

Junior Runner-Up
Aoibhinn Keegan
Ballinamore Community School, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim
Teacher – Neil Slevin



A GAA Legend

My name is Kate Kilkenny and this is the story of how I won an All-Ireland.

It was the year 2020 and I was at the top of my game, playing with my club's senior team. I was the team captain and I had never played so much football in my life.

One Sunday night I was chilling on my couch with my dog Rosco, when suddenly *bling bong bong* my phone started ringing. I looked at the screen, it was an unknown number, but I still answered. "Helloooo? Kate's phone," I shouted.

A man said, "Hi Kate, it's Dave Moran here, I was wondering if you would like to come and participate in the Senior Dublin County Trials."

I screamed and replied with a high-pitched "Yes!" Dave gave me the details of the trial and after I hung up, me and my dog jumped around the kitchen with joy.

The following Saturday I was in my car on the way to county trials for Dublin. I was only 19 years old and I couldn't believe this was happening. When I got there my stomach basically shot out of my mouth and landed all the way in Leitrim -- that's what it felt like anyway. When I got to the football pitch, there were no women there, only men.

I thought I had the wrong address, but out of nowhere a man came up behind me and said, “Kate, it’s Dave Moran, I spoke on the phone to you. I’m so glad you could come down.”

I thought to myself, This man must be mad, but I was wrong. It turned out they wanted me, a woman, to try out for the men’s team -- the Senior Dublin County Team. Dean Rock had torn his cruciate ligament and they wanted a replacement. I didn’t think I could do it but I forced myself to put my boots on and I played my heart out.

A week or two went by and I thought there was no chance I would get picked. Then one evening I was on my laptop when I got an email from Dave Moran.

Dear Miss Kilkenny,
I am happy to say you made the panel and I can’t wait to see what you will bring.

DM

I couldn’t believe it, it felt like a dream – all my Christmases together were not as amazing as that moment.

A few months later, after many tough training sessions, the All-Ireland Final came. Mayo were our opposition for the match. I was on the bench, which made me sad, but then again I was the only woman on the panel.

Come the last ten minutes of the match, Mayo were up by two points when Dave, our manager, called out, “Kate, it’s time for your debut!”

I ran out onto the pitch with nerves jangling in my stomach. There were two minutes left when our team got the ball and Johnny Cooper passed to me. I felt sick but he screamed at me, “G’wan, ya legend!”

I dodged players like having to eat vegetables and took a shot. My whole life was flashing before my eyes as the ball flew through the air but it went wide.

With one minute left on the clock, things weren’t looking good. I thought to myself, Did I just ruin our chance of winning? as the Mayo keeper kicked out the ball. It flew close to me so I leapt in the air with my hands up and, to my surprise, I caught the ball.

This was my chance to prove that I belonged. I grabbed the ball and blasted it goalward...

BANG! It went right into the roof of the net. I couldn't believe my eyes. Then the ref blew his whistle, and it was all over. Dublin had won and I had helped them win it.

Hill 16 started chanting at me, "Legend, legend, LEGEND," and we got to lift the Sam Maguire. It was the best feeling ever.

I couldn't believe I was the first woman to win a men's All Ireland..