awareness of mental health – allowing them to be better positioned to support their participants' mental health and spread awareness. The importance of being aware of your personal mental health is something that is emotionally connected to the ethos of the charity. It was set up in 2011 by Joe Donnelly and Stephen McLaughlin in memory of their close friend, Thomas "Tammy Tucker" McLaughlin, who tragically took his own life in 2009.

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TAMHI, standing for Tackling Awareness of Mental Health Issues, recognised the reluctance of many young people to seek support. The charity developed a unique model of engagement which taps into the central role of local community sport clubs in the lives of young people. Using sport to help discuss mental wellbeing in a non-threatening environment, they mobilised those clubs to promote positive mental health.

Spoted connected with Joe from TAMHI in its formative years, where they were only voluntarily helping two local sports clubs. He was paired with a Spoted business volunteer who provided a more structured and strategic approach to the organisation's development. With the volunteer's support, a strategic business plan for TAMHI was developed, which helped attract the investment needed for Joe to take a career break and become full-time in the organisation.

He said: "TAMHI wouldn't be here today if Brenda and Frank didn't believe in this project from the outset. It was a massive boost of confidence for me."

Since 2012, TAMHI has grown exponentially. The organisation has worked with over 100 clubs and have seen the impact of their work through developing resources, partnerships and sessions that has now seen them bring their services across the UK.

Formed through lived experience of the reality of suicide and mental health, this legacy has proven to be powerful. TAMHI, through their interaction with thousands of young people from communities across the country, are saving lives.

TAMHI



Here are some great examples of the impact that they have had on these communities

Mental Wealth Games

A programme that uses sport as a vehicle for learning, providing a skill set of games as well as mental health education in a fun and engaging way. There are now 6 established games which have been professionally produced and put into an e-learning course as part of an accredited qualification. They have reached in excess of 4000 participants.

Ahead of the Game

This course aims to support clubs and volunteers when dealing with mental health issues, challenging the stigma around mental health, promoting positive mental health and preventative measures. Ahead of the Game is the Irish FA Foundation's mental health programme for football clubs and focuses on the idea and importance of starting the conversation around mental health in football. TAMHI helped develop this course alongside Inspire and Train 2B Smart.

Leadership Programme

TAMHI take a group of young people from diverse backgrounds to upskill and mentor them to become leaders of the future. They believe by this investment they can provide the young people with the relevant skills to benefit them in the future. Impact has shown that participant's mental wellbeing increases significantly during the leadership programme.

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Case study

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Giatur aut ma quam ressin



Sported
Theme Three

Peace Building

Peace Building

Much could be written about the religious and community history of Northern Ireland. It has seen many decades of separation, violence and hostility but also restoration, peace and hope. Throughout all the years of tension, there was, and still is residually, a societal impact from The Troubles across all of the country. Sport, whatever it looks like and wherever it is played, cannot be separated from that society. Historically, while there has been clear evidence of sport reflecting the cultural divide, there are also great stories of the improvements it has made to that culture.



Mary Peters went to the Munich Olympics in 1972. Having placed fourth in 1964, and ninth in 1968, she delivered an extraordinary in the women's pentathlon. The impact was phenomenal as she became the first person from Northern Ireland to take home an Olympic gold medal.

This was a Northern Ireland that was, at that time, still heavily divided and powerfully gripped by The Troubles. As Ian McCourt wrote in his series in The Guardian in 2012, "The Olympics in Munich had been billed as 'the Games of peace and joy' but neither of these were to be found in abundance in Belfast in 1972."

This was highlighted when a death threat was issued to her days later. Peters recounted how her father wanted her to return to Australia with him but she refused, later saying, "my home was in Belfast, my life was there and the people I loved were there."

When she returned to Belfast still reeling from the impact of what was christened 'Bloody Sunday', she was warmly greeted by both communities. Amid division, she became a source of unity and universal acclaim. Where many could have turned away, sport was providing a platform for a new future, giving reason for hope and a different perspective on everyday life.

Whilst all sports have contributed to the ongoing narrative, the three largest national governing bodies – Ulster GAA, Irish Football Association and Ulster Rugby have been significant in the peace building story.

Theme 3

Peace Building

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Rugby in Ulster can be traced back to the 1860's with North of Ireland Football Club (NIFC) being the first rugby club formed in 1868, with only two other clubs being formed throughout the whole of Ireland. The vast history of rugby in our country is shown by the fact that the Ulster Schools' Cup is the world's second oldest rugby competition, having been competed for every year since 1876.

The IFA was founded on 18 November 1880 and is the fourth-oldest governing body in the world behind the other three home associations. Cliftonville, the oldest club in Ireland, gathered other clubs from in and around Belfast to attempt to create a unifying constitution and set of rules for the game.

GAA Ireland was formed through the efforts of Michael Cusack in the early 1880s as he looked to re-establish the national game of hurling. This would lead to the formation of the GAA on November 1st 1884. The following year, Ballyconnel First Ulsters became the first club from Ulster to join the GAA, leading to increased growth in the game and the need to form the Ulster GAA in 1903.

These three sports have such a long and storied history and impact within our local communities. Most people would focus on the differences between the three organisations, either from their sporting preferences or their community background, but their sporting heritage reveals a more joined up approach than would first be imagined.

In early 2022, the PEACE IV-funded project: 'Sport Uniting Communities' brought the three NGB's together to do exactly that. The four-year project reached 20,000 participants from many different backgrounds, including the religious communities across the nation. The history, and impact, of each governing body has already been shown, but by working together they would achieve much more.

At the end of the project, the then-Irish Minister for Rural and Community Development, Heather Humphreys TD, congratulated all participating clubs in "becoming more open, inclusive and welcoming to people from different communities." She went on to say that she was "confident that learnings from the Sport Uniting Communities project will continue to change perceptions and create sustained relationships that will further establish ongoing Peace and Reconciliation for generations to come."

Sports throughout this project, often taking on a multi-sports format, were bringing people together who would not normally meet. It opened their eyes up to new skills and activity, and helped them revisit their thinking around race and religion. Sport held the key to unifying groups. People became teammates rather than enemies, games became inclusive rather than segregated, and relationships were grown rather than torn apart. Unfortunately, over history, sport has not always been that way.

"From the beginning of Association football in Northern Ireland, there has always been the overriding sense that the football pitch is the appropriate platform for supporters to illustrate their political affiliation", wrote Matthew Gault. This was evidenced throughout the late 1800s and continued into the 20th century.

Sadly, even now, there are episodes of this speckled throughout pitches and crowds. Larger examples of the division in the country were found through the 1940s with Belfast Celtic, with their predominantly Catholic/Nationalist supporter base, quitting the Irish Football League late in that decade. There was frequent violence when they faces clubs whose supporter base was from the Protestant/Loyalist community. Similarly in the early 1970s, with The Troubles leaving a devastating impact on communities, again the segregation at the time led Derry City to the decision to leave the domestic league of Northern Ireland before later joining the League of Ireland.

The difficulties and tensions, seen all too frequently on the streets of the country, were also seen in sports stadiums throughout the nation too. Thankfully sport has powerfully learnt from the past and has now utilised its strength in bringing communities together, rather than highlight the divisions.

In 2015, the Northern Ireland Executive commissioned the University of Ulster to produce a report, Social Exclusion and Sport in Northern Ireland. Some of the findings painted a different story to the one throughout the 20th Century. 86% of the people surveyed said they believed sport was a good way to break down barriers between Protestants and Catholics, and around the same figure believed that sport was more "open and inclusive" than it had been a decade earlier; two-thirds of respondents said they believed that sports-based peace-building projects were "effective."



Irish international men's Lacrosse jersey. Ulster Folk...

Targeting children as carriers of change is the mission of Peaceplayers, an international organisation and Sported member, which has been active in Northern Ireland since the early 2000s. It is built on a simple premise, 'Children who play together can learn to live together.' One of their greatest triumphs was in Ardoyne. In the early 2000s, Holy Cross, a Catholic primary school in a Protestant area, was picketed by local parents who claimed that their homes had been attacked by Republicans. The protests turned violent and eventually riot police accompanied the Holy Cross pupils and their parents on their daily walk to school.

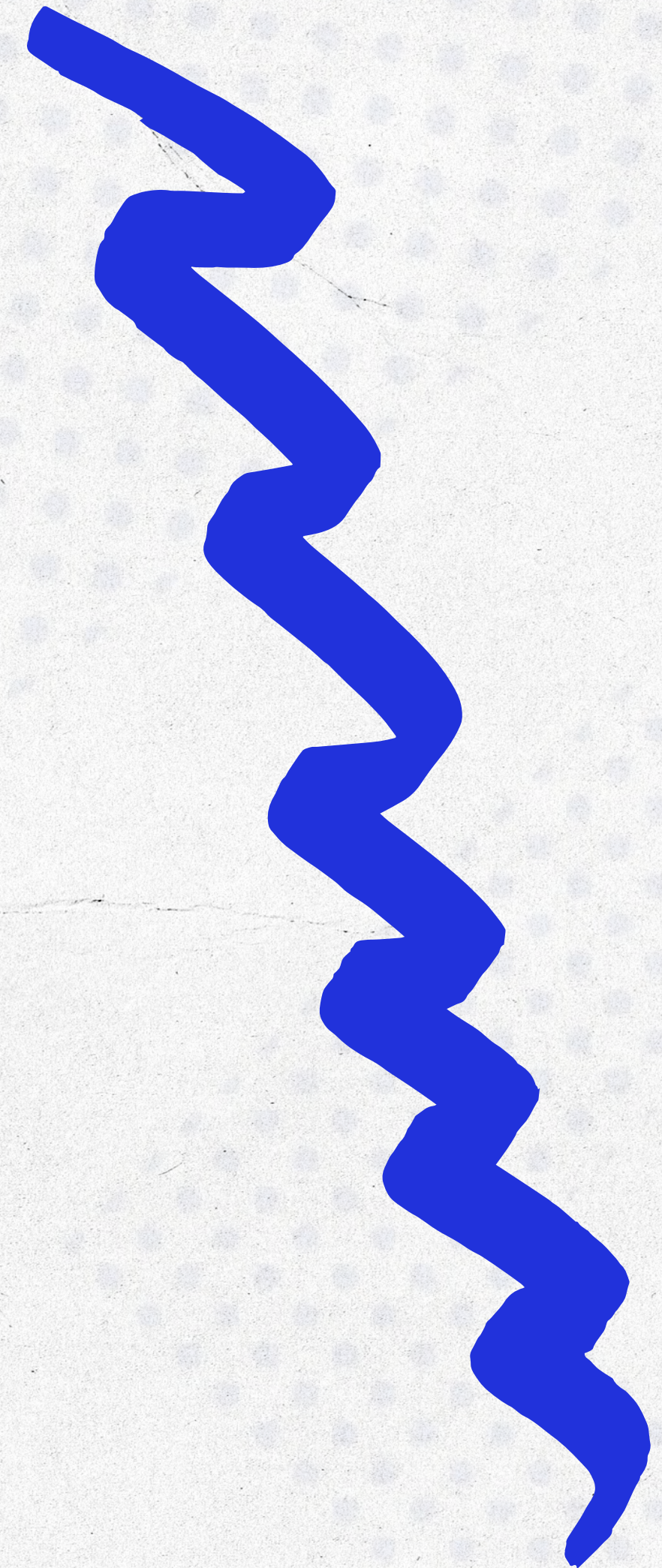
Peaceplayers worked with Holy Cross and a nearby Protestant school in Wheatfield to build an integrated basketball team and, from that, a bridge. Having had the experience of playing basketball together, they got involved in a Game of Three Halves, the Sport Uniting Communities project mentioned earlier. Through hard work and a renewed focus, a different story is now being written. Whilst we cannot re-write history, and the impact of that will last for generations to come, the new unified story – looking to learn from history, rather than live in it – shows the power of sport to bring healing, change and unity.

The legacy of stars like Mary Peters, projects like Sport Uniting Communities, and the grassroots volunteer who creates an inclusive club like we see around the country, is the legacy of sport that will hopefully bring a brighter and harmonious future to everyone in Northern Ireland.

Theme 3

Peace Building

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IFA Grassroots Club Of The Year & Inclusivity Award Winners 2020

CASE STUDY – Tri Star

Tristar Football Club is a football club located in Derry. It was established in 1974 through the heart and determination of one man, Jon Clifford. He formed the club as an alternative to the violent activities that he knew were drawing in many of the local young people. In that period of time in Northern Ireland's history rioting was daily, hostility was normal and peace seemed so far away.

In the story of this club, Clifford was the catalyst for change in how he saw the impact that sport could have on individual people and also his city.

For him, sport was a way through the dark times of the Troubles, even at their worst. Sport was a positive force that could change people's lives for the better. While Derry was known for a wide variety of sports, Tristar formed using the popular and accessible sport of football.

The heritage of Tristar is positioned firmly against the early days of the Troubles. This Bogside club worked hard to keep their young members aligned with cross community activity and recreation – contrary to the accepted narrative of the time. It was perhaps his hard working, selfless attitude that earned him the respect of the community, possibly enabling him to bring Tristar to matches with other sides of different religious background across the country.

This foundation was set for the club to build upon. Clifford's passion and commitment to see change became the centre of the club; those fundamentals infiltrating the mission, vision and values of Tristar.

Jon, affectionately known as 'Big Ugg', was carrying all the weight of the club in its early days. When he passed away in 2011, many thought this would be the end of the club. A man, who shaped the lives of many when times were tough, had disappeared from thousands of people's lives.

However, the former players and coaches pulled together to continue his work. They knew the value of his investment and wanted to ensure it was passed on to further generations.

TRI STAR



They still attract many people. Jon was known to knock on people's doors to let people know about TriStar and information about training and matches. Although the club had around 100 players at the time of his death in 2011, many feared for its future. Yet now there are around 350 players, with the biggest growth being in girls' teams, current running from Under-7 to Under-13. The growth and impact saw them awarded the IFA Club of the Year in December 2021.

They still promote cross-community involvement. As Jon would take the club up and down Ireland promoting the club to all groups of people, this still remains a central part of TriStar. As a continuation of his legacy they now host a NorthWest cross-community tournament every September with over 200 kids coming from all different areas of Ireland. They still seek to invest in young people.

Tristar prioritises personal development for its members. As one coach said it 'Tristar promotes you growing up'. The ethos of the club has remained, through the influence of Jon from its formation, the wellbeing and maturity of young people in Derry. Its impact is seen more off the pitch than on it.

They still.

That use of the continuous verb sums up the activity of Tristar, showing the heritage of a club that started when peace was unimaginable. Now, nearly 50 years after its formation, with peace established, communities changed, and participation from wider communities continuing to grow, that individual impact is still clearly seen.

Within a larger national jigsaw, the isolated, undocumented personal touches of people like Jon Clifford form many of the individual pieces that come together to portray a beautiful, dynamic picture. Without these personal touches, such as the invitations, transport, advice and opportunities, the picture would be incomplete.

One of those jigsaw pieces, David Thompson, a current coach at Tristar, sums it up perfectly by saying, "The big bearded figure of Jon Clifford is still the heart and soul of this club. A man who loved football, who cared for the youth of Derry, left a dynasty for the current coaches to follow, a club which I am proud to be a part of, in an attempt to help continue the dynasty for the long term."



Gary Flemming of Notts Forest and Northern Ireland, Captain of Tristar team in the early 70's, receives the D & D Youth FA under 11 McIntyre Cup from Mrs Margaret McIntyre, Included is D & D Secretary Sean Coyle. Gary played at Full Back and was arguably Tristar's most successful player?

Sported
Theme Four

Including All



The late NFL coach Vince Lombardi famously said that, "winning isn't everything, it's the only thing."

While this was said repeatedly during the 1960s, the heart of competition in sport is still something that can be seen as central to its attraction. As a person participates, spectates, or trains for sporting endeavours maybe this phrase can be held too tightly.

A more common, and seemingly more palatable, term used in sporting competition could be, "May the best man win."

This phrase may sound more wholesome than Lombardi's quote, because it firmly puts the hope on the most deserving person being the victor. While this is indeed virtuous, there are subtle issues overlooked within a sporting environment. In order for the 'best' to win, 'all' need to be included.

For many decades, unfortunately, there have been many barriers to participation in sport and physical activity. 'All' was replaced by 'some' – with the 'some' being those who had the social, economic, or cultural advantage to take part. Over the years, sports were not accessible to those of mixed ability, those from disadvantaged backgrounds, ethnic minorities, females, the LGBTQ+ community and many more.

While we can see progress, and a more accessible and open door to participation now through the determined work of many, there have definitely been unnecessary obstacles put in the way of many groups of people. Only now are we beginning to see what it truly means to be the 'best'.

It must be said that this was not just a sporting issue. Equality has long been a cultural issue, highlighted by the endeavours of Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and others.

Sport has played its own important role in putting a spotlight on these cultural issues of equality, diversity and inclusion – and, through that spotlight, bringing long and lasting change, not only to sport but to culture and communities as well.

One famous example of the power of sport in bringing people together came on Christmas morning in 1914. During World War I, the German and British soldiers put down their weapons, entered no-mans land, and played a game of football.

The remarkable reports were that sport was the medium that enabled groups to move from hostility to equality. For that brief moment football was the common factor in an otherwise opposing view of one another. It has long been remembered as one of the most enduring and symbolic acts of WWI. More recently sport has again been in the spotlight for bringing people together and showing equality, when otherwise it was not seen.

Professional athletes opting to kneel in protest following the murder of George Floyd in the USA put a global focus on equality. Sport has a long history and heritage of bringing people together and removing cultural barriers.

During our research for the project, we heard a similar story. As many sports stakeholders were interviewed, they shared their knowledge and lived experience of the inclusive power of sport.

Tony Barclay, a Sported volunteer and Disability Sport Northern Ireland board member, shared passionately about how sport had changed his own life.

As a blind man, with limited hearing, he told numerous examples of how sport had brought hope and help. "There is nothing more inclusive than sport", he would go on to say. Recalling the efforts of DSNi to bring sport to everyone, and sport helping him overcome his personal doubts and fears due to his disability, Tony knows that sport can be the same help to anyone – no matter their ability, age, or background.

Conrad Kirkwood, IFA President would share that "football has always presented opportunities for different communities to meet, and for people to be brought together in a sport." He would later reflect on the current importance of football by saying, "We are a much more diverse society, and football is working to be a catalyst for that (embracing diversity) right across Northern Ireland."

Having reflected on the vast heritage of sport, especially the sporting events and quotes that reveal how much sport has developed over the last century, we also reflected on the present-day stakeholders and the events and quotes they gave during our interviews. It is these contemporary quotes from our research that show a new story, with quotes that show the inclusion and diversity within sport. These stories of true-life events provide a platform for the 'all' to participate and the 'all' to have their say. The quotes will continue to be recorded as the power of sport opens itself up to everyone.

Including All

EMSONI

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Case study
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CASE STUDY – EMSONI

Ethnic Minority Sports Organisation Northern Ireland are an organisation that are looking to diversify the face of sports. Their approach is to use the medium of sports to integrate migrants within the ethnic minority community and with the local communities in Northern Ireland. Starting in 2016, although not constituted until October 2018, they have seen tremendous growth, impact and recognition.

One significant example in which these are all seen is in their annual Confederation Cup. This hugely successful football competition has seen the number of teams grow from 12 in 2019 to 20 in 2022, equating to over 600 individuals.

These teams are representative of diverse communities across the country. This level of participation enables a greater degree of integration, with the ripple effect seen in friends, families, supporters and local community. EMSONI, through their chair Adekanmi Abayomi, provide links to local football clubs to help those representing their nationality get a platform to integrate into them, growing a connection across all backgrounds through local sport.

“A platform for us to continue with our lives”

This was a section of the passionate interview we conducted with Adekanmi as we connected in with EMSONI during this year’s Confederation Cup semi-final. As he shared with us the values and history of EMSONI against the backdrop of diversity football and cultural connections. They use sport as a tool to deliver far-reaching wellbeing and social development initiatives.

These initiatives are aimed at improving healthy lifestyles, tackling isolation, addressing racism and connecting communities. They would hope that through this all-inclusive environment, people can fulfil their full potential on and off the sports pitch. Through the work with individuals, and their hope to increase the representation of migrants in sports coaching and administration, their value is immense in uniting with government and community to make our society a better place.

Therefore, this does give the ethnic minorities that EMSONI and Adekanmi represent ‘a platform to continue with their lives’ – with less barriers in the way





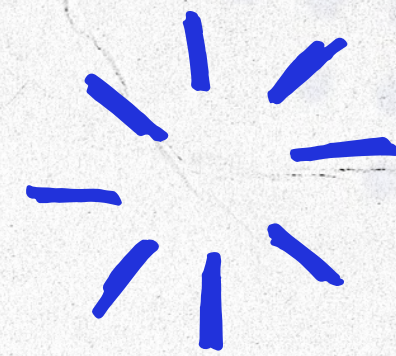
Adekanmi himself, their founder, is described as “a fearless advocate for the voiceless and vulnerable.” He personally embodies the passion for promoting a diverse society and was recognised for his effort and skill through receiving the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Unsung Hero in 2020.

As the face of the organisation, he wants to be a ‘megaphone’ for a diverse community – declaring their needs, rights, hopes and fears – in order to see a country where “people from different ethnicities can regularly participate in the same sports and physical activities without any discrimination.” They want to magnify the voices of the marginalised and direct it to the policy makers, funders and local government.

A megaphone was not needed, however, throughout 2022’s semi-final match between Nigeria and Ghana at Midgley Park in Belfast. The noise constantly heard as the backdrop to this match was the beating of African drums and accompanying songs, sung from the hundreds of spectators cheering on their team. It was this noise of the drums of supporters that showed the impact of the noise of EMSONI’s megaphone.

People felt at home. They felt proud of their nationality. They were comfortable being themselves. They were proud of those representing them on the pitch. This is no small noise, no whisper in a remote environment; this was a deafening exuberance of human passion and hope, in the nation’s capital and beside the National football stadium. It is a noise of the impact that sport has had on communities and integrating a diverse group of people into them.

It’s a noise that is loud, enthusiastic and vibrant, a noise unheard in years gone by but is beautifully melodic in what it represents both now and what it promises for the future.



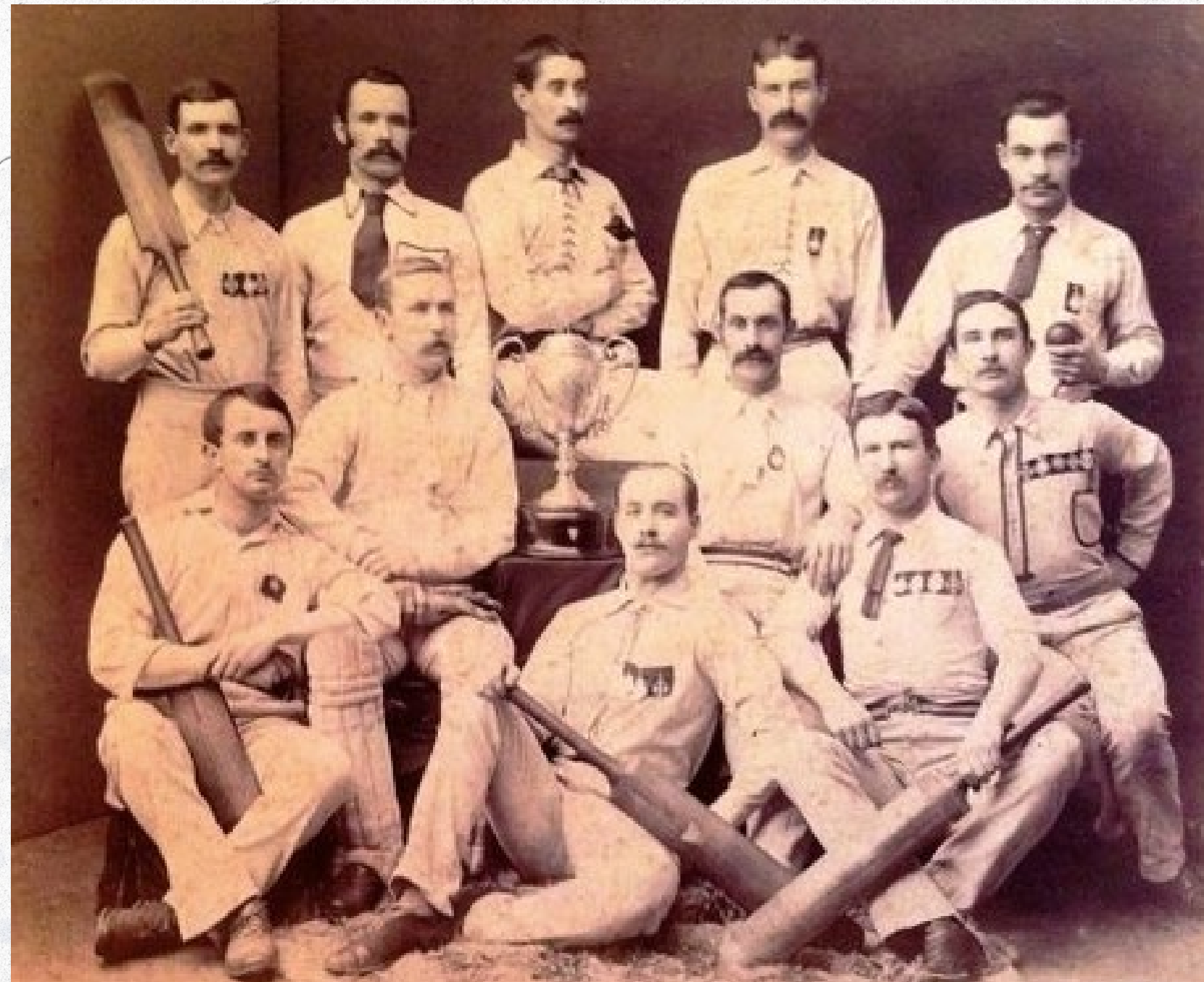
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Closing Remarks



Closing Remarks

It was our hope that we would tell an accurate reflection on the rich heritage of sport impacting communities. As we narrowed the research down to local level here in Northern Ireland, we unearthed a collection of stories.



These were the personal reflections of individuals and the impact that sport had had on them and on their community. We saw a national project filled with powerful personal stories.

Older people recalled events from decades ago with a smile on their faces or tears in their eyes. Current participants reflected on the influence of others on their lives and the impact they can have on those around them.

Grassroots sport has played a massively significant part in changing lives. Therefore, as we narrowed the focus in our research, we also found out that the true community impact of sport and physical activity wasn't built through the accomplishments of the famous: it was generated away far away from the spotlight.

Many recalled stories of local people investing their skills, time and heart into the club, community and into the individuals present.

These names won't be found in Google searches, library papers or TV documentaries – but their impact will be seen directly and indirectly for years to come in the lives of people and their communities.

These are the unknown stories that we wanted to share. These are the unknown stories that should be lauded and recognised.

We would like to thank NI Heritage Fund for enabling this project, and our gratitude to all the contributors on the project, as we interviewed many people from community sports groups.

These clubs included:

Armagh RFC
Ballyclare Comrades Ladies FC
EMSONI
Leander ASC
Ledley Hall Boxing Club
Na Magha CLG
Portadown RFC
Powered By Sport
TriStar FC
Ulster Rugby

These were supplemented with the personal interviews of:

Adekanmi Abayomi
Becky Irvine
Brian McAvoy
Conrad Kirkwood
Eilish Ward
Paul Donnelly
Tony Barclay

Without these groups and individuals, we could not have told this story. We could not have celebrated the impact that sport has had on communities here in Northern Ireland. We couldn't have recorded that story of impact because they themselves are the story.

Learn more about Sported,
and this project at:

<https://sported.org.uk/sport-in-the-community-ni/>