

O'Neill: Dublin deal a game-changer

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GAA president Liam O'Neill says Dublin's new multimillion sponsorship deal may change the way the Association funds county boards.



By John Fogarty

Describing the capital's five-year contract with multinational insurance company AIG as "good news" and praising the county for gaining more money "than some people would have thought they would in a recession", O'Neill said it poses a question for Croke Park in how they dish out TV and league income.

He dismissed the idea of all sponsorship monies being pooled and distributing the sum among counties. However, he would like to see a more even spread of monies across the country.

"What we have to do is just calmly look at it and see what that implies for us. It may well change our thinking on how we finance counties across the board now to equalise things.

"You'll never have an equal world because life isn't equal, that's it. But I would much prefer to face the challenge of having to equalise things because we're getting more money than getting less.

"We dish out TV money and give money back to counties in various ways. Even the way we pool the National League (gate receipts), every county doesn't get the

same amount.

“So we have to look at all of those, across the board, and just see what we can do about. Maybe raising our own income so that we’re in a position to better equalise things. It’s not easy.”

O’Neill estimates the money distributed by Croke Park towards games development to be €10 million.

But he qualified: “You couldn’t possibly say that you’d ever spend the same sort of money in a county with 24 clubs as you would in a county with 100. That’s just not the way it works.

“You can’t punish a child for being in a county that either has a big population or gets more money so we have to be mindful of that too.”

O’Neill revealed the joint proposal by Carlow and Westmeath to change the National Hurling League will not be considered by Central Council next month.

“We can keep on getting proposals but at some stage you have to make a decision. If Carlow and Westmeath join (the top flight), what about the two below them, and if they join what about the two below them?”

“There is a cut-off point at some stage. Central Council will make that decision.”

Other than London, Carlow and Westmeath are the only two Liam MacCarthy Cup teams left out of the 12-team Division 1 structure devised by national fixtures planning committee member Michael Burns and backed by management committee.

But O’Neill said: “I think we’ve been very fair on this. Nobody in the last 30 years has come up with a formula for the National Hurling League.

“You’re (the media) at us every year about it, every time it starts, ‘why are you tinkering with it?’ The reason we’re tinkering with it is because we’re trying to find a formula and we haven’t found one up to now.

“Nobody, until the time that Michael Burns put his proposal on the floor, had a good formula.

“The Carlow/Westmeath one came out of the fact that Michael Burns had made a proposal and we had tabled it because we thought it worthwhile.

“And at the Central Council meeting I was asked why did it take a proposal ‘from the blue’. And I said, quite simply, because it was better than anything we have come up with. We had to be honest about it.”

Meanwhile, O’Neill admitted the GAA as well as the AFL are to blame for the decline of the International Rules since its halcyon days in the early 2000s.

Regarding the fall in attendances over the last two series, he said: “I don’t worry about statistics, really. You can dress them up any way you like.

“We allowed collectively what was at the peak in 1999 to dwindle and I think it was our collective fault.

“We are now at the point we are at and we are saying this shouldn’t be where it is and we want to fix it.”

However, he argued there is no need to make wholesale changes to the parameters of the game to make it more attractive to AFL players.

“I think Paul Earley was right — the rules are the rules. There is not that much tweaking to be done on it. The game is fine, there is nothing wrong with the game. When Ireland were in full flow and played, that was a spectacle. “If Australia had been stronger, I think it would have been an ever better spectacle.

There is nothing wrong with the rules.”

### **O’Neill ‘staggered’ by GAA’s impact in New York**

Liam O’Neill has spoken glowingly of the growing impression Gaelic games is making in New York.

The Shannon Gaels club in Queens are currently utilising two pitches in Frank Golden Memorial Park and intend establishing a clubhouse there.

“They have got a lease on a public park because they are doing so much for children in that area and for that to be recognised by a city council in a borough of New York is staggering,” said O’Neill.

“It’s fascinating that we’ve reached a level with juvenile activity in New York where one group of people are worthy of getting a public area.

“It’s like St Stephen’s Green or Merrion Square being taken over. It’s unheard of, really.

“We will be contributing to their development costs and we’ll be quite happy.”

New York GAA celebrates its 100th anniversary next year but the GAA has all but ruled out the National Football League final being held there in 2014.

Instead, the New York County Board is likely to receive additional funding towards the refurbishment of Gaelic Park.

O’Neill was speaking at the launch of the GAA’s annual coaching conference in Croke Park in January, which will be sponsored by Liberty Insurance.