

Orchard Report 2011

Eanáir - January

Armagh were well represented in the GIRLS ONLY Handball Tournament in Mayo at the beginning of 2011 - With the 13 and Under title going to the ever impressive Aoife McConville, who met her clubmate and National Onewall Champion - Niamh Coleman. The Clann Eireann recreational Ladies also did extremely well in the Challenger section - securing 5 out of the 8 quarter final spots . Denise McDonald reached the final, but was beaten by a very experienced one wall player - Onewall National Challenger Champion, Bairbe NiAinli from Galway.

Feabhra - February

Paddy Sherry from the Eugene Quinn Handball Club, Armagh reached the Irish Interschools B Final, unfortunately losing out to TCD's Cormac McMahon 17-21, 11-21

Márta - March

Orchard Youngsters Contest All-Ireland Finals

March saw Aoife McConville from Clann Eireann return to play her second consecutive U-14 All-Ireland final. In front of a packed gallery in Kingscourt, Aoife took to the court to face Connaught Champion, Galway's Shannon Keady, coming from behind to take the first 15-12, but losing out badly in the second 15-1. We were now treated to a tie-breaker, and though once again the Ulster Champ found herself trailing in points, she fought her way back to level the spoils – to the rapturous applause of all her Armagh supporters present. But the never phased Shannon stuck to her game plan however and edged out as All-Ireland Champion 15-12.

Shanks and Doyle reached Senior All-Ireland Semi-Final

Clann Eireann's Charly Shanks and St. Killian's, Whitecross' James Doyle reached the All-Ireland Senior Doubles Semi-Final seeing off the threat of Mayo pairing, Vinnie Moran and Campbell Brennan before besting last years finalists and 2009 Champions, Dessie Keegan and Joe McCann in the Quarter-Final. Shanks and Doyle then met the Meath combo of Tom Sheridan and Brian Carroll who made no mistakes and overcame the Armagh men to deny the Orchard men a place in the final.

Aibreán - April

Shanks reaches All-Ireland 40x20 senior championship final once again!

It was a sea of Orange and White in the Longford village on the 17th April as Armagh GAA Handball fans flocked to witness their golden boy in his bid for All-Ireland glory.

For the massive contingent of Charly Shanks supporters who had made their way to Abbeylara - in the first game, excitement grew as Charly surged into a 9-1, then 12-3 lead. Such a lead was to be short-lived and with some remarkable retrieves and killshots from Brady – who managed to level proceedings at 16 a piece. He then went on to secure the first game on a 21-17 scoreline. Although Shanks give it his all in the first game and it really did appear it was his for the taking, all of his fans believed that he had more in the tank for the second game and maybe force a tie-breaker. But, the 3times World Champion who was attempting to set a new record of 8-in-a-row had his very own script and took out the Clann Eireann man 21-3 in the second.

FOUR All-Ireland CHAMPIONS

Young Cullyhanna man, Clann Eireann's Conall McCavitt partnered by Eugene Quinn's Ciaran Duffy were crowned All-Ireland U-17 Doubles Champions in Roscommon on Saturday afternoon. Facing the Armagh pairing were Connaught Champions; Al Ryder and Diarmuid Browne from Mayo. Although the Mayo men put up a brave fight, the orchard boys proved much too strong, finishing the match in two straight games, 21-10, 21-13.

Earlier in the afternoon, Clann Eireann starlets, One Wall National Champion Niamh Coleman and Aoibhinn Henderson also secured All-Ireland victory for Armagh in the U-14 Doubles when they saw off the challenge of Caoimhe Shanagher, Fiona Tully both from Roscommon, 15-11, 15-12.

Between both doubles games, Phillip Duffy from the Eugene Quinn Club contested the All-Ireland U-17 singles All-Ireland final facing Cathal Connelly of Roscommon. The result: 21-12 21-12 in favour of the Roscommon man.

Eugene Quinn's Fionnuala McKenna reached the All-Ireland girls minor final. She faced the more experienced Cork's Catriona Casey and although Fionnuala give it her all, the Cork girl went on to win her second consecutive minor title.

Bealtaine - May

Armagh were represented in the Inis Mor Mens Open by two of the top-guns of One wall, Ireland's Number One, Clann Eireann's Charly Shanks and Whitecross' James Doyle. Shanks and Doyle, at opposite sides of the draw both made their way to the Mens Open final. Played in Pairc Spraoi, which runs alongside the Atlantic Ocean, the final was a sizzling affair with Shanks eventually taking the spoils.

Williamstown Onewall tournament

Before the main event, the U-11 girls title was won by the ever impressive Clann Eireann's young Dervla Coleman. Taking the honours in the U-14 grade was Aoife McConville who overcame clubmate, Niamh Coleman in extra time. Not to be outdone, Mum of the Coleman girls', Avoureen beat Michelle Warren from Tyrone to be crowned Ladies Challenger

Champion. Conor McMahon won the Masters plate beating Sean McNally of Down in a highly competitive and keenly contested match.

St. Killian's man, James Doyle, who was playing some of the most impressive onewall on view over the weekend, easily made his way to the final taking out many fine exponents of the game on the way to meet Ruairi Kelly of Tyrone and seemed on track to take the honours when he was accidentally struck by a return ball square in the eye! Although clearly troubled by the injury, Doyle bravely played out the game as best he could, but the title was taken/retained by the Tyrone man.

Iúil - July

Onewall Nationals

Last year's Champion, Clann Eireann's Charly Shanks who was going for three in-a-row failed to progress past the Quarter-final stage with Ruairi Kelly of Tyrone pulling off the shock of the tournament, sealing victory over Shanks by no less than seven points.

James Doyle from the St. Killian's GAA Handball Club in Whitecross reached the Men's Open Plate final and wife Maighread also paved her way to the Ladies Open Plate final.

Eddie McCavitt secured victory in the plate competition playing some very effective, no nonsense handball.

Lúnasa - August

Clann Eireann Onewall Tournament

Lorraine Havern of Down claimed the Ladies Open title beating Tyrone's Meave McElduff who put up a brave fight taking the game right to the wire, Havern managing to pull a few aces clear in the closing minutes.

Men's B Winner Pat Conway from Williamstown, Galway beat Clann Eireann's Conal McCavitt in a very close match with Pat using all his experience and power to win by a few aces.

In the Men's C Stewart Heslin of Louth beat Clann Eireann's Peter Shanks, with both players tied 10 minutes into the match it was Heslin who called on all his reserves to power ahead in the last third.

The Men's Recreational title was claimed by Clann Eireann's Gregory McConville.

Meanwhile the Masters Division final was probably the closest and most entertaining match of the day. Niall Kerr of Tyrone and Clann Eireann's Conor McMahon renewed their rivalries once again and it was McMahon who got off to a flying start. Leading throughout he commanded the rallies but Kerr kept working levelling the score with only a few minutes

remaining. It was Kerr who appeared stronger at the end and he closed out the match to claim the Masters title.

Meán Fómhair - September

Shanks moves Stateside

The talented North Armagh star relocated to New York to work and most importantly to further enhance his playing career. Over the coming months, Charly will compete on the Handball Pro-Tour stateside. Currently number two in Ireland, Shanks is sure to make his mark in the U.S.

Craigavon Council Awards

U-14 All-Ireland Champions, Niamh Coleman and Aoibhinn Henderson received the 'Team of the Year' award at a prestigious ceremony held in Craigavon.

Deireadh Fómhair - October

Shanks reaches U.S. final

In the Simple Green US Open of Handball 2011 Armagh's shining star reached the finals at the premier SoCal facility, Los Caballeros Sports Village, in Fountain Valley, CA.

Shanks competed against Irish Nationals Champion, Westmeath's Robbie McCarthy in one of the biggest games of his career to date.

The final was be a re-play of last year's Golden Gloves final - where Shanks came out on top.

Over the tournament, handball fans all over the world enjoyed watching Shanks and McCarthy - the only two Irish players in the Men's singles event, pave their way to the final. A historic occasion in itself, the first All-Irish U.S. Open Mens final. Both players arguably are in the best shape physically and mentally than ever before and, as expected, it turned out to be a classic contest right up to the end - with the tiebreak game on a knife edge at 9-9 McCarthy just had enough gusto to take the last two points and secure victory.

With Charly's recent exploits in America, he is now the highest seeded Irish player on the Pro-rankings and is one of the favourites to lift the World Title in 2012!

Nollaig - December

Cullyhanna man, Conall McCavitt travelled to Tucson, Arizona to compete in the 19 and Under US Junior Nationals. He progressed through his first round match and lost out to Tyrone's Gabhain McCrystal in round two. The experience will set Conall up for 2012.

Another productive year for the handballers of Armagh – roll on 2012!