

# UCD and the Sigerson

By  
Irial Glynn



**100**  
**YEARS**  
1911-2011

# UCD and the Sigerson

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Editor: Paul Rouse



# Foreword

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*'Bliss was it that dawn to be alive  
But to be young was very heaven.'*

William Wordsworth's lines encapsulate the vigour and joy of youth. They could easily have been written in celebration of participation in the Sigerson Cup over the past 100 years. When Dr. George Sigerson donated a trophy 100 years ago it was to develop and foster healthy relations between colleges. This he has surely achieved and his name will live on for as long as Gaelic football is played in Irish colleges.

UCD have participated in the competition since its inception, through good times and bad, through great eras and fallow times. There is a common thread, a linkage which binds UCD GAA people together: it is that every year we look forward to the college participating in the Sigerson Cup. And, with participation, we hope that it may be our year to be victorious.

The Sigerson Cup is more about memories than medals, however. Long after student days are over, the mention of the Sigerson Cup recaptures the days of our youth, of teammates who you would die for on the field and they for you. In these memories, we stay eternally young. Time moves on, of course, but in the mind it is not the grey-haired middle-aged man that you see in front of you; rather it is the dashing young athletic man in his prime on the field of play. Memories of teams, opponents and managers who you vilified and damned at the time – but deep down respected – mellowed over the years. Now, there is the common bond of having once been Sigerson warriors.

This excellent publication detailing the history of UCD's involvement in the

Sigerson Cup is an attempt to peep through the last 100 years and stir the memories of golden days for past participants and warriors. It is also hoped to give an insight to those new to the Sigerson Cup of what the competition means to those people who have been fortunate enough to wear the UCD jersey over the years.

It is not intended to be a complete history of our participation, but rather a snapshot through the ages. The UCD GAA webpage will carry an archive of the history for those who wish to delve deeper: See [www.ucd.ie/gaa](http://www.ucd.ie/gaa).

This publication would not have been possible without the kind financial patronage of Dalkia Ireland and its managing director Patrick Gilroy (a Trinity graduate!), and of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown Council. We are also indebted to the UCD AUC for their generous support. I would also like to thank Grant Thornton for their ongoing support to our club as a tribute to the former UCD great, Seán Murray.

Many thanks to Investec Ireland and their Chief Executive, Michael Cullen, for their generous patronage of this publication. Investec are great supporters of sport, both here and abroad.

I would like to say a huge thank you to the author of the book, Dr. Irial Glynn, who has done a magnificent job in a short period of time. I would also like to thank Dr. Paul Rouse for his contribution as editor.

Finally, to all former and present UCD GAA people who participated and contributed over the years: eternal thanks.

*David Billings, Director, UCD GAA*

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Sigerson



# Thank You

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I would like to thank Paul Rouse for introducing me to such a fascinating project and for all his help along the way. He constantly provided brilliant feedback, much-needed advice and clear direction whenever needed, as well as ensuring, through his consistent encouragement, genuine enthusiasm and sheer professionalism, that the project bore fruition. Dónal McAnallen's encyclopaedic knowledge and supportive remarks on the text were also incredibly valuable and much appreciated.

I would like to extend my gratitude to Eugene McGee and Dave Billings for offering me indispensable guidance and information on many of the legends who have worn UCD colours over the Sigerson's one-hundred year history; thanks also to Brian Mullins and Suzanne Bailey. And, of course, a great debt is owed to Michael O'Keeffe, Pembroke Communications, for his tireless work on and off the pitch. Thanks also to designer Brian Wilson for all his patience and effort.

My thanks go to Dave Billings, Padraig Carney, Seamus Gardiner, Benny Gaughran, Padraic Gearty, Eugene McGee, Bill Sex, Liam McNiffe and Sportsfile for providing various photos of UCD teams and players down through the ages.

Carrying out interviews for the project gave me a fascinating insight into the camaraderie, commitment and passion that symbolise the special nature of the Sigerson Cup. My appreciation goes to Padraig Carney, Benny Gaughran, Padraic Gearty, Ciarán McManus, Ogie Moran, Pat O'Neill, Seamy Rodgers and Cathal Young for recounting their absorbing memories of the Sigerson. A special gratitude goes to Eugene McGee, Breandán Ó hAinnidh, Paul Fegan and John O'Loughlin for taking the time to contribute their own superb pieces.



📷: Tommy Warburton and John Heslin of UCD at the draw for the 2011 Ulster Bank Sigerson and Fitzgibbon cups. Photo courtesy of Sportsfile.





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# Who was George Sigerson?

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George Sigerson's support for Gaelic games led him in 1911 to donate the cup named in his honour to be played off between the three colleges of the National University of Ireland. Later, of course, the competition was widened to allow entry to other universities and third-level colleges.

Giving his name to that cup may be what Sigerson is popularly remembered for, but his life is a truly fascinating one. He was the youngest of 11 children when he was born on 11 January 1836 in Strabane, Co. Tyrone. His father was a Catholic from Derry and his mother a Protestant. They sent George to school locally before deciding to send him away to be educated in France, at St. Joseph's College in Montrouge. He retained a love of France and French culture throughout his life and regularly revisited the country.

In 1855, he returned to university in Ireland and attended Queen's College Galway before catching typhoid fever. He moved to study at Queen's College Cork where he trained as a medical student and also took to studying Irish. Amongst his friends were several members of the remnants of the Young Ireland movement, including Isaac Varian. He eventually married Isaac's cousin, Hester, who was a writer, painter and musician. They had four children: William, who died before he was two, and Dora, George, and Hester. He lived with his family at various houses in Dublin before settling at 3 Clare Street, just off Merrion Square.

Although he qualified and practiced as a doctor, Sigerson was hugely interested in Irish culture. He had contributed poems and sketches to various newspapers and magazines and these led him to publish his first book, *The poets and poetry of Munster*, when he was 24. He also contributed to various anthologies and wrote the words of the well-known song, *The Mountains of Pomeroy*.

Through all of this, Sigerson worked as a journalist and his nationalistic articles were later collected and published as *Modern Ireland* in 1869. He also started a career as an academic at the Catholic University medical school. Eventually he was appointed as a professor of biology in UCD – an institution that he worked in through all its various incarnations over half a century. Indeed, when UCD became a 'National' college, it was one of the proudest moments of his life.

While in UCD, he was renowned for his extraordinary physical appearance. He was tall and strong, with flowing hair, reminding some of a Viking. Some of his magnificence is captured in a portrait of him by Sir John Lavery, which is kept in UCD, and another by John B. Yeats which is in the National Library of Ireland. He died at his home in Dublin on 17 February 1925. A brilliant account of his life is produced in the *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

# UCD and the Sigerson

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*What is it about Sigerson which is special? Why is it 24 players will give so much time and exertion in preparing for it? ... It's the magnificence of a Sigerson victory. ... It's a weekend when the great spirits make their mark, when new personalities emerge, and, when heroic feats are the order of the day. It's a weekend of abandon. The victory is so precious, we hurl ourselves at every opposition with no thought of danger or hurt ... and keep going flat out 'till the whistle tells you the Sigerson is yours after all.*

*Thomas O'Callaghan (UCD Sigerson winner, 1968)*

George Sigerson, physician, biologist, poet, historian, author, member of the first Seanad, professor in UCD until 87 years of age, gave up part of his UCD salary in 1911 to finance a four-handled trophy that he designed based on the old Irish communal Methern drinking vessel for an inter-varsity gaelic football

competition.<sup>2</sup> His aim, he was alleged to have announced at the 1911 dinner following UCC's victory in the first tournament, was that 'this trophy, symbolic of the unity of our race, will travel round Ireland, visiting the provinces in turn'.<sup>3</sup>

Although opposing teams are no longer met at the train station by the masked hosting students, carrying torches, banners and mottoes and then led in a procession to the teams' hotel by a half dozen on horseback, as occurred in Galway in 1912, teams still meet over one final weekend to decide the winner of the Sigerson tournament one hundred years after its inception.<sup>4</sup> From the beginning, different teams hosted the Sigerson every year and the climax took place over one busy weekend, with celebratory dinners following the final. This still holds true today. Sigerson dinners have seen teams coming together for one hundred years, singing songs, having fun, throwing buns (and infamously throwing some pieces of art in a boathouse after one Sigerson), and generally having a good time. Mooses have even been known to have joined in, with one particular Munster moosehead making a long celebratory journey across the country after one Sigerson (see Ciarán McManus' memories).

The great Galway and UCG player, Enda Colleran, who captained his county to back-to-back All-Irelands in the 1960s, summed up the significance of the Sigerson for some people when he wrote in 1969 that '[o]f all the games I have played including All-Irelands, National Leagues, Railway Cups, the Sigerson Competitions in which I had the pleasure to play in stand out most vividly in my mind especially for the spirit shown, the tough but sporting manner in which they were played, and the host of friends I made with opposing players and all the enjoyment we had at the social functions that go with Sigersons'.<sup>5</sup> This type of camaraderie is recounted in the memories of ex-players since the 1940s again and again (these memories are contained in the second half of the book). This book aims to provide a snapshot into the history and meaning of the Sigerson for the UCD club and UCD players.

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1 Thomas O'Callaghan, 'There is a Tide ...', UCD Gaelic Football Club: Tidings, March 1969 (The UCD football club published two editions of its own magazine, Tidings, for a short spell in 1969 with contributions from past players and players in the club at the time). O'Callaghan, from Kerry, was a member of the winning Sigerson team in March 1968 and captained the UCD team the following season in 1968/69.

2 J. B. Lyons, 'George Sigerson', Dictionary of Irish Biography, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Emma Canavan, 'George Sigerson', Sigerson Cup Programme 2006, pp. 21-2.

3 Quoted in Patrick N. Meenan, St. Patrick's Blue and Saffron. A Miscellany of UCD Sport since 1895, Dublin: Quill, 1997, p. 122.

4 Connaught Tribune, 24 Feb 1912.

5 Enda Colleran, 'Sigerson before All-Ireland', Tidings: UCD Gaelic Football Club, Dec. 1969.

# Format & development of the Sigerson

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From its inception in 1911 to 1932, the Sigerson was played mostly in a league format whereby only three teams UCD, UCC and UCG, played each other once.<sup>6</sup> Queen's did compete in 1923 but only became a regular fixture from 1933 onwards. Following Queen's permanent entry, the tournament became a straight knock-out competition played over one weekend. This changed slightly in 1963 when Trinity entered, thereby adding one quarter-final to the tournament. During the 1970s, the entry of NUI Maynooth (1972) and University of Ulster, Coleraine (1976) saw numbers increase further and from the mid-1980s onwards to the 1990s, the number of teams involved more than doubled with Jordandstown (1985), Thomond, NIHE Limerick and St. Mary's Belfast (all 1988), DCU (1990) and the Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) throughout the 1990s joining the fray to bring the total number of teams competing in the competition today to almost twenty.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps as a consequence, the great majority of UCD's 32 Sigerson Cup victories (and NUI Galway's 22 and UCC's 20 Sigersons) came before the 1980s. Thereafter the competition became a lot tougher to win. This

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6 Dónal McAnallen, 'Sigerson Cup', Des Donegan (ed.), *The Complete Handbook of Gaelic Games*, Dublin: 2009, pp. 276-299, p. 277.

7 'History of the Sigerson Cup', Sigerson Cup Programme 2009.

does not take away from the achievements of earlier Sigerson Cup winning teams – it merely serves to set the context for why UCD, UCC and UCG/NUI Galway have only won two Sigersons each since 1985. Queen's have managed to buck the trend somewhat, winning four of their eight Sigersons after 1985, which also reflects the resurgence of Ulster football since the late 1980s.

In many ways the development of the Sigerson Cup reflects the development of Irish society and the growth of third-level education in Ireland. In 1909/10, UCD held only slightly more than 500 students. This rose to just over 1,500 by the end of the 1920s, by 1939/40 to almost 2,500 and by 1959/60 to nearly 5,000. Nonetheless, it was in the 1960s that the university saw a dramatic rise in student numbers, with the student population reaching over 10,000 by 1969 after the expansion of the college following its relocation to Belfield.<sup>8</sup> This reflected the beginning of a major expansion of education in Ireland, with more and more people attending the third level sector more generally. The formation of the regional technical colleges (RTCs) from the late 1960s further increased third-level enrolments.<sup>9</sup> Indeed the number of people attending RTCs, which in turn became institutes of technology (ITs) from the mid-1990s onwards, grew twice as rapidly as the number of people attending their university counterparts after 1980. By 2004, for example, student numbers at ITs had risen from 41,000 in 1980 to 135,000, whereas student figures at UCD rose from approximately 10,000 in the late 1960s to approximately 20,000 today.<sup>10</sup> Most inter-county players did not have the opportunity to attend third-level institutions before the late 1960s in the same way as today's players. The development of the Sigerson Cup has, therefore, mirrored the greater access Irish people have had to higher education, particularly since the 1980s, when the proportion of secondary school leavers going on to higher education increased from under a third to almost half by 2004.<sup>11</sup>

Another constant relating to the Sigerson Cup is the weather. As a consequence of the tournament having almost always taken place during the colder months of the year, the wintry conditions serve to intensify the physicality

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8 Donal McCartney, *UCD: A National Idea. The History of University College, Dublin*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999, p. 51, 110, 117.

9 Pat McCarthy and Dermot Duffy, 'A Socio-Economic Analysis of Student Population in Third Level Education', *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, Vol. 2: 1, 1999, pp. 101-116, p. 106.

10 Selina McCoy and Emer Smyth, 'Higher Education Expansion and Differentiation in the Republic of Ireland', *Higher Education*, forthcoming edition. Accessed at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/bh136257442p51q0/> on 30 Nov. 2010.

11 Selina McCoy and Emer Smyth, 'Higher Education Expansion and Differentiation in the Republic of Ireland'.



of the battle. In the first decade of the competition, the Sigerson Cup mostly took place in February or early March. From 1921 until 1967, however, the Sigerson Cup occurred chiefly in November and December. A foot-and-mouth outbreak in late 1967, however, meant the postponement of the competition that season until early 1968 and, ever since, the Sigerson Cup has taken place after Christmas and mostly in February or early March. Whilst people often associate All-Ireland finals in Croke Park with sunshine September days, when people think of Sigerson Cup finals, they frequently picture cold, wet and dark evenings with matches played on muddy pitches. Indeed, the bitter chill that often accompanies Sigerson weekends adds to the mental and physical toughness required to win a competition that involves several extremely demanding matches on successive days.

## UCD in the early years, 1910s-1930s

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Although UCD holds the record number of Sigerson Cup wins at thirty-two, it was only at the third time of asking that it won its first Sigerson Cup, in the 1913 season. Despite hosting the first tournament at Jones' Road, where Croke Park stands today, UCD lost to both UCC and UCG.<sup>12</sup> The next year proved somewhat better with UCD securing two draws but it was the hosts, Galway,

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<sup>12</sup> Dónal McAnallen, 'Sigerson Cup', p. 277.

who came away victorious in extremely wet conditions, with the *Connaught Tribune* recording that 'It rained as it never rained before in Galway, and as we trust it will not rain again for some time'.<sup>13</sup> Conditions meant 'fast play, science, finesse, brilliant tactics, effective cohesion, cool and effective calculation' were replaced with 'a gruelling, die-dog-or-eat-the-hatchet sort of game from whistle to whistle'.<sup>14</sup> The *National Student*, UCD's student newspaper at the time, somewhat bitterly remarked that UCD only failed to gather the trophy because several of the best members of the team stayed behind for their spring medical exams: 'without wishing in any way to detract from the merits of the winners, we may say that had these men been able to assist their College the Sigerson Cup would now be resting in Dublin.'<sup>15</sup>

The following year UCD took their first Sigerson Cup in Cork; but only because they had a higher points total than UCG, whom they initially drew with, 2-1 to 2-1, for the second year in a row. According to match reports, the Kerryman Solomon Lawlor – a former student at St. Brendan's Seminary in Killarney who would go on to win three more Sigersons, three Fitzgibbon cup medals and a number of Dublin county titles with Geraldines – was to the fore of the Dublin attack.<sup>16</sup> Both teams beat UCC – Galway by 2-2 to 0-5 and UCD by 3-3 to 0-2, but UCD's higher points total saw them collect the trophy.<sup>17</sup> In 1914 UCD convincingly beat UCG in Terenure, which saw Frank Burke, who went on to become a Dublin football and hurling legend, make his Sigerson Cup debut. Nonetheless, UCC foiled UCD in the final match by the narrow margin of 1-0 to 0-2. UCD got their revenge the following year by beating UCC 1-5 to 0-1, which enabled them to win the Sigerson Cup for the second time on points difference (they had lost to UCG, who had in turn lost to UCC).

The victorious UCD team in January 1915 included John Ryan, a '6ft 3in. powerhouse from the Limerick-Tipperary border' who, in addition to captaining UCD to two Fitzgibbon victories, also captained the Dublin hurlers to All-Ireland victory in 1917.<sup>18</sup> William Nolan asserts that Ryan was 'as influential with respect to Dublin hurling in the 1917-'27 period as Kevin Heffernan was in respect

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<sup>13</sup> *Connaught Tribune*, 24 Feb 1912.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *National Student*, March 1912.

<sup>16</sup> *Connacht Tribune*, 1 March 1913.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick N Meenan, *St. Patrick's Blue and Saffron*, p. 123.

<sup>18</sup> William Nolan (ed.), *The Gaelic Athletic Association in Dublin 1884-2000*, Dublin: Geography Publications, 2005, pp. 142-4 and *ibid.*, p. 653. My thanks to Michael McCaughley for lending me this three-volume collection.

of football in the 1970s'.<sup>19</sup> Two other notable dual players played alongside Ryan in that Sigerson Cup winning team: the Kildare man Frank Burke and the Buenos Aires man Éamon Bulfin. The latter captained UCD's Fitzgibbon winning team that same year, of which Burke was a leading member. Burke went on to win three All-Ireland football medals and two All-Ireland hurling medals with Dublin and just missed out on becoming General Secretary of the GAA in 1929 to Pádraig Ó Caoimh.<sup>20</sup> But even more extraordinary is the part the two men played shortly thereafter in Irish history.

T.D. Williams has recorded that over 500 UCD present and past students had served in the British Army during the First World War and that forty-two had died.<sup>21</sup> John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, had famously called upon the Irish Volunteers to fight with the British Army in the First World War to ensure the British remained receptive to implementing its promise of Home Rule.<sup>22</sup> Despite UCD's president, Denis Coffey, calling on the college in his 1917/18 report to 'give suitable permanent expression to its appreciation of the memory of those who had made the great sacrifice',<sup>23</sup> it was the Irish Volunteers who refused to fight alongside Britain, under the leadership of professor of history at the time in UCD, Eoin MacNeill, who have more frequently entered the annals of Irish history than their counterparts who fought alongside the British. Some of these famously partook in the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916.

Three prominent Sigerson Cup winning players from the UCD team fought in the GPO in Easter 1916: Éamon Bulfin, Frank Burke and Brian Joyce. Bulfin's father, William – an editor, writer and prominent Sinn Féin supporter, had moved from Offaly to Argentina in 1884 but Éamon returned to Ireland at sixteen years of age, in 1908, to attend the newly founded St. Enda's school, alongside Frank Burke, which was then under the tutelage of Patrick Pearse. Both men were prominent members of the Irish Volunteer company at UCD and fought in the GPO during the 1916 Easter Rising. James Connolly, the head of the Irish Citizen Army which fought alongside the Volunteers in the GPO, asked Bulfin to hoist two flags on each end of the GPO's roof: one the Irish tricolour, the other a green flag that read 'Irish Republic'. For his part in the Rising, Bulfin received the

death sentence but the intervention of the Argentinean ambassador to London saw this commuted. Nonetheless, the British deported him to Buenos Aires in March 1917, where – in an attempt to appease the British – the Argentinean authorities sentenced him to prison for desertion from national military service. When released in 1919, de Valera appointed him as Ireland's first ambassador to Argentina.<sup>24</sup>

The British sent Frank Burke for his part in the 1916 Rising to Stafford prison in England but he returned to Ireland in late 1916 as part of the Christmas amnesty.<sup>25</sup> The Aran Islander and dual player Brian Joyce had joined Burke and Bulfin in the GPO. Joyce also won numerous Fitzgibbon medals for UCD and would form part of UCD's Sigerson Cup winning teams in 1917 and 1918, alongside Burke. Four years after the Rising, both players travelled together from St Enda's school, where Burke taught (and where he would later become principal), to Croke Park on the fateful day of 21 November 1920 for the challenge football match between Dublin against Tipperary. The Irish War of Independence had raged since January 1919 but the morning of the game saw a new departure with the IRA killing fourteen British agents and auxiliaries, many of whom formed part of the so-called Cairo Gang. In response, the Royal Irish Constabulary and British auxiliaries raided Croke Park ten minutes into the Dublin-Tipperary game, which had attracted 5,000 supporters. They opened fire on the crowd, killing fourteen people, including the Tipperary captain, Michael Hogan, in a day that became known as Bloody Sunday. UCD's Frank Burke, playing at left-wing forward for Dublin and marked that fateful day by Hogan, later recounted how:

'[...] the play came over to my territory and Hogan and myself went for the ball. I can't remember who won possession because at that moment the shooting started. As the play was mostly near the now Hogan Stand entrance, the majority of the players were over that end and immediately made for the dressing room. There was nobody remaining in the Park at the time but myself, Mick Hogan and Stephen Synott ... We ran but we didn't know where we were going. Confused and frightened we ran to the centre of the field. We could see the bullets hitting the wall at the Railway end. It was then we realised they were shooting at somebody in the crowd. Three of us threw ourselves on the ground.

19 William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, p. 142.

20 Marcus de Búrca, *The GAA: A History*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2nd ed. 2000, p. 144.

21 T.D. Williams, 'The College and the Nation', Michael Tierney (ed.), *Struggle with Fortune. A Miscellany for the Centenary of the Catholic University of Ireland 1854-1954*, Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1954, pp. 166-193, p. 180.

22 Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland: A history*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 375-6.

23 Quoted in Donal McCartney, *UCD: A National Idea*, p. 103.

24 Edmundo Murray, 'Eamon Bulfin [Eduardo, Ned] (1892-1968). Irish republican and diplomatist', *Irish Migration Studies in South America*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March-April 2004, pp. 5-6.

25 Anne Dolan, 'Frank Burke', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

... And we started creeping from the centre of the field towards the goal posts. ... Eventually, through creeping and rolling, we got to the racing track. They used to have a cycle track around the grounds in those days. Hogan said 'We'll lie in here close and we might get some protection'. We lay close to the edge of the field and all the time they were firing. They were only about four or five yards away. Then I heard Hogan cry out: 'I'm shot', and immediately the crowd started running towards Hill 16.<sup>26</sup>

Croke Park was not the only location that British forces raided. Indeed, George Sigerson himself complained to the Governing Body of UCD in March 1921 about 'the unprovoked and repeated interruptions' and the personal searches of professors and students by the British forces.<sup>27</sup> In the same month that Sigerson made his protest, Patrick Moran, who played on the victorious 1920 UCD Sigerson Cup winning team, was hanged by the British in Mountjoy prison for his alleged part in the IRA killings on the morning Bloody Sunday.<sup>28</sup> Moran had an opportunity to escape Kilmainham Gaol the previous month, along with Ernie O'Malley, but he refused because of his perception that this would make him look guilty in the eyes of his prosecutors, despite several eyewitness statements insisting Moran was in Blackrock at mass when the murders he was alleged to have committed took place.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Moran, originally from Roscommon, never attended UCD yet he played for the 1920 Sigerson Cup team. The issue of non-college members playing for the teams would emerge again and again over the subsequent years.

Due to the uncertain situation and the various curfews imposed upon people during the War of Independence, the Sigerson Cup failed to take place in the 1920/21 season. When it did restart under the shadow of the Civil War, one former player, Paddy McDonald, remembers that '[m]embers were willing and able, whilst holding strong divergent political views and harbouring bitter resentments, to take a united stand on the ideals enshrined in the constitution of the GAA'. Despite this, McDonald did acknowledge that 'it was not an uncommon occurrence for players comprised of opposing political parties to hand over small arms before a match to non-playing friends for safe keeping

during the hour of play'.<sup>30</sup>

Until 1920, the Sigerson Cup took place between January and May. From 1921/22 to the late 1960s, however, the completion was hosted most years in November or December. When the competition did return, it took UCD a couple of years to return to winning ways. Nonetheless, the UCD team of the early and mid 1920s contained players that would go on to have an enormous impact on the GAA. Seamus Gardiner, a Clareman who came to be associated with Tipperary GAA for most of his life – a tradition his son, Fr Seamus Gardiner, has carried on to this day – captained the Sigerson Cup UCD winning team of 1923/24 team to victory. Early 1923 also saw the college, up to then known as Collegians when playing in the Dublin league, become officially UCD. He became one of several people linked to the UCD club to later become president of the GAA in 1943. Seán Ryan, the Tipperary solicitor who became the president of the GAA in 1928 at the tender age of thirty-two, played football and hurling with the college from 1924 to 1926.<sup>31</sup>

The Mayoman Seán 'Baller' Lavan played alongside Gardiner in the 1923/4 Sigerson Cup winning team. Lavan was a brilliant footballer for Mayo, a handballer and all around extraordinary athlete, who played rugby and soccer for UCD and went on to compete for Ireland at the Olympics. Lavan famously went on a long run with the ball whilst playing for Mayo against Dublin in an All-Ireland semi-final, soloing the ball by kicking it to himself along the way, before pointing. This allegedly represented the first time anyone had soloed the ball at Croke Park since the Kildare team had attempted something similar in the famous All-Ireland final and replays against Kerry in 1903.<sup>32</sup> The referee disallowed Lavan's point and called for a free-out against the 'culchie making his own rules'.<sup>33</sup> Soon after, however, Lavan's idea took off.

Another member of various Sigerson Cup winning teams in the early 1920s was Éamon O'Sullivan, later to become known as 'The Doc'. The Kerryman trained his native county to eight All-Ireland titles over five decades (1924, 1926, 1937, 1946, 1953, 1955, 1959 and 1962). He lost only one All-Ireland final in his time as the sporadic trainer of Kerry. According to Jim Shanahan,

26 Frank Burke interview with Dermot Peaking, Dublin GAA Yearbook 1980, Quoted in William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, pp. 179-180.

27 Quoted in Donal McCartney, *UCD: A National Idea*, p. 108.

28 May Moran, *Executed for Ireland. The Patrick Moran Story*, Cork: Mercier, 2010, p. 17.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 109-111.

30 Paddy McDonald, 'UCD in troubled times', *Sigerson '85* [official programme for the 1985 Sigerson], 1985, pp. 22-24, p. 22.

31 William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, p. 229.

32 For more information on the Kerry v Kildare 1903 final and replay see Seán Moran, 'Football hits new heights', *Irish Times*, 12 Dec 1999.

33 '125 Most Influential People In GAA History', *Sunday Tribune*, 4 Jan 2009.

'In an era when the training of GAA teams was at best ad hoc and at worst non-existent, O'Sullivan was an advocate of collective training, involving an intensive and comprehensive programme of exercise, diet, and rest, ideally on a full-time basis, for a two-week period before a big game.'<sup>34</sup> He also became the intervarsity javelin champion in 1922, the first president of the Irish National Union of Students in 1924, chairman of the National Athletic and Cycling Association of Ireland in 1932, secretary and president of Dr Crokes, chairman of the committee to build Fitzgerald stadium in Kerry (with contributions from his patients at St Finian's psychiatric hospital in Killarney where he worked as the Resident Medical Superintendent from 1932 onwards), and author of *Ealadhantacht i bpeil Gaegheal: The art and science of Gaelic football* in 1958, as well as writing another book on occupational therapy.<sup>35</sup>

Seán Lavan, who also studied medicine and later taught anatomy at UCD, still formed part of the UCD team in the late 1920s when UCD went on a run of five Sigerson Cup victories in a row from 1928/9 to 1932/3. Alongside him in the 1928/9 and 1929/30 team was Kerryman Éamonn Fitzgerald. Both players represented Ireland at the Olympics. Lavan competed in Paris in 1924 and in Amsterdam in 1928 – when he also captained the Irish team. Fitzgerald, who also won an All-Ireland medal with Kerry in 1930, represented Ireland in the 1928 Olympics and at the 1932 Olympics at Los Angeles, where he came fourth in the triple jump, narrowly missing out on a medal.<sup>36</sup> Like Frank Burke, Fitzgerald went on to teach in St. Enda's in Rathfarnham. Monaghan's Mick O'Gorman played in all five successive Sigerson Cup victories, and captained the team to glory in 1930/31.

Before UCD went on a run of five Sigerson Cup victories from 1928/9 to 1932/3, there was division within the camp. At a meeting of the club in March 1928 held at 86 St. Stephen's Green (Newman House), the captain of the intermediate team stepped down as a protest 'against the inclusion of a certain player, not a member of the club ... on the 1927 Sigerson Cup team.'<sup>37</sup> Further problems with non-college members playing for UCD in the intervarsity

34 Jim Shanahan, 'Eamon 'The Doc' O'Sullivan', Dictionary of Irish Biography, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. See also Weeshie Fogarty, Dr Eamonn O'Sullivan: A Man Before His Time, Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2007.

35 Ibid.

36 See 'Olympic star remembered in his home town of Kiltimagh', Western People, 5 May 2004 and Marie Coleman, 'John Thomas ('Sean') Lavan', Dictionary of Irish Biography, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009 and 'Eamonn Fitzgerald, 'superstar before the term was known', Irish Times, 17 May 2004.

37 UCD Gaelic club minute book, 1927-1942, 9 March 1928.



📷: 1923 Sigerson Cup winning team: Back row: Rev. Fr. Ryan (Vice President), G. Hurley, T. Kirby, E. Doherty, P. Mannix, S. Lavan, E.N. O'Sullivan, Dr. J.M. Ryan (Vice President). Middle row: P. Downes, E. Carroll, Dr. T. Pierse, S. Gardiner (captain), J. Henry (vice-captain), G. Madigan, M. Kilcoyne. Front row: T. Ryle, J.D. Grant (Hon. Sec.), F. McNamara, M. McQuaide. Photo courtesy of Fr. Seamus Gardiner.



📷: 1931/2 UCD Sigerson winning team: Back row: M. Kilmartin (Hon. Sec.), W. Higgins, T. Jones, J. Walsh, J. Lynch, M. McKenna, F. Quinn, J. Collieran, J. Doyle. Front row: Dr. J. Ryan, J. Flood, C. Connelly, M. Gorman (Vice Chairman), G. Powell (Captain), T. Fitzgibbon, J. O'Shea, Prof. A. Cleary. Courtesy of UCD Sportscentre.



competitions emerged in 1930 at a Fitzgibbon cup match between the Cork and Dublin universities. Cork moved 'to end the practice, prevalent in the past, of fielding players who have never had the remotest connection with a university college, but who were picked for their prowess as hurlers' by leaving the cup in their hotel (the reigning champions placed the cup on the centre of the pitch before matches), promising not to hand it over to UCD if they lost.<sup>38</sup> Although Cork won, UCC's move had direct consequences for both the Fitzgibbon and Sigerson cups. Dr John Ryan, one of the vice presidents of the UCD Gaelic club at the time, 'deplored the absolute lack of sportsmanship displayed by the officials of the Cork hurling team' and 'strongly resented the tendency on the part of Cork to act as dictators'. Nonetheless, Dr Ryan acknowledged that there 'has been a decided looseness of late amongst the three Colleges in selecting teams for both these competitions (all three are equally guilty) and we feel that the time has come for a general tightening up in that respect'.<sup>39</sup> As a consequence, Dr Ryan proposed that a meeting should take place between representatives from the three colleges to 'draw up rules to govern such competitions'.

As a result of the get-together, which took place in December 1930, an extraordinary meeting of UCD's Gaelic club on 26 March 1931 confirmed that a statement would be sent to the GAA Central Council 'stating that in future both the Fitzgibbon and the Sigerson Cup competitions would be played under the auspices of the GAA'.<sup>40</sup> At the general meeting in 1933, a constitution of the club was approved. The centrality of the captain's role in any team was clear: '[t]he captain of each team shall have complete control of the team when on the field. In that case he may suspend any player subject to appeal to the senior committee'. Furthermore, '[i]t shall be the duty of the captain to see and insist that each member of his team is properly and neatly attired before leaving the dressing room for field of play'.<sup>41</sup>

UCD's run of five successive Sigersons climaxed in 1932/33 when they won that year's competition in highly convincing fashion, beating UCC by 5-7 to 0-1 and UCG by 5-6 to 1-2. The 1932 Kerry All-Ireland winning midfielder, Johnny Walsh – father of Jackie and Barry Walsh, who later starred in many of UCD's Sigerson victories in the 1970s, played in the UCD team that day. Walsh's time

in UCD came to a premature end in 1933 when he took up a national teacher position in Ballylongford but he went on to win several more All-Irelands for Kerry in the late 1930s in between playing rugby for Garryowen and Munster – for which he was temporarily banned.<sup>42</sup> That same UCD team lost the Dublin county final to Garda, who 'hustled the lighter UCD men off the ball and proceeded to lay siege to their posts', winning by 1-11 to 1-3 (interestingly, a team of teetotallers from Balbriggan, fittingly named Pioneers, won the Dublin junior title that same year).<sup>43</sup> Despite winning the Sigerson Cup and falling only at the final hurdle in the county championship, some within the UCD club felt the team failed to do enough to convince some, who obviously demanded very high standards. Prof. Shields, the acting chairman of the 1933 annual meeting, in relation to that year's critical report on the team, 'recommended that the Report be re-drafted on more cheerful and optimistic lines' – a request not adhered to!<sup>44</sup> With the inclusion of Queen's in the competition in 1933/34, the Sigerson Cup became a knock out competition. Despite beating UCC in that year's semi-final, UCD's winning run came to an end with defeat in the final by UCG at the Sportsground in Galway – 'many of whose players were afterwards, conspicuous in Connaught and All-Ireland Competitions'.<sup>45</sup> UCG proceeded to win eight of the next nine Sigersons from 1933/34 to 1941/42: a run that no team has managed to repeat since. The only respite came in 1935/36 when UCD won in Belfast: a year that saw UCD make 'a great effort ... to win the Cup in the Northern Capital'. Accordingly, it had been decided by the club that 'Mr. Lynham, who had been suspended for one month, was eligible to play in the Sigerson Competition'.<sup>46</sup> Around the same time, UCD's home ground switched to Belfield from Terenure. The transition did not go entirely smoothly at the start, since Paddy McDonald recalls that the grounds at Terenure 'were excellent and the pavilion was far ahead in comfort of any building in use in Belfield prior to the present Sports Complex'.<sup>47</sup>

38 Connacht Tribune, 8 March 1930.

39 UCD Gaelic club minute book, 1927-1942, 12 March 1930.

40 Ibid, 26 March 1931.

41 Ibid, 26 May 1933.

42 Barry Walsh, pers. comm., 13 Dec. 2010.

43 Irish Times, 5 June 1933. Quoted in William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, p. 252-3.

44 UCD Gaelic club minute book, 1927-1942, 2 Nov 1933.

45 Ibid, 4 Dec 1934.

46 Ibid, 26 Nov 1935.

47 Paddy McDonald, 'UCD in troubled times', *Sigerson* '85, p. 23.

# 1940s-1950s: Triumph & tragedy

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The competition continued throughout the Second World War apart from the 1942/3 season. Nonetheless, money and resources were in short supply, with the club captain, M. Kilmartin, noting in late 1941 that 'the club was not to [be] looked on as a St. Vincent De Paul Society and asked members to provide themselves with jerseys and clean togs'.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in 1944 the club recorded that '[i]n view of the present difficulties of obtaining jerseys of the standard colour (Light Blue) the hurling and football clubs wish the colours to be changed to Royal Blue'.<sup>49</sup> In the meantime, UCD had added players of the calibre of Donal Keenan and Phelim Murray, who both won two All-Irelands with Roscommon in 1943 and 1944, Wexford's Jack Culleton and Tyrone's Brendan Devlin, who would play an important part in the club (a pitch in UCD is named after him) for decades to come and for Dublin county teams, for whom he was a selector during the 1960s. Donal Keenan later went on to become President of the GAA in 1973. Another future President of the GAA, the Clare man Dr Joe Stuart, was also to the fore of the success of the UCD club around this time – and for decades afterwards. The club's minute book in the late 1940s thanked Dr Stuart for 'the great service he had given to the club ... He is always ready to give help to injured players and also to help financially' – a practice that lived

on until the 1970s.<sup>50</sup>

Despite UCD's wealth of great players in the early 1940s, the team lost Sigerson finals in 1939, 1940, 1941 and 1943. But success did come to the team in June 1943 in another form when UCD won its first ever Dublin football championship in Croke Park against Seán McDermotts by 1-8 to 1-6, with Dick Stokes, a member of the victorious 1940 All-Ireland Limerick hurling team and a relation of the current UCD and Dublin footballer Michael Fitzsimons, scoring the winning goal in injury time.<sup>51</sup>

The team became even stronger with the addition in 1944 of Frank Kinlough, part of Roscommon's All-Ireland winning teams in 1943 and 1944, and Seán Flanagan, who went on to captain Mayo to back-to-back All-Ireland success in 1950 and 1951; but only after he had acted as one of the signatories of a letter to the Mayo board in 1947 that read 'the time has come when something must be done before football disappears completely in Mayo, unwept, unhonoured, and unsung'.<sup>52</sup> This kind of activism would later come in useful when Flanagan went on to be a minister from 1966 to 1973 for successive Fianna Fáil governments. His son, Dermot, also played on a victorious UCD Sigerson Cup team in 1985, again demonstrating the close family ties that resonate throughout UCD's involvement in the Sigerson.

UCD won the Sigerson Cup in 1944 after beating Queen's by 7-7 to 2-4 in the semi-final and UCC in the final by 3-8 to 0-2, leading the minute book of the club to record that 'UCD's superiority in every department could never be questioned and there was never any doubt about the verdict'.<sup>53</sup> The following year saw the arrival of another host of incredible footballers in the form of Mayo's Pádraig Carney (see the Sigerson memories of the 'flying doctor' in the second half of the book) and Cavan's P.J. Duke, who would both go on to win two All-Irelands with their native counties – and play each other in the 1948 final. 1945 also saw the cup again return to UCD; but this time with a much narrower victory over Queen's in Belfast. Cork won in 1946 but UCD got their revenge the following year at the Mardyke in Cork by beating them in the final by one point in one of the lowest scoring Sigerson finals in history, 0-3 to 0-2. In his annual report to the UCD Gaelic club, the Secretary, Micheál Mac Aodha, wrote that it was 'probably

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48 UCD Gaelic club minute book, 1927-1942, 28 May 1942.

49 UCD Gaelic club minute book, 1944-49, 2 Nov. 1944.

50 Ibid, 4 June 1948.

51 William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, p. 342.

52 Diarmaid Ferriter, 'Seán Flanagan', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

53 UCD Gaelic club minute book, 1944-49, Report 1944/45.



**📷: 1945 Sigerson champions.**

Photo courtesy of Padraig Carney.



**📷: 1949 Sigerson champions:** Back row: Gerry Gearty (Longford), Nicky Redmond (Wexford), John Lynch (Cork), Brendan Duffy (Monaghan), Seamus O'Connor (Monaghan), Hugh McKearney (Monaghan), Frank Deady (Kilkenny) Front row: Edwin Carolan (Cavan), Antoin Rodgers (Donegal), P.J. Duke (Cavan), John O'Brien (Meath), Padraig Carney (Mayo), Jim McDonnell (Louth), Tom Hardy (Cavan), Mick Flanagan (Mayo) . Photo courtesy of Padraig Gearty.



**📷: 1953 Sigerson champions:** Back row: P.J. McElroy (Down), Tom McEvoy (Monaghan), Seán Collins (Kerry), Jim McArdle (Louth), Davy Sheeran (Longford), Kieran Denvir (Down), Paddy Carolan (Cavan), Padraic Geary (Longford) Front row: Mick Gould (Cork), Eddie Devlin (Tyrone), Tom Hardy (Cavan), Paddy Fenelon (Offaly), Mick Murphy (Cork), John McKnight (Armagh), Tim McKnight (Kerry). Photo courtesy of Padraic Gearty.

the most glorious victory UCD ever had in the competition' because 'UCD put their backs to the wall and fought with great spirit and determination and held on to their slendour lead for forty two and half minutes' against 'a very strong breeze' and because it represented 'the first time UCD won the trophy from Cork on their own ground'.<sup>54</sup>

In 1948, UCD lost out in the final to a UCG team containing Mayo's Billy Kenny, Peter Solan and Mick Loftus, Galway's Iggy Hanniffy and Offaly's Pat Fenelon, who would later play with UCD. In a rematch between the two teams in the following year's Sigerson final hosted in Croke Park, UCD came out on top in a closely contested game that was only settled by a point in injury time from Monaghan's Hugh McKearney to bring UCD home on a scoreline of 1-8 to 1-7. The *Irish Times* termed it a 'good final of true inter-university fire and quality. Every kick and every movement was cheered by the crowd who defied bitterly cold showers and remained to the stirring finish'.<sup>55</sup>

One year later, the tide turned Galway's way again, with UCG's Seán Purcell to the fore of events. Sadly, two members of the losing UCD 1948 UCD team died before the 1950 Sigerson Cup took place. The UCD club remembered the contribution of Monaghan's Brian Sharkey, who tragically died in the summer of 1949, by recalling how '[h]is brilliance at studies and his excellence at games would have won high esteem in any community'.<sup>56</sup> P.J. Duke, who played in the losing 1948 team as well as the victorious Sigerson teams of 1945, 1947 (as captain) and 1949, died in 1950 from rheumatic fever much to the shock of the club, who noted that his death was 'one of the greatest and most staggering blows the club had received in many a year' since '[n]o student of UCD had for many years so much affected his contemporaries as the late P.J. Duke'.<sup>57</sup> Cardinal Seán Brady recalled years later how the 'memorable, but very sad event in my native parish when I was growing up was the untimely death of P.J. Duke. He was our hero, our icon, a role model when we were young boys. ... I can still remember the shock that his passing created. Worse was to come in 1952 with the death, after a short illness, of John Joe O'Reilly. His passing meant that two of that famous half-back line of P.J. Duke, J.J. O'Reilly and Simon Deighnan

54 Ibid, Secretary's Report 1947/48.

55 Irish Times, 9 Nov. 1949.

56 UCD Gaelic club minutes, 1949-1969, Secretary's Report, 1948-9.

57 Ibid, Secretary's Report 1949-50.

were dead.<sup>58</sup> O'Reilly had captained Cavan to back-to-back All-Irelands in 1947 and 1948 but incurred a serious injury in a game in 1952 from which he never recovered, dying some time later in the Curragh military hospital (O'Reilly had served as a Commandant). Fittingly, Duke was the first player to have received the specially inscribed gold medal for the Sigerson winning captain in 1947, after he had already gained an All-Ireland earlier that year for Cavan's defeat of Kerry in New York. P.J. Duke also played, and shone, in the first ever match between the Combined Universities and an all-Ireland selection that began in 1950 in memory of Dr. John Ryan, who had served UCD so well as an administrator from the 1920s until the 1940s. The Sports Centre in Belfield is also named after Dr Ryan because of his key role in developing sports facilities in UCD whilst president of the Athletic Union Council in the 1930s.

UCD's grip on the Sigerson Cup loosened in the early 1950s, with Cork following UCG's 1950 victory with back-to-back victories against Galway in 1951 and UCD in 1952. Interestingly, various people within the UCD club called for the ending of the match between the Sigerson Cup team and the Intermediate team before the competition started because 'fanatical fervour, liable to be displayed by junior players, wishing to hold the eyes of Committee men, at a time such as on the eve of Sigerson competition defeat the purpose of having such games – namely to have good practice'.<sup>59</sup> The 1951/2 season also saw the inauguration of the P.J. Duke Memorial Cup, which saw Earlsfort Terrace, the Dental Hospital, the College of Science and the Veterinary College pitted against each other for the first time, with many more teams emerging in subsequent years.

The Sigerson Cup team, by then containing the likes of Tim 'Tiger' Lyons of Kerry, Jim McArdle and Tom Hardy of Louth, Mick Gould and Mick Murphy of Cork, Kevin Denvir of Down and Pat Fenelon of Offaly, returned the cup to Dublin in 1953 under the tutelage of Seán Toomey by convincingly beating UCG in Croke Park on the scoreline of 2-7 to 0-4. Galway had got through to the final after a stirring contest (recollected in the 'Memories' section of this book by Cathal Young) with Cork that had to go to extra time to find a winner. UCD that year were particularly strong. Nonetheless, in 1954/55 UCD lost a replay to Galway in the final in Dublin. The first game, played in November 1954, ended

Galway 2-6 to UCD's 1-9 and when the replay took place in January 1955, the teams were only separated after extra time by one point, 1-10 to 2-6. Crucially, that same season saw the Annual GAA Congress pass the motion enabling students to play for the College in the Dublin championship, as well as in their own championship with their home club once outside Dublin.

UCD returned to winning ways the next season and went on a run that brought them a hat-trick of Sigersons. In the first victory, two sets of talented brothers stood out for UCD: Armagh's John and Felix McKnight and Kerry's Seán and Seamus Murphy. Seán and Felix played in all three Sigerson triumphs, as did Cavan's Jim McDonnell and James Brady. Sadly, the great UCD club stalwart, Patsy McGovern, died in February 1957 causing the club to note that 'not since the death of the late P.J. Duke has the club received such a severe blow'.<sup>60</sup> Despite winning three Sigersons in a row, however, the Secretary of the club that year controversially questioned whether 'each of these victories was somewhat hollow' since UCD 'fielded players who should really be playing for other colleges'. He referred to the practice, whereby certain students from UCC and UCG, such as those doing veterinary or agricultural science, had to come to Dublin to complete their studies (Ogie Moran recounts in his memories that Cork and Galway still resented this practice in the 1970s). In the secretary's opinion, 'such a practice is detrimental to the welfare of the competition' and 'grossly unfair that we should poach on the limited resources of Cork and Galway'.<sup>61</sup> The maverick secretary, Piaras McManus, also maintained that a scientific approach to football, akin to what had happened in soccer, rugby, athletics and golf, would help UCD 'develop an intelligent approach to the game, as St Vincents have done', leading Dr Joe Stuart to respond by saying that the way St Vincents played was not 'the one and only proper method of playing Gaelic football'.<sup>62</sup> Reinforcing Dr Stuart's view was the fact that in August 1956 UCD beat St Vincents in a league match, thereby inflicting the first defeat upon the famous Dublin since 1948!<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, when the two teams met in the championship sparks invariable flew as a great rivalry developed. In the 1959 county final between UCD and St Vincents, the College had come back from deficits of nine points after 7 minutes and again after 33 minutes to lead going into the final minutes only for a late Paddy Farnon goal to steal victory from the

58 Cardinal Séan Brady, 'Parallel Pilgrimages: A personal journey through the GAA', Dónal McAnallen, David Hassan and Roddy Hegarty (eds.), *The Evolution of the GAA*. Ulaídh, Éire agus Eile, Armagh: Stair Uladh, 2009, pp. 6-10, p. 9.

59 UCD Gaelic club minutes, 1949-1969, Report of Annual General Meeting 1950-1.

60 Ibid, Secretary's Report 1956-7.

61 Ibid, Secretary's Report 1957-8.

62 Ibid.

63 William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, p. 477.



students.<sup>64</sup> As if confirming his earlier disagreement with McManus, Joe 'The Doc' Stuart commented that 'the display of our senior team in the Dublin Senior Championship Final gained us more glory than it did our distinguished victor'.<sup>65</sup>

The 1958/59 season also saw Queen's take the Sigerson Cup for the first time in a hard fought battle with UCD. After drawing 2-7 to 2-7 in the first final at Fahy's Field in Galway, Queen's finally took the trophy by one point, 0-10 to 0-9, in the replay. Considering that Queen's had, by their own admission, been the 'whipping boys' of the Sigerson Cup only a few years before, this was an incredible turnaround and a testimony of the northern university's resolve.<sup>66</sup> That same year saw Prof. Shields, the president of the club since the late 1940s, step down, being replaced by Paddy McDonald. In 1959/60, UCD got their revenge over Queen's by defeating them in the semi-final of the Sigerson Cup by 2-9 to 1-5. In the final they despatched the hosts, UCC, by 3-8 to 1-4 to cap off, in the words of the club's secretary, what was 'surely one of the greatest displays ever given by UCD in the Competition'.<sup>67</sup> Despite the appalling conditions, UCD played positive football throughout and their 'remarkable fitness' meant '[t]hey maintained a terrific pace throughout'.<sup>68</sup> Kildare's Kieran O'Malley and Cavan's Charlie Gallagher and James Brady proved the sharpest shooters for UCD and the defence held firm under the watchful gaze of Armagh's Felix McKnight, Derry's Peadar Kealey and Longford's Seán Murray.<sup>69</sup> There was to be no repeat of back-to-back victories, however, as UCG beat the holders the following year in a foggy Belfast despite the best efforts of Mayo's Frank O'Leary and Longford's Bobby Burns, as well as a two-goal salvo from Westmeath's George Kane.<sup>70</sup>

# 1960s-1970s: Sigerson successes, county challenges & All-Ireland adversities

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UCD bounced back in 1961/62 to beat UCG even though they trailed by four points with only a few minutes remaining. Brendan 'Buggie' Brady's switch from centre half-back to full-forward provided the catalyst as 'the gallant Dublin representatives pulled out reserves of energy, the last lines of Galway's defence crumbled and when match-saving opportunities were provided for the [Galway] forwards in the closing stages they were foiled by resourceful and daring defenders' and UCD's Tipperary goalkeeper Jimmy Finn.<sup>71</sup> Yet, UCD

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 420.

<sup>65</sup> UCD Gaelic club minutes, 1949-1969, Secretary's Report 1958-9.

<sup>66</sup> See Matt Fitzpatrick (a Queen's player in the late 1940s and 1950s), 'Sigerson Memories of the Early Fifties', Sigerson Cup Queen's 2007, pp. 16-17.

<sup>67</sup> UCD Gaelic club minutes, 1949-1969, Secretary's Report 1959-60

<sup>68</sup> 'Sigerson Cup Won by U.C.D.', Irish Times, 7 Dec. 1959.

<sup>69</sup> 'UCD's defence held key to Sigerson victory', Irish Independent, 7 Dec. 1959.

<sup>70</sup> 'Sigerson cup for Galway students', Irish Times, 21 Nov. 1960.

<sup>71</sup> 'UCD take Sigerson Cup. Great late goals', Irish Independent, 27 Nov. 1961.

failed to taste victory again in the Sigerson Cup until 1967/68. Despite this, the club had unprecedented success in the Dublin county championship by winning two championships in three years in 1963 and 1965 for the club's second and third ever football championship.

In the 1963 county championship semi-finals, UCD defeated their great rivals in Dublin, St Vincents, by ten points, with George Kane (Westmeath), Eddie Melvin (Mayo), Seán Murray (Longford), Bernard Brady (Donegal), Paud O'Donoghue (Kerry), Mick O'Shea (Kerry) and Séamus Hayden (Leitrim) starring. After 'a dour draw' with Clanna Gael, the final was replayed in early 1964. Despite the *Irish Independent's* prediction the day before ('Clanna Gael to take title') and despite the brilliant performance of Kerryman Donie O'Sullivan for the 'Teachers' Clanna Gael (who would win a Sigerson Cup with the Dublin college in 1968), UCD triumphed in the replay by 2-12 to 2-8 in a 'game worthy of the occasion', with the same paper reporting that '[f]rom goalkeeper Jimmy Finn, whose father, Dr. Denis Finn, Templetuohy, Co. Tipperary, captained a victorious Fitzgibbon team, to left corner forward Liam McEldowney every man in the College side pulled his weight good and true'.<sup>72</sup> Donegal man Paul Kelly captained the students to victory. St Vincents returned stronger in the 1964 championship, however, beating UCD by two points. The following year, UCD returned more resilient and won a league and championship double in Dublin, beating Round Towers in Croke Park in the final in June 1965 by eight points, with Mick O'Shea, Mick O'Brien (Cork), Benny Gaughran (Louth), Davy Doris (Mayo) and George Kane to the fore.<sup>73</sup>

That UCD failed during this incredibly successful period to add some Sigersons to their Dublin trophies demonstrates the strength of the intervarsity competition. In 1964 UCD comfortably beat Trinity in the semi-final, with Benny Gaughran scoring five points, but they succumbed to a Seán O'Neill (Down) inspired Queen's team in the final despite the dominance of midfield by Mick O'Shea and Mick O'Brien. Benny Gaughran, writing in UCD football club's short-lived magazine, *Tidings*, noted that during the match UCD's Paddy O'Hanlon, a future south Armagh MP and founder member of the SDLP – who sadly passed away in 2009 – was laid out that day by 'a perfectly timed shoulder-charge which had the effect of stunning him momentarily. The defender lay on the Casement

Park sod, inert, the ball still tightly in his grasp'. The referee, went on Gaughran 'was within his rights in awarding a 14 yds. free against the unconscious defender'.<sup>74</sup> After the final whistle ended the incredibly physical battle, some of the participants obviously wanted more, as '[t]he Queen's University players ... practically pummel[ed] their goalie-captain, Des Sharkey into the Casement Park mud'.<sup>75</sup>

UCD faced UCC in the semi-final of the subsequent Sigerson Cup. UCD equalised with five minutes to go from the end against UCC, who had led by six points with only twelve minutes to go. UCD's amazing comeback ultimately proved in vain, however, because of a late match-winning point from Kerry's Dave Geaney. UCC, with a side containing eight Corkmen, six Kerry men and one Tipperary man, Pat O'Connell, went on to win that year's Sigerson Cup, thrashing Galway 3-9 to 0-2. Controversy surrounded the 1966/67 tournament the following year in Galway, when Fr Leo Morahan, who had refereed the semi-final between UCC and UCD, which Cork had won by two points (2-7 to 2-5), refused to attend the post-Sigerson dinner. Morahan's protest came in response to his treatment following the semi-final and a match he refereed the following morning between UCD and UCG in the Professor McKenna Cup, the new 'freshers' competition for first-year students. In the aftermath of the first game, Gardaí had to protect the referee when leaving the pitch from spectators and, during the second game, Morahan received constant abuse from the sideline in a match in which he sent two players to the line and booked several others, as outlined by the *Irish Independent* on its frontpage.<sup>76</sup> In the final, UCC overcame their Galway hosts by one point despite playing with fourteen men for most of the match after an apparent clampdown on players following what occurred in the semi-final led to the UCC captain, Denis Philpott, being sent to the line by Dr Mick Loftus (himself a Sigerson Cup winner in 1948 and 1950). The crux of that UCC team, including the Philpott brothers and Billy Morgan from Cork, Mick Morris from Kerry and later Ray Cummins (Cork) and Moss Keane (Kerry) triumphed in three out of four Sigersons from 1966/67 to 1969/70. Interestingly, Cork had a Dublin man, Jim Carroll, playing in goal for them in 1968/9 and 1969/70.

72 'Dublin title for UCD in exciting game', *Irish Independent*, 27 Jan 1964.

73 William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, p. 544

74 Benny Gaughran, 'Tackling and all that', *Tidings*: UCD Gaelic Football Club, Dec. 1969.

75 Benny Gaughran, 'What's so special about UCD?', *Tidings*: UCD Gaelic Football Club, March 1969, pp. 11-12, p. 12.

76 'Priest stays away from dinner as protest', *Irish Independent*, 28 Nov. 1966.

UCC's successful run was punctuated by UCD in 1967/68. Although scheduled to take place in November 1967, that year's competition was postponed to January 1968 because of the foot-and-mouth crisis. Ever since then, the Sigerson Cup occurs after Christmas rather than before it. UCD comfortably conquered Trinity in the semi-finals that year. UCC went down to Galway in a replay of the previous tournament final. UCC's Denis Philpott was sent off for the second Sigerson Cup in a row as the authorities continued their attempt to clean up the games. Although his colleagues had battled against the odds to victory with a man down in the previous competition, Philpott's dismissal after only five minutes meant UCC faced an almost impossible task. In the final, UCD had Kerryman Donie O'Sullivan sent off for 'over-exuberance' in the second half, causing the *Irish Independent* to comment: 'one wonders is this a trophy for football or for toughness'.<sup>77</sup>

In spite of playing much of the second half with 14 men, UCD saw off the challenge of UCC with gallant displays from Cavan's Garrett O'Reilly (whose father, Tom P. O'Reilly, had played Sigerson Cup for UCD in the early 1940s), Roscommon's Gerry Mannion, Donegal's Anton Carroll, Longford's Tom Mulvihill and the captain, Louth's sharpshooter Benny Gaughran, who scored 1-7 in the final. Victory was all the sweeter for UCD because they could then justifiably partake in the Cardinal Cushing games as Irish inter-varsity champions the following June in America; controversially, the GAA chose UCD to represent Ireland before the Sigerson Cup had been played (see Benny Gaughran's memories in the second part for more details about the tour).

Again though, success was fleeting and it took UCD nearly five years to regain the trophy. In 1969 they succumbed to a UCC team in the semi-final that was, according to the *Irish Times*, arguably the best team to have ever come out of Cork. After beating UCD by nine points, largely courtesy of goals by Kerry's Brendan Lynch and Paddy O'Donoghue, as well as important points from Eric Philpott and Ray Cummins, they battered UCC in the final by 24 points!<sup>78</sup> Cork's dominance remained evident in 1970 when they comprehensively beat UCD 3-5 to 0-5 and then went on to defeat Queen's by five points in the final. When the Cork and Dublin universities came together again the following year it proved a real battle. After suffering at the hands of Cork repeatedly over the previous five

<sup>77</sup> 'UCD regain Sigerson in disappointing final', *Irish Independent*, 29 Jan. 1968.

<sup>78</sup> 'UCC superb in scoring runaway win', *Irish Times*, 3 March 1969 and 'Galway in cup final', *Sunday Independent*, 2 March 1969.



📷: 1968 Sigerson team. Photo courtesy of Eugene McGee.



📷 above: UCD in action against New York in June 1968 in Gaelic Park as part of UCD's American tour. Photo courtesy of Benny Gaughran.



📷 right: UCD goal, scored by Benny Gaughran, in 1968 Sigerson final, Croke Park. Photo courtesy of Benny Gaughran.





📷: As a contribution to the overall development of the GAA the UCD club decided in 1969 to stage the All-Ireland club 7-a-side championship involving the 32 county champions and some guests from abroad. The final was played on the morning of the National League final and all games were played in Belfield. Crowds of around 5,000 usually attended the final. In 1971 Carrolls tobacco sponsored the competition to the tune of £1,000 and this was the first commercial sponsorship for a GAA event. The following year Carrolls went on to become the first sponsors of All-Star Awards, which have lasted to this day under various sponsors. A few years later, Kilmacud Crokes took over the running of the All-Ireland 7-a-side tournament. This programme dates from 1972. Programme and information courtesy of Eugene McGee.



📷: UCD playing soccer against a team made up of life prisoners, Hartford state prison, Connecticut 1968. Photo courtesy of Benny Gaughran.



📷: Training in Belfield at 7am in the late 1960s. Photo courtesy of Benny Gaughran.



📷: **1973 Sigerson champions:** *Back row:* Dave McCarthy (Cork), John O'Keeffe (Kerry), Joe Waldron (Galway), C. Gallagher (Donegal), Jimmy Stafford (Cavan), J. Fay (Cavan), Tom Hunt (Waterford), T. Cashel (Longford), Pat O'Neill (Dublin), Alfie Marron (Galway), Pat Duggan (Dublin), Bernie Geraghty (Kildare), Kevin Kilmurray (Offaly) *Front row:* Mick Carty (Wexford), J.P. Kean (Mayo), Paddy Kerr (Monaghan), Éamonn O'Donoghue (Kildare), Enda Condron (Laois), Jackie Walsh (Kerry), Frank Donoghue (Galway), F. Farrell (Longford) Photo courtesy of Eugene McGee.





📷: In the 1973 All-Ireland football final two UCD players, both students of Agriculture, were direct opponents – Dave McCarthy (left, the winner with Cork) and Joe Waldron with Galway. Photo courtesy of Eugene McGee.



📷: 1973 Dublin county final vs. St Vincents, UCD players (l. to r.), Brendan Heneghan (Mayo), Mick Hanrahan (Waterford), Paddy Kerr (Monaghan), Garrett O'Reilly (Cavan). Photo courtesy of Eugene McGee.

years, UCD, under the guardianship of Eugene McGee, who was 'to UCD what Kevin Heffernan was to the Dublin and Vincent's sides',<sup>79</sup> began training with a vengeance and 7.00 a.m. starts became commonplace.

When UCD met the Cork students in the semi-final of the Sigerson Cup in 1971, they did so primed. In a tough, physical encounter, UCD came out on top by 0-14 to 2-6. Drama followed the next day, however, when the Universities' Committee upheld an appeal from UCC regarding the status of a UCD player whom, they argued, was not properly registered to play Sigerson Cup.<sup>80</sup> UCC only learned that they had to play on the morning of the final after presumably having a drink or two to drown their sorrows following their defeat to UCD the previous day. This proved not to be ideal preparation for the match against Queen's, which they lost by one point. The ignominy only served to make UCD more determined to take back the Sigerson Cup. The 1972 semi-final between UCD and UCC lived up to all expectations, with the lead exchanging hands on several occasions. UCD trailed by five points at half-time but turned it around and with ten minutes left to play had gone three points in front. Cork reduced this by only one point as the match entered injury time but a free in front of the UCD goal gave UCC one last opportunity to squeeze through to the final. Up stepped the Kerryman Brendan Lynch for UCC, who somehow managed to get the ball past seven UCD players on the line for a famous UCC victory.<sup>81</sup> Cork went on to overpower Galway in the final the next day. UCD's agony was compounded by losing to St Vincent's in a highly fractious encounter in that year's Dublin county championship – the first of five successive county finals between the two teams that regularly featured Dave Billings and Brian Mullins on the Vincents' side, both of whom later became synonymous with UCD GAA. The over-physical nature of the final led one Dublin club representative to comment at a later county board meeting that 'St. Vincents were running Dublin football and ruining it'.<sup>82</sup>

UCC's victory in the 1972 Sigerson Cup and UCD's cruel loss marked the end of an era in many ways as UCC's power waned and UCD grew stronger and stronger, as they demonstrated by incredibly winning six of the next seven Sigersons, two Dublin championships and two All-Ireland club championships.

79 William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, p. 661.

80 'Home college go down in drama packed Sigerson', *Connaught Tribune*, 12 March 1971.

81 'Lynch blasts UCD out with fantastic last-kick goal', *Sunday Independent*, 5 March 1972.

82 William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, p. 654.

With regular All-Ireland winners such as Kerry's John O'Keeffe, the Walsh brothers (Jackie and Barry), Denis 'Ogie' Moran and Dublin's Pat O'Neill (see Ogie and Pat's memories of the Sigerson Cup in the second part), as well as the likes of Enda Condrón (Laois), John P Kean (Mayo), Éamonn O'Donoghue (Kildare), Mick Carty (Wexford), Kevin Kilmurray (Offaly), future Dublin manager Gerry McCaul and Meath's Colm O'Rourke all prominent, amongst a host of others.

In the 1973 Sigerson Cup, UCD saw off the challenge of Queen's in the semi-finals with Waterford's Tom Hunt resolutely defending his goal and Enda Condrón and Dave McCarthy (Cork) prolific in attack. They played Maynooth, who only joined the competition two years before, in the final after they had somewhat surprisingly beaten the hosts and holders Cork by an astonishing sixteen points.<sup>83</sup> In the final UCD prevailed, but only after a strong Maynooth effort, with McCarthy and Condrón again strong, in addition to Éamonn O'Donoghue, John O'Keeffe, Kevin Kilmurray, Kildare's Bernie Geraghty and Dublin's Pat Duggan. Later that year they took on St Vincents again in the Dublin county final. Another battle ensued, with the *Evening Herald* terming it 'nothing short of a public house brawl'. On this occasion UCD came out on top, courtesy of impressive placekicking from Jackie Walsh, a dominant midfield in the form of John O'Keeffe and Benny Gaughran, a palmed goal from Monaghan's Paddy Kerr and a late point from captain Éamonn O'Donoghue.<sup>84</sup>

The fulcrum of the championship winning team went on to play in the 1974 Sigerson Cup in Maynooth. In the semi-final, UCD beat the hosts much more comfortably than in the previous year's final, by 2-9 to 0-7. John O'Keeffe starred and goals from Jackie Walsh and Cavan's Ollie Leddy after a great move involving several of the team saw the Dubliners through to the final against UCG. With Bernie Jennings 'superlative' at full-back, O'Keeffe and Carty dominant in midfield in the final and impressive performances from Ivan Heffernan (Mayo), Éamonn O'Donoghue (Kildare), Paddy Kerr (Monaghan), Kevin Kilmurray and Ollie Leddy, UCD came home six points to the good. This would be the first of an unprecedented treble for 1974 – a season of unbridled success. One week after their Sigerson Cup triumph, UCD overcame Louth's Cooley Kickhams in the final of the Leinster club championship. Less than one month later, UCD destroyed Knockmore, with Dennis O'Connor snatching three goals against the

Mayo and Connaught club champions, to set up an All-Ireland club final with Clanna Gael of Lurgan, the Armagh and Ulster champions. The *Western People* recorded how 'the UCD panel [wa]s an amalgam of fourteen counties – an all-star side' but also questioned the fairness of such a side competing against small parish communities.<sup>85</sup> The first final saw UCD and Clanna Gael play out a draw at a 'thriller' in Croke Park with the Lurgan men's goalkeeper, Paudge Scullion, making a 'remarkable save' towards the end. In the replayed final at the end of April, UCD came out on top by seven points to take the title of All-Ireland club champions. UCD showed no sign of wilting either by defeating everyone in their path to the Dublin championship in 1974. After destroying Garda in the semi-final, they met their old rivals, St. Vincents, in the final. Incredibly, UCD continued their 31 match unbeaten run to emerge victorious, convincingly beating their arch rivals by 0-12 to 1-3 with solid defending from Mick Carty and Éamonn O'Donoghue, 'model midfield[ing]' from John O'Keeffe and Paddy Kerr, and composure in attack from Kevin Kilmurray and especially Jackie Walsh, who scored ten points (eight from frees).<sup>86</sup>

Unsurprisingly, UCD's near invincibility continued in to the 1975 Sigerson Cup. In the semi-finals, the Walsh brothers scored eight points between them (four each) and Pat Duggan also picked up four points to help the Dublin college beat their Cork counterparts by eleven points. In the final they faced a Queen's side that had destroyed UCG by 17 points, with Fermanagh's Peter McGinnity particularly strong. However, it was the Dublin College that ran out the winners by eight points (0-18 to 0-10) on the back of 'a real team effort'. The UCD defence 'was extremely sound', the Kerry duo John O'Keeffe and Ogie Moran dominated midfield and Mayo's John P. Kean and Jackie Walsh provided most of the scores, with Pat Duggan also prominent.<sup>87</sup> They also won their second successive All-Ireland club championship by beating Munster and Cork champions Nemo Rangers in the final by two points, 1-11 to 0-12. Controversy surrounded UCD's attempt to win their third Dublin county championship in a row that year, however. Due to meet St Vincents once again in the final, problems over player availability due to the clash being scheduled to take place during the UCD examinations meant that UCD tried to refix the tie to late June. The Dublin County Board offered to move the match forward by two

83 'Maynooth blitz shattered', Sunday Independent, 4 March 1973.

84 William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, p. 663.

85 'Injury-hit Knockmore no match for superb UCD', *Western People*, 16 March 1974.

86 Irish Independent, 2 Dec. 1974.

87 Irish Independent, 10 March 1975.





**📷: 1975 Sigerson winning team** after a wet and windy final in Belfast under the captaincy of Mick Carty (Wexford). Photo courtesy of Eugene McGee.



**📷: 1975 All-Ireland club champions for the second year in a row.** Back row: P. Gilroy (Cavan), Gerry McEntee (Meath), Gerry McCaul (Dublin), Éamonn O'Donoghue (Kildare), Pat Duggan (Dublin), Brendan Dunleavy (Donegal), Pat O'Neill (Dublin), Jackie Walsh (Kerry), Garrett O'Reilly (Cavan), Con Moynihan (Mayo), Adge King (Cavan), Paddy McDonald Front row: Brendan Heneghan (Mayo), S. Kilemade (Longford), M. Judge (Galway), Frank Donoghue (Galway), Ivan Heffernan (Mayo), Mick Carty (Wexford), Barry Walsh (Kerry), Enda Condon (Laois), J.P. Kean (Mayo), P.J. O'Halloran (Meath). Photo courtesy of Eugene McGee.

days but this failed to relieve the UCD students' problems. When UCD failed to show for the final on the original scheduled date, the Dublin board awarded the championship to St Vincents. UCD won an appeal against this decision, citing the precedent of previous postponements on the part of St Vincents, but the Dublin board appealed their own appeal committee's decision! Finally, the Leinster Council awarded St Vincents the title, which the Marino club refused to accept. Nonetheless, St Vincents progressed to the Leinster club-champions as the nominees of the Dublin board, and went on to win the All-Ireland club title against Roscommon Gaels in March 1976.<sup>88</sup>

Somewhat surprisingly, UCD's run of Sigerson Cup victories came to an end in 1976, when Maynooth won their first ever trophy. After overcoming Queen's in the quarter finals and Cork in the semi-finals, they succumbed to Maynooth in a wet and windy Croke Park, with Maynooth's Paddy Henry (Sligo), Éamonn Whelan (Laois), and the attacking trio of Peter Burke (Longford), John McPartland (Down) and Pat Donellan (Galway) proving the undoing of UCD.<sup>89</sup> That year UCD also lost to St Vincents in the county final by three points after playing most of the match with one man fewer than their counterparts and having a penalty claim dismissed by the referee. 1976 represented the last Dublin county final UCD played in until 2002. Their Sigerson form did not dissipate so quickly, however, and they went on to win another hat-trick of inter-varsity victories.

In the 1977 Sigerson Cup, UCD despatched Queen's in the quarter finals and narrowly defeated Maynooth in the semis courtesy of some timely Barry Walsh scores. They then faced the hosts, Galway, in the final before a record crowd of 7,000 even though one journalist recorded that it was 'a day only fit for the exposure of brass monkeys' on account of the bitterly cold wind sweeping across Pearse stadium. Galway's Paul McGettigan (Donegal) gave UCG the initiative going in to the final few minutes only for Ogie Moran to set up his Kerry colleague, Barry Walsh, for a skilfully taken goal, to take the tie to a reply. Moran and Gerry McEntee had dominated midfield in the second half and Dave Billings (who played against UCD in many of the Dublin county final encounters in the 1970s with St. Vincents), Pat O'Neill and Mick Carty (Wexford) shored up the defence. Tommy Murphy (Wicklow), Tony McManus (Roscommon) and Pat Duggan (Dublin) attacked well for the Dubliners. In the replay, the *Irish Times*

<sup>88</sup> William Nolan, *The GAA in Dublin*, pp. 664-5.

<sup>89</sup> 'Sigerson goes to brave Maynooth', *Irish Independent*, 1 March 1976.

remarked that 'UCD were so much superior ... that it was difficult to realise that the Dublin students had been lucky to draw the original encounter at the same venue a few weeks back', such was UCD's dominance. Captain Ivan Heffernan (Mayo) set the tone for the team by guarding his goal with aplomb with the aid of Pat O'Neill and Bernie Jennings (Mayo). When Galway threatened to come back in to the match shortly after the break, two points from Tommy Murphy (Wicklow), and a Tony McManus goal, set up by J.P. Kean, as well as the accurate free-taking of Barry Walsh, saw UCD gallop home to a 1-11 to 0-6 victory.

In 1978, UCD took up where they left off in the replay, walloping UCC by nine points and then putting their Galway rivals to the sword again in the final, which the *Irish Independent* said was 'almost akin to taking candy from a child for UCD' as Galway only scored two points from play.<sup>90</sup> With Pat O'Neill and Mick Hickey (Dublin) dominant near the back, Kildare's Paddy O'Donoghue and Kerry's Vincent O'Connor 'lording it in midfield', Barry Walsh as accurate as ever from frees, UCD won out 1-13 to 0-7, the goal coming courtesy of Kildare's Mick Fennelly, after being set up by Mayo's Micheál Flannery (Mayo).<sup>91</sup> UCD's impressive form in the Sigerson Cup continued the following year when they overcame UCG by an even more eye-catching margin. Maynooth came and went in the semi-final and in their third final in a row against UCG they 'scorned the tissue-like challenge' of UCG by defeating them by an astonishing 19 point margin. A magnificent goal from Mayo's Jimmy Lyons, four points from Colm O'Rourke and a penalty from Tommy Murphy allowed UCD to 'revel in the muddy conditions'.<sup>92</sup> The following year saw UCG finally get their revenge over their Dublin opponents to return the Sigerson Cup to Galway for the first time in seventeen years. Level at half-time, Galway scored a 'scintillating' point from Pádraig Mitchell and a goal from Micksey Clarke (Westmeath) after a Gay McManus free-kick rebounded off the crossbar. Critically, UCD's Jimmy Lyons (Mayo) then had a goal-bound shot spectacularly saved by Galway's Gay Mitchell to deprive UCD of the chance of catching the Connaught men. In many ways, this marked the end of an era for UCD in the Sigerson Cup. They have never since been able to match the tough targets set by their predecessors, made harder still by the increasing competitiveness of the Sigerson Cup since the 1980s. Nonetheless, they have continued to have some fleeting success in the Sigerson Cup and, later on, in the Dublin Championship.

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<sup>90</sup> 'Dublin students retain cup', *Irish Independent*, 27 Feb. 1978.

<sup>91</sup> 'UCD gain command – and never let it go', *Irish Times*, 27 Feb. 1978.

<sup>92</sup> 'Sigerson Cup hat-trick for superior UCD', *Irish Times*, 26 Feb. 1979.

# 1980s-2011: Enduring spirit and hard-won trophies

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In 1982, UCD lost to Queen's in Belfast by 1-10 to 0-7 despite being in the lead going into the last quarter. A stunning goal from nineteen year-old Down man Greg Blaney, who would later win two All-Ireland football medals and an Ulster hurling medal with his county, near the end after having being set up by Queen's creator in chief that day, Antrim's Donal Armstrong, turned the match on its head.<sup>93</sup> Queen's went on to win that year's tournament in extra-time with Blaney again prominent in denying UCG a hat-trick of Sigerson Cup victories. 1983 saw UCD come up against their Cork rivals in the quarter finals. The two teams lost no love for each other that day, with the referee kept busy trying to keep in control before Cork came out on top.

As occurred the previous year, UCD were in a good position going in to the final part of the game only for a combination of a quick Cork point from

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<sup>93</sup> 'Blaney stars for Queen's', *Sunday Independent*, 28 Feb. 1982.



Ephie Fitzgerald and goal from Brian Lotty in two rapid-fire minutes taking the impetus away from the Dublin team.<sup>94</sup> UCG won retribution for the previous year, beating holders Queen's in the final at Santry with Mayo's Pdraig Duffy to the fore. The winners hosted the competition the following year. After defeating Maynooth in the quarter-final, with Kildare's Bill Sex and Seán Ryan controlling midfield, Dermot Flanagan shoring up the defence and Jimmy Lyons (Mayo) and Ray Quinn scoring the goals, UCD faced their Cork adversarial in the semi-finals.<sup>95</sup> It looked as if UCD were heading to the final, leading by two points just as the game neared a close only for Cork's Colm O'Neill, sent off in Cork's 1990 All-Ireland final victory after a tangle with Meath's Mick Lyons, to crash home a goal in the dying seconds and grab victory for the Corkmen.<sup>96</sup> UCC's delight was short-lived, however, as Galway romped to victory in the final by 1-11 to 0-6.

The hurt of that late, late loss to Cork ensured that the UCD team of 1985 came back hungrier and more determined to ensure victory. Nonetheless, controversy marred their first match against Jordanstown, who lost 13 players from their panel and seven from their starting 15 because of question marks surrounding their eligibility.<sup>97</sup> With Jordanstown out of the way after a comfortable 1-10 to 0-6 win, UCD then faced the holders, Galway. Despite Mayo's Kevin McStay scoring 1-4 for UCG, the efforts of McStay's fellow Mayoman Dermot Flanagan, Westmeath's Michael Lynham, Dublin's Niall Clancy, and Kildare's Seán Ryan meant that it was UCD who went through to the final.<sup>98</sup> Waiting for them were Queen's, who had despatched the Cork team (whose jerseys, sponsored by a brewery, had proved quite controversial). Captain Bill Sex inspired the team from midfield, with Kerryman Mick O'Donoghue scoring 'three superb points' alongside him. Dublin's future All-Star Noel McCaffrey, Monaghan's John Joe McKearney (whose uncle, Hugh McKearney, won a Sigerson with UCD in 1949) and Westmeath's Peter Smith in defence ensured that it was a low-scoring day for the Belfast men.<sup>99</sup>

Jordanstown rebounded from their defeat at the hands of UCD in 1985 to beat their Dublin counterparts in the quarters in 1986 and go all the way to victory in only their second year in the competition, overcoming a Mick O'Dwyer

<sup>94</sup> 'Queen's, UCC and UCG go through' Irish Times, 19 Feb. 1983.

<sup>95</sup> Irish Times, 3 March 1984.

<sup>96</sup> Sunday Independent, 4 March 1984.

<sup>97</sup> 'Protests and sponsorship dominate opening day', Irish Times, 23 Feb. 1985.

<sup>98</sup> Sunday Independent, 24 Feb. 1985.

<sup>99</sup> 'UCD extend roll of honour lead', Irish Independent, 25 Feb. 1985 and 'Queen's uneven resistance allows UCD capture cup', Irish Times, 25 Feb. 1985.



📷: Picture from the 1985 Sigerson programme displaying UCD team that went on to win the competition under the leadership of Bill Sex (Kildare). Courtesy of Dave Billings.



📷: UCD vs. Trinity in the 1990 Colours game. Courtesy of UCD Sportscentre.



📷: Frontcover of the programme for the infamous 1990 Sigerson tournament held in Trinity. Courtesy of Dave Billings.

📷: UCD celebrating their 1985 Sigerson victory. Courtesy of Bill Sex.

coached UCC team at Cork's Mardyke in a stop-start final punctuated by points from Derry's future All-Ireland winner and All-Star Enda Gormley. Incredibly, Jordanstown repeated the feat in 1987 by defeating UCD in the quarter finals and then grinding out a 0-6 to 0-4 victory once again over UCC at wet and windy Belaghy.

Cork finally won their first Sigerson Cup in eighteen years in 1988, when they defeated UCG in Maynooth, with Kerry's Maurice Fitzgerald prominent throughout. UCD's inability to reach the semi-finals of the Sigerson Cup since victory in 1985 astonishingly continued until 1996; although by this stage, teams needed to win three times to even get to the semi-final stage because of the increasing number of teams competing. In the meantime, Jordanstown had come to the forefront, where they were joined by their northern newcomer neighbours, St. Mary's of Belfast in 1989, who, coached by Derry's Jim McKeever, scored 2-9 without reply, with two goals courtesy of Fermanagh's Fergal McCann after half-time against a UCC side containing Maurice Fitzgerald in 1989. Jordanstown's other nearby rivals, Queen's, won the competition in controversial circumstances in 1990 – controversial for what happened off the pitch in the celebrations housed at Trinity boathouse rather than what happened on it (see Paul Fegan's memories). The following year, the Sigerson Cup reverted again to Jordanstown.

UCG returned to winning ways in 1992 but only after beating Jordanstown in extra-time in the semi-finals and then defeating a Queen's side in Pearse Park in the final – after Queen's hit the post with the final kick of the game.<sup>100</sup> Queen's returned to win the Sigerson Cup the following year, with an incredibly strong team featuring Armagh's Kieran McGeeney and Paul McGrane, as well as Derry's Anthony Tohill. Continuing the return to form of the four original teams involved in the Sigerson Cup, UCC took back-to-back titles in 1994 and 1995. Interestingly, they did so with 11 Corkmen in 1994 and 12 Corkmen out of their starting 15 in 1995; one of the three non-Cork natives in the victorious 1995 team was none other than Kerry's Séamus Moynihan.

When UCD did finally reach the semi-final stage again in 1996 after three wins, they faced the reigning Cork champions gunning for a Sigerson Cup hat-trick. This, as Seán Moran in the *Irish Times* pointed out, proved to be the 'match

<sup>100</sup> 'UCG beat Queen's in Sigerson cup final', *Irish Times*, 16 March 1992.



of the weekend' in Limerick, 'where the football and excitement would have done credit to an All-Ireland final'. It was literally brother against brother on the pitch, with UCD's captain, Fachtna Collins, battling against his sibling Chris in the centre of the park. Trailing by four points going in to the last moments of the game, UCD's John Hegarty (Wexford) scored a goal, followed immediately by a point from Meath's Trevor Giles at the death to force extra time. Hegarty and Giles' 'Houdini Act' sparked extra confidence amongst the UCD players and a goal from Mayo's Anthony Finnerty made sure of victory over a by then dejected UCC team despite the valiant efforts of Séamus Moynihan to shore up his team.<sup>101</sup> The final against Garda was close but not as close as the match against Cork the previous day. UCD still conspired to play attractive football and goals from Giles and Mayo's Anthony Finnerty – who had incredibly won Sigersons in 1981, 1983 and 1984 with UCG – and timely points from Offaly's Ciarán McManus and Mayo's David Nestor saw UCD home by 2-11 to 3-5. Brian Dooher, a future All-Ireland winning captain, was also a member of the successful team. As occurred after UCD's 1985 victory, however, UCD found it hard to defend their title.

The years after UCD's 1996 Sigerson Cup victory were dominated by Kerry RTC/IT, with Séamus Moynihan returning to his home county to star in the first two of a hat-trick of wins between 1997 and 1999. Demonstrating the competitiveness of the competition, UCD failed to make it to the semi-finals again until 2000. The 2000 tournament, held in NUI Galway, saw UCD meet a particularly difficult challenge in the quarters against a GMIT team featuring Dermot Earley and Joe Bergin. The Dublin college finally came out on top in extra time courtesy of well-timed points by Longford's David Hanniffy, who had fisted a goal early in extra-time, and Wexford's John Hegarty.<sup>102</sup> In the semi-final, they met a confident NUI Galway team, fresh from beating favourites Jordanstown. However, a 'Ciarán McManus inspired UCD' broke from the blocks ahead of Galway and went in to an early five point lead but only two great saves from Westmeath's Cathal Mullin in the UCD goals kept Galway at bay and the Dublin university progressed by the width of a post as an NUI effort came off the upright from a late free and after referee Pat McEneaney disqualified a last-minute Galway goal, to the consternation of the home crowd. In the final

101 'UCD and Garda win through to contest Sigerson decider', Sunday Independent, 3 March 1996; 'UCD top of a class pyramid', Irish Times, 4 March 1996.

102 'UCD are extra special', Irish Independent, 26 Feb. 2000.



📷: UCD's Nigel Crawford (Meath) rises tall against DCU, 2001. Photo courtesy of Sportsfile.



📷: Bitter taste of defeat following the 2001 final. Photo courtesy of Sportsfile.



📷: 1996 Sigerson champions. Photo courtesy of David Billings.



📷: Trevor Giles, the first recipient of a UCD GAA scholarship, during the 1997 Sigerson. Photo courtesy of UCD Sportscentre.



📷: UCD's John Hegarty (Wexford) in action against NUI Galway in the 2000 Sigerson. Photo courtesy of Sportsfile.



📷: Brian Mullin celebrates victory over St. Mary's in the 2007 Sigerson. Photo courtesy of Sportsfile.



📷: Tommy Warburton and John Heslin of UCD at the draw for the 2011 Ulster Bank Sigerson and Fitzgibbon cups. Photo courtesy of Sportsfile.

a UCD team with a Dublin trio of Collie Moran, Mick O'Keeffe and Peadar Andrews, came up against a team containing a future UCD teammate, in the form of Tyrone's Cormac McAnallen, and Armagh's Paddy McKeever. Queen's and UCD's quarter-finals on the Friday had gone to extra-time and both battled to close victories in their semi-finals. The fact that the weather made the pitch look like 'the All-Ireland mud-wrestling final', must have drained both sides even further as they played their third tough match in as many days. Great work from Kildare defender John Quinn led to Galway's Declan Meehan levelling matters between the teams as the game drew to a close, before Kerry's John Lynch put UCD one up with two minutes remaining. Fermanagh's Tom Brewster, however, spoiled matters for UCD by scoring a point at the death to bring the tie to extra-time. Queen's drove on from there in the first period of extra-time with a couple of Diarmaid Marsden scores proving crucial as Queen's put distance between themselves and UCD to ensure the trophy returned north after a long sojourn in Kerry.<sup>103</sup>

UCD agony was exacerbated the following year, 2001, with defeat at the final hurdle once again. A Jordanstown team inspired by Donegal's Jim McGuinness and Derry's Paddy Bradley took an eleven point lead going in to the final quarter only for a late UCD fightback, with a goal from Carlow's Joe Byrne giving the Dublin college team, containing Limerick's Stephen Lucey, Meath's Nigel Crawford, Laois's Brian McDonald and the three Wicklow Ó hAinnidh brothers, renewed hope. Unfortunately though, it was not to be as Jordanstown again pulled away as UCD piled forward in an effort to bridge the gap between the teams.<sup>104</sup> A UCD team full of confidence after winning the 2002 Dublin championship with the help of the three Ó hAinnidh brothers and Tyrone's Cormac McAnallen, the first time since the 1970s UCD had achieved such a feat, took revenge on Jordanstown two years later by defeating them by one point in the 2003 Sigerson Cup semi-final. The work of NUI Galway's brilliant Michael Meehan and a questionable refereeing decision relating to the validity of Galway's decisive goal meant that a UCD team with a backbone of Dublin inter-county stars, such as Dublin's Paul Griffin, Alan Brogan, Barry Cahill, Darren Magee and Liam Óg Ó hÉineacháin, missed out on an opportunity to grasp the Sigerson Cup once again.

<sup>103</sup> 'Queen's defy the fatigue factor', Irish Times, 28 Feb. 2000 and Irish Independent, 28 Feb. 2000.

<sup>104</sup> 'Jordanstown resist brave UCD fightback for victory', Irish Times, 12 April 2001.

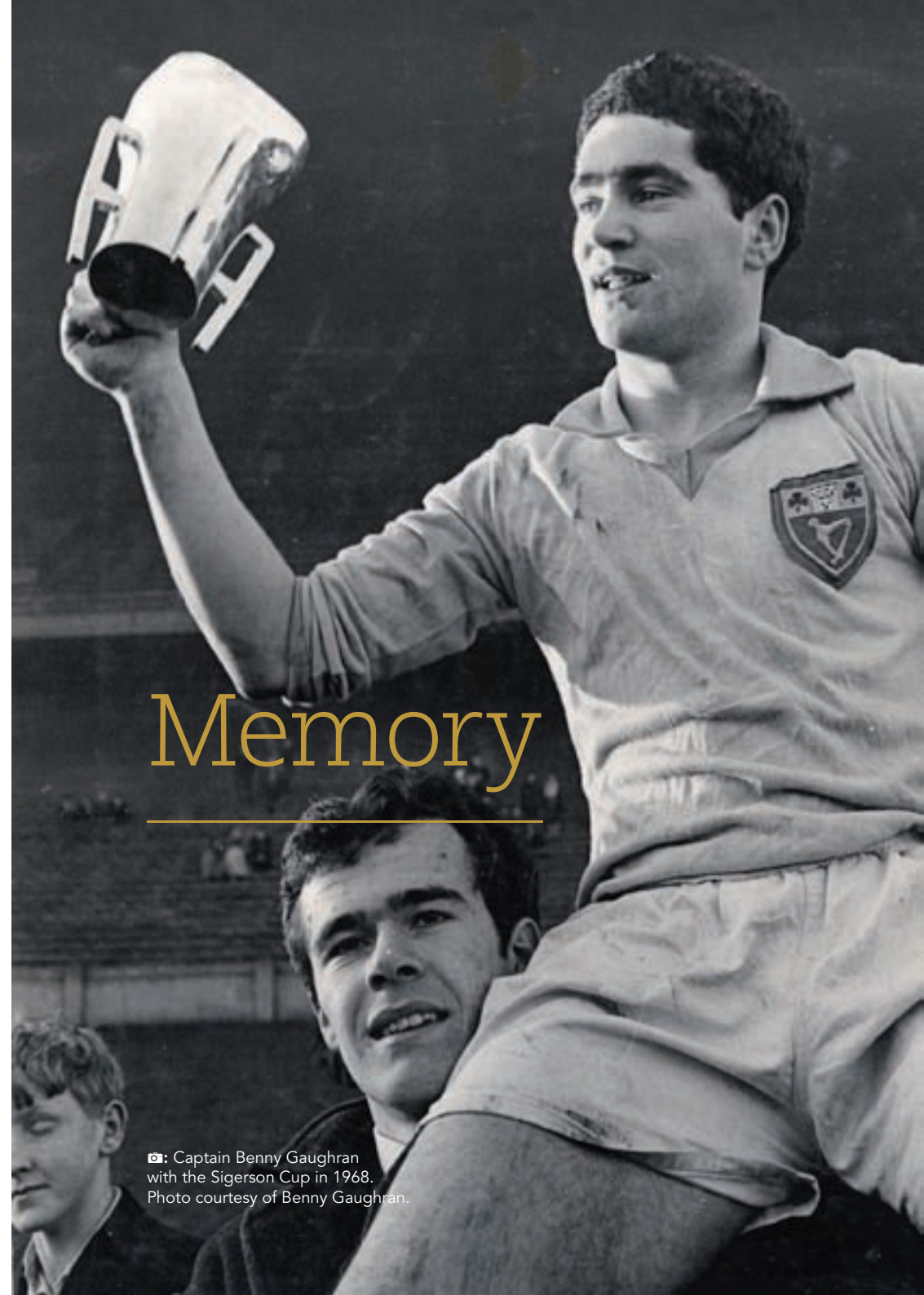


Although fancied to overcome Queen's in the semi-finals of the Sigerson Cup in 2004 after defeating them handsomely in the league, Queen's, with the likes of Mayo's Billy Joe Padden, Monaghan's Dick Clerkin and Down's Eoin McCartan and Aidan Fegan, proved more adaptable to the arctic conditions in Belfast. The *Irish Times*' Ian O'Riordan noted that '[s]ome of the individual performances on the day wouldn't have been lost in the height of the intercounty season, and the character of some scores was enough to warm the heart'. Queen's had defeated St. Mary's, managed by Mickey Harte and Paddy Tally, in the quarter-finals and continued their winning run in the semis, beating UCD by 1-10 to 0-9, despite the best efforts of UCD stalwarts Joe Sheridan, Paul Griffin and Breandán Ó hAinle. <sup>105</sup> But this would be the first of three final defeats in a row for Queen's: in 2004 and 2005 to Sligo IT and in 2006 to DCU. At the fourth time of asking in 2007, however, Queen's beat their old rivals Jordanstown by a point after extra time. It took five years for UCD to reach another Sigerson semi-final, in 2009, only to be defeated by a DIT who lost out to Cork IT in the final. Again though, UCD did manage to attain real glory elsewhere by taking their seventh Dublin county championship in 2006 with an injury time winning point against St Vincents.

By 2010 the failure to win a Sigerson Cup since 1996 had become a serious cross to carry. There is a huge honour in representing UCD in a competition in which they enjoy such a storied past, but that also brings a constant pressure and desire to replicate the successes of the past. Nonetheless, the simple truth is that UCD have lost the Sigerson Cup far more often than they have won it. The crucial tradition is not that of winning the Cup, rather that of honouring the men who filled the jersey previously. There are many men who contributed hugely to the UCD tradition in the Sigerson Cup, but who were not lucky enough to emerge as winners. The commitment to play for the college has not always resulted in triumph, but it has given generations of UCD Gaelic footballers their most cherished memories of their alma mater.

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<sup>105</sup> 'Queen's freeze out visitors', *Irish Times*, 28 Feb. 2004.



# Memory

📷: Captain Benny Gaughran  
with the Sigerson Cup in 1968.  
Photo courtesy of Benny Gaughran.

# Padraig “The Flying Doctor” Carney (1940s)

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Football was very important to integrating into UCD – especially after coming to Dublin from a small town in Co. Mayo at seventeen years of age to do medicine. UCD back then was very manageable. Everything took place within such a small place, especially at the college of science. It was all confined. We would go to our classes and then head up to the hospitals on our bikes.

I had the unusual experience of playing senior for Mayo before I played minor because during the war they did away with the minor competition for a few years. My first senior game for Mayo was in September 1945 and then I played both minor and senior the following year. I was a busy man but it was exciting. Football was a great outlet and allowed me to have another interest apart from my studies. I tried to find a happy medium between football and medicine. In those days I would study from Monday to Friday. On Saturday I'd travel to wherever Mayo were playing before coming back to UCD on Sunday night and hopping on my bike again on Monday morning to go to class.

During my time at UCD we won three Sigersons. My first Sigerson really stands out. I was only 17 at the time and some of the other players, such as Donal Keenan, Phelim Murray and Frank Kinlough, had already won All-Irelands for Roscommon. We played up in Belfast, which was exciting in itself, as it was a great opportunity to see the city in that era, just after the Second World War. We beat Queen's quite well in the semis and UCC in the final. There were around

five Roscommon lads in the team when I won. UCC had their revenge against us the next year but we came back strong in 1947 to win the Sigerson once again. In 1948 we lost to a UCG team that included my county man Mick Loftus. I got injections that day because I had a pulled groin muscle but to no avail as Billy Kenny (another Mayo man) and Mick ran the show. Unfortunately Billy Kenny's career was cut short by an injury sustained in the 1951 All-Ireland semi-final.

Liam Hastings (Mayo), a good friend of mine, played alongside me in the Sigerson in 1946. Joe Gilvarry, another Mayoman, was a few years ahead of me but we played together in the 1945 team. Seán Flanagan also played with me in various Sigerson teams and captained Mayo when we won the All-Ireland in 1950 and 1951. Interestingly, Dr. Seán Lavan, who had won Sigersons for UCD and Connaught titles for Mayo, taught me how to dissect bodies in anatomy classes whilst in UCD! P.J. Duke, who I won Sigersons alongside in 1945, 1947 and 1949 and who won two All-Irelands with Cavan in 1947 and 1948, was a classmate of mine. He did pre-veterinary and I did pre-medicine. P.J. Duke was a wonderful guy and a great player. We played football together, we went to movies together and we generally knocked around together. He died quite suddenly in St. Vincents in 1950. My wife, who was a classmate of ours, was on the ward when he tragically passed away.

We used to train once or twice a week in Belfield. We would ride our bikes out, run around and try to develop some strategies. It was self-motivation really. We would get together after matches to discuss what happened and generally shoot the breeze but it wasn't as organized as it became in later years. We came together for dances in 76 St Stephen's Green at weekends and there was a real communal environment – a lot more so than existed when everything went to Belfield. In the Dublin league we were up against the likes of Civil Service, Garda and St. Vincents (there was no shortage of contact with Vincents!). Whilst there was a certain aura playing for UCD, especially in the Sigerson team, it didn't quite match playing for your county.

I left Ireland for America in 1954. I had been captain of Mayo in 1954 so when we got to the semi-final of the league I flew home from America for the game and they flew me back for the final. After that I played football in America although when Mayo came out to New York the following year I flew over from California to play with them. In 1956 I did more medical training in Detroit, Michigan, but I still managed to play with the Detroit GAA team and we won the

Mid Western Conference against Chicago, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Toronto. When my medical residency finished in 1959 my wife and I travelled back to California to set up a practice. Once I got well established, I started to take trips back home and after I retired I tried to come back to Ireland for as many All-Ireland finals as I could.

# Padraic Gearty (1950s)

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During the summer immediately after completing my Leaving Cert in St. Mel's College in 1952, where I had played in goal and in the half forward line, I was fortunate enough to catch a few good balls playing with my club, Longford Wanderers (later to become Longford Slashers). As a consequence, I received a call-up to the county team for a match against Cavan in Virginia – just before I arrived at UCD to start my law degree.

My brother, Gerry, who had played in goal for UCD on the 1949 Sigerson winning team, told me where to go and what to do on my arrival in Dublin. On my first visit to the sports fields in Belfield, I met the genial and friendly Mick D'Arcy, a Tipp man who mainly looked after the hurlers but who was completely dedicated to UCD GAA club more generally. Mick asked me who I played for; when I told him Longford – Longford Wanderers and Longford county – I think this helped me get on to the Sigerson team a couple of months later (Sigerson was still played in November then).

Several figures from my first encounters at UCD still stand out to this day,

such as the one and only secretary, Patsy McGovern, a chemist from Arva, who was the Eugene McGee of his day and a dynamo within the club. Patsy Devlin, who had taken over from Patsy McGovern, also stood out, as did Mick D'Arcy and perhaps most importantly Dr. Joe Stuart, who was a giant of the UCD club and a legend of the GAA more generally because of his later role as President of the GAA. My links with Dr. Joe Stuart would continue after I left UCD since he went on to deliver my three daughters!

Longford, although they made some impact years later, did not rate too highly when I first started playing for UCD. Therefore, I was in awe of many of the people who I met and played with on arrival in Dublin. They included Eddie Devlin and Johnny O'Reilly of Tyrone, Seán and Seamus Murphy and Tim "Tiger" Lyons of Kerry, Mick Gould of Cork, Paddy Fenelon of Offaly, Kevin Behan and Jim McArdle of Louth, John and Felix McKnight of Armagh, Leo Heslin and Eddie Duffy of Leitrim, P.J. McElroy and Kieran Denvir of Down, Johnny Maguire and Gerry Charlton of Fermanagh, Tom Hardy, Jim McDonald, James Brady, Seamus Conaty, Cathal Young, Tom Crotty of Cavan and, of course, Harry McGann, Seán Murray, Dave Sheeran and Mel Murtagh of Longford. Motor cycle trips to and from club games with Tom Hardy were particularly exciting and memorable experiences.

For most of the 100 years' history of the Sigerson Cup, of course, only the four national University Colleges – Dublin, Cork, Galway and Queen's, Belfast – were involved. There was a rota of venues – two semi-finals were played on the Saturday and the final played on the following day – Sunday. An abiding memory of mine is the exhilarating marathon semi-final of 1953 at Belfield. Galway and Cork played out a fiercely contested game and could only be separated after extra time left the two bruised and battered. Even the fading light of the late evenings could not dull the shining stars playing that day, such as Paudie Sheehy and "the greatest of them all" Seán Purcell.

My first Sigerson took place in Belfast in 1952. I played left-half forward in that tournament – later I would play for UCD in goal, just like my brother. After narrowly defeating Galway in the semi-final, we met UCC in the final. The great Kerryman Jim Brosnan won the final that day for UCC in Corrigan Park – not the finest ground in the world – almost single-handedly. We still had a good night in Belfast after the final. I couldn't get over the quietness of the city though, with "Sunday Observance" strictly observed. It was cold and nothing appeared



to happen there on a Sunday night, with the streets particularly bare even though our hotel was on Donegal Place. I remember not even being able to buy cigarettes anywhere – and paying a porter handsomely for a cigarette because of that. Nonetheless, the entire atmosphere involving all four teams and a full quota of friends and supporters was one of great warmth and camaraderie.

I played in goal for UCD in the following four Sigersons. I like to think that I was a reasonably good goalkeeper but I played almost all my football at midfield and as a forward with Longford and with my home club Longford Slashers. I was more often a sub than a regular member of Longford county teams – but seldom missed out on a game and I played in a variety of positions. It was said of me by a member of the county management team that I “was the best sub Longford ever had – equally bad in every position!”

At that time the goalkeeper was frequently seen as being the least important of all those available to play but I believed then – and I still believe it now – that goalkeeping was extremely important. I used to play in goals in soccer too, as well as outfield as a right wing. Theoretically, because of rule 27 – which I am proud to say that I helped abolish as Longford representative to the Belfast Congress in 1971 – I shouldn’t have been playing soccer at all but I enjoyed it and I played for the UCD midweek soccer team under an assumed name. I nearly even played League of Ireland as a goalkeeper.

In those years there was an Annual Combined Universities versus the Rest of Ireland fixture, in hurling and in football, which added even more to the high standing of the Sigerson and Fitzgibbon intervarsity games. No doubt the Sigerson was the single most important event in third level Gaelic football. UCD’s involvement in the Dublin senior league was secondary and, in a way, preparatory for Sigerson – the Dublin league was populated with country players working in Dublin apart from the likes of St Vincents, who were practically unbeatable. Still, my biggest thrills and achievements were my Sigerson victories in 1953 and 1955. That 1953 team was an incredibly talented bunch – as was the 1955 team.

I developed very warm friendships during those years with “my” fullbacks, none more so than with the late Tim “Tiger” Lyons and Felix McKnight. We really looked after “our square” in those days very jealously – no one was ever allowed to trespass on our territory – other than at their peril! We knew how to celebrate after our victories, but we weren’t really drinkers, there was more

drinking with our counties than with UCD – mainly because we didn’t have the money to drink.

College games were generally extremely tough, particularly Sigerson encounters and, to a slightly lesser extent, the inter-faculty games for the Duke Cup. Of those involved in the Duke Cup none stands out more in my memory than Tom Toner, later Managing Director of Arnotts, and mainly responsible, I am sure, for the longstanding sponsorship by that firm for Dublin football teams.

County games at the time would have been like training games compared to the Sigerson and Duke Cup games, not least playing the likes of the clerical students who seemed to think that God would look after them or the opponents they clattered! Sigerson games weren’t dirty, they were just tough and referees



**📷: 1955 Sigerson champions:** *Back row:* Jim McDonnell (Cavan), Paul McMurrough (Monaghan), Seán Murphy (Kerry), Seamus Conaty (Cavan), John McKnight (Armagh), Art Thornberry (Westmeath), Jim Ryan (Meath), Felix McKnight (Armagh), Padraic Gearty (Longford), Dan ??? (Limerick) *Front row:* John Crone (Cavan), Denis Brosnan (Kerry), Mick Murphy (Cork), James Brady (Cavan), Tim “Tiger” Lyons (Kerry), Colm Swords (Mayo), Kieran Denvir (Down), Tom Crotty (Cavan), Séamus Murphy (Kerry), Paddy Dockery (Sligo), Johnny Maguire (Fermanagh). Photo courtesy of Padraic Gearty.



tended to let a lot go. We had relatively little training at the time. There was a gym in Earlsfort but Ulick O'Connor (athlete and fitness fanatic) always seemed to be using any equipment there was. We nearly all cycled and walked everywhere and availed of public transport.

We were very much match fit. We often played games on Wednesdays, Saturdays and sometimes two games on Sundays. There were times when we toggled out for a Dublin league match at 11a.m. and then hopped into a car to go to Mullingar, Cavan, Sligo or Castlebar to play a county match – I remember distinctly sharing transport with our Cavan friends, playing together in the morning and kicking the shins off one another in the afternoon!

Gaelic games were the poor relations in UCD at the time. In the general hall in UCD they had display boards for all the societies and sports clubs. That's where we assembled. If you were a GAA person you went to the GAA board. You wouldn't be boasting about your GAA credentials back then, however. Most of the girls' eyes would be looking towards the rugby board! The GAA's image certainly wasn't that enviable because there wasn't much respect for it. But the Padraig O'Keeffes, the Joe Stuarts, the Patsy McGoverns and the Eugene McGees greatly improved GAA's standing in UCD, as did Ray Kearns when he became president of the students' union. Ray, or "Bulletproof" as we called him, attended nearly all our matches and his election elevated the status of GAA people. UCD was sometimes considered "D4 territory" and we had felt like outsiders treading on enemy ground but then the GAA club acquired a more favourable reputation and status. There was definitely a difference between being a GAA player when I arrived and when I finished five years later.

We were also closely connected with UCD camogie club during my time and some of us were escorts for banquets associated with the intervarsity camogie competition, the Ashbourne Cup. Socially, the GAA "mafia" frequented "hops" and hoolies like the Yerrawaddies in the Olympic, the Vets in the Metropole, the Ags in the Mansion House – we were a closely knit bunch, and even 60 years on I regard my teammates of those magic years as close friends, the bonds can never be broken and are much cherished.

# Cathal Young (1950s)

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I started doing engineering at UCD in 1953 but I realised soon after that it wasn't the subject for me. Therefore, I came back to UCD in 1955 to do law. During my time there, I played on the Sigerson winning team in 1957; I also won a Duke Cup medal, two Dublin league medals and was a sub on the 1959 team that lost the county championship along the way.

There were a lot of Cavan lads on the team when I arrived. It went in cycles: from the late 1940s until the 1950s there were a huge amount of Cavan guys – P.J. Duke, Barney Cully, and Edwin Carolan in the 1940s, and Tom Hardy, Tom Crotty, Paddy Carolan, Jim McDonnell, James Brady and Brian O'Reilly in the 1950s. Indeed, the two Carolans, Tom Hardy and Brian O'Reilly had played on Cavan's 1952 All-Ireland winning team so I knew all about them when I arrived.

I'll never forget going to watch my first Sigerson match in 1953. UCD were the host team that year and, as a consequence, had a choice of who they wanted to play in the semis. They chose Queen's and won comprehensively. The second semi-final that followed between UCC and UCG turned out to be an incredible match. It was a freezing November day [the Sigerson was played in November and December from 1923 to 1967] and because the game went to extra-time it finished practically in the dark. There were great players on both teams. UCC had the wonderful Kerry players Jim Brosnan [who had won an All-Ireland that summer and went on to win another in 1955 before playing for UCD in 1956] and Paudie Sheehy [who won four All-Irelands with Kerry, one of which when

on the bench<sup>1</sup>]. That day Sheehy went up against Galway's Seán Purcell, who went on to win an All-Ireland in 1956, and Iggy Hanniffy marked Brosnan. Both battles were remarkable physical encounters. I was on the sideline wincing at the intensity of the hits. Nobody had been sent off in a Sigerson match back then so it seemed as if players could get away with anything. In the final, UCD's Tommy Hardy played against Kevin Swords from Mayo and although they were cousins they still beat the life out of each other. UCD won the final quite comfortably in the end but they were helped by the huge effort Galway had put in the day before when they beat UCC. Dublin were also aided by the return of Paddy Carolan, who had received a suspension but had got reinstated in time to play the match.

I think the Sigerson was the most important competition back then. Fellows would turn out and train and play for the Sigerson. But then they often stopped training afterwards because many of them could only play for their clubs back home. That all changed in 1955 when the GAA introduced a new rule to allow guys to play for their club in their home county championship as well as for UCD in the Dublin championship. This was great because if you played well for UCD, your county would often notice and it could benefit you. I played for Cavan Gaels, founded in 1957, at home and UCD in Dublin (and later the Civil Service). I played corner-forward or full forward. I really enjoyed it and I have great memories from it.

I played on the winning Sigerson team in 1957 – UCD's third Sigerson in a row. We beat Queen's in the semis and UCC in the final at Croke Park. We had led at half-time and throughout the second half but a Cork goal a few minutes from the end levelled matters before a point from the great Kerryman Seamus Murphy, whose brother Seán was also playing, made sure of a UCD victory. Felix McKnight (Armagh) was captain of UCD that day. Felix had lost his left eye when he was a kid so he always played right-full back. The team also included Kieran Denvir, who came on in the 1960 All-Ireland for the victorious Down team, as well as my fellow Cavan men, Brian O'Reilly, Jim McDonnell and James Brady. The following year, Queen's won the Sigerson for the first time. It was great for the northern university to have made the breakthrough, despite them beating UCD in the final.

I will always remember the Dublin county final in 1959 between UCD and St Vincents. Despite Vincents having scored four goals in the match (two from Kevin Heffernan in the first half) and UCD being nine points down, we had gone ahead entering the last few minutes only for Paddy Farnon to score a goal near the death. St Vincents had only lost once in the Dublin championship since 1949 (to Erin's Hope in the 1956 final), so it was devastating to lose so late in the game. Club football in Dublin was really tough – especially against the real local teams such as Vincents or Parnells.

I remember going to one Sigerson dinner out in Killiney after I had finished in UCD. There was a good spirit from the start. 'Molly Malone' got a rattle from the Dublin hosts, then 'Galway Bay' was sung by UCG, followed by the 'The banks of my own lovely Lee' by the Corkmen. Finally, the Queen's lads started singing 'The Men behind the Wire' and all joined in. And this was before the meal had even begun! Pat Hourican (the publican from Hourican's on Leeson St, a famous UCD GAA haunt) brought his wife, Mary, along to the dinner and she couldn't believe the incredible atmosphere at the dinner.

The Sigerson was all about playing as hard as you could over the course of the weekend and afterwards sitting down with your opponents and enjoying a few drinks together. Great friendships were made between rival players through the Sigerson and it was often the fellows who fought most with each other who became the best of friends!

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<sup>1</sup> Paudie Sheehy tragically died at 35 years of age from a brain haemorrhage. See Tom English, 'Kerry fires burned bright when Sean Og met Ogie', Sunday Times, 3 Aug. 2003.

# Benny Gaughran (1960s)

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When I first came to UCD I began to play soccer but I had such good fun playing for the junior football team that I decided to choose the fifteen man game over the eleven man game. There was a great spirit between the lads and I went on to become very close friends with many of them during my time playing with UCD. Football was so important to us as students. We played football first and went to lectures second.

When I initially started playing for UCD's first team, the coach, Eugene McGee, came up to me and said: "You're playing right-half forward today. You're playing with county stars. Where you come from you are a big fish in a small pond. Here you're a small fish in a very big pond. You're not picked on this team to solo the ball all over the place. You're picked to win the ball and then give it to other lads to score. If you can't do that, you're off the team." I understandably learnt all about the value of teamwork at UCD and giving off the ball early from the very beginning.

The physicality of the Sigerson Cup was incredible. In my first Sigerson, in November 1964 in Casement Park, we played the reigning champions, UCG, in the semi-final. I was told beforehand that it was going to be extremely tough out on the pitch and that the referees were inclined to let a lot more go than usual. Therefore, I was psyched up and went in as hard as I could – and unfairly – the first

time the ball came near me. I remember the UCG captain Billy McGinn getting up off the ground afterwards and shooting me a look of disdain, which made me feel somewhat ashamed of my overenthusiastic approach. Nonetheless, we went on to win the game, which was played during a snowstorm. I was so cold after the match that I couldn't undo my boots and they had to be cut off me. The next day we were exhausted because of the toll the match had taken on us. Unfortunately for us we met a great Queen's team in the final and Seán O'Neill, the brilliant Down forward who had already won two All-Irelands and would go on to win one more, was at the height of his powers. O'Neill scored 2-2 on us that day as he inspired Queen's to victory. Later that year we went on to win the Dublin county championship, however, so all was not lost.

During my time playing Sigerson at UCD our greatest competitors were UCC. They won the cup four out of five years between 1965 and 1970 – we won it in the 1967-68 season – and they had the likes of the Kerry men, Brendan Lynch, Moss Keane and Dave Geaney, and the Cork men, Billy Morgan and the Philpott brothers in their ranks. We found them extremely hard to beat. Before one Sigerson match with UCC, Eugene McGee came up with a plan to play with two full-forwards, John Kelly from Roscommon and myself, and no one else in the forward line in order to run their full back, Moss Keane, all over the park. Near the beginning of the game a beautiful ball was put in to the corner, around thirty yards in front of us. All three of us set off for the ball. Moss, who famously went on to represent Ireland and the Lions in rugby, and who sadly passed away quite recently, was quick enough over 10 yards but not so quick in a longer sprint so I knew I had him. Moss realised that he was in big trouble because he wasn't going to get there first and I might play the ball in to my teammate so he instead stuck out his big, trunk-like arms and flattened the two of us at the same time with a glorious double clothesline. Moss then picked up the ball, kicked it up the park and gave us a knowing smile.

In 1968 our time came. As captain that year, I would make up a drink for big games, which consisted of watered down orange with several tablespoons of glucose. "That's your kick for the game," I'd tell the players. We beat Trinity in the Sigerson semi-final and then faced UCG in the final in Croke Park. Five minutes into the final, the play came towards me out near the sideline. I knew that if I picked up the bouncing ball my UCG marker, Coleen McDonagh, would shuffle me out over the line. Knowing I was going nowhere, I kicked the ball on

the fly like a soccer player. I don't know why I did; I never did it afterwards but I got lucky and the ball flew around 50 yards in the air towards our forward line and we ended up getting a score from it. It seemed to galvanise our team and demoralise the Galway team. I think we were worthy winners and I was fortunate to score 1–7. The tournament had been scheduled to take place in November 1967 but after having trained extremely hard (often at 7am during the week) and abstaining from drinking in the six or eight weeks before the finals, the tournament was called off two days before it was due to start because of the foot-and-mouth crisis. I actually think we weren't as fit when the tournament was finally held in late January 1968 but we still had enough to win what would be my only Sigerson cup medal.

A week of celebration followed our victory. Indeed, the celebrations were so good that the cup went missing for a while! We thought it might have gone into the Liffey because we had gone down to a pub off the quays but luckily for all it eventually turned up. I was even nominated Sports Star of the Week by the *Irish Press* following our victory. We had been chosen to represent the Irish colleges on an American tour that year so huge pressure had been placed on us to win the Sigerson.

The American trip was great fun. We even played a match against Hartford prison in Connecticut. A band played 'Danny Boy' before the match because they thought that the song was our national anthem. When we went out to play the game they only had eleven players on the pitch though, because they thought it was a soccer match. We had to take off four of our lads as a consequence but we played them at soccer and won. We were told not to talk to the prisoners during the game by the armed guards surrounding the pitch because they were all in prison for life. I was beside the referee, who also was a prisoner, at one stage and I could see he had tears in his eyes. He whispered in a German-tinted accent that it was great to see real football again.

Rugby was the glamour game in UCD at the time. We weren't seen as heroes but we did become a very professional team. When we won the All-Ireland club championship in 1974 (I continued to play for UCD after I finished my degree) we went on a run of around 40 odd games without defeat. We never panicked; we always felt that we had the game under our control even if there were only a few minutes left. In 1971, we were thrown out of the Sigerson because I was enrolled as a night student. We beat Cork decisively in a great

match in the semi-final before we got thrown out. As a way of protesting what we thought was an unfair decision we went to the final with our jerseys tied to our backs to watch the reinstated Cork team – who had only been informed of the decision on the morning of the match – lose by a point to Queen's.

In the Sigerson, players got stuck into one another on the park but there was great socialising between the teams afterwards, especially at the famous dinners. I even remember going back to Dublin from Belfast one time with the UCC bus such was the camaraderie between the teams. Recently I met up again with the 1967/68 Sigerson winning side in a reunion in Galway. The same great character and spirit was still in evidence amongst the team, which serves to demonstrate the incredible and enduring spirit of the Sigerson.



📷: UCD team playing soccer against life prisoners at Hartford State Prison, Connecticut 1968. Photo courtesy of Benny Gaughran.



# Pat O'Neill (1970s)

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I had two periods in UCD: I was there first as an undergraduate in medicine (1967 – 74) and then around two years after graduation I returned to do a postgraduate in anatomy (1976 – 77). Part of the reason for returning was to play football rather than for academic studies. Dublin were doing well at the time and the teaching and research studies allowed more flexibility and time for football training and playing (we sometimes had to work 70-80 hours a week as medical and surgical interns in the teaching hospitals, which made training and playing football at highly competitive and organised levels quite difficult). It was great going back to the university in this capacity.

My first year in UCD was in 1967. I had originally played for St Brigid's Club in Blanchardstown after leaving boarding school at Gormanston College, which was the nearest club to my home place in north county Dublin and at that time was a small village club in rural Dublin. I decided to transfer to UCD in 1969 on the advice of Brendan Devlin, who was involved as a mentor in the UCD setup and was also a Dublin selector. The transfer caused a bit of controversy and was opposed by the Dublin County Board at the time, and I had to serve a period of ineligibility of one year. I had played hurling for Dublin minors and I would have been far better at hurling at the time – perhaps due to the fact that my father was a Kilkenny man although his father (my grandfather) had played on the last Kilkenny side to win the Leinster senior football title in 1911 – but I made a conscious decision to play football because it looked like Dublin had more potential to be successful in football than hurling.

I was playing senior football with Dublin when I first started playing with

UCD in 1970 and I had played in an intermediate semi-final for UCD against Maynooth College in the university league competition before transferring to the club for the Dublin club competitions. Nevertheless, I was not selected for the Sigerson team in March as I had just joined in January. The key midfielder, Tom Mulvihill of Longford, developed acute appendicitis and was admitted to St Vincent's Hospital for emergency surgery the day before the Sigerson was due to start, however, which meant that I was put straight into midfield. Unfortunately, we got a hiding in the semi-final from a giant Cork team with the likes of the Kerry men Jim Coughlin, Brendan Lynch, and Moss Keane to the fore in the 'demolition'. The competition had been due to take place in Belfast but because of the 'Troubles' in the North it was shifted out to Hilltown in Down and we stayed for the weekend in the Abbey Hotel in Newry. I was only 19 at the time but I was very impressed with the UCD setup, headed by Eugene McGee. It was my first exposure to such a tournament. Even though we got beaten, I thought that this was the place to be for the future. There was a stay-over in a hotel, which also was also attractive in itself.

The next year, we got revenge on UCC in a great match in the semi-final in Galway. We all went to bed early to be prepared for the final on the Sunday only to be told the following morning that we had been thrown out of the competition because one of our players was not registered properly. We were annoyed and disgusted, and we refused to go to the Sigerson dinner at the Great Southern Hotel in Eyre Square; although one or two players tried to hang around to have their go at the Cork team but to no avail. In 1972, we lost by a point in the semi-final to a late UCC goal scored by Brendan Lynch with a 14-yard free kick that unluckily touched off the top of the hands of his Kerry teammate, John O'Keeffe, who was playing for UCD. My recollection is of having a woeful game and getting taken off at half-time, which added to the disappointment. The next year it finally all came together. Even though we were dominating Dublin football with St Vincents, we found the Sigerson extremely hard to win; but 1973 was to be our year. We beat Queen's in the semi-final in a hard grind of a match before finally beating Maynooth in the final in Cork.

Most of the people I was friendly with during college were from the football club. There were very few in medicine in UCD who played gaelic football as they mostly played rugby. Most of my medical classmates would have been drinking in Mulligan's on Leeson St, and my football teammates and I would be on the

other side of the road in Kirwan's, which later became Hourican's.

I was very much a football journeyman rather than a star. You had to earn your way onto the UCD team; however Dublin's emergence from 1974 onwards – playing in six All-Ireland finals in a row – helped my cause. I trained mostly with Dublin in Parnell Park to keep Kevin Heffernan happy although I did train in February with the UCD team in Belfield – in often very heavy mucky conditions – in preparation for the Sigerson. I actually would have been the nominated captain of the Dublin team that won the All-Ireland in 1974 because UCD won the Dublin senior football championship in 1973 except I got an injury on Easter Sunday when playing for Dublin against Tipperary in the annual commemorative game for Bloody Sunday event in 1920. I received a kick in my back that partially ruptured my kidney; although it eventually cleared up, a clot stayed in my renal vein in early 1974 resulting in a pulmonary embolus from which I nearly died. Needless to say, I missed the Sigerson, the second All-Ireland club championship and possibly captaining Dublin that season. Seán Doherty was nominated Dublin captain instead of me, which proved to be the final year the county champions' nominated player was the county captain. The only good thing about my injury and subsequent illness was that it gave me a chance to concentrate on my final medical examination in 1974, which might have been otherwise under a bit of pressure.

When I came back to do my postgraduate studies in UCD in 1976-77, I was one of the senior long-term members of the team so I had to try to show an example for the younger lads. I also had to make peace with some of the Kerry men who I had been 'at war' with when playing for Dublin. Mickey O'Sullivan (captain of Kerry in 1975) had received some 'harsh' treatment in a tackle with Seán Doherty, which led to some bad feeling between Kerry and Dublin for a while afterwards. When Mickey came to study at UCD from Strawberry Hill in Twickenham, there might have been a bit of cautious suspicion between us initially but we then went on to become great lifelong friends.

The replayed Sigerson final against UCG in 1977 was a great battle. UCG probably should have won the final the first day in their home Sigerson in Pearse Stadium in Salthill in Galway but in the replay UCD had it tactically so right and won easily in the end. The following year we beat Galway a bit more comfortably.

UCD was a very good platform for people whose counties weren't that



📷: UCD past players vs. UCD present players. Photo courtesy of Benny Gaughran.

prominent in the provincial and all-Ireland competitions. Tom Hunt, for example, the Waterford goalkeeper, was one shining example; Mick Carty, the Wexford trojan horse was another example, as was Tommy Murphy of Wicklow. Sigerson football also showed how good certain players who couldn't get regular games for their county were, such as Jackie Walsh of Kerry, and Pat Duggan of Dublin (who would have been the Dublin full-forward except for a reincarnated Jimmy Keaveny); and many others.

# Denis “Ogie” Moran (1970s)

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I chose to do Physical Education in Thomond College after my Leaving Cert – Commerce in UCD had been my second choice. After four weeks in Thomond College, I decided to change courses and went to UCD. As I had started playing with Thomond College and had been registered there, I continued to play with them for the year. Fortunately, I was still eligible to play Sigerson that year for UCD as the Sigerson was confined to the Universities only at that time (UCD, UCC, UCG, Queen’s, Maynooth and Trinity). That led to my playing Sigerson in Belfast in early March 1975 for UCD and then the following week playing the Higher Education League final for Thomond College against UCD!

When I arrived in UCD, I was fortunate that the Walsh brothers, Jackie and Barry, were already there. The three of us had played together all our lives with Shannon Rangers and we were always great friends. Jackie was a fantastic footballer and was an integral part of the UCD team at the time. During my time in Dublin I shared the same digs with J.P. Kean (Mayo), P.J. O’Halloran (Meath), Barry O’Donoghue (Kildare) and Barry Walsh (Kerry). J.P. and I shared the same room. He was a great footballer and one of nature’s gentlemen. Mrs. Bauress was our landlady. She was a great woman: she washed all our gear and came to all our matches.

I remember my first Sigerson extremely well. It took place in Belfast in 1975. Due to the Troubles, we were largely confined to the hotel all weekend, which helped greatly with team spirit. After beating UCG in the semi-final, we played the host team, Queen’s, in the final. Seán O’Neill, the great Down player, was training Queen’s at the time, and they had some fantastic players like Jerry

McHugh, Paddy Moriarty, Peter McGinnity and Pat Armstrong. It was a great game and we came out on top at the end. It was my first Sigerson and the competition lived up to all my expectations. We had a great weekend and there was a great sense of camaraderie between everyone.

The Sigerson of 1976 was hosted by Trinity and we ended up playing Maynooth in the final in Croke Park. We were hot favourites to win it, but on the day, we had to give second best to a fine Maynooth team who won their first Sigerson. They played really well and my memory of the day was the sheer delight on the faces of my fellow countymen Tony O’Keeffe and Larry Kelly, and the superb performance of their full forward, John McParland.

The following year, 1977, the Sigerson was held in Galway. We ended up playing the host team in the final. It was a cracking game and it ended in a draw. Barry Walsh got a goal in the second half that saved our bacon. It was a very good UCG team with players like Gay Mitchell, Martin Carney, Johnny Tobin, Brendan Collieran and Gay McManus. The replay was played on Easter Monday in Galway. I played midfield with Gerry McEntee. Gerry had all the attributes of the great Meath players – strong, competitive, committed and loyal – a real pleasure to play alongside, a man you’d go to the trenches with. The replay was again well contested by both sides and a goal by the very talented Tony McManus in the second half swung the game in our favour and we never looked back.

Sigersons were never for the faint-hearted and were always fiercely contested. Sometimes the action spilled over, but my memory of Sigersons is of tough, hard football; rarely malicious or dirty. The Sigerson was the focal point of our football year in UCD and all our training was geared around it.

Preparations for the Dublin County Championship would start around Easter time, always a difficult time as people would be getting ready for the exams. We had some fantastic games against St Vincents, whose team at the time included about a third of the Dublin team. They had Tony Hanahoe, Jimmy Keaveney, Gay O’Driscoll, Bobby Doyle and Brian Mullins, to mention but a few. They had Kevin Heffernan as their manager and we had Eugene McGee; they were special times. A lot of our games would have been played on Sunday evenings in Parnell Park so it wasn’t unusual to play with your club in Kerry on Saturday night and head back to Dublin on Sunday morning for the game on



Sunday night. I have great memories of myself Jackie Walsh, Barry Walsh and Mike McEllistram heading back to Dublin in Jackie's Ford Fiesta, battered and bruised from the night before.

In my time in UCD, it's fair to say that we were never the most popular team among the other universities. A lot of this stemmed from the fact that we had a lot of mature students on our team. Many of the lads were national teachers who were doing a four year B.A. at night, followed by the H.Dip. This meant that the average age of our team could have been 23-24 and the other universities always resented this. We played UCC in a Sigerson semi-final in 1976 and after the game, one journalist asked Dr. Con Murphy what was the main difference between the teams. Con said "I suppose UCC's main problem was that we had too many students playing!" Con is one of the real great characters of the GAA and a great friend to generations of Sigerson players. He is still involved with UCC to this very day.

I have nothing but the best of memories of my time in UCD playing Sigerson football. It was great to be playing with so many talented footballers in such a competitive environment, under our great manager, Eugene McGee. I remember one day playing midfield with Gerry McEntee, and we had a forward line of Tony McManus, JP Kean, Jackie Walsh, Colm O'Rourke, Ollie Liddy and Pat Duggan. When you consider we had Pat O'Neill, Éamonn O'Donoghue and Mick Carty (a man who could have played for any county) playing in the backs, it just showed how high the standard of football was in university football at that time. Eugene McGee was a superb manager and we all enjoyed playing under him. He was extremely professional, super organised, and a great motivator and tactician. Sigerson football was a great transition for many players who went from leaving school to making their senior inter-county panel. County team managers always liked players who could cut it at Sigerson level, at that time it was the nearest thing to county football. Long may it continue!

# Seamus Rodgers (1980s & 1990s)

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Without a doubt winning the Sigerson in 1985 was the highlight of my playing time in UCD. I was very fortunate that I got on in the final after around ten minutes when Seán Ryan (Kildare) went off. Seán had played superbly in the first two Sigerson matches but had to depart in the final because of an ankle injury. After a shaky enough start I did okay and I even managed to score the last point of the game with my left foot – much to the astonishment of all watching. When the final whistle went and we knew we had won the Sigerson it was a wonderful feeling – there's nothing quite like it.

We had a very good team. A lot of them had been there for a while but had just missed out on a Sigerson so they were hell-bent that year on winning one. That meant that there was quite a bit of experience in the team. We had fantastic players: our corner backs, Seamus O'Neill (Tipperary) and John Joe McKearney (Monaghan) [John Joe's uncle, Hugh, won a Sigerson with UCD in 1949] would not concede an inch to their opponents, regardless of the location of the ball. Niall Clancy (Dublin) and Frank McNamee (Longford) were particularly talented. Dermot Flanagan (Mayo) [whose father won Sigersons with UCD in 1945 and 1946] was a very good footballer. Andy Healy from Tipperary and Peter Smith

(Westmeath) were superb wing-backs. Mick O'Donoghue, from Valentia Island, a gentleman, scored three points from midfield in the final alongside Bill Sex, who had a wonderful game that day. We also had Noel McCaffrey (Dublin) who marked Greg Blayney very well in the final and Seán McGovern (Kildare) in the spine of the defence. Mick Lynam (Westmeath) and Jimmy Lyons (Mayo) were also excellent forwards.

After we won the Sigerson in Croke Park, we showered and then walked up to Drumcondra to get the bus, which was a huge anti-climax. After a few drinks in Hartigan's on Leeson St, the victory started to sink in and it was brilliant to walk in with the Sigerson trophy to the celebratory banquet with everyone else at their tables clapping us to our seats.

We thought the training was very tough – I'm not sure if the modern day lads would consider it as tough today but at the time it seemed very hard to us. Andy Shortall (Laois), who was an excellent trainer, would do what we called a slog session every week. First of all we would have to do a 1500m run at full tilt. Then we would have ten 80m sprints, followed by six 200m sprints, which all took place on the pitches beside Roebuck. We were segregated into different groups for the 200m runs. Trying to get to the first flag without an elbow or a dig was a tough task! By the fifth or sixth 200m run I would be running on auto-pilot as the body started to give in. The training seemed very intense. We would train for three days in a row, and then we'd have a day off, followed by another three days training again. 16 days before the Sigerson weekend (there were no preliminary rounds in them days) Andy would start tapering down the training and by the time the weekend came we were all flying (at least we thought we were!).

In the quarter-final in 1985, we had beaten a somewhat depleted Jordanstown after some of their players had been disallowed from playing because of question marks over their legitimacy. We never found out who complained about them in the first place but we played against them – and lost to them – in the 1986 and 1987 quarter finals, tournaments that they went on to win. In 1986, Jordanstown beat us after extra time; we should have beaten them in normal time. That was a really great game. In 1987 we lost by a point on the narrowest and probably worst playing field in Coleraine in a match that contained one or two questionable decisions! Jordanstown had some amazing players; including a half forward line of Derry's Enda Gormley and Dermot

McNicholl, as well as Armagh's Ger Houlahan. Although we had a great rivalry there was no animosity between us and we got on well off the field. I still bump into the likes of Paul Blaney (a Jordanstown administrator) and Enda Gormley at big matches and we always manage to have a good chat. Maynooth beat us in my final year with a goal from Laois' Leo Turley, who I would still keep in touch with.

There was a different atmosphere amongst the team for the Dublin championship. The Sigerson was everything to us. When we played in the Dublin championship we were coming into our exams, which was never the best of timing. We couldn't put the same effort into training with the exams on the horizon. In January the exams seemed very distant so we could give our all to preparing for the Sigerson. The year we won the Sigerson we lost narrowly to Fingallians in the first round of the championship but if we had won that match we might have gone on a good run.

I'm very proud to have won a Sigerson medal. I really appreciate it, as does my father, Antoin Rodgers (Donegal), who won a Sigerson with UCD in 1949. He was very friendly with P.J. Duke, who tragically died of rheumatic fever in 1950. My home club (Wolfe Tones) in Armagh was an intermediate club so it was great to play at such a high level and compete for such an important trophy. My club manager, Paddy Moriarty (who won two All-Stars playing for Armagh in the 1970s), really valued my participation in the Sigerson as he knew the benefits it would bring to my football and fitness.

I had a second life with UCD in the Sigerson, when I coached UCD to win the 1996 Sigerson with Tommy Sullivan (selector) and John Reilly (manager). They say that nothing beats winning on the pitch but the victory in 1996 came a very close second. The semi-final that year sticks out in the mind. At half-time we were losing by five points and we were in trouble so we moved Trevor Giles from centre-back to centre-forward and brought Monaghan's Joe Coyle in to the half back line. Although we played much better in the second half it was only in the last minutes of the match that we finally came back into the game on the scoresheet, scoring 1-2 to equalise and bring it to extra-time. We then got three points and a goal in the first few minutes but they came back to score 1-2 before the end of the first period of extra time and we managed to just hold on in the second period, winning by 3-14 to 3-12. UCC were a superb team and that was the best Sigerson match I ever saw.

I remembered from my time as a student in UCD that one year the hurlers had beaten a great UCC team in the semi-final of the Fitzgibbon and then lost the final the next day because I thought that they had failed to ground themselves after beating Cork. Therefore, we let the lads enjoy their moment for a few minutes after the match and then we brought them down to the most remote corner of the pitches in Limerick after the match. We told them that they had won nothing yet in order to keep their feet on the ground. The next day, we beat Garda by a goal in the final and any complacency could have cost us the match.

The 1996 team was an exceptionally good team as many of them showed later on with Brian Dooher (Tyrone), Trevor Giles (Meath) and two of the younger lads on the squad, Derek Savage and John Divilly (both Galway), all going on to win All-Irelands. Wexford's John Hegarty, Mayo's Anthony Finnerty and David Nestor, Ultan Keane (Dublin), Fachtna Collins (Cork), Alan Nolan (Roscommon), Mick O'Dowd (Meath) and Ciarán McManus (Offaly) were all wonderful and committed players, as was Bernie Butler (Roscommon), who got an ear infection on the night of the final and who therefore only came on as a sub the next day. They were a great bunch of lads, very intent on winning.

Anthony Finnerty, who had three kids by then, told me on the Thursday before our first league game that he couldn't play in the weekend match because he had to cover a relative at work in Galway because there was no one else available. Somehow though, he got out of it. He rang me at 9am on the Saturday morning and asked me if the team had been picked yet and I said no. He said 'Okay, I'm on my way'. Another instance sticks out in my mind with that team: Trevor Giles usually didn't say anything because he did his talking on the field but after one league match against Queen's he asked if he could address the team. Basically, he told the lads that that level of play wouldn't be enough to win the Sigerson. Those sort of approaches and attitudes stood to us, as did the Roscommon lads who went against their county managers' wishes – he told them they would be dropped if they did play – and turned out for us in an early season game. Actually, the marked difference between my time playing and my time coaching was that inter-county managers' demands to have their players available for themselves had increased. John Maughan and Seán Boylan were notable exceptions – they knew the benefits of Sigerson football.

Without football you would be a lost soul in UCD. Without being a member

of some club or society people would be lost so football really helped me integrate. The lads I was in class with only started to enjoy themselves in the third year whereas I was having a ball right from the start. Without football in college, life would not have been as much fun.

Mike O'Leary, who captained the team in 1987 and 1988, died tragically some years ago. A game took place in Caherciveen to raise funds for cardiomyopathy research and Goal. A UCD team of the '85-89 era played a similarly aging Caherciveen team. Even though it was nearly twenty years after the Sigerson, there was still a great camaraderie between us all. Mike's father, Frank O'Leary, played Sigerson for UCD as well. The great thing about the Sigerson is that when you meet these people again it's a pleasure to stop and talk to them.

Bill Sex, the captain of the 1985 team, was a great friend of mine. After we finished college I was down in Bill's mother's house, who said that we were very lucky to have played Sigerson Cup football because it gave us access to a huge network of people. I took it for granted until Bill Sex's mother said it. Regardless of what you won with UCD, you got to know so many people that you would not have met only for you were lucky enough to have been involved with Sigerson Cup football, and indeed made lifelong friends through the football club as well.



# Paul Fegan (1980s)

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*'I hear you play football. Well, we'll soon see what you're made of here in U.C.D.'*

These were the first words spoken to me in the Recreation Hall on the first floor of the Vet College in Ballsbridge by the late Mick O'Leary from Cahirciveen (a true gentleman). Arriving to UCD in late September 1987 having tasted success with St Colman's College, with Down Minors and with the Burren Club, I was looking forward to joining up with the UCD GAA Club. Myself and Brendan Kilcoyne (Sligo) were drafted onto the Ryan Cup squad after a few weeks of Freshers' football. This introduction to college football with the intensity and desire for success struck me immediately.

Being from a rural background, it was great to be involved in training with experienced, seasoned campaigners like Mick O'Leary, Tony McMahon, John Reilly, Colm Murphy, Norman Moloney, Andy McEntee, Liam Duggan, Pat Butterly, Stephen Fagan, the late Mick Buckley and the thigh-strained, back-strained, shoulder-strained Seamy Rodgers to name but a few.

The training was torture for that hour, but on showering and organising the post-training celebrations, the timed laps were soon forgotten. Well, they were forgotten at least until the next day of training when always at about 12 o'clock I'd remember what would be ahead of me and I'd be afraid to eat anything should I see it later!!

Andy Shorthall was a mighty man in UCD football for the first two seasons of my college career and in his own quiet but forceful way he was excellent at producing an extremely fit, well-drilled and committed team, ready to do battle in Sigerson football. Each year post-Christmas we organised a weekend away with the itinerary being two matches – one on Saturday and the other on Sunday – against county teams to imitate what a Sigerson weekend might feel like.

I do recall picking up an injury during a Saturday match against Mayo and being ruled out for the Sunday game. This left me off Mr. Shorthall's radar and into Fago's treacherous hands in the town of Ballina. The end result was a headache I hadn't bargained for on a Sunday morning.

Sigerson Cup 1987/88 was very disappointing. We were in control against Maynooth for most of the game but a few Leo Turley points in the second half put paid to our excellent chances that year. In 1988/89, with Andy at the helm again, Tony McMahon, our captain, and classmates Ger Kelly (Clare) and Pauraic Hennigan (Mayo) in the squad, we qualified comfortably. We were leading UCC in the second half, but then we were succumbed to 10 minutes of brilliance from Maurice Fitzgerald. He scored 1-2 without reply and this was enough to edge us out.

The craic in Belfast was brilliant with the bus driver keeping the whole bus in stitches, even when the windows were put out of the bus. It was some consolation for me to see my St Colman's College mates Benny Tierney, Ollie Reel and Cathal Murray lift the Sigerson Cup, along with Peter the Great.

Then 1989/90 saw Donal O'Keefe (Clare), a fantastic fella with great heart, seeking out Mick Spillane as our manager for the season. The season did not go according to our plans, but looking back we had some gifted footballers like Mick Donlon, Paul Kiernan, Terry Jennings, Peter Ward and Vinnie Henry (Offaly).

That year I do recall a night spent in the Burren Club after a match and the team were all farmed out to the local families for lodgings: the next morning there were players found all over the parish. The Burren people still speak of that night with bewilderment; many up here still wonder 'did that really happen?'

In the Sigerson, after beating Coleraine, we did not perform at all against St Mary's. This was the Sigerson that is remembered for the infamous Trinity

Boat Club debacle, when the oars, canoes and pictures from that club were all tested for floatability in the current of the River Liffey. That ended the weekend for Sigerson.

In 1990/91 I was privileged to captain the club and after a good league campaign we again lost out narrowly to Athlone IT. That team was decked with stars like Martin Lynch and Anthony Rainbow from Kildare. Again, players like James Redser Brady, Mick O'Dowd, the late Glen Crossan, Ger Kelly and Pauraic Hennigan all starred that year, but the ability of the ITs to attract high-profile players was making them difficult to defeat.

In 1991/92, Pauraic Hennigan took the reins of captaincy of the club. Fachtna Collins from Cork entered the club that year in veterinary after winning an All-Ireland minor championship. He is a legend in the Vet College and in UCD GAA. Again, the training and the league went well and we were hot favourites to beat Maynooth in the Sigerson, having beaten them well in the league, but injuries and spoiling tactics from Maynooth, coupled with a below-par performance left us a couple of points short at the end.

After five years of dedication to UCD GAA, I had to walk away without any silverware but the commitment shown by each and every player during those years (even Richie Kennedy!) was as good as any county team. Lectures, practicals, tutorials, etc., were carried out during the day, then it was home to lodgings to grab the gear and head by foot, by bicycle or by car to be on the training field for 7pm, two or three times a week. On top of that there were matches on Saturdays and maybe home for club or county football on the Sunday.

Having spent all this time with these players the social aspect of UCD GAA will always be remembered by me. Belfield bar, the Portabello, Keily's, and Bective, to name but a few, bring back memories of John Reilly singing Jockser, Mick O'Dowd giving the post-match analysis Micheál Ó Muircheartaigh style, Fago on his head defying gravity with Guinness, Buttsy messing with Donal O'Keefe, Tom Ashe looking for ice for his Powers (Seamy Rodgers looking for ice for his hamstring). And, of course, Glen Crossan coming out with some of the drollest spakes you ever heard. There were many, many more, including myself sometimes having to empty the place with the Foster and Allen great, 'Old Flames'.

# Ciarán McManus (1990s and 2000s)

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In my first year at UCD, I was captain of the Freshers' team, which really gives you a taste of what it means to represent the College. The following year I was lucky enough to be on the last UCD team to win the Sigerson down in Limerick in 1996. The pace of the games was phenomenal. I just remember the speed, quality hits and huge intensity that accompanied Sigerson games. They were a great introduction to inter-county football. My parents and grandfather came down to watch the tournament, as well as some neighbours from home. I remember scoring an important goal in the semi-final against Cork; Trevor Giles gave me a great pass and everything just teed up very nicely for me. When I got the man of the match award for the final of the tournament at the Sigerson dinner, it was a great feeling and a very proud moment for me in front of my family, friends and teammates. It was an amazing year considering it was my first year to play Sigerson.

The bus ride back to UCD the next day consisted of two of the best hours of my life. Mick O'Dowd (Meath) had us all in stitches with his Micheál Ó Muircheartaigh impressions. He did it again later in the UCD Sportsbar only to be joined by the great man himself for a head to head. We managed to bring a

moose's head back with us to Dublin from the bar in Limerick. I'm not sure which was a bigger achievement: bringing the Sigerson back or the moosehead!

When I think of training with that team in UCD, my main memories are of wet nights and running. We trained on back pitches that were suffering from incessant rain. We also had to train sometimes at 7am. It built character between us. That team was very strong. Our captain, Fachtna Collins, was a powerhouse around the midfield and a fantastic man to break up traffic in the midfield. Anthony Finnerty was a real character – the uncle of the team – and you couldn't help but laugh when Anthony was there. Because of his experience, he also helped us slow the games down at critical times. Trevor Giles and Mick O'Dowd were also great players from that team.

Sigerson is vital for college life. You only have a limited chance to be involved in it. You have over a decade to play in your county championship but only a small window during your college life to play Sigerson. There was nothing easy about winning Sigerson matches and I never remember any runaway victories. Playing so much football was tough but manageable with good planning. Training was usually on at 6.30pm until 8pm and sometimes at lunchtimes so you tried to organise yourself properly.

It took us a few years after the 1996 Sigerson victory to feature again in the closing stages of the tournament. In 1999, we came up against the hosts, a fancied NUI Galway side containing the likes of Maurice Sheridan (Mayo) in the semi-finals after defeating Galway and Mayo IT in the quarter-finals on the Friday night after extra-time. In front of a huge crowd we withstood a late Galway comeback to progress to the final against Queen's. The final took place in terrible conditions in Maigh Cuilinn. I even remember losing a boot in the muck at one stage; the game really shouldn't have been played and after the match lads were almost suffering from hypothermia. We were winning by a point going in to the last couple of minutes but Queen's came back near the death to take it to extra time and they unfortunately won it from there. The following year we also lost in the final – this time to Jordanstown.

I had the pleasure of also playing on the UCD team that won the Dublin senior championship against St. Vincents. It was a tough one for our manager Dave Billings at the time who is a great St. Vincents man. Sometimes, it was hard to get the same team together for the Dublin championship team as for

the Sigerson team because it was during the summer but that year, once we got through the first few rounds, everyone rowed in behind us.

Playing for UCD I played against and alongside great players. I competed against the likes of Liam McBarron (Fermanagh) for Queen's, Seamus Moynihan (Kerry) and Pádraig Joyce (Galway) for Tralee. I also came up against my fellow county man, Cathal Daly, when playing against the Gardai; we always made sure to beat the Gardai during my time there and, of course, Trinity in the colours' match. I played with lads such as John Hegarty, Joe Coyle, Brian Dooher, Trevor Giles, Mick O'Dowd, Breandán Ó hAinnaidh, Nigel Crawford, Cormac McAnallen (RIP) and a host of others. It was a huge help through college to know so many brilliant people. We made great friends. The first thing that comes up still when you meet football lads from UCD is the Sigerson.



📷: Ciarán Mcmanus in action for UCD. Photo courtesy of Sportsfile.



# Breandán Ó hAinídh (1990s & 2000s)

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I had the fortune to play with UCD GAA throughout my college years from 1996 to 2006! It's not that I was intellectually challenged, but rather, I was enjoying college so much during my undergraduate years that I stuck around for a few more doing a PhD, and of course playing GAA, and finally participated one last time with the teams using my year of grace. Throughout the years I played with UCD I had the honour to line out with some of the most talented and dedicated players in Ireland and befriend the greatest characters ranging from the most genuine to the most deranged! I even had the added personal pleasure to play with my brothers Dara and Oisín (the Duck) and captain the team that won the Dublin Championship in 2002. The memories of those years will never leave me and the network of UCD players has been the core of my GAA career.

The Sigerson Cup is the ultimate goal and focus of every senior university team and while we relished participating in the Dublin Championship, with great success I may add, it is the number of Sigerson finals that we lost that remains one of my most passionate memories. None so much as my first final in 2000. We had qualified to the infamous Sigerson Cup weekend and made our way to the final against Queen's University. The route to the final was arduous, playing

championship football three days in a row, made worse by the inclement weather usually associated with February. We had a fine team with solid players such as Offaly's Ciarán McManus, Meath's Nigel Crawford, Sligo's Noel Maguire, Dublin's Peadar Andrews, the two Meehans from Galway, Declan and Noel, Kerry's John Lynch, Dublin's Colin Moran and Mick O'Keeffe, Wexford's John Hegarty, and the list can go on and on, as the requirement for a full panel is paramount in a series of matches like this. The conditions in Galway (hosts) were atrocious, but I suppose seeing as the match was being televised, the games had to go on. This final went to extra time, as did some previous matches. We seemed the stronger team for much of the passages of play but Queen's kept getting vital scores to stay in touch and indeed it was Queen's who led in extra time to eventually take the cup. It was a well fought memorable battle against a team with great players such as Diarmaid Marsden, Enda McNulty, Paddy McKeever, Tom Brewster, Liam McBarron and Cormac McAnallen.



📷: Captain Breandán Ó hAinídh lifting the Dublin County title, 2002.  
Photo courtesy of Sportsfile.

Indeed, Cormac McAnallen joined UCD the following year, 2001, and proved a tremendous addition. He was that leader on the field we know, and was pivotal in our success to again reach the final the following year, this time against Jordansown (UUJ). That year was slightly different as GAA fixtures throughout Ireland were affected by the Foot-and-Mouth restrictions, so the traditional Sigerson weekend was being played out with matches over several weeks. Jordansown, with players such as Jimmy McGuinness, Paddy Bradley, John Toal, among others, proved to be more efficient at taking scores than us and won out in a well fought battle.

Despite a revamped team containing the likes of Darren Magee, Liam Óg Ó hÉineacháin, Billy Sheehan, James Sherry, Alan Brogan, and many more, 2003 was another bitter defeat in the Sigerson final as we lost out to NUIG, who put the skill of Michael Meehan to great effect.

These weren't the only occasions that we met these formidable teams. There was, of course, the league matches - the Ryan Cup. Quite often we met the likes of Queen's, Jordansown, NUIG, UCC and Sligo and beat them on these campaigns, such as in 2004, when we won the Ryan Cup, but it always seemed that they got the upper hand on us in Sigerson finals!

We had of course two successful Dublin Championship campaigns, in 2002 and 2006. In 2006 it was only because of the year of grace that I participated, but in 2002 I had the privilege and honour to captain the team and lift the Clery's Cup. It was a huge success for UCD, as it was UCD's first Dublin title in nearly three decades. This achievement after so much effort and many years of heartache was a most welcome change in fortunes and the celebrations remain indescribable ...

For all the sacrifices and efforts made by so many players, all the training, the juggling of commitment between club, county and college for so many years it was a delight to see players such as Cormac McAnallen, Ciarán McManus, Nigel Crawford, Stephen Lucey, Brian 'Beano' McDonald, Redmond Barry, Conor Evans and all the others rewarded with such a prestigious achievement.

Whenever I have met up with those UCD players over the years, be it on the pitch – more often than not on opposing teams these days, or out and about, the conversations and memories always return at some point to the experiences at our old Alma Mater.

# John O'Loughlin (2008-2010)

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The painful trip of the 2010 UCD Sigerson Cup team across the city to Belfield on 3 February 2010 after narrowly losing the first round of the Sigerson Cup to the eventual champions, DCU, was our last trip as a team after months of hard training and football. Another year had gone by and still the drought continued.

Preparations were very good last year. We were confident, we were fit, skilful and committed, and we knew beforehand that this was going to be one hell of a battle. Indeed, many had viewed this first round game as the final of the competition. On the day DCU were 2-6 to 0-9 winners. They had led by 1-4 to 0-4 at the interval.

The disappointment of this particular defeat was hard to bear and as the loss began to sink in there was a sombre atmosphere in the dressing room and on the bus home. Later, with DCU going on to win the competition, we know we were incredibly close, and this has left a feeling of unfinished business which we hope to address in the 2011 competition.

It was another disappointment to heap on top of the fact that we had lost to our other Dublin rivals, DIT, at the semi-final stage the previous year. That 2009 Sigerson had been such a brilliant time, full of unforgettable matches. When UCD had played UL in the second round of the competition in Belfield, in February 2009, a hard-fought victory was ground out – UCD 1-16 UL 1-15 – after

two periods of extra time. Huge character, commitment, and pride was shown in this game from every single UCD player. UL were leading by one point with less than a minute remaining, but a spirited UCD team never gave up, showed everything that was good about the college and equalized and took the game from there.

Next up were the highly rated Guards, in Templemore. We were faced with a huge challenge. On a cold February day, UCD produced an amazing performance that saw us beat the Guards 0-15 to 0-12, with all 15 points coming from play: an incredible result, where huge credit was due to the management, as well as the players.

As with any team great friendships built up throughout the year, especially after great wins like these. When lads are living with each other and training together daily, a bond is created and that was the case with this team. After these victories there was great banter amongst the team, especially on the bus journey home from Templemore, then later on in CopperFace Jacks, where we regularly had great nights out during the year.

We were then heading for CIT, Cork, for the Sigerson weekend where we played DIT and were beaten in the semi-final. Ultimately, we failed to win the competition in 2009, but the manner in which we got through to the semi-final epitomised the courage and skill of every player involved.

I have had the honour of captaining the last two UCD Sigerson teams, a huge privilege that I am very grateful for, especially to those who gave me the opportunity of representing Ireland's most prestigious university, and the university that has dominated the competition, winning 32 titles.

The stats of the last few Sigerson campaigns will tell their own tale, but once the results are forgotten, the bitter pill of defeat swallowed and digested, that aspect of pride and dignity may end up being the most important of all. When playing and representing UCD in the Sigerson Cup there is a general feel-good factor of playing in the competition.

This is complemented by the huge effort that is required. Like quite a few players on college teams, I play club and county football also, and at times it can be a lot of training and very time-consuming. Like anything, however, if managed properly then playing with a number of teams is very achievable, and

📷: John O'Loughlin in action  
Photo courtesy of Sportsfile.





of course the first two months of the year are dedicated to the Sigerson team, just like the summer months are dedicated to the county team, and the autumn to the club team.

Sigerson training can often be very condensed and tough. The training starts well before Christmas, in the gym and on the field, but then after Christmas, there could be two or three training sessions in one day, e.g. a fitness session and a tactical session.

The big thing with Sigerson compared to other championships is that it is so early in the year. This is a challenge. Sigerson players are generally trying to peak at that time, as well as other times for inter-county matches. During this time I feel it is essential for players to be managed properly in order to make sure that they are not doing too much and in turn are able to peak for the Sigerson, first and foremost. After all, it is the first big competition on the GAA's calendar.

During my time as captain there have been great days for the College in the competition, days that I am honoured to say I was a part of. There were days when players and management alike have left the playing field with smiles on their faces and treasured memories at their experience of representing UCD at the pinnacle of Colleges' football.

Still, I really feel the pain of defeat from the last few campaigns, and knowing that the College was very close to winning the competition has reignited the passion for success that had been so doused by the disaster of losing so narrowly and agonisingly for the last few seasons. What better time for the passion to be reignited than the centenary year of the completion, when UCD are hosting it.

# Century of Sigerson has served the GAA well

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## Eugene McGee

*Eugene McGee was involved as mentor with seven winning Sigerson teams with UCD from 1968 to 1979.*

One thing that can definitely be said about the Sigerson Cup competition is that it has stood the test of time admirably. As the second oldest national competition after the GAA championships themselves, the Sigerson has survived two World Wars, a Civil War, the conflicts in the Six Counties and numerous political upheavals of a less dramatic nature. It has also managed to etch its place firmly in GAA history despite being a minority sport in that very few teams are eligible to compete, unlike intercounty or club competitions. So there must be something special attached to the Sigerson that has ensured its very respectable place in the national body that is the GAA after 100 years.

But where does one start when attempting to define why the Sigerson is so respected? Is it because of the great nationally known football icons who played for the various colleges, the development of new teams from obscurity into winning the competition, or the longevity of the competition dating back to 1911 and its survival when other national competitions like the Railway Cup or the Oireachtas in hurling have all but disappeared?

The Sigerson is all of these and a lot more besides. From players' point of view possibly the biggest attraction is that it offers those who have or are keen rivals at other times a chance to temporarily suspend their sporting animosities to one another and come together as 'bands of brothers' for the honour and glory of winning a Sigerson. Over the years there have been numerous examples of this such as players from Kerry and Cork uniting with fervour to play for UCC, Down and Armagh men creating a truce long enough to combine their talents with Queen's University for more than 60 years and later with University of Jordanstown or St. Mary's College. And rabid Dublin players were eager enough to broaden their horizons to the extent that they became bosom pals, for football at least, when wearing the Sky Blue and Gold of UCD.

It was these sorts of relationships that provided one of the core values of the Sigerson – friendship. All over Ireland students went on to graduate and pursue their careers in every corner of the country and abroad but the strong bonds of friendship engendered on the training grounds at the various colleges lasted for a lifetime – even when in their later careers some of these players were in ferocious opposition with their respective counties. A good example of this was in the 1973 All-Ireland final when Dave McCarthy played for the winners Cork and his direct opponent in that final was Joe Waldron of Galway. Not only did they both play with UCD but they were also in the faculty of Agriculture. Pat O'Neill of Dublin and UCD would have 'clashed', which is a nice way of putting it, with UCD colleagues from Kerry like John O'Keeffe and Denis 'Ogie' Moran in the hectic contests between those counties in the seventies and many similar personal contests took place over the years.

Invariably when GAA people discuss the Sigerson they talk of great players whose fame was generated from their intercounty performances. In UCD alone about 60 players have won All-Ireland medals and in the past 25 years many Ulster players from the Belfast colleges have also won All Irelands as have players from nearly all the other third-level institutions. At least five UCD players have collected the Sam Maguire cup as All-Ireland captains: Seán Flanagan (twice), Donie O'Sullivan, Mickey Ned O'Sullivan, Ogie Moran and Brian Dooher who also played with Queen's. From UCG winning captains were Seamus O'Malley, Mick Higgins, John Donnellan and Enda Collieran (twice) and Ray Silke and winning captains from other colleges such as Billy Morgan, Tony Hanahoe (twice), Kevin Heffernan, Kevin Mussen, Tommy Drumm, Jimmy Deenihan,

Henry Downey, D.J. Kane, Seamus Moynihan, Kieran McGeeney, Peter Canavan and Dara O'Cinneide, while there may also be others.

But the magic of Sigerson football has often been the presence of non-county players who fought their way onto Sigerson teams, often at the expense of famous county players, and became literally legends in their own right because of their heroic performances in Sigerson matches. I often recall hearing people in the crowd at a Sigerson Cup game commenting something like: 'That fellow is a great player, where did he come out of?' They had never heard of the lad but could see that when it came to the Sigerson he was the man for the job. The reason is simple enough. Such players were usually from weaker counties who had little or no prospect of winning a provincial or All-Ireland title so they grasped the opportunity provided by playing for UCD to compete at the highest level.

Even in one of UCD's best periods in the seventies when six Sigersons were won in seven years there were many players who were not intercounty stars such as Frank Donoghue from Galway, Bernie Jennings, Mayo, Michael Judge, Sligo, Paddy Gray, Meath and Joe Joe O'Connor from Kerry who were but some of these unsung performers who played vital roles in all those victories. Jackie Walsh from Kerry was not a big star with the Kingdom but was often regarded as the most important contributor to UCD successes.

Sigerson football played a vital role down the years in improving standards in many counties, particularly the less glamorous ones because the experience those players gained from training with a team like UCD and playing with and against players from the leading counties often inspired change and innovation in those weaker counties. One of the best examples of that was when Queen's University won their first Sigerson Cup in 1958/59. That was regarded as a sensational result at the time but the victory changed the course of GAA history at county level as players from that Queen's team, such as Seán O'Neill of Down and Phil Stuart of Derry, played key roles in the emergence of Ulster counties as major players at national level. Derry played in the 1958 All-Ireland final while Down won their first two All-Irelands in 1960 and '61.

One of the fascinating aspects of the Sigerson in relation to UCD, and it was probably the same in the other colleges, was how a particular faculty or county could dominate a Sigerson team selection at particular times. In UCD the

Agriculture Faculty (Ags) were always very strong – in every sense of the word. But now and again the Medical Faculty would produce three or four team members at one time and once in the seventies there was a batch of Vets who made a big impression, including Tony McManus (Roscommon), Tommy Murphy (Wicklow), P.J. O'Halloran (Meath), Ivan Heffernan (Mayo) and P.J. Finlay (Monaghan) all of whom played in the Sigerson winning team of 1977. As regards batches from the same county, Meath had four players on the 1976 Sigerson team: Gerry McEntee, Colm O'Rourke, P. J. O'Halloran and Paddy Gray.

Further back in the forties Cavan was always very strongly represented in UCD Sigerson teams at a time when the county was generally among the top four counties in Ireland. They had legendary figures like Barney Cully, P. J. Duke (who died while still a student in UCD), Edwin and Paddy Carolan and T. P. O'Reilly, all of whom won All-Irelands with Cavan. Indeed Cavan was one of the most prominent Sigerson contributors in the fifties as well and had four players in the winning 1957/58 team: Brian O'Reilly, Jim McDonnell, James Brady and Cathal Young. Not surprisingly Kerry teams often dominated UCC teams while UCG often had half a dozen or more players from Galway or Mayo. Very often the captain of Sigerson teams had an enormous influence because until the seventies Sigerson teams were largely selected and controlled by the team captain.

There have been many records regarding teams and individuals during the course of Sigerson history but some caveats have to be issued in certain cases. For example for many years up to about the 1950s, UCG and Queen's were given permission to play a few non-students to boost their playing resources. So it was often difficult to establish when a team was totally student-registered or just 'visitors'. UCG would appear to have two records firstly as the only college to have won six successive Sigersons from 1936/'37 onwards. Indeed in the period 1933/'34 to 1941/'42 UCG won eight out nine Sigersons, which was a phenomenal record. The record for individual Sigerson medals would appear to be Mick Raftery from Galway and UCG who has an astonishing EIGHT Sigerson medals from 1933/'34 to 1941/'42 and all while playing at fullback. Mick was a staunch UCG supporter all his life and hardly ever missed a university game in Galway. UCD won five in a row from the late 1920s to the early 1930s and several hat-tricks of victories including two in the seventies but Maynooth's historic first Sigerson title in 1975/'76 deprived UCD of six in a row.

By modern-day standards it was easy for the original Sigerson entrants, UCD, UCC and UCG to win a lot of titles as they were the only three playing for the first 30 years or so and Queen's only won their first title in 1958/'59.

Everything has changed in the past 25 years as the arrival of many new third-level institutions changed the Sigerson landscape forever. The growth of new colleges did two things: it weakened the traditional universities as young footballers now had many more academic courses in the new institutions and the arrival of thousands of new students allowed many new colleges to grow and eventually match the traditional universities. Therefore after Maynooth's win we have seen Sigerson titles going to University of Jordanstown, St. Mary's Belfast, Tralee IT, Sligo IT, Cork IT and DCU. This expansion has meant that the old-style Sigerson where all the competing colleges arrived in one city and the competition was played off over two or three days has had to end, much to the then regret of many, and qualifying games have to be played at different locations to produce the four teams competing at the annual Sigerson venue. This year to mark the centenary there will be eight teams competing in UCD Belfield on a once-off basis.

The Sigerson of course was not just about playing football because the administrative side of the GAA was a huge beneficiary of university students involved with the respective GAA clubs. UCD produced several GAA Presidents starting with Seamus Gardiner from Clare, who won Sigersons in the nineteen twenties. Seán Ryan also played for UCD in the 1920s. Former President Donal Keenan won several Sigersons with UCD in the forties and also starred in Roscommon's All-Ireland victories of 1943 and '44. Hugh Byrne from Wicklow was also a member of the UCD club and in more recent times Seán Kelly played Intermediate football for UCD on his way to being President. Mick Loftus from Mayo was a Sigerson winner with UCG and went on to be GAA President as did Alf Murray of Armagh who played for Queen's University. Dr. Joe Stuart was a GAA President and a lifelong administrator with UCD football and hurling clubs. Other GAA presidents with Sigerson experience included Peter Quinn (Queen's) and Joe McDonagh (UCG). Numerous County Chairmen also were former Sigerson players in all the colleges and indeed providing leadership in the GAA was always regarded as one of the primary benefits of all university GAA clubs to this day.

Summing up we can truthfully say that the role of the Sigerson Cup in the



development and success of the GAA over the last 100 years has been very substantial. Inspiring players from weaker counties to be more ambitious when they returned to their own counties, setting very high standards of preparation and discipline among all the colleges and supplying a constant supply of leaders within the GAA's structures all combined to make the Sigerson, its tradition and continuing influential role pivotal components in the success story of Cumann Lúthcleas Gael.

## UCD and the Sigerson

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Last kick-out of the 1968 Sigerson final at Croke Park.  
Photo courtesy of Benny Gaughran.

