The Amateur-Professional Debate: An Exploration of Attitudes and Opinions within the Gaelic Athletic Association

Michael H. Frain BA, GDBA

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UCD School of Public Health and Population Science

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Tara Magdalinski
**ABSTRACT**

The amateur-professional debate is a recurrent theme within the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). This exploratory study reviews the literature in terms of the preconditions to and the implications of professionalism in sport, with specific reference to both rugby union and soccer. This review provides the framework for the discussion on the key issues pertaining to the debate using qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, namely, senior inter-County players, senior administrators and executive members of the Gaelic Players Association (GPA).

In addition to payment for play, the research identifies and discusses the attitudes and opinions of the participants on other important aspects which are relevant to the debate; these include firstly, broken-time payments and shamateurism, commercialisation and sponsorship; secondly, the structural implications, particularly, player contracts and transfers; the implications for the club; thirdly, the role of players’ association; fourthly, the role of the GPA within the amateur-professional debate; and finally a review of amateurism. The results of the research highlight that the aforementioned aspects are central to the amateur-professional debate within an indigenous sports organisation. The research identifies that professionalism within the GAA cannot be examined solely in terms of direct payment to the players.
DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I declare that the material contained in this thesis is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

Signed: __________________________________________

Date: __________________________________________
DEDICATION

To my Mother Margaret and my deceased Father Henry

To my Wife Gráinne and Sons Aodhán and Cillian
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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Contextual Overview

Whether the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) can remain an amateur organisation is a recurring theme that the organisation has to consider and respond to on an ongoing basis. At the Annual Congress in April 2008, in what is viewed by many members as further diminution of amateurism; the GAA agreed to sanction the payment of eligible expenses through the Annual Team Performance Scheme and the Annual Support Scheme for the Development of Excellence in Indigenous Sports of Hurling and Gaelic football, formerly known and more commonly referred to as the player grants. The concept of player grants scheme emanated from a GPA proposal to the Irish Government in 2002 to extend the tax breaks currently available to elite professional athletes to senior inter-county hurling and Gaelic football players (Moran, 2007a). The agreement was the culmination of approximately six years of negotiation between the GAA, the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) and the Irish Government.

Accordingly, a €3.5 million Government grant was made available and disbursed through the Irish Sports Council to the GAA in December 2008. This benefited approximately 1800 senior inter-County players (O’Riordan, 2008a). The GAA wanted to ensure that the scheme did not contravene Rule 11 on amateurism, which is contained within their official guide, while at the same time guaranteeing that the move was generally in consonance with European law and tax exemption. In order avoid accusations of direct financial assistance, the GAA reacted by re-branding the
Generally, the status of the players involved in the Gaelic game can be described as amateur, since they are not directly remunerated for playing games. However, the GAA is far from being amateur in the strictest sense. As a modern sporting entity the GAA has undergone a multifaceted evolutionary process that has seen the Association adopting and embracing many attributes existing within other well established professional sporting organisations. Indeed, it can be argued, and this will be highlighted later in this research, that the primary difference between the GAA and other professional sporting organisations is the fact that senior inter-County players are not paid to play. In the context of Ireland, there is a general paucity of academic literature on the amateur-professional debate in sport. Therefore, the literature review explores existing academic sources from other countries where the concept of professionalism in sport is discussed and documented much more extensively. This research, based on interviews, primarily examines attitudes and opinions within the amateur-professional debate. Prior to discussing the central tenets of this research, it is germane to provide at a general level, a brief overview of the formation of the GAA, as well as outlining the major trends that have characterised the development of amateurism within the organisation.

1.1 The Formation and Rationale for the GAA

The Irish famine of 1845, and the mass emigration that ensued in the aftermath of this tragedy, combined to impede the development of both the cultural and sporting landscape in Ireland. By the late nineteenth century and the earlier decades of the
twentieth century, England’s control over the Ireland fostered a climate of intense antagonism that provided a rationale for various waves of Irish republican rebellion. Aside from the nationalist, sporting, and political reasons, the foundation of the GAA reflected the fear and anxiety within the Irish population that the distinctiveness of Irish culture would be systematically eroded if organised sports were directed and coordinated from England (Mandle, 1987).

By the latter part of the nineteenth century Victorian sport had become well established in Ireland. Sports Clubs and associations were organised or in the process of organising in athletics, badminton, boxing, cricket, rugby football, association football, tennis, rowing, and swimming (Mullan, 1995). The urgency to assert Irishness within sport was compounded by a crisis in terms of national identity. The founders of the GAA considered the bond of unity created by sport as a vehicle which could be used to enhance a sense of national identity and pride among Irish people (de Búrca, 1999; Cronin, 1999). Furthermore, the founders of the GAA disliked the broader imperialist agenda of British sport. However, not all of British colonies reacted in similar manner. In the southern hemisphere, some colonies were keen to adopt both cricket and rugby, while focusing on beating the British at of their own games. Nevertheless, like the British, they were averse to the corruption and gambling that were linked to professional sport, while also concurring that sport should provide a basis for moral development (Holt, 2009).

The GAA was founded in November 1884 in Thurles, Co.Tipperary with the objective of administering and managing the activities of two indigenous field sports, namely Hurling and Gaelic Football. The Association is primarily an all-Ireland sporting and cultural organisation which promotes Irish culture and national identity,
through participation in indigenous field games and pastimes. In terms of Irish history the GAA is a unique manifestation of the relationship between sport and nationalism in Ireland (Cronin, 1999). The establishment of the Association can be located within the overall context of governance within the country. It can be argued that the advent of the GAA provided a conduit for expressing Irish nationalism in ways that perhaps, defied the conventional model of national sport development in other countries (Mullan, 1995). Some commentators within the literature (Allison, 2002; Cronin, 1999) discuss the importance of the interrelationship between nationalism and sport, arguing that sport enhances national identity. Furthermore, Jarvie (2003) contends that while globalisation may have undermined the relationship between nationalism and sport, it is still relevant in the context of modern sport.

While the early development of the GAA is viewed by critics in some respects as being politically motivated owing to the fact the founding members of the Association were patently opposed to linkages with a British label, including “new bourgeois sports” (Mullan, 1995: 268). Nevertheless, the organisation was energised by the social and cultural developments taking place – as a reaction to, and a consequence of the modernisation that prevailed during this period (Cronin, 1999). An interesting irony within the evolutionary phase of the development of the GAA is highlighted in the decision to adopt and defend the concept amateurism which (while being more pragmatic) was a key identifier of English sport during the mid to late nineteenth century. The founders of the GAA wanted to ensure that the organisation was democratic and therefore pursued the realisation of their activities with little class distinction.
During this period those who administered the Irish Amateur Athletics Association (IAAA) adopted class based rules on amateurism, similar to gentleman amateur rules that were adopted in England. Despite this, many instances occurred in Dublin athletics during the 1870s where fraudulent handicapping and the awarding of prize money to amateurs was prevalent (de Búrca, 1999). For instance, Michael Cusack, a driving force in the foundation of the GAA, had participated in a wide variety of sports as was the norm for the Victorian era. Cusack as an all-round sportsperson criticised the IAAAs rigid definition of amateurism for excluding “people who are vulgar enough to be muscular” (de Búrca, 1989: 83).

As involvement in sporting activities in Ireland during the 1880s became the preserve of the ruling classes, members of the ordinary working class seldom participated in what were generally perceived as socially exclusive leisure pursuits (Tierney, 1976). Nevertheless, the formation of GAA provided a counter balance to the class distinction that existed. As the sectarian fault lines between Catholics and Protestants intensified, demarcations developed within Irish sports that replicated the broader bifurcation of sports into Gaelic and Anglo-Irish factions, which forced large parts of the population as well as social groups to follow one segment or the other (Mullan, 1995).

By the early 1880s, the political and social changes in Ireland had influenced Cusack’s mindset. At this time, Cusack was cultivating his career in journalism, and he used this as a platform to promote and re-establish Gaelic sports, particularly hurling (Rouse, 2009). He disliked the class based structure and the elitist attitude within the administrative hierarchy of the sporting bodies, who at the time, refused to recognise the right of the working classes to participate in their activities. Overall
Cusack’s campaign in 1884 can be seen as a culmination of efforts to enable ordinary Irishmen to compete in recognised Irish games. His intention was primarily to utilise native games and language as vehicles to energise national culture, identity and pastimes, which were increasingly on the brink of extinction. (de Búrca 1999).

Cusack continually sought patronage and support for the GAA wherever he could find it and selected people from a broad spectrum of the Irish nationalist movement. In addition to being aligned with nationalism, the GAA also developed a strong alliance with prominent clerics within the Catholic Church. After the inaugural meeting Dr Thomas William Croke, then Catholic Archbishop of Cashel was invited to be one of the first patrons of the GAA. Croke became a passionate voice for the Association’s progress during the embryonic years (Tierney, 1976), constantly championing a viewpoint that highlighted the need for native Irish people to dedicate greater interest and resources to save hurling and other forms of Irish sports that were already facing declining popularity. (Holt 1989).

Cusack further displayed an enduring leadership by garnering support from individuals such as Michael Davitt (Leader of the Irish Land League) and Charles Stewart Parnell. Both of these were parliamentary representatives of Irish democracy who advocated a revival of Irish sports. As Mandle (1987) noted, the selection of Croke, Davitt and Parnell as patrons of the Association represented a significant recognition of the major forces in the Irish nationalist movement.

Initially the Association wanted to limit the importation of foreign/non-Irish games (mainly soccer, rugby, hockey and cricket which were viewed as British Games) into Ireland. In 1887, this was demonstrated by the introduction of a contentious and
infamous rule of membership, more commonly referred to as ‘the ban’. This Ban may be viewed as the ultimate expression of the GAA’s intimate association with nationalism. For the proponents, the nationalist ethos implicit in continued acceptance of the ban was essential to the growth of the organisation. In essence, it prohibited membership of the GAA for any person who played, promoted or attended foreign games or who was a member of the British defence and security forces (Rouse 1993). The Ban, which was one of the most divisive rules, existed for eighty-four years and was seen as a potent symbol of the GAA’s intimate relationship with nationalism (Mandle 1987).

From 1884 onwards, the GAA underwent rapid evolution, and just two years after being established, approximately 400 affiliated Clubs had been established. In comparative terms, this was a remarkable feat, as the two main rivals; the Irish Football Association (IFA) and the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), both founded earlier, witnessed less spectacular rates of expansion than the newly formed GAA (Garnham, 2004).

1.2 The Organisation Structure of the GAA

The GAA is a community, club or parish based organisation, with the club being the primary focus of much of the Association’s activities. As with many large sporting organisations, the club members despite being the largest grouping within the Association hold the least amount of power. The club members are represented by elected officials within each club who constitute the Club Executive Committee. Each club elects one or two members (depending on whether club plays one or two codes) who are delegates to the County Board (also known as County Committee). The
County Delegates in turn elect officers of the County Board at the Annual County Convention.

The Provincial Councils are comprised of two representatives from each County within a particular province. The Provincial Council elects officers (chairperson, secretary, treasurer and public relations officer) the secretary of the provincial council is normally a full-time professional. The Provincial Council reports to the Management Committee and ultimately the Central Council, which “is the supreme governing body of the Association” (GAA Official Guide, 2006: 48). Central Council implements decisions taken at the Annual Congress, interprets rules and issues binding decisions covering all aspects of the organisation. The Central Council composition, powers and function are set out in rules 84 and 85 of the official guide (GAA Official Guide, 2006).

1.3 The GAA: A Bastion of Amateurism?

The maintenance and protection of the Association’s de facto amateur status, (amateurism was not formally discussed until 1953) has been a ubiquitous issue which the organisation has grappled with since the embryonic years. By the late 1880s and early 1890s, the issue amateurism had become the subject of discussion, as the expenses incurred by most inter-County teams were reimbursed. While there was a trend towards professionalism in other sports; due to the small Irish population and economy, it was acknowledged that Gaelic games did not have the ability to generate adequate revenue to adopt a professional model. Some County Boards recognised the need to address issues pertaining to player welfare, which took the form of remuneration to players who were injured, and assisting them in securing employment (McAnallen, 2009).
From 1913, collective training became a regular occurrence for successful senior inter-County teams. Even at this early stage, the Louth team while preparing for national finals, hired professional coaches and paid the players wages for two weeks training (Corry, 1989). In 1953, the GAA central council established a committee to examine the area of full-time collective training which occurred, particularly during the summer months. The committee reached the conclusion that inconsistencies had developed around the issue of amateurism owing to the disbursement of cash or benefit in kind to players (McAnallen, 2009). Thus, in 1954 at the GAA Annual Congress, a ban on collective training camps was enacted - this was “the first time the amateur status of Gaelic team sports was referred to in rule” (McAnallen, 2009: 172). However, amateurism was not defined, and the penalties for any breaches of the rule were not stipulated (McAnallen, 2009).

In 1971, a major watershed was reached in the development of the GAA, as the annual congress that year decided to rescind ‘the ban’ on foreign games, (Rouse, 1993). Furthermore, for the first time since 1954, the rule on amateurism was amended, with the new rule defining the GAA as an amateur association, while prohibiting any forms of “payment or other material reward…for participation in games and pastimes” (GAA Official Guide, 1971: 3-4).

Following these reforms, the GAA in 1971 approved commercial sponsorship of activities on a limited basis. This decision enabled the Association to increase their profile, while simultaneously generating supplementary finance to fund other activities. An expansion in media attention, marketing and preponderance towards commercialism through access to Television in the 1970s, propelled Gaelic games to
more significant prominence. By the late 1970s and 1980s, top-level GAA players had gained national recognition, and it was not unusual for senior inter-county players to gain employment or generate additional business for themselves as a consequence of their involvement with inter-County teams. A Kerry player of this era summed it up, “If you look at the prominent players of that era, they did well” (Foley, 2007: 111).

In 1986, there was a significant milestone in terms of a comprehensive review of amateurism. This was only the second time an amendment to the rule on amateur status was enacted since 1954. Three new principles underpinned rule. Firstly, no-one could receive a payment as part of their membership of the Association. Secondly; expenses were paid at a threshold agreed and sanctioned by the Central Council, and finally, any members in breach of the rule incurred a minimum six months suspension (McAnallen, 2009).

An examination of internal GAA documents and reports reveals that the Association’s administrative hierarchy were suspicious about possible infringements to the amateur status. This is manifested by the fact that the GAA reviewed the amateur status issues more regularly from 1983 to 1997 inclusive (Amateur Status Report, 1997). These reviews led to the revision of certain rules which reflected the developments within modern sport, particularly in relation to commercialism and endorsements.

In 1986 the Association consulted with a variety of players, team officials and County Board officials. The 1986 report reached the following salient conclusions: (1) few players were in favour of professionalism or semi-professionalism; but players wanted reasonable treatment in relation to player welfare (travelling expenses, meals, and playing gear for training matches); (2) There was little evidence of abuse of the
Association’s amateur status rules by players. However, it strongly advocated that the
Association should take action against members who breached the rules; (3) despite
anecdotal suggestions; there was no evidence of players demanding appearance
money for attending club functions. Nevertheless, it reiterated that payment for such
appearance constituted a breach of the Association’s rules; (4) there were further
anecdotal allegations concerning payments to a very small number of inter-County
team coaches/managers, and a greater number of club team coaches/managers.
Consequently, emphasis was placed on the need to uncover and punish all those
involved in any proven malpractice, in accordance with the Association’s rules. In
addition the report re-emphasised the necessity for maintaining the voluntary
commitment of all members (Amateur Status Report, 1997).

As a consequence of aforementioned conclusions, the sub-committee who drafted the
1986 report highlighted that “while it had been unable to find proof of any violations
of the Association’s rules, it believed that breaches had occurred and were occurring
and that these were being aided and abetted by GAA units or people who turned a
blind eye to them” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 2). In 1989, The Annual Report to
Congress identified that the most serious breaches of amateurism emanating from the
1986 review involved the payment of coaches at club level, as well as, the payment of
appearance money to players for attending club functions or events (GAA Annual

This overview demonstrates that the maintenance of amateurism has been a constant
source of concern for the leadership of the Association, and while the aforementioned
findings are unlikely to have startled many members, they are quite revealing. While
the GAA accepted the existence of breaches to amateurism, it chose to adopt a policy
of inertia in face of such allegations. As was the case with the 1954 review, the 1986 rule was not implemented or reinforced and no member was suspended from the Association on grounds of breaching the rules on amateurism.

Since 1986, the issue of amateurism has been reviewed on four occasions, and the conclusions have been broadly similar. It was in this context that in 1997, the Central Council of the GAA established a sub-committee to further review the interpretation of the amateur rules. The Association accepted that the challenges “cannot be ignored or allowed to develop organically or randomly” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 4). The objectives of the report were to identify methods to maintain the amateur ethos, decide if further amendments should be implemented, and propose how any changes should be enforced (Amateur Status Report, 1997).

The 1997 report concluded that there was a lack of awareness between the senior inter-County players and the County Board officers in relation to the County Board finances. In addition, the report stated that “there is virtually no demand at any level within the Association for payment for playing” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 4). Furthermore, the findings addressed the issue of broken-time payments, stating “that reimbursement for lost time as distinct from out of pocket expenses incurred is tantamount to payment for playing” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 4). This statement illustrates that the prevailing concerns around the issue of broken-time payment within the Association have been evident for some time.

In total, the 1997 Amateur Status Report made 28 recommendations. Some of the more relevant recommendations pertaining to this research can be summarised as
follows: (1), Members of County squads should receive a mileage allowance (which at this time were a minimum 18p and a maximum 30p per mile). However, depending on their financial position County Boards should have the right to determine what mileage rate was paid. (2), Inter-County panels should be provided with meals of an acceptable quality after both matches and training sessions. In addition, all squad members should be supplied with adequate training and playing equipments; (3), Players could write articles or books, and appear as guest panellists on radio or television programmes and be paid for same. (4), Players or teams were not allowed to appoint a personal agent(s) to develop commercial and financial opportunities arising from their involvement in Gaelic games; (5), the expenses paid to club managers, coaches etc must not exceed the prescribed limits. In addition County Boards must approve annually the level of expenses being paid to those involved in managing club teams; (6), No club or County can offer any form of financial inducement to a player from another club or County to transfer his allegiance. Any proven violations shall result in the imposition of penalties in accordance with the Association’s rules.

A further recommendation stated that “players should be allowed to endorse [commercial] products not in direct competition with any relevant national, provincial, County or player’s club sponsor” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 7). In addition, the report contended that the Association should establish and manage their own internal structure to oversee developments in relation to product endorsement and commercial appearances for both players and teams, and ensure that the players will not be liable “to excessive fiscal deductions” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 8). This formally enabled players to benefit financially from their image rights. While the
decision may be viewed as radical departure from the Association’s previous stance, it ensured that Gaelic games continued to compete with other professional sports. The decision must be viewed through a broader prism of other sports, as in the 1990s both rugby and soccer players benefited from product endorsement as a means of generating additional income (Conlon, 1997).

By relaxing the regulations and allowing players to benefit financially from endorsements, the Association created an unintended consequence in terms of the restrictions on hiring personal agents. It is debatable if the GAA can prevent players from hiring personal agents as this could be construed as restrictive practice (Conlon, 1997). Thus, some of the recommendations emanating from the 1997 report illustrate the pragmatic approach that the organisation has adopted. This demonstrates once again, that the GAA has been prepared to compromise provided the core principle, direct monetary payment for the playing of the games remains in tact.

The 1998 Annual Report to Congress highlighted a failure of the 1997 Amateur Status Committee to address the issue of alleged payments to team managers and coaches. The report by the Director General contended that given the amount of preparatory work and time dedicated to a training County teams, “there is a strong case to be made for paying County team managers an allowance” (Annual Report, 1998: 13). The oversight by the 1997 Amateur Status Committee in relation to this matter is surprising given that in the preceding Annual Report to Congress, the Director General alluded to the fact the issue of paying County team managers needs to be addressed (Annual Report, 1997). Evidently, the Association has a misguided opinion
that by ignoring breaches of amateur status regulations, they would not become a pervasive culture throughout the organisation.

In 2002, the amateur status was revisited in an overall strategic review of the Association. This review noted a prevailing dissatisfaction amongst players with respect to concerns over payments to team coaches and managers, with indications that players may “ultimately demand the same terms and conditions for playing themselves” (Strategic Review, 2002: 205). This development will incur major financial implications across all levels of the Association (Strategic Review, 2002). The GAA has to accept some responsibility for ‘fuelling the flames’ in relation to the amateur-professional debate. While the organisation has endeavoured to ensure that it is fair to the elite players who benefit from commercial arrangements, this has unintended consequences, as the expectations of players are increased.

Furthermore, the 2002 review, alluded to the financial opportunities available for players. This review recommended that “players involved in a sponsorship, or promotional arrangement can receive all the benefits…apart from any statutory deductions or other mandatory payments” (Strategic Review, 2002: 206). Additionally, this review gives credence to those who contend that the Association’s rules on amateurism are being interpreted rather loosely by “emphasising the responsibility of star players to attend to functions and events without an over-emphasis on being paid” (Strategic Review, 2002: 207).

A further review of amateurism was undertaken in 2003 by the Amateur Status Advisory Committee. This committee consulted with players, team managers,
officials and representatives of other sports organisations, in order to address the concerns of senior inter-County players. A 2003 report to the Central Council highlights that “the vast majority of players have no demand for pay for play, but expect to be treated fairly and with respect” (GAA Amateur Status Advisory Report, 2003: 1). Furthermore, the report contends that “pay for play or compensation to participate, irrespective of where it starts means payment without limit” (GAA Amateur Status Advisory Report, 2003: 1). Nevertheless, this report led to an increase in the mileage/travel allowance from 38 cent to 50 cent per mile. In addition, the payment of acceptable vouched out of pocket expenses to cover taxi fares, meals and public transport was agreed (GAA Amateur Status Advisory Report, 2003).

Rule 11: GAA Official Guide clearly states the organisation’s current position in terms of their amateur status:

The Association is an Amateur Association. A player, team, official or member shall not accept payment in cash or in kind in conjunction with the playing of Gaelic Games. A player, team, official or members shall not contract himself/itself to any agent other than those officially approved by Central Council. Expenses paid to all officials, players and members shall not exceed the standard rates laid down by the Central Council. Members of the Association may not participate in full-time training. This rule shall not prohibit the payment of salaries or wages to employees of the Association (GAA Official Guide, 2006: 6).

In essence, while striving to maintain the core principle outlined in rule 11, the internal deliberations undertaken by the Association over the last number of decades
have led to the adoption and implementation of policies that are similar to other professional sports. The increasing demands by, and the material concessions to elite players have created an environment where creeping professionalism is a recurrent theme. The recommendations emanating from the aforementioned reports demonstrate that the GAA is constantly reviewing amateurism in a retrospective and reactive manner within a modern sporting context.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

This research focuses on an identification and understanding of the attitudes, issues, and implications that are relevant to the amateur-professional debate within the GAA. The current position of the GAA as an amateur sporting organisation provides the major case study for the research. This study responds to a gap in the literature, as up-to-date academic research on the issue of amateurism-professionalism within the GAA is scarce. This is achieved through an analysis of primary sources and qualitative interview data from senior administrators, senior inter-County players and GPA executive members.

This research reviews some of the main literature and explores some of the common themes and preconditions for professionalism namely shamateurism and broken-time payments that have been prevalent in other sports such as rugby union and soccer. Over the last few years, there has been regular commentary within the media, particularly, newspapers and radio programmes which revisit the issue of pay for play. However, these discussions tend to focus specifically on direct payment to the elite senior inter-County players, which do not provide the complete picture. The amateur-professional debate needs to analyse and consider the structural implications
associated with pay for play, namely, a transfer system and player mobility, player contracts, the implications for the club and the role of GPA.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions have been designed to guide the study through to completion. The discussion will firstly; examine the prevailing attitudes and opinions of the key stakeholders in terms of the amateur-professional debate; secondly, demonstrate if the GAA is subject to similar circumstances that undermined amateurism in other team sports and locate the GAA on the amateur-professional continuum; thirdly, identify the structural ramifications of professionalism; fourthly, explore the role of the GPA within the amateur-professional debate; and finally, discuss whether a further review of amateurism is necessary.

1.6 Summary

This introductory chapter has identified that the payment of the annual team performance scheme and annual support scheme in 2008 is a recent development that the Association must deal with in the context of the amateur-professional debate. The overview of the foundation of the Association, in conjunction with a discussion on amateurism and concluding with the research objectives and questions provides a framework for the overall discussion.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

It is appropriate to consider the amateur-professional debate within the GAA in the context of the transition from amateurism to professionalism that occurred in other sports. While the chapter will examine the issues that arose in other sports, where relevant, some sections will be interspersed with reference to similar developments that have occurred within the GAA.

The first part of the review provides a brief overview of the development of amateurism and professionalism in terms of the foundation and development of rugby and soccer in England. The second section identifies the key structural implications of professionalism encountered within rugby union from the mid 1990s onwards. The focus on rugby is justified by the fact that rugby union provides a more recent example of a sport (albeit with an international dimension) that recently underwent the transition from amateurism to professionalism. Furthermore, the chapter identifies the implication of the Bosman ruling for sport in general. The areas discussed in the literature review provide the structure for the subsequent analysis in the results and discussion section.

2.1 The Development of Amateurism and Professionalism in Sport

Initially it was believed that the amateur ethos developed during the period of the ancient Olympic Games in Greece. This was sometimes referred to as the Corinthian spirit, where athletes participated honestly, fairly and with respect for their opponent’s
personal achievement. However, Allison (2001) suggests that the ancient Olympics were neither amateur nor professional, as these concepts had not been developed during this period. Furthermore, the winners of the events were often rewarded financially, or otherwise.

Amateurism is a relatively modern issue that evolved in the mid-late nineteenth century after a transitional period between 1830 and 1863. During this period there were developments in society in terms of communications, technology and transport. It is unclear who the leading proponents in the amateur movement were (Holt, 1992). Nevertheless, there is a general agreement that the modern amateur concept originated in England during the mid-nineteenth century (1863-95) within the public school environment (Allison, 2001). It should be noted that during this period, the emergence of and the seriousness of sport was not always viewed positively. Both religious leaders and educated professionals believed that value of sport was a matter of conjecture, owing to the linkages with drinking, gambling and violence, having adverse effects on business and commercial activities (Gruneau, 2006).

The term professional came into use in the 1850s (Holt, 1989). The term “comes from the verb to profess, the core of the concept is the idea of a vocation or calling” (Allison, 2001:142). A professional sportsperson trains on a full-time basis, is remunerated and normally competes at the highest level of their sport. During their professional career they have no other occupation outside of their sport. The French word amateur is derived from the Latin word ‘amator’, meaning ‘lover’. Therefore, an amateur partakes in sports because of love and passion for it (Horne et al, 1999).
Glader (1978) posits that the essential difference between amateurs and professionals in nineteenth century Britain was social rather than economic. He outlines three characteristics of amateurism; firstly as a social distinction, which allowed a separation of the so-called gentleman amateur from the lower class members of society. In terms of rowing, the mechanic clause which effectively excluded boat-builders or manual labourers from participating in competitions highlights this social distinction. In addition, there was intolerance towards professional athletes who competed for money as they were viewed as inferior and being of questionable character. The second characteristic of amateurism was termed a special advantage distinction. Labourers who rowed regularly as part of their occupation were classed as professionals and were declared ineligible for amateur competition, and thus, denied opportunity to compete against gentlemen amateurs. The third characteristic of amateurism relates to the motivational distinction, this is where a real amateur competes for the fun and the love of a sport, with success being viewed as secondary to the equality, fairness, and the standard of competition. Thus, the motives of those who participated in sport for financial reward were questionable.

Allison’s (2001) definition of amateurism corroborates Glader’s (1978) perspectives by way of reference to three areas, social, ethical and bureaucratic/financial. The social definition explores the idea of the amateur being a gentleman who has never been paid for manual or physical labour, a definition that was more applicable to sport in the south of England due to the public school influence. The ethical definition highlights that amateurs compete in their sport for personal gratification, and not for pecuniary reward. The bureaucratic/financial definition describes the idea of an amateur being someone who does not receive payment or financial reward for competing or winning.
From the 1860s onwards, national governing bodies were established to administer, codify, and regulate their respective sports. During the formative years of some sports the issue of payment for play was to the forefront. For example, the relatively conflict-free emergence professional cricket in the 1800s was driven by the aristocracy and the gentry who held an overwhelming balance of power owing to the social dominance of their class based position in society. In this instance, the gentlemen amateurs and professionals played together on the understanding that the social differences were recognised and adhered to (Holt, 2009). This enabled the aristocracy and gentry to structure the game in a self serving manner. Thus, the structure that emerged resulted in the subservience of the professional to the amateur, with the professional players being employed by gentry and landed amateurs due their proficiency at the game (Dunning, 1999). This was typical of the general pattern of professionalism that emerged within British sport. It was characterised by the “subordination both of professional to amateur personnel, and of professional to amateur conceptions of sport” (Sheard, 1997: 119).

Some sports, particularly soccer and rugby dealt with the issue of professionalism at an early stage in there development. In the case of rugby union, twenty–two clubs from northern England broke away from English Rugby Football Union in 1895. These clubs formed the Northern Rugby Football Union. Subsequently, these clubs were influential in developing rugby league as a professional sport in 1904. From the 1850s onwards, the first soccer clubs began to emerge, mainly in southern England, and the Football Association (FA) was formed in 1863. Following the codification of the rules of soccer, by a small number of Club, the embryonic forms of soccer permeated into the wider society via former public school players. While many of these clubs were in the London region, some clubs were founded in northern England
In the early 1880s, rumours of illegal cash payments to soccer players in England were widespread, thus the notion of creeping professionalism was a phenomenon during the formative years (Tischler, 1981).

While open professionalism in soccer occurred in 1885 with the formation of the Football League, payment for play can be traced back to 1876, when players such as James J Lang left Scotland to play in Sheffield (Curry, 2004). The first stage in the emergence of professionalism within soccer manifested itself in a crisis surrounding importation. Importation is a process where players from outside the locality or region are imported to represent the local team. Importation occurred regularly at the end of the 1870s especially for important knockout cup competitions (Curry, 2004). Those involved in the FA, disapproved of importation even more so than professionalism. The FA believed that if professionalism was adopted, importation would become redundant (Mason, 1980).

The development of rugby followed a similar “process of regional and social segregation” (Holt, 2009: 39). Rugby clubs in the south of England tended to be status-exclusive and did not compete in matches against working class teams. However, northern England contained a large number of factories and other industries that facilitated interaction between the different social classes. Rugby became important within these communities and provided a social outlet to the otherwise regimented schedules of work that existed society in the late 1800s (Dunning and Sheard, 2005).

An amateur ideology emerged in opposition to the encroachment of professionalism and the commercialisation of sport through gate-taking. However, owing to the
imminent threat of professionalism, the public school elite ensured that the amateur ethos became an elaborate, documented and distinctive ideology. A power struggle developed over the concept of amateurism (Dunning and Sheard, 2005), and rugby became the “site of conflict between the expression of working class cultural practices and the dominant cultural codes of the public school ethos” (Collins, 1998: 61). However, the Rugby Football Union (RFU) was also concerned with the emerging challenge posed by professionalism in terms of the threat it wielded against their organisational authority (Sheard, 1997).

Professionalism did not emerge as means of “financial speculation, but was used mainly as a vehicle of social control” (Sheard, 1997: 119). This suggests that professionalism was not developed by would be professionals, but, by the amateurs who governed the sport. A similar crisis pertaining to the issue of amateurism and professionalism arose but was resolved in cricket and soccer. These two sports each remained under the governance of one administrative body, which incorporated both amateurs and professionals (Dunning and Sheard, 1976).

The tensions and machinations surrounding the professionalisation of soccer during this period were similar to those that occurred in rugby, but unlike rugby, these strains did not result in a permanent split. In Soccer, in 1895, two distinct organisations and structures were formed to accommodate both amateurs and professionals. Acquiescence to the notion of payment for pay within soccer occurred with less recrimination than it had occurred in rugby. The amateurs and the professionals within football co-existed relatively peacefully with fewer power struggles between the gentlemen amateurs and those who were in favour of professionalism (Mason, 1989).
Nevertheless, there were some traces of power struggles between the amateur and professional ethos that resonated for a long period within football. In 1907, class distinction and regional rivalry led to the establishment of the Amateur Football Association (AFA). The AFA remained outside the auspices of the FA for seven years. However, the AFA realigned itself with the FA in 1914 as an affiliated association. Thus, the spilt in English football is viewed a relatively minor occurrence in the development of sport (Porter, 2006).

Vamplew highlights that professionalism in sport faced a barrage of criticism. Firstly, on the basis of social prejudices, since it was perceived that professionalism lowered the nobility of the sport, transforming it into a mere trade. Secondly, professionalism in the sport had turned play into work, elevating the pertinence of winning over the pursuit of enjoyment, thus promoting foul play and sharp practice. Thirdly, professionalism came under scrutiny from detractors who argued that because spectators were creating icons of their sporting heroes, sport had become an unjustifiable feature on newspapers. This was often linked with vexations related to the ability of players to buy and sell their allegiances to rival clubs for money, not necessarily out of the desire for service. Finally, perhaps the most fundamental criticism of professionalism hinged on the belief that those who were paid to win could also be paid to lose as the struggle for existence in professional sport would lead to temptation with the best not necessarily being the winners (Vamplew, 1988). Gentlemen amateurs objected to professionalism because they feared losing to their social inferiors, thereby, damaging their self-interest in terms of control over the sport. Consequently, they attempted on occasions to ensure that professionals were kept under strict control through legislation enacted by those who controlled particular sports (Dunning and Sheard, 2005). It is important to highlight, as Vamplew (1988)
further suggests that it was not professionalism _per se_ that was responsible for any corruption, but rather the gambling associated with professional sport

### 2.2 Broken-Time Payments/Shamateurism

Despite the aforementioned criticisms of professionalism it is debatable if pure amateurism has existed, particularly since nineteenth century. Therefore, the issue of broken–time payments and/or shamateurism are interwoven within the amateur-professional debate. Shamateurism occurs when a sports person derives direct or indirect financial benefit from sporting activities though classified as amateur (Dunning, 1999). Broken-time payments occur when a player is compensated or reimbursed for having to take time-off from work in order play or train. By the middle of the nineteenth century, shamateurism was prevalent in English County cricket, “on those occasions when the amateurs’ reimbursements were accidentally delivered to the wrong dressing room, the professionals became well aware of who was being paid the most” (Vamplew 1988:200).

The conflict in relation to broken-time payments/shamateurism is a recurring theme in many sports. In terms of rugby, by 1893 the English RFU became aware of the northern clubs proposal to adopt broken-time payments. This hastened the split within the game into rugby union and rugby league in 1895 (Porter, 2006). The Rugby Football Union turned a ‘blind eye’ to the rules in relation to amateurism when it suited the union to do so. Working men discovered that amateur sport could be financially rewarding, thus covert professionalism has been well established in rugby union (Collins, 2006; and Dunning and Sheard, 2005). Despite the fact that Soccer has adopted professionalism, there was still a culture of shamateur payment within the amateur competitions, where honest professionalism was discouraged (Porter, 2006).
In the context of the GAA, broken–time payments/ shamateurism were also an issue that the GAA had to address from a relatively early stage. In 1914, the Laois County Board paid their players “the equivalence of their wages, or replacement money to the men who worked in their place” (McAnallen, 2009:165). By the 1920s, successful teams who toured America were provided with broken-time payments for absence from work as well as some spending monies. While these payments breached amateur status rules, the GAA decided to not enforce regulations on these activities (McAnallen, 2009).

In order to reduce their training costs both the Central Council and the Provincial Councils gave a special grant to the Counties who reached the All-Ireland final. By 1926, the GAA was moving towards professionalism because the County Boards were “effectively bankrolling broken–time payment” (McAnallen, 2009:170). From the 1940s, onwards, broken-time payments remained a contentious issue. Inter-County players were compensated for taking time-off work to train, with some players receiving more than their normal income for working. Interestingly, even those players who did not incur a loss of wages (teachers and students) also received small payments (McAnallen, 2009).

2.3 The Transition from Amateurism to Professionalism

In rugby union, three significant developments occurred in the 1960s and 1970s that required the RFU to revaluate the policies on amateurism. Firstly, owing to increased competition from the southern hemisphere, there was a movement towards a spectator-orientated sport. Allied to this, the international dimension of the game resulted in the competitive success of the national team being crucial in the overall
development of the game. Secondly, the influential gate-taking clubs initiated formal cup and league competitions to increase playing standards while expanding their commercial activities. Thirdly, the RFU and the top club became increasingly dependent on gate-receipts, revenue from media coverage and advertising, as well as commercial sponsorships (Malcolm et al., 2000). The monetisation of the rugby continued and senior club players had become “time professionals” (Dunning and Sheard, 1976: 65), as they were devoting increasing amounts of time and energy to the game. Rugby had a major role in their life, relegating their professional career, marriage, education and family to the background (Dunning and Sheard, 1976).

In late 1980s and early 1990s, changing attitudes and values in rugby were accompanied by the incremental formation, and growing tolerance, of a developing professional structure in both the northern and southern hemisphere. O’Brien and Slack (1999), Malcolm et al., (2000), and Wyatt (1995) identify a number of similar features in the monetisation and incremental professionalism within the rugby union. Malcolm et al., (2000), identify the following, firstly, the gradual increase of direct, but veiled and excessive payments to players including inducements to transfer from, or to Club. Secondly, the indirect payment to players (including travel and accommodation and payment) for product endorsement and promotion. Thirdly, at the elite level there was an informal transfer market operating amongst the clubs. Fourthly, the complexity and commercialism involved in running gate-taking clubs and international competitions resulted in the growth of the administrative, coaching and management functions and the hiring of professional staff to oversee the organisation of these Club. Fifth, there was a growing formalisation in the relationship between the stakeholders in the club, for example player/club, player/governing body and the club/governing body, and this included the emergence of player associations.
and representative groups both formally and informally. Finally, commercialism, sponsorship and marketing became a ubiquitous part of the game at both club and international levels.

The RFU responded in an unpredictably controversial manner by tightening the amateur regulations in relation to the transfer of players. This involved compromising on the permitted sources of earnings and ignoring some breaches of regulations. Thus, a veiled form of monetisation operated within the game. During the early 1990s, rugby union shifted along the amateur-professional continuum (White, 2004). Smith (2000) and Wyatt (1995) highlight that the 1991, Rugby World Cup was pivotal since it relaxed the restrictions on technically amateur players benefiting financially from the game. At this stage the RFU did not object to elite players taking up employment as rugby development officers or receiving inflated expenses. From the late 1980s onwards, shamateurism had escalated to the extent that “it was not unheard-of for a player to have his job, car and accommodation provided for by his Club” (Williams, 2008: 66). The Welsh Rugby (WRU) tolerated and even encouraged shamateurism in order to discourage union players from the lure of the professional rugby league in the north of England. However, some players such as Scott Gibbs who made this transition later highlighted the existence of ‘shamateurism’ within rugby union. He commented:

> It grates me that I am called a prostitute while players and officials keep on covering up what’s going on in the union. Every player in Wales knows that when you play on Saturday, if you win you can get a few quid. Players get the cash after the game (Smith, 2000: 150).
During the early 1990s in both the northern and southern hemisphere, some rugby union players transferred to rugby league. They were lured by the prospect of a career in a professional game and the associated advantages in terms of large salaries and luxurious living conditions. Initially, the rugby union administrators believed the traditions and values of the amateur game could cope with these changes (Barnes 1997, Fitzsimons 1997). However, in the southern hemisphere, there was a response to the changing external environment within which rugby union operated. In 1991, a player trust scheme emerged (Skinner et al, 1999). The scheme ensured that elite players who committed a lot of time and energy to the game received “some remuneration from the game without infringing on their amateur status” (Skinner et al, 1999: 184). In reality, the financial rewards, and arrangements that initially affected a small minority of the elite players and had little influence on the other administrators and players as the central tenet of amateurism remained in tact (Skinner et al, 1999).

2.4 Commercialisation, Sponsorship and Television Rights

Since the 1895 schism between the RFU and the Northern gate-taking Club, English RFU administration resolutely fought to protect the principle of amateurism, a legacy that influenced their reaction to open professionalism and helped to explain the “underwhelming response by the union establishment to the opportunities and threats presented by professionalism in 1995” (Malcolm et al., 2000: 63). The Irish RFU adopted a similar mindset in their attitude towards the threat of payment for play, and continued to espouse the mantra that the game should be played on a voluntary basis (Fanning, 2007).

Notably, the issue of social control or class hostility was not a central issue in relation to professionalism. In general, those rugby union players benefiting from
professionalism shared similar educational and social backgrounds. They had comparable values and were exposed to similar socialisation experiences (Sheard, 1997). The competition for playing resources provided much of the momentum in the transition to professionalism. In contrast to the pressures exerted on the RFU by the northern gate-taking clubs in the 1895 split, it was the union themselves that believed they had no option but to agree to pay for play in 1995. It was “international relations rather than intra-national relations that led to professionalism” (White, 2004: 63). The collective acknowledgement of pay for play was championed by the three southern hemisphere nations, namely, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. This left the overall governing body the International Rugby Board (IRB) with little option but to adopt professionalism (Cronin et al; 2008).

The main drivers in the move towards professionalism included, global and international competitions namely, the rugby world cup, the southern hemisphere tri-nations tournament, the increasing commercial and media influence and the competition for players from rugby league. Furthermore, the development of sponsorship was a major influence in the transition to overt professionalism owing to the fact that many of the players in the late 1980s and the early 1990s were employed at executive level within private companies. These elite players recognised international rugby’s commercial potential and their own potential as marketable assets (O’Brien and Slack, 1999; O’Brien and Slack, 2004a; Williams, 2002; Wyatt 1995).

In 1995, the landscape of the game changed when the union players (who were still amateurs) were offered substantial payments by Television Company News Corp. Eventually, the three south hemisphere unions, after a battle for players with a rival
body the World Rugby Corporation (WRC), agreed a pay-per-view television deal with News Corp. This led to the situation where much of the finances invested in the game were controlled by the players. This development hastened the adoption of professionalism in momentous ways (Dabscheck, 2003; Fitzsimons, 1997).

It was television as well as the “genuine embarrassment at the hypocrisy of shamateurism and the detrimental impact on the sport” (Smith, 2000: 152-153), which forced the IRB to act. News Corp, under the direction of media mogul Rupert Murdoch, played a major role in facilitating club-based professional rugby in Britain, especially in England (Barnes, 1997). The balance of power between the English RFU and the senior sides had shifted to about a dozen elite clubs, with only a handful operating from a stable commercial base. The monies accruing from television rights became a major source of revenue for the RFU (Barnes 1997, Fitzsimons 1997, Smith, 2000).

From a GAA perspective, the Association has not been insulated from the commercial realities of sport. From the early years, spectators paid admission to games. Furthermore, limited commercial sponsorship was discernible in that trophies or medals were donated for competitions or tournaments (McAnallen, 2009). In 1914, Croke Park (GAA Headquarters) was incorporated into holding company called Páirc an Chrócaigh Teo (PCT). PCT manages match and non-match day events in the venue. This involves maximising the financial return from the stadium’s infrastructure, such as, GAA Museum, corporate and premium facilities, conference facilities and advertising opportunities (Croke Park Website, 2008). In 2007, the stadium holding company, and associated subsidiaries recorded a turnover of €44 million and profit of over €17 million (Moran, 2008a).
Prior to 1971, the GAA generated revenue from advertising in match programmes, publications, limited sponsorship of secondary competitions, as well as the limited use of advertising hoardings around Major GAA grounds. Furthermore, commercial sponsorship which provided any demonstrable benefit to the sponsor was limited (McAnallen, 2009). Nevertheless, while GAA teams could not display a sponsor’s name on jerseys or kitbags, club and inter-County teams accepted sponsorship on an ad-hoc basis. This was community support from a benign benefactor rather than sponsorship for the promotion of commercial or business interests (McAnallen, 2009). Despite the fact the GAA was aware of the competition from other sports and the commercial potential in a growing sports and leisure market, the GAA was reluctant to fully embrace commercialism.

In 1991, the GAA acceded to the inevitable. A Directive on Sponsorship and Licensing was published that made specific reference to the retention of the amateur status and the role of each member in the preservation of that status (Directive on Sponsorship and Licensing, 1991: 3). While the Association has benefited financially from commercial activities, there are implications, especially as the elite players who through their participation at senior inter-County level display the product (Gaelic games), without receiving direct monetary payment from the financial windfalls accruing to the Association.

2.5 The Structural Ramifications of Professionalism

For rugby the genesis of open professionalism in August-September 1995 resulted in a number of adjustments to the organisation and structure of both the club and international games. Despite adopting professionalism, the English RFU was reluctant to fully embrace professionalism in the 1995/96 season. Initially, the clubs were
allowed one year’s grace to decide whether they would remain amateur or adopt professional status. Thus, it was not until a season later in 1996/97, that professionalism was fully adopted by an association clearly wary of undermining the amateur ethic that had underpinned the game for 100 years (O’Brien and Slack, 1999). Similarly, the Irish RFU were also opposed (Fanning, 2007).

Some significant developments in club administration occurred in rugby from 1995 onwards. Firstly, the introduction of limited companies (shareholding) by the club and secondly, the emergence of major benefactors/owners who wanted a role in controlling and managing the financial affairs of the top clubs (O’Brien and Slack, 1999, O’Brien and Slack, 2004a). In some instances fifty per cent control was ceded to a sponsor under joint venture agreements (Malcolm et al, 2000). In a short period, the control of the club affairs by the amateur members as well as the values of amateurism became seriously eroded. Consequently, those involved in rugby union, who had under the amateur model become institutionalised, undertook a period of deinstitutionalisation in order to adapt to the new culture and ideas that prevailed in the professional environment (O’Brien and Slack, 1999; O’Brien and Slack, 2004a).

A related issue is the impact of professionalism on volunteer members. Prior to professionalism, the administrative structures within rugby union at club level (as is the case of GAA) were in many cases co-ordinated and managed by voluntary administrators, officials and coaches many of whom were ex-players (Horton, 2009). Subsequent to professionalism, top English clubs recognised that owing to the increased financial burden, they had to restructure and adopt a business-like approach. Many of the voluntary positions were re-assigned to professional and commercially-focussed staff who inculcated a rigid financial awareness at all levels of club
administration. This created tensions as the balance of power shifted away from the voluntary members who had erstwhile controlled an organisation that was essentially built on the premise of amateurism (O’Brien and Slack, 2004, Barnes, 1997, Thibault et al; 1991). By 2007, the amateur administrators in Australia had conceded that “the game is now unquestionably the domain of the professional” (Horton, 2009: 979).

Smith (2000) argues that the advent of the open game in England brought the club versus country debate to the forefront. The clubs in England regarded the players as club employees; this obligated the players to fulfil contractual requirements to the Club. Therefore, players on international contracts had to prioritise their club over their country. In England, this issue proved divisive. However, protracted discussions between the RFU and the clubs resulted in the Mayfair agreement. Arising from this the clubs agreed to release their players for up to eight international matches (Smith, 2000). In an Irish context, the contractual arrangement is somewhat different. The players are contracted to a province or have an international contract, both of which are regulated by the Irish RFU. Thus, elite players only have a tenuous playing arrangement with their clubs (Fanning, 2007).

To a considerable extent, after the adoption of professionalism, the focus shifted towards the physical and financial resources within the game. One of the consequences of professionalism was the growing awareness of the human assets in the ‘industry’, i.e. the players. The elite clubs realised the importance of human assets and wanted to protect their players, while managing their playing demands in order to reduce their players’ exposure to injury. The clubs further sought to limit the number of matches players played to curb the likelihood of fatigue and injury, a situation that has created tensions within English rugby union and clubs, especially as top clubs.
have routinely endeavoured to protect their playing resources (Barnes, 1997, Malcolm et al., 2000).

Nevertheless, the top clubs faced a dilemma, recognising the need to play more revenue generating and competitive fixtures. The increasing globalisation of rugby and the conflict of interest between the club and international fixtures culminated in a trend whereby clubs lobbied to reschedule the Six Nations championship in order to accommodate the club season (Malcolm et al., 2000). This has not happened, as the Six Nations Championship fixtures take place in the middle of the club season with the European Cup, the flagship club competition for the top clubs being suspended until after the Six Nations has finished.

Professionalism led to an increase in the squad size within some of the wealthier clubs, to ensure that in the event of an injury crisis, a sufficient number of high quality full-time players were available to compete in the various competitions. The anxiety to guarantee and consolidate high level performances forced clubs at the initial stages of professionalism to recruit players from the southern hemisphere. Thus, in the first season of professionalism clubs generated substantial losses, while their revenue in the next season did not increase proportionately (Malcolm et al., 2000).

In Wales, Clubs also experienced the financial reality of larger squads and ended up in dispute with the Welsh RFU. The Welsh union decided that they could only sustain four fully professional Club, with the others adopting a semi-professional model. Some Clubs in England had a similar experience as professional Club, such as Wakefield and Moseley, while initially opting for professionalism, had to settle for semi-professional status owing to threat of bankruptcy. Top clubs like Bristol were
relegated from the premiership when the main benefactor decided not to continue funding an unprofitable venture. The club was eventually forced into bankruptcy in July 1998. While Bristol later recovered financially, other clubs were quick to internalise the sometimes complex implications of professionalism (Smith, 2000).

Smith (2000) and Malcolm et al; (2000) examined the experiences of one notable club in the south of England in the context of the business model approach to rugby union. By June 1999, the third oldest club in the world, Richmond Rugby Club, ceased to exist. Thus, three years after adopting pay for play standards, it became crystal clear that the history, identity and tradition of club were indeed worthless without balanced financial accounts. As a result of Richmond Rugby Club going into receivership, a salary ceiling was introduced, with the premiership teams agreeing to cap their wage bill (Malcolm et al., 2000).

A further implication of professionalism and the limited long term revenue generating potential in relation to club rugby in England was the realisation of the need to maximise the use of sports grounds to generate revenue or, alternatively, reduce their infrastructural costs by becoming tenants at more established venues. Some top clubs adopted ground sharing agreements for home game, for example Harlequins and the Rugby League Club London Bronco’s shared ‘the stoop’; Wasps played at Loftus road, Queens Park Rangers Football Ground, and Saracens played at Vicarage Road home to Watford Football Club. Tradition and community affiliations have been diluted in the light of financial reality, and English rugby union followed the trend of rugby league, soccer and ice-hockey where teams adopted a similar strategy to American sports and relocated when market conditions dictated no alternative (Smith, 2000; Barnes, 1997).
2.6 Implications from Soccer: From Retain and Transfer to Bosman

During the 1880s, in the interests of self preservation soccer club directors developed a system that severely restricted player mobility. The transfer system; also known as retain and transfer, curtailed the poaching of players and allowed clubs to control the career of their players. This system limited player mobility and wages, while ensuring that all top football players were not monopolised by the richest clubs (Tischler, 1981). In the era of the maximum wage, this meant that many top players spent their whole careers with their home club and often experienced little financial or playing successes.

It is important to consider the master (club) and servant (player) power relationship that existed in professional football between the club and players until the 1960s. In the early decades of professional football after the introduction of the transfer system, and the maximum wage, which were both introduced in 1901-02 season, the power balances within the game resided firmly with the directors. A consensus existed within the game that players should only focus on playing the game, while the directors managed the club’s affairs (Tischler, 1981). These two rules were an attempt by those who organised football to control professionalism and prevent a small number of rich clubs from monopolising all the talents. One reason why this system remained in place for nearly six decades was that the players union was not powerful (Mason, 1989).

The union appeared even more fragile after an unsuccessful appeal to the courts against the transfer system. A further problem for the union emanated from the fact that as a representative association, they had an unconvincing mandate as many players did not appreciate the need for the union, and believed “they were doing far
better than their peers” (Mason, 1980: 117). It was not until 1958, that the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) gathered momentum. Despite some unsuccessful attempts to reform the rules, both the retain-and-transfer system and the maximum wage restriction remained in place until the 1960s (Mason, 1989). During the 1960-61 seasons and for the first time since 1909, the PFA chairman Jimmy Hill received a mandate for a players strike if the maximum wage was not abolished. In the end the Pea’s demands were met without a strike (Mason, 1989).

Later in 1963, the divisive retain-and-transfer system was finally abolished when George Eastham, a Newcastle United player refused the retention terms offered for the 1961-62 season and Eastham’s repeated requests for a transfer were turned down. Eastham sought redress in the High Court. The case was based around restraint of trade. The court found against the retain-and-transfer system. Thus, “If club did not re-hire their player on a further contract, players it decided, should be able to leave for free” (Lowrey et al., 2002: 1-2).

In 1995, The Bosman case proved to be the Rubicon for football. The judgement dealt with two issues, firstly, transfer fees and secondly quota systems in sport (Dabscheck, 2004). Initially, the Belgian Football Association (BFA) and United European Football Associations (UEFA) contended that legal redress was not appropriate for dealing with sport related matters (Parrish and McArdle, 2004). However, a previous legal precedent established that European Community law was applicable to sport, “in so far as it constitutes an economic activity” (Morris et al; 1996: 894). Prior to the Bosman ruling, a player could move from one club to another in two ways. Firstly, a player could transfer while on a contract provided the two clubs reached an
agreement. Secondly, a player moved when a contract had expired, using transfer fees that were regulated by league officials (Ericson, 2000).

Jean-Marc Bosman was contracted to, and played for a Belgian first division club FC Liege. At the end of the 1990 season Bosman wanted to transfer to a French side, Dunkerque FC, primarily because he was offered a contract that was lower than his previous one using a value that was determined by applying a calculation using his wage and age (Dabscheck, 2004). The Belgian Club, the Belgian Football Association and the prospective club did not reach agreement on a transfer fee and as he failed to agree a new contract with his Belgium Club, the club suspended him (Ericson, 2000). Subsequently, Bosman undertook a legal action, on the basis of the agreement on payment of transfer fees which prohibited European Union (EU) citizens from a freedom of movement in employment (Ericson, 2000, and Lowrey et al., 2002).

In 1995, the European Court of Justice ruled in Bosman’s favour, this created a legal precedence where players were free to move club when their contract had expired. The ruling enabled a player to discuss and negotiate their own deal with a new club when their current contracts expires, or when the contract is nearing conclusion. Generally, the control over players has shifted away from the clubs, with top players now in a very powerful position, (Lowrey et al., 2002; Madichie, 2009). The Bosman type free transfer judgement has been well integrated into the sporting lexicon, and the media often refer to this case in a self-explanatory manner.

There are implications arising from the Bosman judgement for all professional sports. In England, the number of foreign players within the Premiership has increased dramatically. This has led to concerns in relation to the emergence of home-grown
talents in English Football, forcing many European football leagues to place quotas on
the number of foreign players employed in various leagues (Madichie, 2009). While
the issue of foreign players has few implications for an indigenous sports body like
the GAA, the Bosman ruling does have some implications for the Association.
Nevertheless, the long term contracts and high salaries that are paid by the successful
and wealthy clubs to talented soccer players, making it possible for elite clubs to
continually strengthen their squads with quality players. The dilemma of the rich
becoming richer has been the subject of much debate too, irrespective of whether this
has to do with clubs or players (Stead, 2001).

A further outcome of Bosman verdict has to do with identity, particularly in terms of
changing relationship between the club, players and supporters. As Stead (2001: 3)
has contemplated, “can any English club team that might not include one English
player identify with the club traditions and be committed?” High salaries paid to
professional players have increased the social distance between supporters and
players. However, in terms of professional sport, this may not be always true, as some
players can symbolise the strength of a local identity. For example, former French
International and Arsenal player Patrick Vieira was lauded by Arsenal supporters and
the British press for showing “the fighting spirit of a true Brit” (Ranc, 2009: 56). In an
Irish context, the theme of assimilation by elite foreign players into Irish professional
club rugby was explored. Cronin et al, contend that “irrespective of ethnic background
or nationality, players can assimilate” (2008: 1020). Owing to the fact, that the
playing ability of a new player is vital in the assimilation process (Cronin et al; 2008).

There is a related dimension to the identity and loyalty conundrum, as the options
available to players nearing the end of their contracts can lead to postponement of the
entire contract negotiations. While players might continue to play for the Club, their commitment may easily be questioned. Additionally there may be adverse reaction to players who signed a pre-contract agreement with another club but continue to fulfil the remainder of their current contract (Stead, 2001). This highlights the centrality of the concept of identity with regards to club or Counties within the GAA.

However, a fundamental question arises from the Bosman ruling, namely, the misconception that employment law did not supersede sport law (Stead, 2001). This is a critical issue in terms of the amateur-professional debate and has far-reaching consequences for the organisation and structure of sport.

2.7 Player Associations/Unions

Players Associations have become a typical feature of professional sport, from baseball to soccer, and cricket to Australian rules. They have developed in parallel with professional teams sports (Scoville, 1974). The origins of player unions can be traced to the USA, where, in 1885 baseball was one of the first sports in which a players’ union was established. Nevertheless, attempts to regularise the baseball union failed on five occasions. However, in 1954 the Major League Baseball Players’ Association (MLBPA) was founded and remains the current association for baseball professionals. In the 1950s and 1960s, player associations developed in other sports (Dabscheck, 2003). In England, soccer is home to the oldest continuous professional player’s association, the Professional Footballers Association (PFA), formerly, the Players Union, was formed in 1907 (Harding 1991).

In 1995, the Australia Rugby Union (ARU), in the final days of amateurism, agreed to fund the establishment of the Rugby Union Players Association (RUPA). In addition,
the ARU also agreed to allow the yet-to-be formed players’ association to have substantial input into the decision making in relation to the distribution of the revenue accruing from television agreements with News Corporation. As a result of the failure of the ARU to fully implement their original agreement, the RUPA undertook a successful case to the Supreme Court. This led to the signing of a collective bargaining agreement, based on revenue sharing, in October 1997. In 2001, a second agreement was signed. These agreements have enabled administrators and players to jointly maximise revenue for the sport (Dabscheck, 2003).

As will be highlighted in the results and discussion section of this study, the advent of the Gaelic Player’s Association (GPA) has provided the GAA with a challenge in dealing with the amateur-professional debate. The GPA was launched in Ulster as a national body in autumn 1999. The GAA’s relationship with the GPA has been tense. Initially authorities within the ranks of the GAA chose not to acknowledge the existence of the Association as the official players’ representative body. Nevertheless, the GPA has grown in stature and champion’s player welfare for senior inter-county players (O'Riordan, 2006b). The GPA was not the first players’ association to have been formed within the GAA, as a previous players’ body was initiated in 1981. This body suffered from inadequate administrative and management support and despite the players’ best intentions, it ultimately failed to achieve their objectives (McAnallen, 2009).

The establishment of the GPA arose from a perception amongst senior inter-County GAA players that their welfare was not taken into satisfactory consideration especially with the demanding personal, professional and financial sacrifices required to compete at the highest levels. Furthermore, despite the existence of the Amateur
Status Committee Report 1997, there is a belief that the recommendations arising from this report were being ignored by some County executives, this compounded earlier feelings that players were not being treated consistently across all Counties and playing codes.

2.8 Amateur-Professional Debate

As mentioned earlier, literature pertaining to amateur-professional debate within the GAA is limited. However, in 2005, a research study was commissioned by the GPA in conjunction with the UCD Centre for Sports Studies. This quantitative study explored the views of senior inter-County Gaelic footballers and hurlers in GAA. The survey was an anonymous self-administered questionnaire posted to a total of 1779 players (over ninety per cent indicated that they were members of the GPA). The survey findings are based on 680 responses, of which over ninety-one per cent respondents were members of the GPA (Hooper et al., 2005). Some sections of the survey are relevant to some aspects of this study, especially those related to amateur status, broken-time payments, advertising, image rights, as well as the relationship between the GAA and GPA in terms of player welfare issues.

The opinions of respondents on the amateur status highlight that eight per cent favoured the adoption of full professionalism, nearly sixty two per cent of respondents favoured a move to semi professionalism, with over twenty nine per cent responding that the GAA should remain amateur (Hooper et al, 2005). In terms of the long term future of amateurism, this survey identified that seventy three per cent of the players “believe that Gaelic games could not sustain full-time professionalism” (Hooper et al., 2005: 8). In addition, fewer than half of the respondents intimated that this could be the case by the year 2020. In terms of the adoption of a semi-professional model at
senior inter-county level, “two-thirds of players believe that, even at present, semi-professionalism could be sustained” (Hooper et al., 2005: 8).

An examination of the statistical report arising from the survey reveals that in terms of the advertising, media and image rights accruing to the GAA, over ninety four per cent of respondents intimated that the GAA and the GPA should work together in order to maximise the commercial revenue for Gaelic games. Furthermore, in terms of monies generated from television again, over ninety four per cent of respondents indicated that some of this income should be paid into a players’ pool (GPA/UCD survey results, 2005). Some of the other relevant findings emanating from this study will be highlighted in the discussion and findings section.

2.9 Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the development of amateurism and professionalism. In addition, the chapter examines the issues that arose in other sports and discussed the salient implications that are relevant to the amateur-professional debate. The areas discussed above constitute the basis for the concepts explored in the interviews. The rationale for this approach is based on the knowledge that there is commonality in relation to the themes encountered by sport organisations who have encountered the amateur-professional debate.
Chapter Three

Research Methods

3.0 Rationale

Over the last number of years and particularly since the foundation of the GPA, GAA administrators, players and GPA executive members have expressed their opinions in the media in relation to the amateur-professional debate. However, these opinions are generally at a superficial level, where the focus of discussion is primarily on direct payment to players. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the attitudes and opinions that underpin this issue, this research explores the amateur/professional conundrum with the three aforementioned stakeholders using semi-structured interviews.

The rationale for using this research method is that interviews move away from seeing human subjects as easy to manipulate, and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans often through conversations (Kvale, 1996). An interview can be described as interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. Furthermore interviews acknowledge the “centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and emphasises the social situation of research data” (Kvale, 1996: 11). Interviews enable the interviewer and the interviewee to discuss “the interpretations of the world in which they live”. Cohen et al. (2007: 349)

Interviews are a powerful medium of communication for researchers as they facilitate the use of multi-sensory channels (verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard). While the
interviewer can control the order of the questions, there is room for clarification and spontaneity. This form of interview enables researchers “to adopt a flexible approach to data collection” (Gratton and Jones, 2004: 141). The interviewer “can press for complete answers and responses about complex and deep issues” (Cohen et al 2007: 349). Semi-structured interviews are well suited to gaining an understanding of people’s subjective experiences and to gathering qualitative data. The questions can be adapted around a basic structure in order to suit the personal circumstances of the respondent, while additional questions may be addressed in order to follow-up on issues raised by the interviewee or to probe issues as they arise (Gratton and Jones, 2004). There are certain limitations associated with the use of interviews, namely; time considerations, interviewer bias, inconvenience to interviewees, and fatigue on the part of the interviewee, which may affect the quality of the interview, while anonymity can be difficult. Furthermore, “interviews are subject to problems of recall, misperception and incorrect knowledge” (Gratton and Jones, 2004: 143).

While this approach may not be as satisfactory as a random sample, the method used is probably the most appropriate way to obtain a sample, as it can be argued that the participants interviewed are fairly representative of the other senior administrators, senior inter-county players and the GPA more generally. While acknowledging that the number of interviews was small in comparison to the volume of quantitative data that can be collected in a survey. These semi-structured interviews provide a richer form of data in that the opinions of the interviewees and the issues relating to the research question can be explored in detail. The semi-structured interview enable the researcher to develop a rapport with the participants, and allow responses to be put in context. Therefore, the data gathered is not limited to “yes”, “no” or “do not know”
answers, nor a detached snapshot of the responses normally associated with data from quantitative surveys (Gratton and Jones, 2004).

The findings from the research are based on the qualitative data provided from semi-structured interviews from the aforementioned stakeholders. Initially, the themes to be explored in the semi-structured interviews were generated from primary and secondary data. The data was obtained from the review of academic literature (books and journals), newspaper articles, the internet and unpublished internal GAA documents; this enabled the development of informed themes (O’Brien and Slack, 2003: 426).

3.1 Research Design and Methods

A convenience sample was initially employed in the selection of study subjects based on the researcher’s personal experiences and contacts. In the early stages of the primary data collection, one experienced senior administrator and one experienced senior player were identified as they were deemed to be knowledgeable on themes that were being examined. After interviewing these individuals, the sample was then expanded on a ‘snowball’ basis. Thus, the researcher was able to access “influential members of the sample population, who suggested other participants. This helped to build trust between the interviewer and the participants (Gratton and Jones, 2004: 103). To surmount any potential bias in the data, some respondents were selected on the basis of the researcher’s knowledge. From a review of the primary data from newspapers, the researcher was in some instances able to identify the interviewees who were perceived to have alternative viewpoints, and who represented both sides of amateur-professional debate (O’Brien and Slack, 2003). A main weakness of this technique is the possibility of some respondent making biased referrals to other
subjects on grounds of personal contacts and relationships, and not being objective in their evaluation of suitability, this may result in findings that might not be clearly representative (O’Brien and Slack, 2003).

3.2 How the study was conducted

The study involved digitally recorded interviews, which were carried out from June 2006 to December 2007 inclusive. The interviews varied in duration from 45 to 75 minutes. Participants included four administrators, who have held senior executive position on a County committee, and seven senior inter-County (hurling and Gaelic football) players from Counties in the Munster region, who were either current players or had played regularly in recent years at senior inter-County level. Two of the players were dual representatives, meaning, they played both senior football and hurling for their County. In addition, two executive members of the GPA were also interviewed.

For ease of access and logistical reasons many of the interviewees were based in the Munster region. The interviews were conducted at a location and time that suited the participants. In addition, the researcher ensured that the interviewees were not under any time constraints which could have an adverse effect on the responses (Gratton and Jones, 2004). In order to enhance the quality of the data, it was important to ensure the credibility of the research. Thus, it was necessary for the researcher to establish trust with the interviewees. The issue of access to the interviewees was surmounted by the fact that the researcher has been involved within the GAA at both an administrative and coaching level for twenty years and is familiar with the administrative structures of the organisation. In keeping with good research practices the participants were initially contacted by telephone and subsequently by post. The correspondence
included a letter of introduction from the researcher’s supervisor at University College Dublin (UCD).

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, the participants were provided additional background information in relation to the study. Furthermore, they were asked to read and sign a consent form, which stated that they had participated in the study on a voluntary basis, as well as an endorsement of anonymity and confidentiality for participants that guaranteed the concealment of the identity of respondents and the Counties they represented. Furthermore, they were told that they could withdraw from the research at any time. This was done in order to reduce any anxiety on the part of the interviewees about discussing the issues pertaining to the amateur-professional debate within the GAA. After each interview, the respondents were asked to confirm if they were satisfied that the information and/or opinion that they disclosed could be used in the research, In addition, they were asked if they wished to review a final transcript of the interview.

The participants were asked a number of similar open-ended questions. In order to avoid any misinterpretation, all the interviewees were asked if they were familiar with the terms and concepts, and in some of instances, the meanings were explained. In the early stages of the research, after interviewing one administrator and one player, the questions were amended to reflect some that had been raised in these initial set of interviews. For instance, during an early stage of the first interview, the issue of reviewing amateurism was alluded to, in an unprompted response by the interviewee. It became clear that the issue of reviewing amateurism was central to the debate. This prompted the researcher to incorporate this issue into the remainder of the interviews.
The recordings were subsequently transcribed by a third party. The researcher reviewed the recordings and checked the transcripts for accuracy. In instances where there was ambiguity between the recording and the transcript, the researcher contacted the interviewee to clarify their response. The findings suggest that the interviewees had sufficient confidence in the process to be relatively forthcoming in expressing their opinions on the issues. While it is important to acknowledge that comments and views from participants have to be taken as an accurate reflection of their opinions, some allowance should be given to the fact, that privately they may hold a different viewpoint that they did not disclose.

The themes emerged from both the research questions and the literature review. The primary data was analysed and manually coded into nine common themes. However, after completing a preliminary review of the results, the researcher discussed the thematic coding with an academic colleague who has professional expertise in the analysis of qualitative data. Subsequently, it was decided to re-categorise the themes into four broad categories with sub-themes. This enabled more rigorous analysis of the data and a reduction in the number representative quotes derived from the findings.
Chapter Four

Results and Discussion

4.0 Introduction

The literature review provided the context for and identified the themes that are salient to the amateur-professional debate. The experience of researcher and the concepts that emerged from the literature review formed basis for the research questions as well as the areas explored in the interviews. The rationale for this is the commonality of issues which sports organisations encounter within the amateur-professional conundrum. The results and discussion are set out under four broad categories, and three of them include sub-sections. Firstly, the amateur-professional debate, secondly, the structural ramifications, thirdly, the players association and finally, a review of amateurism. These themes address the research questions that were set out in the introduction.

4.1 The Amateur-Professional debate

The literature review, particularly in terms of rugby union highlights that the amateur-professional debate was a divisive issue that exercised the minds of both administrators and players for many years. Many of the administrators who governed rugby union, particularly in England were reluctant to embrace the notion of professionalism. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, despite the adoption of regulations by governing bodies to protect amateurism, rugby union developed an unofficial structure that mirrored a professional sport (Barnes, 1997 and Fitzsimons, 1997).
As mentioned previously the GPA/UCD survey 2005 of the elite players highlights that eight per cent favoured the adoption of full professionalism, nearly sixty two per cent of players favoured a move to semi professionalism, with nearly thirty per cent responding that the GAA should remain amateur (Hooper et al, 2005). In terms of the long term future of amateurism, the majority (seventy three per cent) of the players “believe that Gaelic games could not sustain full-time professionalism” (Hooper et al., 2005: 8). In addition, fewer than half of the respondents intimated that this could be the case by the year 2020. In terms of the adoption of a semi-professional model at senior inter-county level, “two-thirds of players believe that, even at present, semi-professionalism could be sustained” (Hooper et al., 2005: 8).

The broader issue of full and semi professionalism was examined, and all the participants were asked a number of similar questions. It is apparent from the discussions that full-time professionalism is unsustainable within the present structure of the organisation, where all the Counties compete against each other in the Provincial and All-Ireland series. For instance, the comments of Administrator 4 are particularly telling:

The games we play are very successful in relation to getting patrons to pay into the games, but there are not enough of those kinds of [high profile] games to sustain professional games.

The findings demonstrate that the opinions of the senior administrators, players and members of the GPA executive are not as polarised as one might have perceived them. It was clear that the ethos and indigenous nature of Gaelic games are key tenets in relation to the debate. Unsurprisingly, the administrators were not in favour of the
Association adopting full or semi-professionalism. Their views are similar to those of the senior administrators in rugby union who resisted the adoption of professionalism (Fanning, 2007; Wyatt 1995). When questioned, the senior administrators provided emotional, financial and ideological reasons for their opposition to professionalism. Administrator 1 for instance, stated:

The GAA that I know and love and am involved in could never have a place for pay for play, because, not just disagreeing with the principle, but because of the changes that would come about as a result of pay for play. The further isolation of rural club, and particularly the voluntary ethos.

This research demonstrates that none of the players believe that the GAA should adopt full professionalism as it is financially unsustainable. Four players interviewed were generally in favour of semi-professionalism. Two players did not favour any form of professionalism and one player was unsure. More specifically, when the issue was explored in detail, all of the players interviewed expressed a desire to continue in their professional working career. Player 1 (hurling) commented:

I think that the GAA would not be able to afford full professionalism for all the Counties, so I think that semi-professional would be ideal. If it goes semi-professional it will not go back, but, I definitely would like to keep my job.

Similarly, the players were conscious of the historical, ideological and financial issues relating to pay for play and that professionalism would change the ethos and social fabric of the Association. It is evident from the discussions with the administrators and players that professionalism would change the structure of the organisation. A
The recurrent theme that emerged from the elite players in terms of their opinions on professionalism was the necessity to examine the issue of indirect financial recompense. Currently players are entitled to claim mileage expenses at 50 cent per mile. In addition, players are reimbursed for vouched out of pocket expenses to cover taxi fares, meals, and public transport (Amateur Status Advisory Report, 2003). In essence, while the players acknowledge that the adoption of pay for play is not feasible, they believe that the role of the elite players should be acknowledged in other ways. Player 3 (hurling) who was unsure about professionalism was unhesitant in expressing his doubts:

I do not know, that would cause a lot of bitterness...some fellows would be getting paid more than others...that would wreck it, but, I surely have a massive 'bee in my bonnet' about getting sorted out with regards to the cash.

This position was corroborated by Player 6 (football):

Not in our sport, because our base is too small, we are only a small nation... I would certainly agree with looking after the guys well, send them off on holidays and give them money for themselves... but I do not think it is viable.

Within the GPA it would appear that there are subtle differences of opinion as to whether the GAA should adopt a form of professionalism. GPA Executive 1 acknowledged that: “the Association will come under more and more pressure to protect the amateur status. Whether that will ever change or not I’m not too sure”. GPA Executive 2 believes that the GAA will have to directly address the amateur-professional debate:
I think if the GAA continue to ignore it you will get what you have had in every other sporting code and that is a ‘big bang’ and there will be a stand-off and players do not lose in stand-offs…I would rather it did not happen but I believe it will happen at some point.

Furthermore the GPA Executive 1 highlighted that: “the GPA works on a democratic basis, so the overall majority [of players] would be in favour of retaining the amateur status”. This comment is at variance within one of the findings from the GPA/UCD survey 2005, where nearly sixty two per cent of players favoured a move to semi professionalism, with nearly thirty per cent indicating that GAA should remain amateur (Hooper et al, 2005). While disregarding the viability of full professionalism the same respondent intimated: “now...that is different to semi-professionalism...semi-professionalism could be looked at in the future”.

A related issue that was explored with all the interviewees was whether payment for play (full or semi-professionalism) would occur within the GAA over the next five to ten years. While none of the respondents believed that the GAA would adopt full professionalism. The research found that eight respondents believed that the GAA would adopt semi-professionalism, whereas four respondents believe that semi-professionalism may be adopted, with one senior administrator stating that the GAA would not adopt any form of professionalism. Some administrators expressed differing opinions. For instance, Administrator 1 commented:

No, I do not and I am not putting my head in the sand I am saying that there is too much at stake for the organisation, not in terms of money, but in terms of
the Club. We can no longer protect a club player to stay with the club if anybody gets a bob [Euro].

In terms of the players’ viewpoint there was some disagreement, Player 4 (hurling) expressed doubts about a fast-pace of change: “possibly in ten years definitely not five years. Not a hope in five years, it cannot move that fast. Baby steps like. There is very little give and take”. Player 6 (football) stated: “I think so, probably to some extent, maybe a diluted version of it”.

While the GPA is perceived as a driver of the amateur-professional debate, the executive members within the players association believe that any move to professionalism will occur in the longer term. GPA Executive 1, for instance, argued: “I think in ten to twenty years time it will become an issue...it will be another decade at least”.

The findings arising from the conversations with the administrators correlate with other data. In 2006, the Sunday Tribune conducted a survey of County Board chairpersons, twenty nine County chairpersons were asked whether they would be for or against the adoption of semi-professionalism/professionalism, ninety seven per cent were against the idea (McEvoy, 2006). One County chairperson, for instance, stated “we must hold on to our amateur status, the GAA is where it is because of it” (Lanigan, 2006). The only chairman who favoured a move towards semi/full professionalism stated: “it would be sea change for the Association but it is creeping that way ” (Lanigan, 2006).
Interestingly, as the introduction highlighted, many of the Association’s internal reviews concluded that: “the vast majority of players have no demand for pay for play” (Amateur Status Advisory Report, 2003: 1). Thus, the GAA administration’s view appears to be at variance with the outcome of the GPA/UCD survey which identified that while fewer than nine per cent favoured the adoption of full professionalism, nearly sixty two per cent of players favoured a move to semi-professionalism (Hooper et al, 2005).

The opinions on professionalism demonstrate from a financial perspective, full professionalism is not an option. While there is a broad agreement that semi-professionalism may occur within the GAA. Nevertheless, the findings identify that this is unlikely to occur within the next five years. The respondents are aware of the fact that the GAA policy makers will be very slow to move towards semi-professionalism. As has been illustrated in the introduction the GAA will endeavour to implement policies to ensure that direct payment to players’ do not happen. Therefore, it may take some time for the Association to adopt semi-professionalism, although one must argue, that the GAA does not operate within a vacuum and is subject to changes in the external environment which have a direct affect on the organisation.

At a broader level the advantages/benefits and constraints/disadvantages of professionalism were discussed with the respondents. The general consensus from the respondents was that the quality of the games would improve if the game adopted a professional, but that there would be a negative impact on the club and the ‘grassroots’ level of the Association. The respondents highlight that while there may be financial benefits for an elite number of players in each County.
Administrator 3 commented:

You would have a better game. You will have players who are totally dedicated to the game…playing a better standard of game – I would think that would be the main thing. I find it difficult to see it attracting more people to the games.

The GPA executive respondents demonstrated an awareness of the intricacies of the amateur-professional debate and provided a balanced overview in relation to this issue. GPA Executive 1 stated:

Semi Professionalism, no more than any other sport has certain benefits – it brings more money to the game and possibly more appeal if things were done on a professional level where they might not be as professional in the current regime. The negatives, it needs a full feasibility study and a debate to kick off because it is very difficult to predict. It is an indigenous game it does not have that mass appeal outside this country… it is very difficult to sustain and I think ultimately it could perhaps be to the detriment of the game at grass roots level.

GPA Executive 2 stated:

I have one opinion with my GPA hat on, and another opinion based on my experience how the business of sport works…I know for a fact that a champion’s league format with fewer teams would absolutely work and work extremely well. Then you have obviously the GPA’s position which is that the
players are not ready to go there yet. The GAA’s position which is they hope they will never have to go there and they do not intend to ever go there. When you pull in all the political and social issues… then it becomes a different scenario.

As O’Brien and Slack (2004), (Barnes, 1997), and Thibault et al; (1991) highlighted, professionalism in rugby union created tensions where the balance of power shifted away from the voluntary members who until 1995 controlled an organisation that was underpinned by amateurism. One of administrative respondents highlighted that the County Boards would have to operate on a more business orientated manner, while the administrators did not indicate any immediate threat to their control the responses imply that their positions as voluntary administrators would come under scrutiny.

Administrator 3 commented:

The association would really have to become more professional… you would need to get people who are a lot more professional involved in County Boards. Maybe, it would mean that County Boards would have to examine their consciences a lot more and see where can we tighten up – the association would need to be run more like a business, it would be more balance sheet minded.

4.1.1 Broken-time payments/Shamateurism

By the late 1980s, the financial expectations of those involved at the elite level within rugby union increased to the extent that they sought indirect recompense for involvement in the game. Furthermore, the clubs and players became ambivalent
towards the implementation of the rules and regulations on amateurism, which subsequently precipitated professionalism (White, 2004; Dunning and Sheard, 2005). Broken-time payments/shamateurism was pervasive within rugby union in the decade prior to open professionalism. In the context of the GAA, broken-time payments/shamateurism is an issue that the GAA has grappled with since 1914 (McAnallen, 2009).

This concept was explored with the interviewees on two levels: the existence/prevalence of broken-time payments/shamateurism within the GAA, and the evidence of broken-time payments/shamateurism. A constant theme that emerged from the responses from administrators, players and GPA is that the widespread payment of managers and coaches at the senior inter-County and club level is viewed as being one of the drivers in the debate on professionalism. Player 1 (hurling) stated:

Oh, there is no doubt about that in my opinion. From my own experience, clubs have said to me that they will make it worth my while. Our own club will pay to get a decent coach; most of the coaches nowadays that have a name [reputation] or are any way decent are on upwards of €150 per session/night.

GPA Executive 1 had this to say:

In Jack O’Connor’s autobiography recently [2007], and to be honest he stated nothing that has not been in the public domain prior to this, stated he had been reimbursed by the Kerry County Board because he had to give time up from work and went job-sharing in fact. I would also imagine that there are an awful lot of managers being paid.
GPA Executive 2 agreed: “It is common at a managerial level... yes!”

While not all interviewees had explicit examples, the evidence from the discussions indicates that shamateurism not only exists within the GAA but is widespread. Administrator 3 added: “If you are going to call a spade a spade, the elite players do not do anything unless there is a brown envelope for them”. Similarly, Player 1 (hurling) highlighted his personal experience: “I have had a number of clubs asking me to take training sessions; these clubs are offering decent money, up to €250 per night which is a lot of money”.

The findings provide clear evidence that broken-time payments for loss of earnings for matches or training exist within the GAA. This is manifested by the similarity of the responses from administrators, players and GPA Executives. While broken-time payments occur, the County Boards and the Association are turning a ‘blind eye’ to this matter. Administrator 1 commented: “At the moment I am not sure if you are aware of it, there are a number of players in one of the Northern football Counties who have given up work”. He went on to ask a pertinent question: “So who is paying them? where is the money coming from?”

Player 5 (football) confirmed the existence of broken-time payments:

I heard in X it happens, it has been happening for eight years where they take time off work and are rewarded. It does not happen in X, and it has not happened in X to my knowledge. In my own case I lost an awful lot of time at
work, but again, I was in a job that I could use my profile to gain financially out of it and I did.

GPA Executive 1 commented: “the majority of cases would be injury related; some of them of late might have moved beyond that to time-off work to dedicate themselves to the sport and that type of thing”. When asked were broken time payments widespread he responded “I know of players who have received payments to allow them to push through their career. Leave of absence, etc”.

GPA Executive 2 stated that broken-time payments do exist but when asked for clarification was unwilling to discuss the matter: “I think it is accepted in some quarters as being standard, in others it is not, but it does happen. It would be dependent on the County. I would not comment on which reasons, but, I know it has happened”.

The findings highlight that all the respondents were either aware of, or in some instances had benefited directly from shamateurism. This substantiates the anecdotal evidence that the GAA alluded to in their internal reviews of amateurism. In 1986, an unpublished report highlighted that “there were [anecdotal] allegations about payments to a very small number of coaches of County teams and to a [considerable] number of coaches of club teams” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 2). Thus, the aforementioned findings highlight that “the GAA is exposed to the risk of shamateurism which bedevilled other sports in the past” (Hooper et al., 2005: 9).

Additionally, there is a direct correlation between the findings of this research and other evidence which identify that the financial rewards for coaching/managing a
senior inter-County team are lucrative. Foley and O’Connor (2008) highlighted the prevalence of payments to coaches/managers at club and County level in both hurling and football. Accordingly, coaches can command rates “on average between €100 and €150 a [training] session…one manager in a struggling County received almost €50,000 for the year… another is on €4,000 a month as a cover-all payment” (Foley and O’Connor, 2008). These figures may appear fanciful given that in 2003, the Central Council agreed mileage/travel for all GAA members is 50 cent per mile.

The 1997 Amateur Status report addressed the issue of broken-time payments stating “that reimbursement for lost time as distinct from out of pocket expenses incurred is tantamount to payment for playing” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 4). The GPA/UCD survey 2005, reveals that “ninety two per cent of the players feel that they should be reimbursed for documented absence from work due to matches or training” (Hooper et al., 2005: 7). This includes the period of absence not covered by the GAA player injury scheme and recompense for loss of earnings, including overtime. (Hooper et al., 2005)

The GAA administrative hierarchy are cognisant of the contradictions pertaining to amateurism. Peter Quinn, a former president and chairman of the 1997 Amateur Status Review Committee, which was mandated to provide documentary evidence of shamateurism, quite simply summed up his experiences this way: “we couldn’t even find the table” (Foley and O’Connor, 2008). Furthermore, the findings provide credence to the assertion from the current GAA Director General that “the single most difficult issue we face are under the counter payments” (McGarry, 2009). In terms of pertaining to broken-time payments/shamateurism, the GAA is not only exposed to, but, is experiencing tensions similar to other sports which undermined the concept of
amateurism. The evidence of creeping professionalism clearly demonstrates that in reality, the GAA is located at least in the middle of the amateur and professional continuum.

4.1.2 Commercialisation within the GAA

The literature highlights that commercialisation acted as one of the drivers to open professional in rugby union. The elite players recognised international rugby’s commercial potential and their own earning potential as marketable assets. Furthermore, the revenues generated from the income from television rights and sponsorship acted as a catalyst for pay for play (O’Brien and Slack, 1999; O’Brien and Slack, 2004a; Williams, 1989; Wyatt 1995). As an amateur organisation competing within a professional sporting environment, the GAA is an example of a successful commercial model. In 1991, the Directive on Sponsorship and Licensing coincided with the redevelopment of Croke Park, which was completed in 2005 at a cost of €255 million. A large percentage of money for the development was derived from the business and corporate sector via the sale of corporate boxes and premium seats.

As discussed, in 1997, the GAA implicitly acknowledged their commercial success, when the Association passed regulations to enable elite players to benefit from commercial activities. The area of commercialisation was discussed with all the interviewees. The administrators indicated that they did not mind the players benefiting from advertising or endorsements, which are allowable under the rules of the Association, Administrator 1, for instance, expressed his views succinctly: “I want to make quite clear I have absolutely no difficulty with player endorsements, advertising, as I do not think that interferes with amateur status in any way”. Player 5
(football) was acutely aware of the commercial opportunities available for elite players:

There are players; again it is a very small percentage of players’ that could earn €20 – €25,000 per annum… That is indirectly from the game and not from GAA, but the GAA promote this…The GAA have a lot of corporate attachments and corporate alliances who might want to promote a product. The GAA are very, very conscious of their [players] earning power and potential of their biggest stars and they do not want to deny them that...

The potential of Gaelic games as an avenue for promoting a brand or product can be illustrated as follows. In April 2006, some high profile GAA players were promoting a sponsorship deal with Adidas, “as amateurs, none of them could be paid; neither were there any contract nor image rights involved. More significantly, neither the GAA, nor the GPA had anything to do with it” (O’Riordan, 2006). However, by May 2006, the GAA decided that elite players who took part in advertising and promotion campaigns should be paid by the Association (Cummiskey, 2006). This is another example of the GAA reacting to the commercial realities that are available to the elite players. Currently, the elite GAA players who endorse a sports drink, and are involved in five or six company launches per year can generate an income of over €20,000 a year (Keys, 2007).

There is an added dimension to the issue of commercialisation which the GAA administration will be concerned with, that is the revenue accruing from television deals. As discussed in the literature review this was a key issue in the movement towards payment for play in Rugby Union. GPA Executive 2 highlighted that the
discussions on professionalism within the GAA may be dictated by external factors, namely the monies accruing to the GAA from television rights, “I think you would be looking to ten years more than five…but again I think the television deals will instrumental”.

As part of a long term strategy, the GPA has indicated that they want to secure a percentage of any television monies accruing to the GAA. According to GPA chief executive Dessie Farrell, the GPA is continually seeking to expand their commercial interests to help improve player welfare (O’Riordan, 2006c). The GAA’s willingness to embrace the commercial potential of the games is manifested by the decision to allow television three (TV3) to become the first independent broadcaster to be granted rights to live GAA championship matches. This provides a further example of “the potential of the games to generate further revenue streams for the Association” (Moran, 2007d).

If the GAA decide to offer the games on pay per view television in order to create additional income, it may result in the players seeking some form of remuneration from the revenue that the GAA generates. However, given the problems encountered by Setanta sports in fulfilling their financial obligations to the English Premier League for the rights to televise English and Scottish Premier Leagues (Moran 2009). It is debatable if pay per view strategy is a realistic revenue generator for an indigenous sports organisation.

The importance of the Croke Park Stadium in terms of generating revenue can be demonstrated in the Association’s 2007 accounts. During this period, the stadium generated €13.5 million (Moran, 2008a). On a broader issue, the 2007 revenue
accruing from gate receipts fell to forty eight per cent compared to sixty three per cent in 2005 and sixty per cent in 2006 (Moran, 2008a). This indicates that in recent years the Association’s commercial acumen and ability to generate revenue from sponsorship and television rights, as well as renting the venue to other sports has increased. While the GAA has benefited from the increased commercial revenue there are consequences, in that the Association is perceived to have financial resources. This is used by advocates of payment for play. For example, the GPA/UCD survey results (2005) over ninety four per cent of respondents indicated that some of this income should be paid into a players’ pool.

The results demonstrate that there are commercial opportunities available, particularly to elite players throughout the country. Nevertheless, in a small indigenous market, there are only a select group of players who can thrive, since the financial resources are clearly finite. In the current economic downturn, the commercial earning power of GAA players is likely to be diluted. Thus, the real value for a GAA player still lies in employment in the private and public sector. What is clear, particularly since 1997, when the GAA relaxed the rules that enabled players to benefit from commercial activities, is that the Association is prepared to tolerate commercial activities. Thus, the concept of pure amateurism has long since departed.

The absence of a real international dimension prohibits GAA players from ‘cashing in’ on their fame in a small country where the market is simply too small. However, there are a select few who have had, and can in the future, earn some income indirectly for a couple of years. Nevertheless, the decisions taken by the Association has created an environment where the expectations of the players have increased. Furthermore, the payment of the Annual Team Performance Grants in 2008 is a
further example of the diminution of amateurism within the Association. This highlights that the GAA is susceptible to the preconditions that led to professionalism in other sports. Therefore, the commercial opportunity available to elite players provides further evidence that the GAA is no longer located at the amateur end of the continuum.
4.2 Structural Ramifications

The section focuses on three key structural issues that are inter-connected, namely transfer systems/player mobility, contracts and the implication for Club. The literature demonstrates that these areas are central to the amateur-professional debate Williams (2002) highlights the emergent issue of player movement became as concern for rugby union in the late 1980s. Furthermore, in terms of Rugby union, pay for play enabled player mobility and transfers, and facilitated a situation where players received contracts that were unsustainable for some Club. Furthermore, the financial imperatives of the professional era undermined the long established tradition and identity associated with club in the amateur game (Malcolm et al; 2000; Smith, 2000, and Fleuriel and Vincent, 2007).

4.2.1 Transfer System/Player Mobility

The success of the GAA is predicated on the sense of identification with both a club and County. The GAA is a community-based organisation where the club is the focal point. Currently, the Transfer and Declaration rules in GAA Official Guide and the County Board Bye-Laws highlight that a player is “considered to owe allegiance and loyalty to his Home Club and County ” (GAA Official Guide, 2009: 58). In so far as possible, the Association’s rules try to ensure that players continue remain loyal to their home or first Club. Players are allowed to transfer to another club and/or County, however, they must fulfil certain criteria that are laid out in the Official Guide.

The advent of a formalised transfer system and the ensuing player mobility has ramifications for the sport at both administrative and playing levels. In essence, the overall fabric of the Association would be altered dramatically within a short time-frame if the GAA adopted a semi-professional model. Administrator 1, who is
familiar with the implications, made the following observation regarding the legislative framework that currently underpins the playing structure of the Association: “the transfer system/parish rule will be challenged in courts…it cannot be [currently] challenged on the grounds of money, and this is what is protecting the organisation”.

One key feature that emerged from many of the interviews was the overall reaction to the implications of transfer and player mobility in terms of Bosman ruling which enables a player to negotiate their own deal with a new club when their current contracts expire, or is nearing conclusion (Lowrey et al., 2002; Madichie, 2009). Given the indigenous nature of Gaelic games the findings need to be interpreted within this context. In addition, the respondents are current/experienced players who have been assimilated within the amateur model. This may change for future generations. Nevertheless, the players were aware of the implications of transfer systems and player mobility. While they did not dismiss the implications of these in the longer-term, they did not want to countenance the notion. None of the players interviewed intimated that they would transfer. Player 1 (hurling) stated categorically, in relation to a transfer system: “my answer to that one is definitely no!” Furthermore, Player 3 (hurling) equally expressed his worry: “so, if you are a professional player with X and you want to go to Y that will happen under the Bosman? Jesus! I would hate for that to happen; that would be terrible”.

Nonetheless, this trend is changing, particularly in the Dublin clubs and other urban areas as the findings suggests that in recent times some players have decided to transfer their playing allegiance. Player 4 (football) highlights this point:
I have heard of a couple of things all right…with players getting tied up in Dublin clubs and being looked after, you would be talking €5K or €10K, I have heard of those kinds of figures.

Another salient feature that emerged in relation to the discussion on professionalism was the re-orientation of the player opinions when the issue of player transfer and mobility is discussed. The respondents, who favoured the implementation semi-professionalism at a superficial level in terms of direct payment, were uneasy with the notion of player transfers. For instance, Player 7 (football) commented: “The GAA should re-define some of the rules and some of the regulations yeah! Now, I think it is not as easy as I am making it sound, but contracts and Bosman that is not the way of the GAA”. Player 4 (football) stated: “If they masked it [pay for play] in another way… you might be able to get around all that kind of stuff”.

However, there were some differing opinions on introduction of a transfer system between the executive members of the GPA who were interviewed. As GPA Executive 1 argued, “I think it would just lead to problems. I think you will lose what is really good about the GAA, that parochial, localised situation that has benefited the GAA greatly over the years”. GPA Executive 2 offered a different opinion and commented:

I think there is a very strong argument for a transfer system in hurling… In my opinion there is a very strong argument. You have many players in Kilkenny that are not playing for Kilkenny, that would lift a team elsewhere and bring something positive in that regards. In football it is not quite as prevalent, but it is not something I would be averse to.
As the results demonstrate the loyalty of players to their home or first club and County has enabled the Association to develop a very successful model of amateur sport. Tadhg Kennelly from Kerry, who played Australian Rules football with the Sydney Swans professionally for six years and returned to Ireland in 2009 and won an All-Ireland football medal in the same year and subsequently returned to the Australian Rules game for 2010, alluded to the loyalty issue and stated: “I’ve seen the game the way it is set up in Australia. There is no loyalty” (O’Brien, 2009). Thus, young players start their careers at their home Club or first Club where they are developed. In time some players progress to inter-County level. This model has served the Association well and continues to do, as the sense of identity associated with playing for their home Club and County is still an important motivation for many players.

If the GAA adopted either a semi or fully professionalism model, the issues of transfer systems and player mobility will merit careful consideration. The legal precedent established by the Bosman judgement would enable senior inter-County GAA players to discuss and negotiate their own deals with their current or new employer. Therefore, “any decent player in a smaller County would be gobbled up. Players would be moving and you couldn’t blame them” (Lanigan 2006). Thus, the top GAA players would be in a powerful negotiating position within their own County and with other Counties when their contracts are nearing the end.
4.2.2 Player Contracts

One issue that is inextricably linked to the transfer system/player mobility is player contracts. As the literature on rugby union demonstrates, the advent professionalism and the ensuing contracts allied to the proliferation of professional employees at various administrative and management levels within game changed the focus within rugby. In a short period, the control of the administrative and playing matters by the amateur members as well as the values of amateurism became diluted. They were replace with an administrative and financial culture that reflected a professional environment (O’Brien and Slack, 1999; O’Brien and Slack, 2004a).

As mentioned, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) centrally contract all the players to prevent the ownership of the game being dissipated among various private interests owning different Club. In an Irish context, the professional era did not dismiss all of the values of the amateur game (Fanning, 2007). Professional sides in England and France are dominated by privately-owned rugby club franchises with non-national players. These teams do not command the levels of support and identity of the Irish Provinces (McGurk, 2009).

While wealthy clubs can buy the best players, there is no guarantee of success. Professional rugby in England has created clubs which lack support or tradition. In France, the French federation are considering the adoption of a wages ceiling and a limit on the numbers of foreign players playing with the French Club. The southern hemisphere is not immune. In New Zealand and Australia, spectator interest is low. This highlights that money does not solve all the problems, and thus some the legacies of amateur rugby may have been dispensed with too readily (McGurk, 2009).
If the GAA adopt pay for play, the exposure to the professional environment would radically alter the current structure of the Association through a proliferation of franchises and or corporate ownership of a number of inter-County teams. Therefore, the County Boards which currently manage the administrative and financial affairs within each County are in danger of being marginalised as was the case with rugby union. Surprisingly, only one of the respondents made reference to this matter County Administrator 1 commented:

The very minute that you have payment for play at inter-county level the organisation as we know it is gone…some Counties would not be able to survive, there would be an opportunity for someone to buy the County and set up the team and ultimately buy an All Ireland [Championship]. That does not happen at the moment. There is the danger of professionalism.

As was the case in relation to the transfer system/player mobility there was a further re-orientation of the player opinions. The findings indicate that those who favoured payment for play did not necessarily wish to sign a contract, which indicates that when payment for play is explored in detail, the players again become circumspect of the implications. Player 7 (football) for instance, stated: “that would be a big issue, but, I think the whole pay for play issue has to be addressed through expenses…that is where it gets difficult and it could be made much simpler in terms of expenses”.

Generally, the responses highlight certain problems that could percolate down to club activity. While the implications of the professionalism for GAA in the context of club
activity will be discussed in the next section, the effect on club came out strongly in many of the responses. Administrator 3, for example contended:

If you bring in professionalism then obviously they are going to be contracted to the County and the club becomes obsolete. What you would have is that your club produce the best players in the County and then the club would not have the use of those players once they become a top class player. How are the County [Club] championships’ going to work? I do not know… I would think it is going to be a difficult one – there are lots of things that need to be sorted out before you go down that road.

Furthermore, an agreement would have to be reached as to what unit within the GAA would be responsible for the payment of the player’s contract. Currently the individual Counties within the GAA reimburse the players within their own County for any legitimate expenses incurred. If pay for play was adopted, all of the respondents intimated that any payments to the contracted players should be administered, managed and paid by Croke Park. Many of the Counties are operating within a tight financial budget and would not have a surplus funding available to pay players under a professional model. In 2001, nearly half the Counties expended over fifty per cent of their income, with some Counties expending over eighty of their income on preparation of inter-County teams. This level of expenditure has a negative impact on the funding available for coaching and games development activities as well as future capital development projects within the Counties (Strategic Review, 2002).
In 2005, the average cost to the 32 County Boards on the preparation of inter-County teams was €518,000. This represents an increase of fifty five per cent over a three year period (McEvoy, 2006). In addition, twelve out of the 32 County Boards were operating at an overall loss (Lanigan, 2006). One County chairman commented, “Counties will not be able to sustain costs and you talk about professionalism” (McEvoy, 2006). Thus, the onus for the payment of players is likely to reside directly with administrative headquarters in Croke Park.

When respondents, particularly those with favourable disposition towards professionalism, were asked to reconcile these opinions with the structural ramifications of professionalism, particularly transfer systems and contracts it was once again evident that professionalism within the GAA is not simply about direct payment for playing games. The findings demonstrate that the respondents’ hope that this situation can be avoided. However, these responses may only reflect the traditional values and ethos that they have grown accustomed to as members of the Association. In the longer term, if players at inter-County level only have experiences of being contracted to a County, then these attitudes are likely to change. Nevertheless, these are the ramifications that the GAA needs to consider. The implications of player transfers/mobility and player contracts would seriously alter the landscape within which the organisation currently operates.

4.2.3 Implications for the Club

The implications for the club activities are an important and relevant consideration within the debate. Therefore, this is an area that was examined with all the respondents. The opinions of the interviewees were divided. Administrator 1 identified that club allegiance was likely to be adversely affected and stated:
If we resort to pay for play at inter-County level, the immediate aftermath would be that club will no longer hold any players, and the players will no longer be considered a club player, because he is earning a living no matter how small at County level.

Player 3 (hurling) expressed his concerns in relation to picking up an injury while playing for their club and the implications for his contract:

If we got injured playing for the club instead of playing with the County, would they [GAA] take money off you or would you be in trouble... There would be more bitterness – the players would not be available for their Club.

However, not all the respondents subscribed to the negative impact for the Club, owing to the focus on senior inter-County playing activities within the amateur model, many clubs are currently disenfranchised. Player 2 (hurling) identified this concern, when he argues:

I could not see how it could be any more detrimental than it is… It is farcical, the situation with clubs [in my County], we played the first round of our championship the third week in May and the second round wasn’t until third week in July. So there was 8 weeks clear until your next game, to me that is in an amateur set up and how could it be any more farcical than that.

Similarly, GPA Executive 2 was also unconvinced and stated:
Clubs are at the mercy of the inter-County scene at the moment. Despite all the great oratory from the top table [Central Council] it is not going to be any other way, and I think the club are probably better off knowing where they stand. I know from my own experience this year, I would rather know where I stood. You get [County] players back in ‘rag order’ as well.

Under the amateur model, the GAA has continually reinvested their income within various units of the Association. In 2008, Croke Park distributed over forty five per cent of the total revenue of €64,317,933 among the Counties for games and infrastructural development (Annual Report, 2009). The GAA have invested a lot time and finance in developing playing pitches, dressing rooms and other facilities at club level. In addition, the Provincial Councils and County Boards developed a number of stadiums throughout the country to host inter-County games. The ability of the GAA to do this is enabled by the fact that at inter-County level, the GAA is a well supported spectator sport. In 2008, the overall gate receipts amounted to €26,354,710. Despite a €5million reduction in 2008, the monies accruing from gate receipts accounted for forty one per cent of total revenue (Annual Report: 2009). While the scope of this research does not include a financial analysis of the sustainability of pay for play, it is clear that the GAA has been able to develop on the basis of the revenue that it generates being used for the overall administration and development of the games.

At another level, if professionalism was introduced within the GAA, it would only be only a matter of time before the principle of payment would percolate down to club activity and in this instance the richer clubs within a County could start to attract the better players. This would be one of the unintended consequences/outcomes for the
GAA. Thus, it is inevitable that the club or parish structure which is the corner stone of the Association would be compromised. Currently, all senior inter-County players play with their clubs (on a restricted basis) throughout their County’s involvement in the senior inter-County championship season. If pay for play was introduced and players were contracted to their County, this situation would change and clubs would not have the same access to their players as they have under the current model.

Using the case of rugby, the implications for club are apparent. Since the advent of professionalism in 1995, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), which pay the wage bill for a fixed number of players who are contracted to four provinces – Connacht, Leinster, Munster and Ulster or the IRFU (Cronin, 2006). These players are seldom given the opportunity to play with their ‘home’ club owing to their involvement in the Magners League, Heineken Cup and international competitions. In addition, the IRFU can take international players away from the provinces prior to international games (Cronin, 2006). While professional rugby is now embedded at provincial and national levels. In rugby union, the emphasis has moved away from club competitions to provincial and international activities. This is a trend that the GAA needs to consider within the pay for play debate. Player 5 (football) alluded to this issue: “the buzz is gone in terms of the all-Ireland [Club] league, ok... the profile of rugby has never been higher but the [club] product has never been worse”.

Additionally, if pay for play was adopted, and allowed to percolate down to the club, they would have to set aside a percentage of funds that they currently generate through fund raising to finance their football and hurling teams from underage up to senior levels. A large proportion of the revenue that all GAA Clubs generate comes from people or businesses within local communities that are willing to provide
financial assistance to a club to which they are loyal. It is a matter of conjecture whether or not these clubs would be able to generate similar amounts of income from the local communities. Local benefactors and sponsors would be conscious that some of the funds were being used to pay a small proportion of the players within a club. In essence, the benevolence that many people/businesses have towards their local club could become eroded. As Administrator 3 has responded:

There would be a knock on effect to that. The concept of people doing things for nothing would go. It would have a detrimental effect on the club, and a knock on effect on the community at large if the club scene was to be downgraded in any way… Clubs need to be careful that they do not go to the wall [encounter financial difficulties] you hear all types of stories about the [club] bars paying for the players and all that kind of thing.

Of considerable significance is the role of volunteers within clubs, which According to the Irish Economic and Social Research Institute Report in 2005 has made the GAA a major generator of volunteers in Irish sport (Watterson, 2005). Most clubs possess a cadre of members who are willing to provide an input into their club at a coaching or administrative level, and currently, they give freely of their expertise and time without any financial compensation. While some of the respondents believed pay for play at club level for a small percentage of the players could create a degree of tension within Club. It can be argued that this may well be a generational issue and pay for play could become the norm over time within Club.

There was not a consensus on the negative impact on volunteerism amongst the respondents, for example Player 3 (hurling) stated:
No – I could not see how there would be, I think it is up to the teams to ensure they are successful – the more successful you are the more people you will have lending out a hand and it is the same with club and everyone else.

Furthermore, GPA Executive 2 provided the example of Australian Rules football, which is also an indigenous sport, argues:

In Aussie rules, lawyers, businessmen and consultants came in and structured what I believe is one of the greatest sports in the world in terms of marketing and promotion. They nurtured an amateur game, a semi-professional game, and a professional game without damaging the integrity of the grass roots level… so I think this is the only model to look at, as this probably the closest model and it works very well.

4.3 The Gaelic Players Association

The previous thematic sections discussed the first three research questions. This section explores the role of the GPA and acts as a precursor the final research question relating to a further review of amateurism. The advent and consolidation of the GPA as the formal players’ representative body has presented the GAA with an additional variable. Whether the GAA administration agrees or disagrees, the amateur-professionalism debate cannot occur without the input of the GPA.

The literature highlights that player associations provide a conduit for interaction and representation between the elite players and their governing body. In Australian rugby union, the emergent players’ body reached agreement with the ARU on the
distribution of television monies (Dabscheck, 2003). The co-operation between the players’ association and the ARU provides a pertinent example of an agreement that has enabled administrators and players to jointly maximise revenue for the sport.

Since the foundation of the GPA, there has been a continuing tension between the GAA and the GPA. In 1999, a former GAA president Joe McDonagh took umbrage at what he saw as the “fledgling organisation's presumptuousness” (Moran, 2006) to represent GAA players. While the GPA has continually tried to distance itself from the issue of payment for play, stating: “we're looking for the basic requirements to participate as players within an amateur game” (Moran, 2006). The findings explicitly and implicitly point to the existence tension between the GAA and the GPA. Administrator 3 expressed his opinion in this regard as follows:

I think the reason for the GPA coming into existence was that in some ways from a GAA administrator point of view that we are too blasé about our relationship with players. We did not actually react to what was happening and were too slow to react to it. Maybe people used their power to keep players down. A lot of what is happening now is due to the way players were treated in the past.

Player 6 (football) confirms hesitant nature of the relationship between the GAA and the GPA:

I think they are suspicious of each other to an extent and that their relationship has improved over the last couple of years, but, they were suspicious of each other. They are putting their differences aside for the betterment of the GAA.
Despite the fractious nature of their relationship, the representatives of GPA and the GAA began to develop a working relationship with both parties meeting regularly, to discuss player welfare matters (Cummiskey, 2005). The GAA has gradually acknowledged the GPA as the voice of the elite players and the representatives of the elite inter-County players; the Chief Executive of the GPA was appointed as ex-officio member of the GAA Central Council. (Cummiskey, 2005)

Evidently the GPA is here to stay and there has been a gradual acceptance of this in more recent times. In a Sunday Tribune newspaper poll, three quarters of the 29 chairmen polled believed that “the GPA had a worthwhile role to play in terms of player welfare” (Lanigan, 2006). Furthermore, the GPA/UCD survey 2005 highlights the virtually unanimous belief that the GPA should be formally recognised by the GAA as the de facto players’ representation body. In addition, no fewer than eighty eight per cent of respondents agreed that the GPA should be represented at key GAA committees, namely; County Boards, management committee and central council (Hooper et al., 2005).

It is pertinent to highlight the role of the elite players association in terms of developing commercial revenue streams to benefit senior inter-County players. One of the main reasons for the advent of the GPA has been the failure of the GAA to fully utilise the commercial potential of Gaelic games to benefit the players. Thus, the GPA identified this niche and decided to set the agenda for the GAA. This was illustrated when the GPA unveiled a television advertisement for the sports drink Club Energiser, which is endorsed by the GPA. Owing to the success of television advertisements, the funds generated from the sale of this sports drink are used by the GPA (O’Riordan, 2006c).
The GPA has evolved from being simply a players’ representative agency. The GPA has enabled their membership to become commercially astute in utilising their profile as elite players. Furthermore, the absence of funding from the GAA means that the GPA had little option other than to seek commercial sponsorship (Moran, 2006a). The GPA has a great deal of expertise in relation to player issues. GPA Executive 2 quite clearly emphasised the player association’s relevance:

There is an acceptance now that the GPA is not going away. Commercially, we have been quite successful and that is really by virtue of GAA ineptitude in that particular area. I think they are improving all the time, but, there was a vacuum there that allowed us to create a commercial programme that has funded the [players’] association.

There was a general view shared by both administrators and players that the emergence and consolidation of the GPA has made the GAA seriously reconsider the issue of players’ welfare as well as other existing concerns that had been neglected, especially as players are primarily responsible for generating much of the revenue for the organisation. GPA Administrator 1 states:

I do think that we [GAA] handled it [the GPA] issue badly; we handled it so badly, we probable made them stronger. I have no problem with an organisation representing players, being strong, but I would have a problem with it being outside the organisation. They should have a part to play in the promotion and development of the game within the organisation.
Nevertheless one of the respondents believed the GAA should firmly resist any direct payment for play. Player 5 (football) suggests that:

The GAA does need to take a stand if they feel in any way that the traditions, the values, the culture, the founding principles are being changed beyond recognition or taking a different form altogether. I think they should step in and be strong about it and say no, this is what we stand for.

In terms of the GPA’s strategy, namely, whether they are only concerned with player welfare or have a longer term strategy in relation to professionalism, remains to be seen. The opinions expressed by non-GPA respondents on this issue were evenly divided, as four respondents said pay for play was on their agenda, and another four disagreed, with the remainder being unsure. None of the respondents believed that full professionalism was on the agenda. According to Player 5 (football):

There are certain people… in the organisation [GPA] who would certainly advocate the pay for play, certainly would welcome it, and definitely would not reject it, because they would stand to benefit…pay for play is certainly on the table or on their agenda in the long run or some form of it.

However, Administrator 2 argued that: “The GPA is there for the welfare of the players, I know that they have mooted pay for play, but, they are not pushing it as hard as some people think. In my opinion, they are not”.

In April 2006, prior to meeting with GAA, the GPA clearly emphasised the welfare agenda and ruled out any agitation for play for play; “this is what the GPA is about.
There’s no reference to semi-professionalism and no reference to [full] professionalism. This can be taken at face value… we're not looking for pay-for-play” (Moran, 2006b).

The longer-term strategy was explored in detail with the executive members of the GPA. While both respondents stated that it was not currently on the GPA agenda, they did not rule out the possibility that pay for play will move towards the top of the GPA agenda in the future. They highlighted that the players will dictate the agenda on the issue of pay for play. GPA Executive 1, when asked about this issue responded: “I can see younger generations of players coming through who have a different mindset to the current generation, so if that trend is set to continue obviously there will be serious questions asked and serious challenges for the GAA down the line”.

The “generation” issue view appears be consistent with views of some of the players who were interviewed and indeed GPA Executive 2 made a similar comment: “No, it is not on the agenda at the moment… so I think we are at the bottom end of the bell curve, but attitudes will change as generations move on…I think players will at some point start to ask”.

Clearly, the GPA is a crucial stakeholder in the amateur-professional debate. The players’ association, through numerous commercial activities has created awareness amongst inter-County player of their marketability. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that tensions have existed within the GPA in terms of the pay for play issue. The original founder and former commercial manager of the GPA Donal O’Neill stated that the issue of pay for play will not go away. “It is happened in every other sport. GPA or no GPA, players will be paid at some point, I've no doubt in my mind”
(Foley, 2008a). Dessie Farrell, the current Chief Executive Officer of the GPA, disputed that pay for play was on the agenda stating that: "these are just his personal opinions and I think they are almost irrelevant as he has moved on [from the organisation]" (Foley, 2008a).

4.3.1 Player Grants/Welfare

In April 2008, the GAA annual congress agreed to sanction the payment of the Annual Team Performance Scheme(player grants) through the Irish sports council. It is unclear if the government are prepared fund this scheme in the coming years as recent indications suggest that the present economic uncertainty may result in the scheme being halted (Keys 2009a). While some of the interviews were conducted prior to the final agreement on the Annual Team Performance Scheme, the context of the discussions are still relevant. The findings highlight the unintended consequences associated with the payment of the Annual performance scheme. Some respondents viewed the payment of monies from this scheme as move towards professionalism, Administrator 1 stated: “If the grants were implemented it could bring in professionalism by the back door, believe it or not, even though it is a state payment”.

Whilst other respondents believed that the grants may enable the issue of professionalism to be set aside for the time being. When the idea of the player grant payments being a precursor to professionalism was explored, a number of responses indicated that the payment of the grants may enable the pay for play issue to be parked for a while. County Administrator 3 responded: “It may actually keep professionalism away, it may be a precursor to it, it is another step if you like, but at the same time it is ensuring that players are compensated”.
Similarly, GPA Executive 1 commented: “No I do not, if anything, I can see it offsetting the drive to semi-professionalism”. GPA Executive 2 concurred: “I think it will certainly push out any debate that may emerge or may be about to emerge or gain momentum on the whole issue of remuneration for players”.

Although players were in favour of the grants, some did acknowledge that the grant issue cannot be viewed in isolation and is potentially linked to the overall issue of pay for play. In response to whether the payment of grants was a first step towards professionalism, Player 6 (football) stated: “It is a big issue in the broader picture, where does it stop?” Player 7 (football) stated: “If it did not stop at grants, what about it. It is crazy... pay for play is not going to go away”.

Clearly the establishment of the GPA has generated both a negative and suspicious reaction amongst some GAA administrators. Nevertheless, there is a perception that the GPA has ultimately improved standards of player welfare. Given the perceived apathy towards the general playing body that tended to exist within the GAA prior to the formation of the GPA, it is unsurprising that the GPA has successfully mobilised players. More recently during meetings with the GAA hierarchy the issue of formal recognition and distribution of commercial monies has come to the fore. The GPA has campaigned on an ongoing basis for formal recognition. This campaign was stepped up when the GPA indicated that their members will be not available for promotional work and interviews during the championship season (Boyle, 2009). As future payments of the Annual Team Performance Scheme are no longer guaranteed, this has created an additional variable. The GPA have identified that the player welfare initiatives can be funded from the commercial revenue generated by the GAA (Keys, 2009b).
This development is unsurprising as results from this research indicate that ultimately the GPA believe that the GAA should fund GPA player welfare from their own resources. With this in mind, the GPA has suggested that five per cent of funding from all player related revenues generated from gate receipts, TELEVISION rights and sponsorship should be provided to the GPA to spend on player welfare. The revenue accruing from these areas in 2008 was approximately €40million (Keys, 2009b).

There is evidence that the GAA and GPA have gradually moved forward together since that latter’s formation in 1999. In November 2009 the GAA and GPA reached an interim agreement in relation to formal recognition and funding of the player welfare initiatives for 2010, (approximately two and half per cent of commercial income) to be administered by the GPA (Moran, 2009b). This interim agreement will enable negotiations on a comprehensive agreement between the two parties to continue with a view to reaching agreement in autumn 2010. This agreement demonstrates the interdependency between the GAA and the GPA and thus a recognition that both parties need to co-operate with each other in terms on the amateur-professional debate.

4.4 Reviewing Amateurism

This section addresses the final research question and analyses the extent to which a further review of amateurism is necessary for the Association. The aforementioned findings demonstrate that the organisation has made concessions in relation to amateurism that have increased the expectations of players. One important theme that
arose unprompted from the first interview conducted with one administrator was the issue of reviewing amateurism. Administrator 1 offered these candid views:

I am sorry if I am repeating myself, [we need to] define what we mean by amateur status firstly, in great detail, and enforce it. If that means throwing my County out of a championship, throw them out, full stop. But who is going to have the ‘balls’ to take it on. That includes, by the way dealing with the issue of manager payment as well, it is not just players. It is manager payment as well.

Arising from this initial interview, this theme was explored in the subsequent interviews with the administrators, players and GPA. The findings in relation to this issue are revealing, as the respondents believe that the GAA should undertake a comprehensive review. In Australian Rules football there is a retirement fund contingency whereby a percentage of the monies accruing the television rights income are paid into a fund on an annual basis. The fund is administered by the players’ association. Currently Australian Football League (AFL) players’ receive nearly €9,000 for each season that a player competes in the AFL. While a similar scheme for GAA players may create controversy, this initiative has been suggested to the GAA (O’Brien, 2009).

The views highlighted provide clear evidence that a review of amateurism is necessary. Player 1 (hurling) responded: “it would certainly help, that would help in some cases…glorified expenses, would mean that it [pay for play] would go way for a while”.
Player 5 (football) expressed a similar viewpoint:

Yeah absolutely… it is gone to the point now where certain players and I would say... would be less than five per cent have agents, but, there are certainly there is a lot of activity out there… I think they should maybe get rid of the word itself, because, by strict definition, the GAA is not amateur.

Player 7 (football) had this to say:

It is total contradiction in terms to describe the GAA as being amateur. I mean there is too much money involved to describe it as amateur. It is only amateur because the players are being described as amateur. Sure it is a big business. The GAA could free up some money for County Boards, they could increase mileage expenses.

GPA Executive 1 stated:

I think it is very difficult in this day and age for an ambitious County or County Board with ambitious players…to retain the services of those individuals without contravening the amateur ethos. So I think certain components of the amateur ethos need to be reviewed. I am not for one minute condoning the advent of professionalism but, I am saying that to eradicate the hypocrisy that exists currently within the game that needs to be looked at.

Similarly GPA Executive 2, was adamant that a review of amateurism “was as an absolute necessity”
In terms of a review of amateurism, the respondents were asked how this issue could be dealt with, as was demonstrated by some of the responses in previous sections the respondents believe that mileage/travelling expenses is one avenue that could be examined. Player 1 hurling commented:

It would certainly help, that would help in some cases you would have the question can everyone drive? If everyone could drive and claim a €1 per mile that would definitely help because there would be money in it at the end of the month.

Player 7 reflected on this issue and stated:

What could you do? the GAA [Croke Park] could free up some money for the County Boards, they could increase mileage expenses or they could increase the rate of expenses.

In terms of the enforcement and implementation of a review of amateurism, Administrator 1 stated:

If the [agreed] expenses are €1 a mile, I have no problem with a player getting them…I am saying that they should be properly remunerated for what they do, or, for what it costs them....an amateur status report [1997] came out and it was the greatest farce of all time. I said that it did not go far enough…

The interviews were concluded prior to the April 2008 agreement by the GAA congress to endorse the payment of the Annual Team Performance Scheme to senior
inter-County. Therefore, this research did not discuss the outcome of the decision. Nevertheless, it is important to outline the subsequent developments that have taken place since this decision. The player grants were approved despite strong opposition from a group within the Association called of the one belief. This group contended that the payment of the Annual Team Performance Scheme and the Annual Support Scheme for the Development of Excellence in Indigenous Sports was in breach of the Rule 11. Subsequently, the group exhausted the GAA internal disputes process and took a case against the Association’s Central Council on the issue, to the Disputes Resolution Authority (DRA) which is the final arbitrator. The DRA (20 page judgement) in April 2008 ruled that the player grants were not in breach of Rule 11, Section 60 which states:

the absence of clear definitions as to what constitutes eligible expenses gives rise to a concern that the Scheme will be misused, and that the Schemes do not adequately police what they [of the one belief] term the murky overlap between pay and expenses. In the final analysis, however, it cannot be said that any present features of the Schemes breach Rule 11 (DRA, 3/2008).

Ironically, after making the decision on Annual Team Performance Scheme, the Association recognised the need for a review of Rule 11. It is possible to speculate that this DRA decision, particularly section 60 of the judgement, may have influenced decision of the GAA to establish a committee to review Rule 11, as well as addressing illegal payments to managers/coaches. Just days after the Annual Congress of 2008, former GAA president Brennan highlighted what many had suspected, which is that the GAA is not ‘strictly’ an amateur organisation:
I have felt Rule 11 is very loose and bland at the moment and I think we need to re-define it in the context of amateurism today and what we mean by it… There is also been much debate about the payment of managers. The reality is that there has to be some compensation for being a team manager, for example, because there are genuine costs associated with that task… clearly, when it is loose, people put their own interpretation on that and amateurism is being eroded (Foley, 2008b).

While the approval of the Annual Team Performance Scheme and the Annual Support Scheme for the Development of Excellence in Indigenous Sports has created some disquiet amongst those committed to the amateur ethos, there is a counter balance. As: anyone with a passing interest in the machinations of the GAA would acknowledge that rule 11 leaves much scope for interpretation and is “a priceless piece of work - even allowing for the national [Irish] willingness (indeed, preference) to tolerate laws and regulations that have long ago ceased to have any connection with reality”(Moran, 2007c).

Currently, the GAA allows players to accept money for commercial endorsements, promotional appearances, media commitments, third-level education bursaries and generous expenses when travelling overseas in relation to certain Gaelic games activities. These activities are payments in cash, in conjunction with the playing of Gaelic games (Moran, 2007c).

The 1997 amateur status report approved various ways in which individuals might benefit from their status as inter-County GAA players. While the recommendations contained in that report were approved by GAA Central Council, “Rule 11 in the
Official Guide was never adequately amended to reflect those recommendations” (Moran, 2008b). In 2008, Former GAA president Nicky Brennan stated:

I will be initiating a re-examination and evaluation of the realities of what is happening today, to reaffirm and ensure that our association's amateur status is retained as a core tenet of what we do and what we are about (Moran, 2008b)

Despite this assurance a formal organisation-wide review of amateurism has not taken place to-date. In addition to the aforementioned the public utterances, the findings provide clear evidence that review of amateurism is a necessity. As well as the issue of expenses, other innovative ways of improving player welfare need to be examined; these could include a review of mileage/travel allowances, the establishment of a player’s trust fund, and the payment of match fees for league and championship games.

The 2009 interim agreement between the GAA and the GPA has laid the foundation for this review. Thus, the review will have to be undertaken in conjunction with the GPA. Nevertheless, some ground rules have to be established for this to be successful. From the GAA’s perspective, it is explicit and implicit from this research that they do not wish to concede the basic tenet of direct payment for play; from the GPA’s perspective they need to make it clear to the GAA what exactly they expect from the Association in terms of player welfare.
4.5 Summary

The chapter highlighted the attitudes and opinions of key stakeholders within the GAA towards the amateur-professional debate. Furthermore, it identified that the Association is experiencing similar preconditions that existed in other sports that undermined amateurism. The findings locate the GAA on the amateur-professional continuum. There is clear evidence that within the findings on the structural ramifications of professionalism and the role of the GPA that Association must undertake a further review of amateurism. The conclusion of the research will suggest how a review of amateurism will contribute to the ongoing debate.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

In a broader context, the sustainability of professionalism within Irish sport has been subject to much debate. The financial difficulties in maintaining the professional status of Irish soccer clubs in the Republic of Ireland who compete within the League highlights the vagaries attached to professionalism. In 2008, a High Court examiner was appointed to oversee the financial future of both Cork City and Drogheda United Football Clubs respectively. These are not the only clubs to encounter financial difficulties, other Club, such as Cobh Ramblers, Sligo Rovers, Galway United and Kildare County experienced liquidity problems during the 2008 season (Malone, 2008a). The precarious nature of the financial situation of the aforementioned soccer clubs provide the GAA, particularly the administrative leaders, with the perfect riposte to those who argue that the GAA should adopt some form of professionalism. This chapter will suggest how the GAA can deal with amateur-professional debate, as it will continue to be an on-going issue.

5.1 Reviewing Amateurism in a Modern Sporting Context

As demonstrated in the introduction and throughout the results and discussion, the GAA has conducted a number of internal reviews on amateurism. The recommendations emanating from these reviews reveal how the organisation has progressively adjusted their stance in relation to amateurism to reflect a modern sporting context.
An overview of the findings highlight that in terms of the attitudes and opinions of amongst the key stakeholders there is a consensus that full professionalism is financially unsustainable within the GAA. Furthermore, and unsurprisingly, the research demonstrates that there is little or no demand for a fully professional model. In terms of semi-professionalism, the findings identify that at a superficial level, namely, direct payment of money to senior inter-County players, there is a belief amongst the players that the GAA should consider adopting a semi-professional model. The administrators do not share this viewpoint. This is not remarkable as the loss of control and power experienced by their counterparts in rugby union is likely to have influenced their opinions. There is broad agreement from the respondents that the adoption of semi-professionalism is unlikely to occur within the next five to ten years. While the reader may conclude that the above findings are somewhat predictable, this does not convey the complete picture as the other results summarised below reveal the complexity of the debate.

It is significant that the research provides clear and irrefutable evidence from all the stakeholders that the GAA is experiencing similar circumstances that undermined amateurism in other sports. The opinions of the respondents in the interviews clearly demonstrate examples of indirect or veiled payment to senior inter-County players and managers, this reinforces the anecdotal findings that have been regularly alluded to in the course of the Association’s internal reviews of amateurism. The findings identify that the payment of coaches and managers are pervasive at both inter-County and club level throughout the Association. In the context of the discussion this issue has to be addressed, as it is a key driver in the amateur-professional debate.
Furthermore the evolving commercialisation of the GAA, particularly, over the last two decades has created an environment that has enabled the elite players to benefit financially from their commercial activities. Therefore unwittingly the Association has increased the awareness and expectations amongst the players that they can generate some income from these activities. In term of the amateur-professional continuum; the GAA has gradually shifted away from the amateur end of this continuum as it has adopted many of the characteristics of a professional sporting organisation.

The findings relating to the structural ramifications of professionalism are significant and identify that the amateur-professional debate is not just a case of pay for play. Player contracts, player transfers/mobility and the implications for the Counties and club have far-reaching consequences for the Association. While at a superficial level there is some demand within the GAA for semi-professionalism. More fundamentally, the responses reveal a key issue, namely, that when those respondents who are favourably disposed towards professionalism are asked to reconcile their opinions with respect to the structural implications of professionalism they reconsider and re-orientate their initial responses and provide conflicting answers. In essence, those who favour semi-professionalism clearly want some financial recompense for their commitment to Gaelic games. Nevertheless, their opinions demonstrate that when the structural implications of pay for play are examined, they become circumspect about the ramifications.

If the GAA adopt semi-professionalism and the elite players sign a contract, then on balance the model of senior inter-County activity that currently exists will be challenged. This may result in a slow diminution of player loyalty to both their club and County. Indeed, if player contracts were introduced then the overall structure of
the GAA would be exposed to the advent of franchises and/or corporate ownership of some inter-County teams. While the aforementioned changes represent the worst case scenario for those who remain steadfast their belief that the GAA should remain amateur, these possible outcomes must be seriously considered.

The role of the GPA cannot be underestimated, since 1999; the GPA has made the GAA reflect on how the association deals with the elite players by continually championing issues of player welfare. Initially, there was a degree of ambivalence towards the players’ association and possibly an expectation that they would disband in failure, therefore progress has been slow. The findings demonstrate that the GPA has remained resolute in their quest for formal recognition and the GAA has reacted to the constant lobbying from the GPA in relation to player welfare issues. Furthermore, the findings highlight that in terms of the structural implications of professionalism, the opinions executive members of the GPA are at variance. Thus, it appears that players’ association believe that semi-professionalism may not be a realistic option.

The payment of the player grants in 2008 is an acknowledgement of the commitment of the elite players. Nevertheless, the continuing payment of the player grants in an economic downturn remains problematic. However, the recent interim agreement in November 2009 between the GAA and the GPA in relation to the formal recognition of the latter as well as the distribution of a percentage of commercial income to the GPA indicate that the GPA remains resolute in terms of the deliverance of the overall player welfare agenda. This agreement provides both parties with an opportunity to address the issues of player welfare in the context of the amateur-professional debate,
and avoid the public disagreements that were prevalent in the media during the player grants debate.

The findings and discussion illustrate that this is an opportune period for the Association to undertake a further review of amateurism. There are two key aspects that distinguish the GAA from other sports, firstly, the indigenous nature of the games and secondly, the skew towards amateurism. It can be argued that as an indigenous sporting organisation in a country with a relatively small population, the games will never truly evolve on a worldwide stage. While this maybe viewed in a negative manner, it may prove to be the crucial factor that enables the organisation to remain one of the last bastions of amateur sport, albeit in a diluted form.

The findings provide clear evidence that a review and amendment of the rule pertaining to amateurism should be undertaken. There is clear agreement from the responses from the representatives of the three groups that a review of amateurism should be undertaken. This review should reflect the developments that have taken place in modern sport, owing to the fact that the results provide evidence that the GAA has not been immune to these changes. Any amendment to Rule 11 should recognise that a sporting organisation can have many rules in relation to amateurism, but unless these rules are fully enforced and implemented throughout the Association, they are meaningless.

This research demonstrates that current rule on amateurism is clearly and constantly breached and/or loosely interpreted by members. Thus, much of the erosion of the amateur ethos experienced by the organisation over the last number of years is attributable to the fact that the Association has turned a ‘blind eye’ to activities such
as, payments of cash and benefit in kind which have contravened the amateur status of
the Association. To-date, no member of the Association has been suspended for
breaching the amateur code. Thus, if the GAA continues to adopt a reactive approach
that reviews and relaxes the rules on amateurism, with little commitment for strong
enforcement, the organisation will continue to operate within a disquieting
environment characterised by laxity where ‘the tail is wagging the dog’.

There have been numerous public utterances from senior officials within the
Association in relation to the adherence to the ethos of amateurism, Nevertheless,
these same officials have been apathetic in implementing the existing rules on
amateurism. Thus, they are contribute to the diminution of the amateur values that
they continually espouse. The GAA have reviewed the concept of amateurism on a
number of occasions. Indeed, the aforementioned amendments made over the last two
decades, have had unforeseen consequences, in that they are enablers of incremental
professionalism that pervades the organisation.

Both the amateur status report 1997 and the GAA strategic review 2002 do not
anticipate a professional game evolving. Thus, any proposed change to amateurism
should consider two main areas which have been highlighted and discussed. Firstly,
will it facilitate or impede the survival of the GAA as a community/parish-based
organisation? Secondly, will it facilitate or impede the survival of the Irish indigenous
games? Professionalism is unlikely to facilitate these two key tenets of the
Association. The reason is that survival in the face of competition from both media
and sponsor driven international sports, means that the GAA at the community/club
level needs to ensure that it spends their money shrewdly on coaching, promotion and
development. Thus, GAA needs to distribute their revenue to the various units within
the Association, while ensuring that the players who are a key driver in the promotion of the games receive the appropriate recognition.

The experience of other sports provides evidence that paying inter-County players would undermine the culture and values that have made the GAA unique over the last 125 years. The identification with the club, parish and community are fundamental to the GAA. As discussed, the club would be seriously undermined by direct payment to the players. The predictability of human nature would ensure that gradually the players would change allegiance and follow the money. Professionalism will precipitate contracts; contracts will lead to disputes and thus legal redress. The inevitable transfer market will always favour the stronger and the wealthier Counties and club. While regular player movement is likely to erode the identity within Counties and clubs and thus the cornerstone of the GAA will be radically altered.

Bearing in mind these issues, it is important to make a distinction between player welfare and pay for play. Those who favour professionalism continue to highlight the excessive demands on players’ time. While the number of competitive games is not an issue; the requirements for training and preparation can be. The GAA and the GPA need to find commonality. They should examine and investigate training regimes with the aim of reducing the over emphasis on inter-County activity and restore the critical balance between club and inter-County activity. However, there are external factors, the commercial revenues generated from the senior inter-County games are a direct outcome of the product and any reduction in the quality of the games may have an adverse effect on commercial income. This argument can be counter-balanced, by the
reality that in times of economic recession; finances accruing from advertising and sponsorship are likely to be eroded.

As discussed in the findings, player welfare can be examined through restructuring and regulation. However, any breaches of regulations should be addressed. Currently, inter-County players can benefit from the glory, the status and the commercial spin-offs. While inter-County games generate revenue for the Association, the revenue accruing from these high profile games enables the organisation to continually develop. Clearly, the issue of professionalism can not be examined solely in terms of payment for play, but in broader terms. It is important to take cognisance of the long-term good of the Gaelic games, the players of the future and Irish community life. In essence, it remains debatable if payment for play is a valid alternative.

While the relevant findings from the GPA/UCD quantitative survey (2005) indicated that over seventy per cent of players want a move to some form of professionalism, this survey does not provide the complete picture. Furthermore, the survey does not provide respondents with an option of reviewing amateurism. This research explored the opinions of the players and administrators at a deeper level. The findings emerging from the research illustrate that when administrators, players and the GPA reflect on the structural implications of professionalism they are unsure about whether they want the GAA to move towards even a semi-professionalism model. Indeed when the option of reviewing amateurism in a modern sporting context was discussed in terms of the overall debate on pay for play, all the administrators, players and GPA agreed that this was a realistic and viable option.
5.2 Limitations and Recommendations

Before concluding the discussion, it is necessary to identify the limitations of this study and make some recommendations for further research in this area. While this research has responded to the research questions, the small sample size of the study is limiting. Nevertheless, it is quite revealing, as opinions were sought from the key stakeholders, namely, administrators, players and the GPA. However, the generational disparity of the participants interviewed has limitations. The interviews were conducted with senior administrators and inter-County players and GPA Executive members, who have grown up in an environment where the GAA has been an amateur organisation. It would be interesting to see if these attitudes correlated with the next generation of administrators, players and GPA executive members who have been exposed to the continuing debate on the viability of the amateur model.

The financial ability of the GAA to maintain professionalism is a constant theme that resonates in many discussions on pay for play. This is one area that provides some scope for future research. In the course of the research, nearly all the respondents were unsure whether the Association had the financial capacity to sustain semi-professionalism, let alone full-time professionalism. However, this issue needs to be explored in greater detail as there are organisational and structural implications if any of the revenue that the organisation currently generates was used to finance payment for play.

The financial repercussions of pay for play warrant thorough examination. Indeed, within the context of a review of amateurism, the feasibility of the payment to coaches and managers and the increased mileage or other expenses must be explored in conjunction with the financial obligations that would placed on the County Boards. As
has been highlighted, the overall cost of preparation of the inter-County teams represents a large percentage of the annual expenditure incurred by the County Boards.

A quantitative research study that involves the broader membership of the Association such as, administrators, players and members involved at both club and County level and not just the elite players should be undertaken in order to canvass the views of the overall membership of the Association. The GAA and the GPA should agree on the contents of the survey. As well as being disseminated as a postal survey, the survey should be made available on-line to a sample population. In order to ensure the validity of the survey access should be on a restricted basis. Furthermore, the availability of an on-line survey would enable the collection and analysis of a large volume of primary data.

This survey could be supplemented with qualitative information from a larger sample of semi-structured interviews. As has been discussed, any further research should not focus specifically on the issues of direct payment to players and player welfare. Instead, the research should examine the financial and structural ramifications of professionalism. The findings and outcomes from the study should provide the Association with comprehensive and documented evidence as well as compelling mandate to address the amateur-professional debate.

5.3 The Way Forward

While the ideal outcome for the research is to provide some clear cut findings, this is not always possible when dealing with qualitative analysis pertaining to such a complex issue. The findings illustrate that the amateur-professional debate is, and will
continue to be, a ‘live’ issue for the Association to grapple with. Having considered and examined the issue, and bearing in mind that the last major review of amateurism was in 1997, the conclusion emanating from this research suggests that an all encompassing review of amateurism should be undertaken by the Association. There are a number of reasons for this conclusion. In relation to the potential solutions mentioned below the issue of tax compliance would have to be examined within the context of any agreement.

Firstly, taking into account the interdependencies that exist between the stakeholders within the organisation, and in order to avoid the furore that occurred in relation to the approval and disbursement of the player grants scheme, The research provides sufficient evidence that there has been a gradual shift in the traditional power balances with the Association, away from the GAA administrators towards the players and the GPA, which has created tensions. Therefore, unlike the previous internal reviews, any future review of amateurism cannot be conducted in isolation. In more recent years the GAA and GPA have developed a less confrontational working relationship, this provide both the GAA and the GPA with an opportunity to work together to resolve this ongoing issue.

This review should be conducted in conjunction with the players, the GPA, and the wider membership. The 2009 interim agreement between the GAA and the GPA represents the first step in the process in formally recognising the GPA as the formal players’ representative body within the Association. Furthermore, within this agreement the GPA make an explicit commitment to the voluntary and amateur ethos of the GAA. Cleary this agreement provides a framework for the future discussions on amateurism.
As part of this process, the GAA should request that the GPA integrate within the Association’s administrative structure and allow them to champion the interests of player welfare from within formal structure of the Association. While it can be argued that the GPA as an external body is more powerful by remaining outside the official umbrella of the GAA, the recent interim agreement indicates that both the GAA and the GPA are moving towards a pragmatic solution in relation to their future relationship. Furthermore any future disagreement can be conducted in a less confrontational manner and outside of the public arena.

Secondly, the evidence from this research highlights that the payment to coaches and managers must be addressed, and, as mentioned in the annual reports to congress, these expenses/payments need to be regularised. A rate of expenses agreed by the GAA and the GPA should be implemented and paid to managers and coaches. Furthermore, these expenses/payments should be administered and managed by Croke Park, thus, taking the financial burden away from the County Boards.

Thirdly, the findings from the interviews suggest that payment of regularised mileage/travel expenses is one possible way of moving the amateur-professional debate forward. Currently, the GAA pays a mileage allowance of 50 cent per mile to both administrators and players. In the context of the overall discussions on payment for play with the interviewees there was a general consensus that an increase in the mileage expenses/payments to players could be explored. A limitation of this recommendation is that not all players own or drive cars, thus an allowance would have to be afforded to players in this category. As demonstrated in the results section there are other ways the issue could be addressed which were not explored in the
interviews. This could include the establishment of a players’ fund administered by
the GPA. In this instance a player could receive an agreed pro-rata payment when
their inter-county career is completed. Another possibility is the payment of
appearance/match fees, in this case, players would be paid an agreed amount for each
league and championship game that they play during a season.

Fourthly, the commercial activity associated with Gaelic games has been recognised
and to some extent the GPA identified this niche and generated revenue from it. In
terms of a review of amateurism, if the interim agreement between the GAA and the
GPA is fully implemented, then GPA as the formal representative body can continue
their commercial activity on behalf of the players in conjunction with the GAA. This
will create a synergy between both organisations which can be enabling, as they can
work together to enhance the commercial income for the players and the Association.

The amateur-professional debate could be addressed in terms of the overall
distribution of a percentage of the monies accruing from sponsors and television into
a player welfare scheme, similar to the player trust fund adopted by the southern
hemisphere in rugby union in 1991. Any revenue generated can be used to offset the
aforementioned any increase in mileage expenses and out of pocket-expenses or
contributions to players fund. In addition, any breaches of agreed rules should be dealt
with by enforcing the penalties as per the official guide. Essentially, the GAA needs
to review the question of amateurism but also ensure that it shows leadership on the
issue. The future direction of the organisation must include an alliance with the
players and the GPA. The Association must avoid the reactionary manner that has
pervaded the decision-making process, particularly during the last two decades.
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The Amateur-Professional Debate: An Exploration of Attitudes and Opinions within the Gaelic Athletic Association

Michael H. Frain BA, GDBA

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Principal Supervisor: Dr. Tara Magdalinski
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ABSTRACT

The amateur-professional debate is a recurrent theme within the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). This exploratory study reviews the literature in terms of the preconditions to and the implications of professionalism in sport, with specific reference to both rugby union and soccer. This review provides the framework for the discussion on the key issues pertaining to the debate using qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, namely, senior inter-County players, senior administrators and executive members of the Gaelic Players Association (GPA).

In addition to payment for play, the research identifies and discusses the attitudes and opinions of the participants on other important aspects which are relevant to the debate; these include firstly, broken-time payments and shamateurism, commercialisation and sponsorship; secondly, the structural implications, particularly, player contracts and transfers; the implications for the club; thirdly, the role of players’ association; fourthly, the role of the GPA within the amateur-professional debate; and finally a review of amateurism. The results of the research highlight that the aforementioned aspects are central to the amateur-professional debate within an indigenous sports organisation. The research identifies that professionalism within the GAA cannot be examined solely in terms of direct payment to the players.
DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I declare that the material contained in this thesis is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

Signed: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
DEDICATION

To my Mother Margaret and my deceased Father Henry

To my Wife Gráinne and Sons Aodhán and Cillian
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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Contextual Overview

Whether the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) can remain an amateur organisation is a recurring theme that the organisation has to consider and respond to on an ongoing basis. At the Annual Congress in April 2008, in what is viewed by many members as further diminution of amateurism; the GAA agreed to sanction the payment of eligible expenses through the Annual Team Performance Scheme and the Annual Support Scheme for the Development of Excellence in Indigenous Sports of Hurling and Gaelic football, formerly known and more commonly referred to as the player grants. The concept of player grants scheme emanated from a GPA proposal to the Irish Government in 2002 to extend the tax breaks currently available to elite professional athletes to senior inter-county hurling and Gaelic football players (Moran, 2007a). The agreement was the culmination of approximately six years of negotiation between the GAA, the Gaelic Players Association (GPA) and the Irish Government.

Accordingly, a €3.5 million Government grant was made available and disbursed through the Irish Sports Council to the GAA in December 2008. This benefited approximately 1800 senior inter-County players (O’Riordan, 2008a). The GAA wanted to ensure that the scheme did not contravene Rule 11 on amateurism, which is contained within their official guide, while at the same time guaranteeing that the move was generally in consonance with European law and tax exemption. In order avoid accusations of direct financial assistance, the GAA reacted by re-branding the
Generally, the status of the players involved in the Gaelic game can be described as amateur, since they are not directly remunerated for playing games. However, the GAA is far from being amateur in the strictest sense. As a modern sporting entity the GAA has undergone a multifaceted evolutionary process that has seen the Association adopting and embracing many attributes existing within other well established professional sporting organisations. Indeed, it can be argued, and this will be highlighted later in this research, that the primary difference between the GAA and other professional sporting organisations is the fact that senior inter-County players are not paid to play. In the context of Ireland, there is a general paucity of academic literature on the amateur-professional debate in sport. Therefore, the literature review explores existing academic sources from other countries where the concept of professionalism in sport is discussed and documented much more extensively. This research, based on interviews, primarily examines attitudes and opinions within the amateur-professional debate. Prior to discussing the central tenets of this research, it is germane to provide at a general level, a brief overview of the formation of the GAA, as well as outlining the major trends that have characterised the development of amateurism within the organisation.

1.1 The Formation and Rationale for the GAA

The Irish famine of 1845, and the mass emigration that ensued in the aftermath of this tragedy, combined to impede the development of both the cultural and sporting landscape in Ireland. By the late nineteenth century and the earlier decades of the
twentieth century, England’s control over the Ireland fostered a climate of intense antagonism that provided a rationale for various waves of Irish republican rebellion. Aside from the nationalist, sporting, and political reasons, the foundation of the GAA reflected the fear and anxiety within the Irish population that the distinctiveness of Irish culture would be systematically eroded if organised sports were directed and coordinated from England (Mandle, 1987).

By the latter part of the nineteenth century Victorian sport had become well established in Ireland. Sports Clubs and associations were organised or in the process of organising in athletics, badminton, boxing, cricket, rugby football, association football, tennis, rowing, and swimming (Mullan, 1995). The urgency to assert Irishness within sport was compounded by a crisis in terms of national identity. The founders of the GAA considered the bond of unity created by sport as a vehicle which could be used to enhance a sense of national identity and pride among Irish people (de Búrca, 1999; Cronin, 1999). Furthermore, the founders of the GAA disliked the broader imperialist agenda of British sport. However, not all of British colonies reacted in similar manner. In the southern hemisphere, some colonies were keen to adopt both cricket and rugby, while focusing on beating the British at of their own games. Nevertheless, like the British, they were averse to the corruption and gambling that were linked to professional sport, while also concurring that sport should provide a basis for moral development (Holt, 2009).

The GAA was founded in November 1884 in Thurles, Co.Tipperary with the objective of administering and managing the activities of two indigenous field sports, namely Hurling and Gaelic Football. The Association is primarily an all-Ireland sporting and cultural organisation which promotes Irish culture and national identity,
through participation in indigenous field games and pastimes. In terms of Irish history
the GAA is a unique manifestation of the relationship between sport and nationalism
in Ireland (Cronin, 1999). The establishment of the Association can be located within
the overall context of governance within the country. It can be argued that the advent
of the GAA provided a conduit for expressing Irish nationalism in ways that perhaps,
defied the conventional model of national sport development in other countries
(Mullan, 1995). Some commentators within the literature (Allison, 2002; Cronin,
1999) discuss the importance of the interrelationship between nationalism and sport,
arguing that sport enhances national identity. Furthermore, Jarvie (2003) contends that
while globalisation may have undermined the relationship between nationalism and
sport, it is still relevant in the context of modern sport.

While the early development of the GAA is viewed by critics in some respects as
being politically motivated owing to the fact the founding members of the Association
were patently opposed to linkages with a British label, including “new bourgeois
sports” (Mullan, 1995: 268). Nevertheless, the organisation was energised by the
social and cultural developments taking place – as a reaction to, and a consequence of
the modernisation that prevailed during this period (Cronin, 1999). An interesting
irony within the evolutionary phase of the development of the GAA is highlighted in
the decision to adopt and defend the concept amateurism which (while being more
pragmatic) was a key identifier of English sport during the mid to late nineteenth
century. The founders of the GAA wanted to ensure that the organisation was
democratic and therefore pursued the realisation of their activities with little class
distinction.
During this period those who administered the Irish Amateur Athletics Association (IAAA) adopted class based rules on amateurism, similar to gentleman amateur rules that were adopted in England. Despite this, many instances occurred in Dublin athletics during the 1870s where fraudulent handicapping and the awarding of prize money to amateurs was prevalent (de Búrca, 1999). For instance, Michael Cusack, a driving force in the foundation of the GAA, had participated in a wide variety of sports as was the norm for the Victorian era. Cusack as an all-round sportsperson criticised the IAAAs rigid definition of amateurism for excluding “people who are vulgar enough to be muscular” (de Búrca, 1989: 83).

As involvement in sporting activities in Ireland during the 1880s became the preserve of the ruling classes, members of the ordinary working class seldom participated in what were generally perceived as socially exclusive leisure pursuits (Tierney, 1976). Nevertheless, the formation of GAA provided a counter balance to the class distinction that existed. As the sectarian fault lines between Catholics and Protestants intensified, demarcations developed within Irish sports that replicated the broader bifurcation of sports into Gaelic and Anglo-Irish factions, which forced large parts of the population as well as social groups to follow one segment or the other (Mullan, 1995).

By the early 1880s, the political and social changes in Ireland had influenced Cusack’s mindset. At this time, Cusack was cultivating his career in journalism, and he used this as a platform to promote and re-establish Gaelic sports, particularly hurling (Rouse, 2009). He disliked the class based structure and the elitist attitude within the administrative hierarchy of the sporting bodies, who at the time, refused to recognise the right of the working classes to participate in their activities. Overall
Cusack’s campaign in 1884 can be seen as a culmination of efforts to enable ordinary Irishmen to compete in recognised Irish games. His intention was primarily to utilise native games and language as vehicles to energise national culture, identity and pastimes, which were increasingly on the brink of extinction. (*de Búrca 1999*).

Cusack continually sought patronage and support for the GAA wherever he could find it and selected people from a broad spectrum of the Irish nationalist movement. In addition to being aligned with nationalism, the GAA also developed a strong alliance with prominent clerics within the Catholic Church. After the inaugural meeting Dr Thomas William Croke, then Catholic Archbishop of Cashel was invited to be one of the first patrons of the GAA. Croke became a passionate voice for the Association’s progress during the embryonic years (Tierney, 1976), constantly championing a viewpoint that highlighted the need for native Irish people to dedicate greater interest and resources to save hurling and other forms of Irish sports that were already facing declining popularity. (Holt 1989).

Cusack further displayed an enduring leadership by garnering support from individuals such as Michael Davitt (Leader of the Irish Land League) and Charles Stewart Parnell. Both of these were parliamentary representatives of Irish democracy who advocated a revival of Irish sports. As Mandle (1987) noted, the selection of Croke, Davitt and Parnell as patrons of the Association represented a significant recognition of the major forces in the Irish nationalist movement.

Initially the Association wanted to limit the importation of foreign/non-Irish games (mainly soccer, rugby, hockey and cricket which were viewed as British Games) into Ireland. In 1887, this was demonstrated by the introduction of a contentious and
infamous rule of membership, more commonly referred to as ‘the ban’. This Ban may be viewed as the ultimate expression of the GAA’s intimate association with nationalism. For the proponents, the nationalist ethos implicit in continued acceptance of the ban was essential to the growth of the organisation. In essence, it prohibited membership of the GAA for any person who played, promoted or attended foreign games or who was a member of the British defence and security forces (Rouse 1993). The Ban, which was one of the most divisive rules, existed for eighty-four years and was seen as a potent symbol of the GAA’s intimate relationship with nationalism (Mandle 1987).

From 1884 onwards, the GAA underwent rapid evolution, and just two years after being established, approximately 400 affiliated Clubs had been established. In comparative terms, this was a remarkable feat, as the two main rivals; the Irish Football Association (IFA) and the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), both founded earlier, witnessed less spectacular rates of expansion than the newly formed GAA (Garnham, 2004).

1.2 The Organisation Structure of the GAA

The GAA is a community, club or parish based organisation, with the club being the primary focus of much of the Association’s activities. As with many large sporting organisations, the club members despite being the largest grouping within the Association hold the least amount of power. The club members are represented by elected officials within each club who constitute the Club Executive Committee. Each club elects one or two members (depending on whether club plays one or two codes) who are delegates to the County Board (also known as County Committee). The
County Delegates in turn elect officers of the County Board at the Annual County Convention.

The Provincial Councils are comprised of two representatives from each County within a particular province. The Provincial Council elects officers (chairperson, secretary, treasurer and public relations officer) the secretary of the provincial council is normally a full-time professional. The Provincial Council reports to the Management Committee and ultimately the Central Council, which “is the supreme governing body of the Association” (GAA Official Guide, 2006: 48). Central Council implements decisions taken at the Annual Congress, interprets rules and issues binding decisions covering all aspects of the organisation. The Central Council composition, powers and function are set out in rules 84 and 85 of the official guide (GAA Official Guide, 2006).

1.3 The GAA: A Bastion of Amateurism?

The maintenance and protection of the Association’s *de facto* amateur status, (amateurism was not formally discussed until 1953) has been a ubiquitous issue which the organisation has grappled with since the embryonic years. By the late 1880s and early 1890s, the issue amateurism had become the subject of discussion, as the expenses incurred by most inter-County teams were reimbursed. While there was a trend towards professionalism in other sports; due to the small Irish population and economy, it was acknowledged that Gaelic games did not have the ability to generate adequate revenue to adopt a professional model. Some County Boards recognised the need to address issues pertaining to player welfare, which took the form of remuneration to players who were injured, and assisting them in securing employment (McAnallen, 2009).
From 1913, collective training became a regular occurrence for successful senior inter-County teams. Even at this early stage, the Louth team while preparing for national finals, hired professional coaches and paid the players wages for two weeks training (Corry, 1989). In 1953, the GAA central council established a committee to examine the area of full-time collective training which occurred, particularly during the summer months. The committee reached the conclusion that inconsistencies had developed around the issue of amateurism owing to the disbursement of cash or benefit in kind to players (McAnallen, 2009). Thus, in 1954 at the GAA Annual Congress, a ban on collective training camps was enacted - this was “the first time the amateur status of Gaelic team sports was referred to in rule” (McAnallen, 2009: 172). However, amateurism was not defined, and the penalties for any breaches of the rule were not stipulated (McAnallen, 2009).

In 1971, a major watershed was reached in the development of the GAA, as the annual congress that year decided to rescind ‘the ban’ on foreign games, (Rouse, 1993). Furthermore, for the first time since 1954, the rule on amateurism was amended, with the new rule defining the GAA as an amateur association, while prohibiting any forms of “payment or other material reward…for participation in games and pastimes” (GAA Official Guide, 1971: 3-4).

Following these reforms, the GAA in 1971 approved commercial sponsorship of activities on a limited basis. This decision enabled the Association to increase their profile, while simultaneously generating supplementary finance to fund other activities. An expansion in media attention, marketing and preponderance towards commercialism through access to Television in the 1970s, propelled Gaelic games to
more significant prominence. By the late 1970s and 1980s, top-level GAA players had gained national recognition, and it was not unusual for senior inter-county players to gain employment or generate additional business for themselves as a consequence of their involvement with inter-County teams. A Kerry player of this era summed it up, “If you look at the prominent players of that era, they did well” (Foley, 2007: 111).

In 1986, there was a significant milestone in terms of a comprehensive review of amateurism. This was only the second time an amendment to the rule on amateur status was enacted since 1954. Three new principles underpinned rule. Firstly, no-one could receive a payment as part of their membership of the Association. Secondly; expenses were paid at a threshold agreed and sanctioned by the Central Council, and finally, any members in breach of the rule incurred a minimum six months suspension (McAnallen, 2009).

An examination of internal GAA documents and reports reveals that the Association’s administrative hierarchy were suspicious about possible infringements to the amateur status. This is manifested by the fact that the GAA reviewed the amateur status issues more regularly from 1983 to 1997 inclusive (Amateur Status Report, 1997). These reviews led to the revision of certain rules which reflected the developments within modern sport, particularly in relation to commercialism and endorsements.

In 1986 the Association consulted with a variety of players, team officials and County Board officials. The 1986 report reached the following salient conclusions: (1) few players were in favour of professionalism or semi-professionalism; but players wanted reasonable treatment in relation to player welfare (travelling expenses, meals, and playing gear for training matches); (2) There was little evidence of abuse of the
Association’s amateur status rules by players. However, it strongly advocated that the Association should take action against members who breached the rules; (3) despite anecdotal suggestions; there was no evidence of players demanding appearance money for attending club functions. Nevertheless, it reiterated that payment for such appearance constituted a breach of the Association’s rules; (4) there were further anecdotal allegations concerning payments to a very small number of inter-County team coaches/managers, and a greater number of club team coaches/managers. Consequently, emphasis was placed on the need to uncover and punish all those involved in any proven malpractice, in accordance with the Association’s rules. In addition the report re-emphasised the necessity for maintaining the voluntary commitment of all members (Amateur Status Report, 1997).

As a consequence of aforementioned conclusions, the sub-committee who drafted the 1986 report highlighted that “while it had been unable to find proof of any violations of the Association’s rules, it believed that breaches had occurred and were occurring and that these were being aided and abetted by GAA units or people who turned a blind eye to them” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 2). In 1989, The Annual Report to Congress identified that the most serious breaches of amateurism emanating from the 1986 review involved the payment of coaches at club level, as well as, the payment of appearance money to players for attending club functions or events (GAA Annual Report, 1989).

This overview demonstrates that the maintenance of amateurism has been a constant source of concern for the leadership of the Association, and while the aforementioned findings are unlikely to have startled many members, they are quite revealing. While the GAA accepted the existence of breaches to amateurism, it chose to adopt a policy
of inertia in face of such allegations. As was the case with the 1954 review, the 1986 rule was not implemented or reinforced and no member was suspended from the Association on grounds of breaching the rules on amateurism.

Since 1986, the issue of amateurism has been reviewed on four occasions, and the conclusions have been broadly similar. It was in this context that in 1997, the Central Council of the GAA established a sub-committee to further review the interpretation of the amateur rules. The Association accepted that the challenges “cannot be ignored or allowed to develop organically or randomly” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 4). The objectives of the report were to identify methods to maintain the amateur ethos, decide if further amendments should be implemented, and propose how any changes should be enforced (Amateur Status Report, 1997).

The 1997 report concluded that there was a lack of awareness between the senior inter-County players and the County Board officers in relation to the County Board finances. In addition, the report stated that “there is virtually no demand at any level within the Association for payment for playing” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 4). Furthermore, the findings addressed the issue of broken-time payments, stating “that reimbursement for lost time as distinct from out of pocket expenses incurred is tantamount to payment for playing” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 4). This statement illustrates that the prevailing concerns around the issue of broken-time payment within the Association have been evident for some time.

In total, the 1997 Amateur Status Report made 28 recommendations. Some of the more relevant recommendations pertaining to this research can be summarised as
follows: (1), Members of County squads should receive a mileage allowance (which at this time were a minimum 18p and a maximum 30p per mile). However, depending on their financial position County Boards should have the right to determine what mileage rate was paid. (2), Inter-County panels should be provided with meals of an acceptable quality after both matches and training sessions. In addition, all squad members should be supplied with adequate training and playing equipments; (3), Players could write articles or books, and appear as guest panellists on radio or television programmes and be paid for same. (4), Players or teams were not allowed to appoint a personal agent(s) to develop commercial and financial opportunities arising from their involvement in Gaelic games; (5), the expenses paid to club managers, coaches etc must not exceed the prescribed limits. In addition County Boards must approve annually the level of expenses being paid to those involved in managing club teams; (6), No club or County can offer any form of financial inducement to a player from another club or County to transfer his allegiance. Any proven violations shall result in the imposition of penalties in accordance with the Association’s rules.

A further recommendation stated that “players should be allowed to endorse [commercial] products not in direct competition with any relevant national, provincial, County or player’s club sponsor” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 7). In addition, the report contended that the Association should establish and manage their own internal structure to oversee developments in relation to product endorsement and commercial appearances for both players and teams, and ensure that the players will not be liable “to excessive fiscal deductions” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 8). This formally enabled players to benefit financially from their image rights. While the
decision may be viewed as radical departure from the Association’s previous stance, it ensured that Gaelic games continued to compete with other professional sports. The decision must be viewed through a broader prism of other sports, as in the 1990s both rugby and soccer players benefited from product endorsement as a means of generating additional income (Conlon, 1997).

By relaxing the regulations and allowing players to benefit financially from endorsements, the Association created an unintended consequence in terms of the restrictions on hiring personal agents. It is debatable if the GAA can prevent players from hiring personal agents as this could be construed as restrictive practice (Conlon, 1997). Thus, some of the recommendations emanating from the 1997 report illustrate the pragmatic approach that the organisation has adopted. This demonstrates once again, that the GAA has been prepared to compromise provided the core principle, direct monetary payment for the playing of the games remains in tact.

The 1998 Annual Report to Congress highlighted a failure of the 1997 Amateur Status Committee to address the issue of alleged payments to team managers and coaches. The report by the Director General contended that given the amount of preparatory work and time dedicated to a training County teams, “there is a strong case to be made for paying County team managers an allowance” (Annual Report, 1998: 13). The oversight by the 1997 Amateur Status Committee in relation to this matter is surprising given that in the preceding Annual Report to Congress, the Director General alluded to the fact the issue of paying County team managers needs to be addressed (Annual Report, 1997). Evidently, the Association has a misguided opinion
that by ignoring breaches of amateur status regulations, they would not become a pervasive culture throughout the organisation.

In 2002, the amateur status was revisited in an overall strategic review of the Association. This review noted a prevailing dissatisfaction amongst players with respect to concerns over payments to team coaches and managers, with indications that players may “ultimately demand the same terms and conditions for playing themselves” (Strategic Review, 2002: 205). This development will incur major financial implications across all levels of the Association (Strategic Review, 2002). The GAA has to accept some responsibility for ‘fuelling the flames’ in relation to the amateur-professional debate. While the organisation has endeavoured to ensure that it is fair to the elite players who benefit from commercial arrangements, this has unintended consequences, as the expectations of players are increased.

Furthermore, the 2002 review, alluded to the financial opportunities available for players. This review recommended that “players involved in a sponsorship, or promotional arrangement can receive all the benefits…apart from any statutory deductions or other mandatory payments” (Strategic Review, 2002: 206). Additionally, this review gives credence to those who contend that the Association’s rules on amateurism are being interpreted rather loosely by “emphasising the responsibility of star players to attend to functions and events without an over-emphasis on being paid” (Strategic Review, 2002: 207).

A further review of amateurism was undertaken in 2003 by the Amateur Status Advisory Committee. This committee consulted with players, team managers,
officials and representatives of other sports organisations, in order to address the concerns of senior inter-County players. A 2003 report to the Central Council highlights that “the vast majority of players have no demand for pay for play, but expect to be treated fairly and with respect” (GAA Amateur Status Advisory Report, 2003: 1). Furthermore, the report contends that “pay for play or compensation to participate, irrespective of where it starts means payment without limit” (GAA Amateur Status Advisory Report, 2003: 1). Nevertheless, this report led to an increase in the mileage/travel allowance from 38 cent to 50 cent per mile. In addition, the payment of acceptable vouched out of pocket expenses to cover taxi fares, meals and public transport was agreed (GAA Amateur Status Advisory Report, 2003).

Rule 11: GAA Official Guide clearly states the organisation’s current position in terms of their amateur status:

The Association is an Amateur Association. A player, team, official or member shall not accept payment in cash or in kind in conjunction with the playing of Gaelic Games. A player, team, official or members shall not contract himself/itself to any agent other than those officially approved by Central Council. Expenses paid to all officials, players and members shall not exceed the standard rates laid down by the Central Council. Members of the Association may not participate in full-time training. This rule shall not prohibit the payment of salaries or wages to employees of the Association (GAA Official Guide, 2006: 6).

In essence, while striving to maintain the core principle outlined in rule 11, the internal deliberations undertaken by the Association over the last number of decades
have led to the adoption and implementation of policies that are similar to other professional sports. The increasing demands by, and the material concessions to elite players have created an environment where creeping professionalism is a recurrent theme. The recommendations emanating from the aforementioned reports demonstrate that the GAA is constantly reviewing amateurism in a retrospective and reactive manner within a modern sporting context.

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

This research focuses on an identification and understanding of the attitudes, issues, and implications that are relevant to the amateur-professional debate within the GAA. The current position of the GAA as an amateur sporting organisation provides the major case study for the research. This study responds to a gap in the literature, as up-to-date academic research on the issue of amateurism-professionalism within the GAA is scarce. This is achieved through an analysis of primary sources and qualitative interview data from senior administrators, senior inter-County players and GPA executive members.

This research reviews some of the main literature and explores some of the common themes and preconditions for professionalism namely shamateurism and broken-time payments that have been prevalent in other sports such as rugby union and soccer. Over the last few years, there has been regular commentary within the media, particularly, newspapers and radio programmes which revisit the issue of pay for play. However, these discussions tend to focus specifically on direct payment to the elite senior inter-County players, which do not provide the complete picture. The amateur-professional debate needs to analyse and consider the structural implications
associated with pay for play, namely, a transfer system and player mobility, player contracts, the implications for the club and the role of GPA.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned objectives, the following research questions have been designed to guide the study through to completion. The discussion will firstly; examine the prevailing attitudes and opinions of the key stakeholders in terms of the amateur-professional debate; secondly, demonstrate if the GAA is subject to similar circumstances that undermined amateurism in other team sports and locate the GAA on the amateur-professional continuum; thirdly, identify the structural ramifications of professionalism; fourthly, explore the role of the GPA within the amateur-professional debate; and finally, discuss whether a further review of amateurism is necessary.

1.6 Summary

This introductory chapter has identified that the payment of the annual team performance scheme and annual support scheme in 2008 is a recent development that the Association must deal with in the context of the amateur-professional debate. The overview of the foundation of the Association, in conjunction with a discussion on amateurism and concluding with the research objectives and questions provides a framework for the overall discussion.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

It is appropriate to consider the amateur-professional debate within the GAA in the context of the transition from amateurism to professionalism that occurred in other sports. While the chapter will examine the issues that arose in other sports, where relevant, some sections will be interspersed with reference to similar developments that have occurred within the GAA.

The first part of the review provides a brief overview of the development of amateurism and professionalism in terms of the foundation and development of rugby and soccer in England. The second section identifies the key structural implications of professionalism encountered within rugby union from the mid 1990s onwards. The focus on rugby is justified by the fact that rugby union provides a more recent example of a sport (albeit with an international dimension) that recently underwent the transition from amateurism to professionalism. Furthermore, the chapter identifies the implication of the Bosman ruling for sport in general. The areas discussed in the literature review provide the structure for the subsequent analysis in the results and discussion section.

2.1 The Development of Amateurism and Professionalism in Sport

Initially it was believed that the amateur ethos developed during the period of the ancient Olympic Games in Greece. This was sometimes referred to as the Corinthian spirit, where athletes participated honestly, fairly and with respect for their opponent’s
personal achievement. However, Allison (2001) suggests that the ancient Olympics were neither amateur nor professional, as these concepts had not been developed during this period. Furthermore, the winners of the events were often rewarded financially, or otherwise.

Amateurism is a relatively modern issue that evolved in the mid-late nineteenth century after a transitional period between 1830 and 1863. During this period there were developments in society in terms of communications, technology and transport. It is unclear who the leading proponents in the amateur movement were (Holt, 1992). Nevertheless, there is a general agreement that the modern amateur concept originated in England during the mid-nineteenth century (1863-95) within the public school environment (Allison, 2001). It should be noted that during this period, the emergence of and the seriousness of sport was not always viewed positively. Both religious leaders and educated professionals believed that value of sport was a matter of conjecture, owing to the linkages with drinking, gambling and violence, having adverse effects on business and commercial activities (Gruneau, 2006).

The term professional came into use in the 1850s (Holt, 1989). The term “comes from the verb to profess, the core of the concept is the idea of a vocation or calling” (Allison, 2001:142). A professional sportsperson trains on a full-time basis, is remunerated and normally competes at the highest level of their sport. During their professional career they have no other occupation outside of their sport. The French word amateur is derived from the Latin word ‘amator’, meaning ‘lover’. Therefore, an amateur partakes in sports because of love and passion for it (Horne et al, 1999).
Glader (1978) posits that the essential difference between amateurs and professionals in nineteenth century Britain was social rather than economic. He outlines three characteristics of amateurism; firstly as a social distinction, which allowed a separation of the so-called gentleman amateur from the lower class members of society. In terms of rowing, the mechanic clause which effectively excluded boat-builders or manual labourers from participating in competitions highlights this social distinction. In addition, there was intolerance towards professional athletes who competed for money as they were viewed as inferior and being of questionable character. The second characteristic of amateurism was termed a special advantage distinction. Labourers who rowed regularly as part of their occupation were classed as professionals and were declared ineligible for amateur competition, and thus, denied opportunity to compete against gentlemen amateurs. The third characteristic of amateurism relates to the motivational distinction, this is where a real amateur competes for the fun and the love of a sport, with success being viewed as secondary to the equality, fairness, and the standard of competition. Thus, the motives of those who participated in sport for financial reward were questionable.

Allison’s (2001) definition of amateurism corroborates Glader’s (1978) perspectives by way of reference to three areas, social, ethical and bureaucratic/financial. The social definition explores the idea of the amateur being a gentleman who has never been paid for manual or physical labour, a definition that was more applicable to sport in the south of England due to the public school influence. The ethical definition highlights that amateurs compete in their sport for personal gratification, and not for pecuniary reward. The bureaucratic/financial definition describes the idea of an amateur being someone who does not receive payment or financial reward for competing or winning.
From the 1860s onwards, national governing bodies were established to administer, codify, and regulate their respective sports. During the formative years of some sports the issue of payment for play was to the forefront. For example, the relatively conflict-free emergence professional cricket in the 1800s was driven by the aristocracy and the gentry who held an overwhelming balance of power owing to the social dominance of their class based position in society. In this instance, the gentlemen amateurs and professionals played together on the understanding that the social differences were recognised and adhered to (Holt, 2009). This enabled the aristocracy and gentry to structure the game in a self serving manner. Thus, the structure that emerged resulted in the subservience of the professional to the amateur, with the professional players being employed by gentry and landed amateurs due their proficiency at the game (Dunning, 1999). This was typical of the general pattern of professionalism that emerged within British sport. It was characterised by the “subordination both of professional to amateur personnel, and of professional to amateur conceptions of sport” (Sheard, 1997: 119).

Some sports, particularly soccer and rugby dealt with the issue of professionalism at an early stage in there development. In the case of rugby union, twenty–two clubs from northern England broke away from English Rugby Football Union in 1895. These clubs formed the Northern Rugby Football Union. Subsequently, these clubs were influential in developing rugby league as a professional sport in 1904. From the 1850s onwards, the first soccer clubs began to emerge, mainly in southern England, and the Football Association (FA) was formed in 1863. Following the codification of the rules of soccer, by a small number of Club, the embryonic forms of soccer permeated into the wider society via former public school players. While many of these clubs were in the London region, some clubs were founded in northern England
(Dunning and Sheard 2005). In the early 1880s, rumours of illegal cash payments to soccer players in England were widespread, thus the notion of creeping professionalism was a phenomenon during the formative years (Tischler, 1981).

While open professionalism in soccer occurred in 1885 with the formation of the Football League, payment for play can be traced back to 1876, when players such as James J Lang left Scotland to play in Sheffield (Curry, 2004). The first stage in the emergence of professionalism within soccer manifested itself in a crisis surrounding importation. Importation is a process where players from outside the locality or region are imported to represent the local team. Importation occurred regularly at the end of the 1870s especially for important knockout cup competitions (Curry, 2004). Those involved in the FA, disapproved of importation even more so than professionalism. The FA believed that if professionalism was adopted, importation would become redundant (Mason, 1980).

The development of rugby followed a similar “process of regional and social segregation” (Holt, 2009: 39). Rugby clubs in the south of England tended to be status-exclusive and did not compete in matches against working class teams. However, northern England contained a large number of factories and other industries that facilitated interaction between the different social classes. Rugby became important within these communities and provided a social outlet to the otherwise regimented schedules of work that existed society in the late 1800s (Dunning and Sheard, 2005).

An amateur ideology emerged in opposition to the encroachment of professionalism and the commercialisation of sport through gate-taking. However, owing to the
imminent threat of professionalism, the public school elite ensured that the amateur ethos became an elaborate, documented and distinctive ideology. A power struggle developed over the concept of amateurism (Dunning and Sheard, 2005), and rugby became the “site of conflict between the expression of working class cultural practices and the dominant cultural codes of the public school ethos” (Collins, 1998: 61). However, the Rugby Football Union (RFU) was also concerned with the emerging challenge posed by professionalism in terms of the threat it wielded against their organisational authority (Sheard, 1997).

Professionalism did not emerge as means of “financial speculation, but was used mainly as a vehicle of social control” (Sheard, 1997: 119). This suggests that professionalism was not developed by would be professionals, but, by the amateurs who governed the sport. A similar crisis pertaining to the issue of amateurism and professionalism arose but was resolved in cricket and soccer. These two sports each remained under the governance of one administrative body, which incorporated both amateurs and professionals (Dunning and Sheard, 1976).

The tensions and machinations surrounding the professionalisation of soccer during this period were similar to those that occurred in rugby, but unlike rugby, these strains did not result in a permanent split. In Soccer, in 1895, two distinct organisations and structures were formed to accommodate both amateurs and professionals. Acquiescence to the notion of payment for pay within soccer occurred with less recrimination than it had occurred in rugby. The amateurs and the professionals within football co-existed relatively peacefully with fewer power struggles between the gentlemen amateurs and those who were in favour of professionalism (Mason, 1989).
Nevertheless, there were some traces of power struggles between the amateur and professional ethos that resonated for a long period within football. In 1907, class distinction and regional rivalry led to the establishment of the Amateur Football Association (AFA). The AFA remained outside the auspices of the FA for seven years. However, the AFA realigned itself with the FA in 1914 as an affiliated association. Thus, the spilt in English football is viewed a relatively minor occurrence in the development of sport (Porter, 2006).

Vamplew highlights that professionalism in sport faced a barrage of criticism. Firstly, on the basis of social prejudices, since it was perceived that professionalism lowered the nobility of the sport, transforming it into a mere trade. Secondly, professionalism in the sport had turned play into work, elevating the pertinence of winning over the pursuit of enjoyment, thus promoting foul play and sharp practice. Thirdly, professionalism came under scrutiny from detractors who argued that because spectators were creating icons of their sporting heroes, sport had become an unjustifiable feature on newspapers. This was often linked with vexations related to the ability of players to buy and sell their allegiances to rival clubs for money, not necessarily out of the desire for service. Finally, perhaps the most fundamental criticism of professionalism hinged on the belief that those who were paid to win could also be paid to lose as the struggle for existence in professional sport would lead to temptation with the best not necessarily being the winners (Vamplew, 1988). Gentlemen amateurs objected to professionalism because they feared losing to their social inferiors, thereby, damaging their self-interest in terms of control over the sport. Consequently, they attempted on occasions to ensure that professionals were kept under strict control through legislation enacted by those who controlled particular sports (Dunning and Sheard, 2005). It is important to highlight, as Vamplew (1988)
further suggests that it was not professionalism *per se* that was responsible for any corruption, but rather the gambling associated with professional sport

2.2 Broken-Time Payments/Shamateurism

Despite the aforementioned criticisms of professionalism it is debatable if pure amateurism has existed, particularly since nineteenth century. Therefore, the issue of broken–time payments and/or shamateurism are interwoven within the amateur-professional debate. Shamateurism occurs when a sports person derives direct or indirect financial benefit from sporting activities though classified as amateur (Dunning, 1999). Broken-time payments occur when a player is compensated or reimbursed for having to take time-off from work in order play or train. By the middle of the nineteenth century, shamateurism was prevalent in English County cricket, “on those occasions when the amateurs’ reimbursements were accidentally delivered to the wrong dressing room, the professionals became well aware of who was being paid the most” (Vamplew 1988:200).

The conflict in relation to broken-time payments/shamateurism is a recurring theme in many sports. In terms of rugby, by 1893 the English RFU became aware of the northern clubs proposal to adopt broken-time payments. This hastened the split within the game into rugby union and rugby league in 1895 (Porter, 2006). The Rugby Football Union turned a ‘blind eye’ to the rules in relation to amateurism when it suited the union to do so. Working men discovered that amateur sport could be financially rewarding, thus covert professionalism has been well established in rugby union (Collins, 2006; and Dunning and Sheard, 2005). Despite the fact that Soccer has adopted professionalism, there was still a culture of shamateur payment within the amateur competitions, where honest professionalism was discouraged (Porter, 2006).
In the context of the GAA, broken–time payments/shamateurism were also an issue that the GAA had to address from a relatively early stage. In 1914, the Laois County Board paid their players “the equivalence of their wages, or replacement money to the men who worked in their place” (McAnallen, 2009:165). By the 1920s, successful teams who toured America were provided with broken-time payments for absence from work as well as some spending monies. While these payments breached amateur status rules, the GAA decided to not enforce regulations on these activities (McAnallen, 2009).

In order to reduce their training costs both the Central Council and the Provincial Councils gave a special grant to the Counties who reached the All-Ireland final. By 1926, the GAA was moving towards professionalism because the County Boards were “effectively bankrolling broken–time payment” (McAnallen, 2009:170). From the 1940s, onwards, broken-time payments remained a contentious issue. Inter-County players were compensated for taking time-off work to train, with some players receiving more than their normal income for working. Interestingly, even those players who did not incur a loss of wages (teachers and students) also received small payments (McAnallen, 2009).

2.3 The Transition from Amateurism to Professionalism

In rugby union, three significant developments occurred in the 1960s and 1970s that required the RFU to reevaluate the policies on amateurism. Firstly, owing to increased competition from the southern hemisphere, there was a movement towards a spectator-orientated sport. Allied to this, the international dimension of the game resulted in the competitive success of the national team being crucial in the overall
development of the game. Secondly, the influential gate-taking clubs initiated formal
cup and league competitions to increase playing standards while expanding their
commercial activities. Thirdly, the RFU and the top club became increasingly
dependent on gate-receipts, revenue from media coverage and advertising, as well as
commercial sponsorships (Malcolm et al., 2000). The monetisation of the rugby
continued and senior club players had become “time professionals” (Dunning and
Sheard, 1976: 65), as they were devoting increasing amounts of time and energy to
the game. Rugby had a major role in their life, relegating their professional career,
marrige, education and family to the background (Dunning and Sheard, 1976).

In late 1980s and early 1990s, changing attitudes and values in rugby were
accompanied by the incremental formation, and growing tolerance, of a developing
professional structure in both the northern and southern hemisphere. O’Brien and
Slack (1999), Malcolm et al., (2000), and Wyatt (1995) identify a number of similar
features in the monetisation and incremental professionalism within the rugby union.
Malcolm et al., (2000), identify the following, firstly, the gradual increase of direct,
but veiled and excessive payments to players including inducements to transfer from,
or to Club. Secondly, the indirect payment to players (including travel and
accommodation and payment) for product endorsement and promotion. Thirdly, at the
elite level there was an informal transfer market operating amongst the clubs.
Fourthly, the complexity and commercialism involved in running gate-taking clubs
and international competitions resulted in the growth of the administrative, coaching
and management functions and the hiring of professional staff to oversee the
organisation of these Club. Fifth, there was a growing formalisation in the relationship
between the stakeholders in the club, for example player/club, player/governing body
and the club/governing body, and this included the emergence of player associations
and representative groups both formally and informally. Finally, commercialism, sponsorship and marketing became a ubiquitous part of the game at both club and international levels.

The RFU responded in an unpredictably controversial manner by tightening the amateur regulations in relation to the transfer of players. This involved compromising on the permitted sources of earnings and ignoring some breaches of regulations. Thus, a veiled form of monetisation operated within the game. During the early 1990s, rugby union shifted along the amateur-professional continuum (White, 2004). Smith (2000) and Wyatt (1995) highlight that the 1991, Rugby World Cup was pivotal since it relaxed the restrictions on technically amateur players benefiting financially from the game. At this stage the RFU did not object to elite players taking up employment as rugby development officers or receiving inflated expenses. From the late 1980s onwards, shamateurism had escalated to the extent that “it was not unheard-of for a player to have his job, car and accommodation provided for by his Club” (Williams, 2008: 66). The Welsh Rugby (WRU) tolerated and even encouraged shamateurism in order to discourage union players from the lure of the professional rugby league in the north of England. However, some players such as Scott Gibbs who made this transition later highlighted the existence of ‘shamateurism’ within rugby union. He commented:

> It grates me that I am called a prostitute while players and officials keep on covering up what’s going on in the union. Every player in Wales knows that when you play on Saturday, if you win you can get a few quid. Players get the cash after the game (Smith, 2000: 150).
During the early 1990s in both the northern and southern hemisphere, some rugby union players transferred to rugby league. They were lured by the prospect of a career in a professional game and the associated advantages in terms of large salaries and luxurious living conditions. Initially, the rugby union administrators believed the traditions and values of the amateur game could cope with these changes (Barnes 1997, Fitzsimons 1997). However, in the southern hemisphere, there was a response to the changing external environment within which rugby union operated. In 1991, a player trust scheme emerged (Skinner et al, 1999). The scheme ensured that elite players who committed a lot of time and energy to the game received “some remuneration from the game without infringing on their amateur status” (Skinner et al, 1999: 184). In reality, the financial rewards, and arrangements that initially affected a small minority of the elite players and had little influence on the other administrators and players as the central tenet of amateurism remained in tact (Skinner et al, 1999).

### 2.4 Commercialisation, Sponsorship and Television Rights

Since the 1895 schism between the RFU and the Northern gate-taking Club, English RFU administration resolutely fought to protect the principle of amateurism, a legacy that influenced their reaction to open professionalism and helped to explain the “underwhelming response by the union establishment to the opportunities and threats presented by professionalism in 1995” (Malcolm et al., 2000: 63). The Irish RFU adopted a similar mindset in their attitude towards the threat of payment for play, and continued to espouse the mantra that the game should be played on a voluntary basis (Fanning, 2007).

Notably, the issue of social control or class hostility was not a central issue in relation to professionalism. In general, those rugby union players benefiting from
professionalism shared similar educational and social backgrounds. They had comparable values and were exposed to similar socialisation experiences (Sheard, 1997). The competition for playing resources provided much of the momentum in the transition to professionalism. In contrast to the pressures exerted on the RFU by the northern gate-taking clubs in the 1895 split, it was the union themselves that believed they had no option but to agree to pay for play in 1995. It was “international relations rather than intra-national relations that led to professionalism” (White, 2004: 63). The collective acknowledgement of pay for play was championed by the three southern hemisphere nations, namely, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. This left the overall governing body the International Rugby Board (IRB) with little option but to adopt professionalism (Cronin et al; 2008).

The main drivers in the move towards professionalism included, global and international competitions namely, the rugby world cup, the southern hemisphere tri-nations tournament, the increasing commercial and media influence and the competition for players from rugby league. Furthermore, the development of sponsorship was a major influence in the transition to overt professionalism owing to the fact that many of the players in the late 1980s and the early 1990s were employed at executive level within private companies. These elite players recognised international rugby’s commercial potential and their own potential as marketable assets (O’Brien and Slack, 1999; O’Brien and Slack, 2004a; Williams, 2002; Wyatt 1995).

In 1995, the landscape of the game changed when the union players (who were still amateurs) were offered substantial payments by Television Company News Corp. Eventually, the three south hemisphere unions, after a battle for players with a rival
body the Word Rugby Corporation (WRC), agreed a pay-per-view television deal with News Corp. This led to the situation where much of the finances invested in the game were controlled by the players. This development hastened the adoption of professionalism in momentous ways (Dabscheck, 2003; Fitzsimons, 1997).

It was television as well as the “genuine embarrassment at the hypocrisy of shamateurism and the detrimental impact on the sport” (Smith, 2000: 152-153), which forced the IRB to act. News Corp, under the direction of media mogul Rupert Murdoch, played a major role in facilitating club-based professional rugby in Britain, especially in England (Barnes, 1997). The balance of power between the English RFU and the senior sides had shifted to about a dozen elite clubs, with only a handful operating from a stable commercial base. The monies accruing from television rights became a major source of revenue for the RFU (Barnes 1997, Fitzsimons 1997, Smith, 2000).

From a GAA perspective, the Association has not been insulated from the commercial realities of sport. From the early years, spectators paid admission to games. Furthermore, limited commercial sponsorship was discernible in that trophies or medals were donated for competitions or tournaments (McAnallen, 2009). In 1914, Croke Park (GAA Headquarters) was incorporated into holding company called Páirc an Chrácaigh Teo (PCT). PCT manages match and non-match day events in the venue. This involves maximising the financial return from the stadium’s infrastructure, such as, GAA Museum, corporate and premium facilities, conference facilities and advertising opportunities (Croke Park Website, 2008). In 2007, the stadium holding company, and associated subsidiaries recorded a turnover of €44 million and profit of over €17 million (Moran, 2008a).
Prior to 1971, the GAA generated revenue from advertising in match programmes, publications, limited sponsorship of secondary competitions, as well as the limited use of advertising hoardings around Major GAA grounds. Furthermore, commercial sponsorship which provided any demonstrable benefit to the sponsor was limited (McAnallen, 2009). Nevertheless, while GAA teams could not display a sponsor’s name on jerseys or kitbags, club and inter-County teams accepted sponsorship on an ad-hoc basis. This was community support from a benign benefactor rather than sponsorship for the promotion of commercial or business interests (McAnallen, 2009). Despite the fact the GAA was aware of the competition from other sports and the commercial potential in a growing sports and leisure market, the GAA was reluctant to fully embrace commercialism.

In 1991, the GAA acceded to the inevitable. A Directive on Sponsorship and Licensing was published that made specific reference to the retention of the amateur status and the role of each member in the preservation of that status (Directive on Sponsorship and Licensing, 1991: 3). While the Association has benefited financially from commercial activities, there are implications, especially as the elite players who through their participation at senior inter-County level display the product (Gaelic games), without receiving direct monetary payment from the financial windfalls accruing to the Association.

2.5 The Structural Ramifications of Professionalism

For rugby the genesis of open professionalism in August-September 1995 resulted in a number of adjustments to the organisation and structure of both the club and international games. Despite adopting professionalism, the English RFU was reluctant to fully embrace professionalism in the 1995/96 season. Initially, the clubs were
allowed one year’s grace to decide whether they would remain amateur or adopt professional status. Thus, it was not until a season later in 1996/97, that professionalism was fully adopted by an association clearly wary of undermining the amateur ethic that had underpinned the game for 100 years (O’Brien and Slack, 1999). Similarly, the Irish RFU were also opposed (Fanning, 2007).

Some significant developments in club administration occurred in rugby from 1995 onwards. firstly, the introduction of limited companies (shareholding) by the club and secondly, the emergence of major benefactors/owners who wanted a role in controlling and managing the financial affairs of the top clubs (O’Brien and Slack, 1999, O’Brien and Slack, 2004a). In some instances fifty per cent control was ceded to a sponsor under joint venture agreements (Malcolm et al, 2000). In a short period, the control of the club affairs by the amateur members as well as the values of amateurism became seriously eroded. Consequently, those involved in rugby union, who had under the amateur model become institutionalised, undertook a period of deinstitutionalisation in order to adapt to the new culture and ideas that prevailed in the professional environment (O’Brien and Slack, 1999; O’Brien and Slack, 2004a).

A related issue is the impact of professionalism on volunteer members. Prior to professionalism, the administrative structures within rugby union at club level (as is the case of GAA) were in many cases co-ordinated and managed by voluntary administrators, officials and coaches many of whom were ex-players (Horton, 2009). Subsequent to professionalism, top English clubs recognised that owing to the increased financial burden, they had to restructure and adopt a business-like approach. Many of the voluntary positions were re-assigned to professional and commercially-focussed staff who inculcated a rigid financial awareness at all levels of club
administration. This created tensions as the balance of power shifted away from the voluntary members who had erstwhile controlled an organisation that was essentially built on the premise of amateurism (O’Brien and Slack, 2004, Barnes, 1997, Thibault et al; 1991). By 2007, the amateur administrators in Australia had conceded that “the game is now unquestionably the domain of the professional” (Horton, 2009: 979).

Smith (2000) argues that the advent of the open game in England brought the club versus country debate to the forefront. The clubs in England regarded the players as club employees; this obligated the players to fulfil contractual requirements to the Club. Therefore, players on international contracts had to prioritise their club over their country. In England, this issue proved divisive. However, protracted discussions between the RFU and the clubs resulted in the Mayfair agreement. Arising from this the clubs agreed to release their players for up to eight international matches (Smith, 2000). In an Irish context, the contractual arrangement is somewhat different. The players are contracted to a province or have an international contract, both of which are regulated by the Irish RFU. Thus, elite players only have a tenuous playing arrangement with their clubs (Fanning, 2007).

To a considerable extent, after the adoption of professionalism, the focus shifted towards the physical and financial resources within the game. One of the consequences of professionalism was the growing awareness of the human assets in the ‘industry’, i.e. the players. The elite clubs realised the importance of human assets and wanted to protect their players, while managing their playing demands in order to reduce their players’ exposure to injury. The clubs further sought to limit the number of matches players played to curb the likelihood of fatigue and injury, a situation that has created tensions within English rugby union and clubs, especially as top clubs
have routinely endeavoured to protect their playing resources (Barnes, 1997, Malcolm et al., 2000).

Nevertheless, the top clubs faced a dilemma, recognising the need to play more revenue generating and competitive fixtures. The increasing globalisation of rugby and the conflict of interest between the club and international fixtures culminated in a trend whereby clubs lobbied to reschedule the Six Nations championship in order to accommodate the club season (Malcolm et al., 2000). This has not happened, as the Six Nations Championship fixtures take place in the middle of the club season with the European Cup, the flagship club competition for the top clubs being suspended until after the Six Nations has finished.

Professionalism led to an increase in the squad size within some of the wealthier clubs, to ensure that in the event of an injury crisis, a sufficient number of high quality full-time players were available to compete in the various competitions. The anxiety to guarantee and consolidate high level performances forced clubs at the initial stages of professionalism to recruit players from the southern hemisphere. Thus, in the first season of professionalism clubs generated substantial losses, while their revenue in the next season did not increase proportionately (Malcolm et al., 2000).

In Wales, Clubs also experienced the financial reality of larger squads and ended up in dispute with the Welsh RFU. The Welsh union decided that they could only sustain four fully professional Club, with the others adopting a semi-professional model. Some Clubs in England had a similar experience as professional Club, such as Wakefield and Moseley, while initially opting for professionalism, had to settle for semi-professional status owing to threat of bankruptcy. Top clubs like Bristol were
relegated from the premiership when the main benefactor decided not to continue funding an unprofitable venture. The club was eventually forced into bankruptcy in July 1998. While Bristol later recovered financially, other clubs were quick to internalise the sometimes complex implications of professionalism (Smith, 2000).

Smith (2000) and Malcolm et al; (2000) examined the experiences of one notable club in the south of England in the context of the business model approach to rugby union. By June 1999, the third oldest club in the world, Richmond Rugby Club, ceased to exist. Thus, three years after adopting pay for play standards, it became crystal clear that the history, identity and tradition of club were indeed worthless without balanced financial accounts. As a result of Richmond Rugby Club going into receivership, a salary ceiling was introduced, with the premiership teams agreeing to cap their wage bill (Malcolm et al., 2000).

A further implication of professionalism and the limited long term revenue generating potential in relation to club rugby in England was the realisation of the need to maximise the use of sports grounds to generate revenue or, alternatively, reduce their infrastructural costs by becoming tenants at more established venues. Some top clubs adopted ground sharing agreements for home game, for example Harlequins and the Rugby League Club London Bronco’s shared ‘the stoop’; Wasps played at Loftus road, Queens Park Rangers Football Ground, and Saracens played at Vicarage Road home to Watford Football Club. Tradition and community affiliations have been diluted in the light of financial reality, and English rugby union followed the trend of rugby league, soccer and ice–hockey where teams adopted a similar strategy to American sports and relocated when market conditions dictated no alternative (Smith, 2000; Barnes, 1997).
2.6 Implications from Soccer: From Retain and Transfer to Bosman

During the 1880s, in the interests of self preservation soccer club directors developed a system that severely restricted player mobility. The transfer system; also known as retain and transfer, curtailed the poaching of players and allowed clubs to control the career of their players. This system limited player mobility and wages, while ensuring that all top football players were not monopolised by the richest clubs (Tischler, 1981). In the era of the maximum wage, this meant that many top players spent their whole careers with their home club and often experienced little financial or playing successes.

It is important to consider the master (club) and servant (player) power relationship that existed in professional football between the club and players until the 1960s. In the early decades of professional football after the introduction of the transfer system, and the maximum wage, which were both introduced in 1901-02 season, the power balances within the game resided firmly with the directors. A consensus existed within the game that players should only focus on playing the game, while the directors managed the club’s affairs (Tischler, 1981). These two rules were an attempt by those who organised football to control professionalism and prevent a small number of rich clubs from monopolising all the talents. One reason why this system remained in place for nearly six decades was that the players union was not powerful (Mason, 1989).

The union appeared even more fragile after an unsuccessful appeal to the courts against the transfer system. A further problem for the union emanated from the fact that as a representative association, they had an unconvincing mandate as many players did not appreciate the need for the union, and believed “they were doing far
better than their peers” (Mason, 1980: 117). It was not until 1958, that the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) gathered momentum. Despite some unsuccessful attempts to reform the rules, both the retain-and-transfer system and the maximum wage restriction remained in place until the 1960s (Mason, 1989). During the 1960-61 seasons and for the first time since 1909, the PFA chairman Jimmy Hill received a mandate for a players strike if the maximum wage was not abolished. In the end the Pea’s demands were met without a strike (Mason, 1989).

Later in 1963, the divisive retain-and-transfer system was finally abolished when George Eastham, a Newcastle United player refused the retention terms offered for the 1961-62 season and Eastham’s repeated requests for a transfer were turned down. Eastham sought redress in the High Court. The case was based around restraint of trade. The court found against the retain-and-transfer system. Thus, “If club did not re-hire their player on a further contract, players it decided, should be able to leave for free” (Lowrey et al., 2002: 1-2).

In 1995, The Bosman case proved to be the Rubicon for football. The judgement dealt with two issues, firstly, transfer fees and secondly quota systems in sport (Dabscheck, 2004). Initially, the Belgian Football Association (BFA) and United European Football Associations (UEFA) contended that legal redress was not appropriate for dealing with sport related matters (Parrish and McArdle, 2004). However, a previous legal precedent established that European Community law was applicable to sport, “in so far as it constitutes an economic activity” (Morris et al; 1996: 894). Prior to the Bosman ruling, a player could move from one club to another in two ways. Firstly, a player could transfer while on a contract provided the two clubs reached an
agreement. Secondly, a player moved when a contract had expired, using transfer fees that were regulated by league officials (Ericson, 2000).

Jean-Marc Bosman was contracted to, and played for a Belgian first division club FC Liege. At the end of the 1990 season Bosman wanted to transfer to a French side, Dunkerque FC, primarily because he was offered a contract that was lower than his previous one using a value that was determined by applying a calculation using his wage and age (Dabscheck, 2004). The Belgian Club, the Belgian Football Association and the prospective club did not reach agreement on a transfer fee and as he failed to agree a new contract with his Belgium Club, the club suspended him (Ericson, 2000). Subsequently, Bosman undertook a legal action, on the basis of the agreement on payment of transfer fees which prohibited European Union (EU) citizens from a freedom of movement in employment (Ericson, 2000, and Lowrey et al., 2002).

In 1995, the European Court of Justice ruled in Bosman’s favour, this created a legal precedence where players were free to move club when their contract had expired. The ruling enabled a player to discuss and negotiate their own deal with a new club when their current contracts expires, or when the contract is nearing conclusion. Generally, the control over players has shifted away from the clubs, with top players now in a very powerful position, (Lowrey et al., 2002; Madichie, 2009). The Bosman type free transfer judgement has been well integrated into the sporting lexicon, and the media often refer to this case in a self-explanatory manner.

There are implications arising from the Bosman judgement for all professional sports. In England, the number of foreign players within the Premiership has increased dramatically. This has led to concerns in relation to the emergence of home-grown
talents in English Football, forcing many European football leagues to place quotas on the number of foreign players employed in various leagues (Madichie, 2009). While the issue of foreign players has few implications for an indigenous sports body like the GAA, the Bosman ruling does have some implications for the Association. Nevertheless, the long term contracts and high salaries that are paid by the successful and wealthy clubs to talented soccer players, making it possible for elite clubs to continually strengthen their squads with quality players. The dilemma of the rich becoming richer has been the subject of much debate too, irrespective of whether this has to do with clubs or players (Stead, 2001).

A further outcome of Bosman verdict has to do with identity, particularly in terms of changing relationship between the club, players and supporters. As Stead (2001: 3) has contemplated, “can any English club team that might not include one English player identify with the club traditions and be committed?” High salaries paid to professional players have increased the social distance between supporters and players. However, in terms of professional sport, this may not be always true, as some players can symbolise the strength of a local identity. For example, former French International and Arsenal player Patrick Vieira was lauded by Arsenal supporters and the British press for showing “the fighting spirit of a true Brit” (Ranc, 2009: 56). In an Irish context, the theme of assimilation by elite foreign players into Irish professional club rugby was explored. Cronin et al, contend that “irrespective of ethnic background or nationality, players can assimilate” (2008: 1020). Owing to the fact, that the playing ability of a new player is vital in the assimilation process (Cronin et al; 2008).

There is a related dimension to the identity and loyalty conundrum, as the options available to players nearing the end of their contracts can lead to postponement of the
entire contract negotiations. While players might continue to play for the Club, their commitment may easily be questioned. Additionally there may be adverse reaction to players who signed a pre-contract agreement with another club but continue to fulfil the remainder of their current contract (Stead, 2001). This highlights the centrality of the concept of identity with regards to club or Counties within the GAA.

However, a fundamental question arises from the Bosman ruling, namely, the misconception that employment law did not supersede sport law (Stead, 2001). This is a critical issue in terms of the amateur-professional debate and has far-reaching consequences for the organisation and structure of sport.

2.7 Player Associations/Unions

Players Associations have become a typical feature of professional sport, from baseball to soccer, and cricket to Australian rules. They have developed in parallel with professional teams sports (Scoville, 1974). The origins of player unions can be traced to the USA, where, in 1885 baseball was one of the first sports in which a players’ union was established. Nevertheless, attempts to regularise the baseball union failed on five occasions. However, in 1954 the Major League Baseball Players’ Association (MLBPA) was founded and remains the current association for baseball professionals. In the 1950s and 1960s, player associations developed in other sports (Dabscheck, 2003). In England, soccer is home to the oldest continuous professional player’s association, the Professional Footballers Association (PFA), formerly, the Players Union, was formed in 1907 (Harding 1991).

In 1995, the Australia Rugby Union (ARU), in the final days of amateurism, agreed to fund the establishment of the Rugby Union Players Association (RUPA). In addition,
the ARU also agreed to allow the yet-to-be formed players’ association to have substantial input into the decision making in relation to the distribution of the revenue accruing from television agreements with News Corporation. As a result of the failure of the ARU to fully implement their original agreement, the RUPA undertook a successful case to the Supreme Court. This led to the signing of a collective bargaining agreement, based on revenue sharing, in October 1997. In 2001, a second agreement was signed. These agreements have enabled administrators and players to jointly maximise revenue for the sport (Dabscheck, 2003).

As will be highlighted in the results and discussion section of this study, the advent of the Gaelic Player’s Association (GPA) has provided the GAA with a challenge in dealing with the amateur-professional debate. The GPA was launched in Ulster as a national body in autumn 1999. The GAA’s relationship with the GPA has been tense. Initially authorities within the ranks of the GAA chose not to acknowledge the existence of the Association as the official players’ representative body. Nevertheless, the GPA has grown in stature and champion’s player welfare for senior inter-county players (O’Riordan, 2006b). The GPA was not the first players’ association to have been formed within the GAA, as a previous players’ body was initiated in 1981. This body suffered from inadequate administrative and management support and despite the players’ best intentions, it ultimately failed to achieve their objectives (McAnallen, 2009).

The establishment of the GPA arose from a perception amongst senior inter-County GAA players that their welfare was not taken into satisfactory consideration especially with the demanding personal, professional and financial sacrifices required to compete at the highest levels. Furthermore, despite the existence of the Amateur
Status Committee Report 1997, there is a belief that the recommendations arising from this report were being ignored by some County executives, this compounded earlier feelings that players were not being treated consistently across all Counties and playing codes.

2.8 Amateur-Professional Debate

As mentioned earlier, literature pertaining to amateur-professional debate within the GAA is limited. However, in 2005, a research study was commissioned by the GPA in conjunction with the UCD Centre for Sports Studies. This quantitative study explored the views of senior inter-County Gaelic footballers and hurlers in GAA. The survey was an anonymous self-administered questionnaire posted to a total of 1779 players (over ninety per cent indicated that they were members of the GPA). The survey findings are based on 680 responses, of which over ninety-one per cent respondents were members of the GPA (Hooper et al., 2005). Some sections of the survey are relevant to some aspects of this study, especially those related to amateur status, broken-time payments, advertising, image rights, as well as the relationship between the GAA and GPA in terms of player welfare issues.

The opinions of respondents on the amateur status highlight that eight per cent favoured the adoption of full professionalism, nearly sixty two per cent of respondents favoured a move to semi professionalism, with over twenty nine per cent responding that the GAA should remain amateur (Hooper et al, 2005). In terms of the long term future of amateurism, this survey identified that seventy three per cent of the players “believe that Gaelic games could not sustain full-time professionalism” (Hooper et al., 2005: 8). In addition, fewer than half of the respondents intimated that this could be the case by the year 2020. In terms of the adoption of a semi-professional model at
senior inter-county level, “two-thirds of players believe that, even at present, semi-professionalism could be sustained” (Hooper et al., 2005: 8).

An examination of the statistical report arising from the survey reveals that in terms of the advertising, media and image rights accruing to the GAA, over ninety four per cent of respondents intimated that the GAA and the GPA should work together in order to maximise the commercial revenue for Gaelic games. Furthermore, in terms of monies generated from television again, over ninety four per cent of respondents indicated that some of this income should be paid into a players’ pool (GPA/UCD survey results, 2005). Some of the other relevant findings emanating from this study will be highlighted in the discussion and findings section.

2.9 Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the development of amateurism and professionalism. In addition, the chapter examines the issues that arose in other sports and discussed the salient implications that are relevant to the amateur-professional debate. The areas discussed above constitute the basis for the concepts explored in the interviews. The rationale for this approach is based on the knowledge that there is commonality in relation to the themes encountered by sport organisations who have encountered the amateur-professional debate.
Chapter Three

Research Methods

3.0 Rationale

Over the last number of years and particularly since the foundation of the GPA, GAA administrators, players and GPA executive members have expressed their opinions in the media in relation to the amateur-professional debate. However, these opinions are generally at a superficial level, where the focus of discussion is primarily on direct payment to players. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the attitudes and opinions that underpin this issue, this research explores the amateur/professional conundrum with the three aforementioned stakeholders using semi-structured interviews.

The rationale for using this research method is that interviews move away from seeing human subjects as easy to manipulate, and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans often through conversations (Kvale, 1996). An interview can be described as interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. Furthermore interviews acknowledge the “centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and emphasises the social situation of research data” (Kvale, 1996: 11). Interviews enable the interviewer and the interviewee to discuss “the interpretations of the world in which they live”. Cohen et al. (2007: 349)

Interviews are a powerful medium of communication for researchers as they facilitate the use of multi-sensory channels (verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard). While the
interviewer can control the order of the questions, there is room for clarification and spontaneity. This form of interview enables researchers “to adopt a flexible approach to data collection” (Gratton and Jones, 2004: 141). The interviewer “can press for complete answers and responses about complex and deep issues” (Cohen et al 2007: 349). Semi-structured interviews are well suited to gaining an understanding of people’s subjective experiences and to gathering qualitative data. The questions can be adapted around a basic structure in order to suit the personal circumstances of the respondent, while additional questions may be addressed in order to follow-up on issues raised by the interviewee or to probe issues as they arise (Gratton and Jones, 2004). There are certain limitations associated with the use of interviews, namely; time considerations, interviewer bias, inconvenience to interviewees, and fatigue on the part of the interviewee, which may affect the quality of the interview, while anonymity can be difficult. Furthermore, “interviews are subject to problems of recall, misperception and incorrect knowledge” (Gratton and Jones, 2004: 143).

While this approach may not be as satisfactory as a random sample, the method used is probably the most appropriate way to obtain a sample, as it can be argued that the participants interviewed are fairly representative of the other senior administrators, senior inter-county players and the GPA more generally. While acknowledging that the number of interviews was small in comparison to the volume of quantitative data that can be collected in a survey. These semi-structured interviews provides a richer form of data in that the opinions of the interviewees and the issues relating to the research question can be explored in detail. The semi-structured interview enable the researcher to develop a rapport with the participants, and allow responses to be put in context. Therefore, the data gathered is not limited to “yes”, “no” or “do not know”
answers, nor a detached snapshot of the responses normally associated with data from quantitative surveys (Gratton and Jones, 2004).

The findings from the research are based on the qualitative data provided from semi-structured interviews from the aforementioned stakeholders. Initially, the themes to be explored in the semi-structured interviews were generated from primary and secondary data. The data was obtained from the review of academic literature (books and journals), newspaper articles, the internet and unpublished internal GAA documents; this enabled the development of informed themes (O’Brien and Slack, 2003: 426).

3.1 Research Design and Methods

A convenience sample was initially employed in the selection of study subjects based on the researcher’s personal experiences and contacts. In the early stages of the primary data collection, one experienced senior administrator and one experienced senior player were identified as they were deemed to be knowledgeable on themes that were being examined. After interviewing these individuals, the sample was then expanded on a ‘snowball’ basis. Thus, the researcher was able to access “influential members of the sample population, who suggested other participants. This helped to build trust between the interviewer and the participants (Gratton and Jones, 2004: 103). To surmount any potential bias in the data, some respondents were selected on the basis of the researcher’s knowledge. From a review of the primary data from newspapers, the researcher was in some instances able to identify the interviewees who were perceived to have alternative viewpoints, and who represented both sides of amateur-professional debate (O’Brien and Slack, 2003). A main weakness of this technique is the possibility of some respondent making biased referrals to other
subjects on grounds of personal contacts and relationships, and not being objective in their evaluation of suitability, this may result in findings that might not be clearly representative (O’Brien and Slack, 2003).

3.2 How the study was conducted

The study involved digitally recorded interviews, which were carried out from June 2006 to December 2007 inclusive. The interviews varied in duration from 45 to 75 minutes. Participants included four administrators, who have held senior executive position on a County committee, and seven senior inter-County (hurling and Gaelic football) players from Counties in the Munster region, who were either current players or had played regularly in recent years at senior inter-County level. Two of the players were dual representatives, meaning, they played both senior football and hurling for their County. In addition, two executive members of the GPA were also interviewed.

For ease of access and logistical reasons many of the interviewees were based in the Munster region. The interviews were conducted at a location and time that suited the participants. In addition, the researcher ensured that the interviewees were not under any time constraints which could have an adverse effect on the responses (Gratton and Jones, 2004). In order to enhance the quality of the data, it was important to ensure the credibility of the research. Thus, it was necessary for the researcher to establish trust with the interviewees. The issue of access to the interviewees was surmounted by the fact that the researcher has been involved within the GAA at both an administrative and coaching level for twenty years and is familiar with the administrative structures of the organisation. In keeping with good research practices the participants were initially contacted by telephone and subsequently by post. The correspondence
included a letter of introduction from the researcher’s supervisor at University College Dublin (UCD).

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, the participants were provided additional background information in relation to the study. Furthermore, they were asked to read and sign a consent form, which stated that they had participated in the study on a voluntary basis, as well as an endorsement of anonymity and confidentiality for participants that guaranteed the concealment of the identity of respondents and the Counties they represented. Furthermore, they were told that they could withdraw from the research at any time. This was done in order to reduce any anxiety on the part of the interviewees about discussing the issues pertaining to the amateur-professional debate within the GAA. After each interview, the respondents were asked to confirm if they were satisfied that the information and/or opinion that they disclosed could be used in the research, In addition, they were asked if they wished to review a final transcript of the interview.

The participants were asked a number of similar open-ended questions. In order to avoid any misinterpretation, all the interviewees were asked if they were familiar with the terms and concepts, and in some of instances, the meanings were explained. In the early stages of the research, after interviewing one administrator and one player, the questions were amended to reflect some that had been raised in these initial set of interviews. For instance, during an early stage of the first interview, the issue of reviewing amateurism was alluded to, in an unprompted response by the interviewee. It became clear that the issue of reviewing amateurism was central to the debate. This prompted the researcher to incorporate this issue into the remainder of the interviews.
The recordings were subsequently transcribed by a third party. The researcher reviewed the recordings and checked the transcripts for accuracy. In instances where there was ambiguity between the recording and the transcript, the researcher contacted the interviewee to clarify their response. The findings suggest that the interviewees had sufficient confidence in the process to be relatively forthcoming in expressing their opinions on the issues. While it is important to acknowledge that comments and views from participants have to be taken as an accurate reflection of their opinions, some allowance should be given to the fact, that privately they may hold a different viewpoint that they did not disclose.

The themes emerged from both the research questions and the literature review. The primary data was analysed and manually coded into nine common themes. However, after completing a preliminary review of the results, the researcher discussed the thematic coding with an academic colleague who has professional expertise in the analysis of qualitative data. Subsequently, it was decided to re-categorise the themes into four broad categories with sub-themes. This enabled more rigorous analysis of the data and a reduction in the number representative quotes derived from the findings.
Chapter Four

Results and Discussion

4.0 Introduction

The literature review provided the context for and identified the themes that are salient to the amateur-professional debate. The experience of researcher and the concepts that emerged from the literature review formed basis for the research questions as well as the areas explored in the interviews. The rationale for this is the commonality of issues which sports organisations encounter within the amateur-professional conundrum. The results and discussion are set out under four broad categories, and three of them include sub-sections. Firstly, the amateur-professional debate, secondly, the structural ramifications, thirdly, the players association and finally, a review of amateurism. These themes address the research questions that were set out in the introduction.

4.1 The Amateur-Professional debate

The literature review, particularly in terms of rugby union highlights that the amateur-professional debate was a divisive issue that exercised the minds of both administrators and players for many years. Many of the administrators who governed rugby union, particularly in England were reluctant to embrace the notion of professionalism. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, despite the adoption of regulations by governing bodies to protect amateurism, rugby union developed an unofficial structure that mirrored a professional sport (Barnes, 1997 and Fitzsimons, 1997).
As mentioned previously the GPA/UCD survey 2005 of the elite players highlights that eight per cent favoured the adoption of full professionalism, nearly sixty two per cent of players favoured a move to semi professionalism, with nearly thirty per cent responding that the GAA should remain amateur (Hooper et al, 2005). In terms of the long term future of amateurism, the majority (seventy three per cent) of the players “believe that Gaelic games could not sustain full-time professionalism” (Hooper et al., 2005: 8). In addition, fewer than half of the respondents intimated that this could be the case by the year 2020. In terms of the adoption of a semi-professional model at senior inter-county level, “two-thirds of players believe that, even at present, semi-professionalism could be sustained” (Hooper et al., 2005: 8).

The broader issue of full and semi professionalism was examined, and all the participants were asked a number of similar questions. It is apparent from the discussions that full-time professionalism is unsustainable within the present structure of the organisation, where all the Counties compete against each other in the Provincial and All-Ireland series. For instance, the comments of Administrator 4 are particularly telling:

The games we play are very successful in relation to getting patrons to pay into the games, but there are not enough of those kinds of [high profile] games to sustain professional games.

The findings demonstrate that the opinions of the senior administrators, players and members of the GPA executive are not as polarised as one might have perceived them. It was clear that the ethos and indigenous nature of Gaelic games are key tenets in relation to the debate. Unsurprisingly, the administrators were not in favour of the
Association adopting full or semi-professionalism. Their views are similar to those of the senior administrators in rugby union who resisted the adoption of professionalism (Fanning, 2007; Wyatt 1995). When questioned, the senior administrators provided emotional, financial and ideological reasons for their opposition to professionalism. Administrator 1 for instance, stated:

The GAA that I know and love and am involved in could never have a place for pay for play, because, not just disagreeing with the principle, but because of the changes that would come about as a result of pay for play. The further isolation of rural club, and particularly the voluntary ethos.

This research demonstrates that none of the players believe that the GAA should adopt full professionalism as it is financially unsustainable. Four players interviewed were generally in favour of semi-professionalism. Two players did not favour any form of professionalism and one player was unsure. More specifically, when the issue was explored in detail, all of the players interviewed expressed a desire to continue in their professional working career. Player 1 (hurling) commented:

I think that the GAA would not be able to afford full professionalism for all the Counties, so I think that semi-professional would be ideal. If it goes semi-professional it will not go back, but, I definitely would like to keep my job.

Similarly, the players were conscious of the historical, ideological and financial issues relating to pay for play and that professionalism would change the ethos and social fabric of the Association. It is evident from the discussions with the administrators and players that professionalism would change the structure of the organisation. A
recurrent theme that emerged from the elite players in terms of their opinions on professionalism was the necessity to examine the issue of indirect financial recompense. Currently players are entitled to claim mileage expenses at 50 cent per mile. In addition, players are reimbursed for vouched out of pocket expenses to cover taxi fares, meals and public transport (Amateur Status Advisory Report, 2003). In essence, while the players acknowledge that the adoption of pay for play is not feasible, they believe that the role of the elite players should be acknowledged in other ways. Player 3 (hurling) who was unsure about professionalism was unhesitant in expressing his doubts:

I do not know, that would cause a lot of bitterness...some fellows would be getting paid more than others...that would wreck it, but, I surely have a massive ‘bee in my bonnet’ about getting sorted out with regards to the cash.

This position was corroborated by Player 6 (football):

Not in our sport, because our base is too small, we are only a small nation... I would certainly agree with looking after the guys well, send them off on holidays and give them money for themselves... but I do not think it is viable.

Within the GPA it would appear that there are subtle differences of opinion as to whether the GAA should adopt a form of professionalism. GPA Executive 1 acknowledged that: “the Association will come under more and more pressure to protect the amateur status. Whether that will ever change or not I’m not too sure”. GPA Executive 2 believes that the GAA will have to directly address the amateur-professional debate:
I think if the GAA continue to ignore it you will get what you have had in every other sporting code and that is a ‘big bang’ and there will be a stand-off and players do not lose in stand-offs…I would rather it did not happen but I believe it will happen at some point

Furthermore the GPA Executive I highlighted that: “the GPA works on a democratic basis, so the overall majority [of players] would be in favour of retaining the amateur status”. This comment is at variance within one of the findings from the GPA/UCD survey 2005, where nearly sixty two per cent of players favoured a move to semi professionalism, with nearly thirty per cent indicating that GAA should remain amateur (Hooper et al, 2005). While disregarding the viability of full professionalism the same respondent intimated: “now...that is different to semi-professionalism...semi-professionalism could be looked at in the future”.

A related issue that was explored with all the interviewees was whether payment for play (full or semi-professionalism) would occur within the GAA over the next five to ten years. While none of the respondents believed that the GAA would adopt full professionalism. The research found that eight respondents believed that the GAA would adopt semi-professionalism, whereas four respondents believe that semi-professionalism may be adopted, with one senior administrator stating that the GAA would not adopt any form of professionalism. Some administrators expressed differing opinions. For instance, Administrator 1 commented:

No, I do not and I am not putting my head in the sand I am saying that there is too much at stake for the organisation, not in terms of money, but in terms of
In terms of the players’ viewpoint there was some disagreement, Player 4 (hurling) expressed doubts about a fast-pace of change: “possibly in ten years definitely not five years. Not a hope in five years, it cannot move that fast. Baby steps like. There is very little give and take”. Player 6 (football) stated: “I think so, probably to some extent, maybe a diluted version of it”.

While the GPA is perceived as a driver of the amateur-professional debate, the executive members within the players association believe that any move to professionalism will occur in the longer term. GPA Executive 1, for instance, argued: “I think in ten to twenty years time it will become an issue...it will be another decade at least”.

The findings arising from the conversations with the administrators correlate with other data. In 2006, the Sunday Tribune conducted a survey of County Board chairpersons, twenty nine County chairpersons were asked whether they would be for or against the adoption of semi-professionalism/professionalism, ninety seven per cent were against the idea (McEvoy, 2006). One County chairperson, for instance, stated “we must hold on to our amateur status, the GAA is where it is because of it” (Lanigan, 2006). The only chairman who favoured a move towards semi/full professionalism stated: “it would be sea change for the Association but it is creeping that way ” (Lanigan, 2006).
Interestingly, as the introduction highlighted, many of the Association’s internal reviews concluded that: “the vast majority of players have no demand for pay for play” (Amateur Status Advisory Report, 2003: 1). Thus, the GAA administration’s view appears to be at variance with the outcome of the GPA/UCD survey which identified that while fewer than nine per cent favoured the adoption of full professionalism, nearly sixty two per cent of players favoured a move to semi-professionalism (Hooper et al, 2005).

The opinions on professionalism demonstrate from a financial perspective, full professionalism is not an option. While there is a broad agreement that semi-professionalism may occur within the GAA. Nevertheless, the findings identify that this is unlikely to occur within the next five years. The respondents are aware of the fact that the GAA policy makers will be very slow to move towards semi-professionalism. As has been illustrated in the introduction the GAA will endeavour to implement policies to ensure that direct payment to players’ do not happen. Therefore, it may take some time for the Association to adopt semi-professionalism, although one must argue, that the GAA does not operate within a vacuum and is subject to changes in the external environment which have a direct affect on the organisation.

At a broader level the advantages/benefits and constraints/disadvantages of professionalism were discussed with the respondents. The general consensus from the respondents was that the quality of the games would improve if the game adopted a professional, but that there would be a negative impact on the club and the ‘grassroots’ level of the Association. The respondents highlight that while there may be financial benefits for an elite number of players in each County.
Administrator 3 commented:

You would have a better game. You will have players who are totally dedicated to the game…playing a better standard of game – I would think that would be the main thing. I find it difficult to see it attracting more people to the games.

The GPA executive respondents demonstrated an awareness of the intricacies of the amateur-professional debate and provided a balanced overview in relation to this issue. GPA Executive 1 stated:

Semi Professionalism, no more than any other sport has certain benefits – it brings more money to the game and possibly more appeal if things were done on a professional level where they might not be as professional in the current regime. The negatives, it needs a full feasibility study and a debate to kick off because it is very difficult to predict. It is an indigenous game it does not have that mass appeal outside this country… it is very difficult to sustain and I think ultimately it could perhaps be to the detriment of the game at grass roots level.

GPA Executive 2 stated:

I have one opinion with my GPA hat on, and another opinion based on my experience how the business of sport works…I know for a fact that a champion’s league format with fewer teams would absolutely work and work extremely well. Then you have obviously the GPA’s position which is that the
players are not ready to go there yet. The GAA’s position which is they hope they will never have to go there and they do not intend to ever go there. When you pull in all the political and social issues… then it becomes a different scenario.

As O’Brien and Slack (2004), (Barnes, (1997), and Thibault et al; (1991) highlighted, professionalism in rugby union created tensions where the balance of power shifted away from the voluntary members who until 1995 controlled an organisation that was underpinned by amateurism. One of administrative respondents highlighted that the County Boards would have to operate on a more business orientated manner, while the administrators did not indicate any immediate threat to their control the responses imply that their positions as voluntary administrators would come under scrutiny.

Administrator 3 commented:

The association would really have to become more professional… you would need to get people who are a lot more professional involved in County Boards. Maybe, it would mean that County Boards would have to examine their consciences a lot more and see where can we tighten up – the association would need to be run more like a business, it would be more balance sheet minded.

4.1.1 Broken-time payments/Shamateurism

By the late 1980s, the financial expectations of those involved at the elite level within rugby union increased to the extent that they sought indirect recompense for involvement in the game. Furthermore, the clubs and players became ambivalent
towards the implementation of the rules and regulations on amateurism, which subsequently precipitated professionalism (White, 2004; Dunning and Sheard, 2005). Broken-time payments/shamateurism was pervasive within rugby union in the decade prior to open professionalism. In the context of the GAA, broken-time payments/shamateurism is an issue that the GAA has grappled with since 1914 (McAnallen, 2009).

This concept was explored with the interviewees on two levels: the existence/prevalence of broken-time payments/shamateurism within the GAA, and the evidence of broken-time payments/shamateurism. A constant theme that emerged from the responses from administrators, players and GPA is that the widespread payment of managers and coaches at the senior inter-County and club level is viewed as being one of the drivers in the debate on professionalism. Player 1 (hurling) stated:

Oh, there is no doubt about that in my opinion. From my own experience. clubs have said to me that they will make it worth my while. Our own club will pay to get a decent coach; most of the coaches nowadays that have a name [reputation] or are any way decent are on upwards of €150 per session/night.

GPA Executive 1 had this to say:

In Jack O’Connor’s autobiography recently [2007], and to be honest he stated nothing that has not been in the public domain prior to this, stated he had been reimbursed by the Kerry County Board because he had to give time up from work and went job-sharing in fact. I would also imagine that there are an awful lot of managers being paid.
GPA Executive 2 agreed: “It is common at a managerial level... yes!”

While not all interviewees had explicit examples, the evidence from the discussions indicates that shamateurism not only exists within the GAA but is widespread. Administrator 3 added: “If you are going to call a spade a spade, the elite players do not do anything unless there is a brown envelope for them”. Similarly, Player 1 (hurling) highlighted his personal experience: “I have had a number of clubs asking me to take training sessions; these clubs are offering decent money, up to €250 per night which is a lot of money”.

The findings provide clear evidence that broken–time payments for loss of earnings for matches or training exist within the GAA. This is manifested by the similarity of the responses from administrators, players and GPA Executives. While broken-time payments occur, the County Boards and the Association are turning a ‘blind eye’ to this matter. Administrator 1 commented: “At the moment I am not sure if you are aware of it, there are a number of players in one of the Northern football Counties who have given up work”. He went on to ask a pertinent question: “So who is paying them? where is the money coming from?”

Player 5 (football) confirmed the existence of broken-time payments:

I heard in X it happens, it has been happening for eight years where they take time off work and are rewarded. It does not happen in X, and it has not happened in X to my knowledge. In my own case I lost an awful lot of time at
work, but again, I was in a job that I could use my profile to gain financially out of it and I did.

GPA Executive 1 commented: “the majority of cases would be injury related; some of them of late might have moved beyond that to time-off work to dedicate themselves to the sport and that type of thing”. When asked were broken time payments widespread he responded “I know of players who have received payments to allow them to push through their career. Leave of absence, etc”.

GPA Executive 2 stated that broken-time payments do exist but when asked for clarification was unwilling to discuss the matter: “I think it is accepted in some quarters as being standard, in others it is not, but it does happen. It would be dependent on the County. I would not comment on which reasons, but, I know it has happened”.

The findings highlight that all the respondents were either aware of, or in some instances had benefited directly from shamateurism. This substantiates the anecdotal evidence that the GAA alluded to in their internal reviews of amateurism. In 1986, an unpublished report highlighted that “there were [anecdotal] allegations about payments to a very small number of coaches of County teams and to a [considerable] number of coaches of club teams” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 2). Thus, the aforementioned findings highlight that “the GAA is exposed to the risk of shamateurism which bedevilled other sports in the past” (Hooper et al., 2005: 9).

Additionally, there is a direct correlation between the findings of this research and other evidence which identify that the financial rewards for coaching/managing a
senior inter-County team are lucrative. Foley and O’Connor (2008) highlighted the prevalence of payments to coaches/managers at club and County level in both hurling and football. Accordingly, coaches can command rates “on average between €100 and €150 a [training] session…one manager in a struggling County received almost €50,000 for the year… another is on €4,000 a month as a cover-all payment” (Foley and O’Connor, 2008). These figures may appear fanciful given that in 2003, the Central Council agreed mileage/travel for all GAA members is 50 cent per mile.

The 1997 Amateur Status report addressed the issue of broken-time payments stating “that reimbursement for lost time as distinct from out of pocket expenses incurred is tantamount to payment for playing” (Amateur Status Report, 1997: 4). The GPA/UCD survey 2005, reveals that “ninety two per cent of the players feel that they should be reimbursed for documented absence from work due to matches or training” (Hooper et al., 2005: 7). This includes the period of absence not covered by the GAA player injury scheme and recompense for loss of earnings, including overtime. (Hooper et al., 2005)

The GAA administrative hierarchy are cognisant of the contradictions pertaining to amateurism. Peter Quinn, a former president and chairman of the 1997 Amateur Status Review Committee, which was mandated to provide documentary evidence of shamateurism, quite simply summed up his experiences this way: “we couldn’t even find the table” (Foley and O’Connor, 2008). Furthermore, the findings provide credence to the assertion from the current GAA Director General that “the single most difficult issue we face are under the counter payments” (McGarry, 2009). In terms of pertaining to broken-time payments/shamateurism, the GAA is not only exposed to, but, is experiencing tensions similar to other sports which undermined the concept of
amateurism. The evidence of creeping professionalism clearly demonstrates that in reality, the GAA is located at least in the middle of the amateur and professional continuum.

4.1.2 Commercialisation within the GAA

The literature highlights that commercialisation acted as one of the drivers to open professional in rugby union. The elite players recognised international rugby’s commercial potential and their own earning potential as marketable assets. Furthermore, the revenues generated from the income from television rights and sponsorship acted as a catalyst for pay for play (O’Brien and Slack, 1999; O’Brien and Slack, 2004a; Williams, 1989; Wyatt 1995). As an amateur organisation competing within a professional sporting environment, the GAA is an example of a successful commercial model. In 1991, the Directive on Sponsorship and Licensing coincided with the redevelopment of Croke Park, which was completed in 2005 at a cost of €255 million. A large percentage of money for the development was derived from the business and corporate sector via the sale of corporate boxes and premium seats.

As discussed, in 1997, the GAA implicitly acknowledged their commercial success, when the Association passed regulations to enable elite players to benefit from commercial activities. The area of commercialisation was discussed with all the interviewees. The administrators indicated that they did not mind the players benefiting from advertising or endorsements, which are allowable under the rules of the Association, Administrator 1, for instance, expressed his views succinctly: “I want to make quite clear I have absolutely no difficulty with player endorsements, advertising, as I do not think that interferes with amateur status in any way”. Player 5
(football) was acutely aware of the commercial opportunities available for elite players:

There are players; again it is a very small percentage of players’ that could earn €20 – €25,000 per annum… That is indirectly from the game and not from GAA, but the GAA promote this…The GAA have a lot of corporate attachments and corporate alliances who might want to promote a product. The GAA are very, very conscious of their [players] earning power and potential of their biggest stars and they do not want to deny them that...

The potential of Gaelic games as an avenue for promoting a brand or product can be illustrated as follows. In April 2006, some high profile GAA players were promoting a sponsorship deal with Adidas, “as amateurs, none of them could be paid; neither were there any contract nor image rights involved. More significantly, neither the GAA, nor the GPA had anything to do with it” (O’Riordan, 2006). However, by May 2006, the GAA decided that elite players who took part in advertising and promotion campaigns should be paid by the Association (Cummiskey, 2006). This is another example of the GAA reacting to the commercial realities that are available to the elite players. Currently, the elite GAA players who endorse a sports drink, and are involved in five or six company launches per year can generate an income of over €20,000 a year (Keys, 2007).

There is an added dimension to the issue of commercialisation which the GAA administration will be concerned with, that is the revenue accruing from television deals. As discussed in the literature review this was a key issue in the movement towards payment for play in Rugby Union. GPA Executive 2 highlighted that the
discussions on professionalism within the GAA may be dictated by external factors, namely the monies accruing to the GAA from television rights, “I think you would be looking to ten years more than five…but again I think the television deals will instrumental”.

As part of a long term strategy, the GPA has indicated that they want to secure a percentage of any television monies accruing to the GAA. According to GPA chief executive Dessie Farrell, the GPA is continually seeking to expand their commercial interests to help improve player welfare (O'Riordan, 2006c). The GAA’s willingness to embrace the commercial potential of the games is manifested by the decision to allow television three (TV3) to become the first independent broadcaster to be granted rights to live GAA championship matches. This provides a further example of “the potential of the games to generate further revenue streams for the Association” (Moran, 2007d).

If the GAA decide to offer the games on pay per view television in order to create additional income, it may result in the players seeking some form of remuneration from the revenue that the GAA generates. However, given the problems encountered by Setanta sports in fulfilling their financial obligations to the English Premier League for the rights to televise English and Scottish Premier Leagues (Moran 2009). It is debatable if pay per view strategy is a realistic revenue generator for an indigenous sports organisation.

The importance of the Croke Park Stadium in terms of generating revenue can be demonstrated in the Association’s 2007 accounts. During this period, the stadium generated €13.5 million (Moran, 2008a). On a broader issue, the 2007 revenue
accruing from gate receipts fell to forty eight per cent compared to sixty three per cent in 2005 and sixty per cent in 2006 (Moran, 2008a). This indicates that in recent years the Association’s commercial acumen and ability to generate revenue from sponsorship and television rights, as well as renting the venue to other sports has increased. While the GAA has benefited from the increased commercial revenue there are consequences, in that the Association is perceived to have financial resources This is used by advocates of payment for play. For example, the GPA/UCD survey results (2005) over ninety four per cent of respondents indicated that some of this income should be paid into a players’ pool.

The results demonstrate that there are commercial opportunities available, particularly to elite players throughout the country. Nevertheless, in a small indigenous market, there are only a select group of players who can thrive, since the financial resources are clearly finite. In the current economic downturn, the commercial earning power of GAA players is likely to be diluted. Thus, the real value for a GAA player still lies in employment in the private and public sector. What is clear, particularly since 1997, when the GAA relaxed the rules that enabled players to benefit from commercial activities, is that the Association is prepared to tolerate commercial activities. Thus, the concept of pure amateurism has long since departed.

The absence of a real international dimension prohibits GAA players from ‘cashing in’ on their fame in a small country where the market is simply too small. However, there are a select few who have had, and can in the future, earn some income indirectly for a couple of years. Nevertheless, the decisions taken by the Association has created an environment where the expectations of the players have increased. Furthermore, the payment of the Annual Team Performance Grants in 2008 is a
further example of the diminution of amateurism within the Association. This highlights that the GAA is susceptible to the preconditions that led to professionalism in other sports. Therefore, the commercial opportunity available to elite players provides further evidence that the GAA is no longer located at the amateur end of the continuum.
4.2 Structural Ramifications

The section focuses on three key structural issues that are inter-connected, namely transfer systems/player mobility, contracts and the implication for Club. The literature demonstrates that these areas are central to the amateur-professional debate Williams (2002) highlights the emergent issue of player movement became as concern for rugby union in the late 1980s. Furthermore, in terms of Rugby union, pay for play enabled player mobility and transfers, and facilitated a situation where players received contracts that were unsustainable for some Club. Furthermore, the financial imperatives of the professional era undermined the long established tradition and identity associated with club in the amateur game (Malcolm et al; 2000; Smith, 2000, and Fleuriel and Vincent, 2007).

4.2.1 Transfer System/Player Mobility

The success of the GAA is predicated on the sense of identification with both a club and County. The GAA is a community-based organisation where the club is the focal point. Currently, the Transfer and Declaration rules in GAA Official Guide and the County Board Bye-Laws highlight that a player is “considered to owe allegiance and loyalty to his Home Club and County” (GAA Official Guide, 2009: 58). In so far as possible, the Association’s rules try to ensure that players continue remain loyal to their home or first Club. Players are allowed to transfer to another club and/or County, however, they must fulfil certain criteria that are laid out in the Official Guide.

The advent of a formalised transfer system and the ensuing player mobility has ramifications for the sport at both administrative and playing levels. In essence, the overall fabric of the Association would be altered dramatically within a short time-frame if the GAA adopted a semi-professional model. Administrator 1, who is
familiar with the implications, made the following observation regarding the legislative framework that currently underpins the playing structure of the Association: “the transfer system/parish rule will be challenged in courts…it cannot be [currently] challenged on the grounds of money, and this is what is protecting the organisation”.

One key feature that emerged from many of the interviews was the overall reaction to the implications of transfer and player mobility in terms of Bosman ruling which enables a player to negotiate their own deal with a new club when their current contracts expire, or is nearing conclusion (Lowrey et al., 2002; Madichie, 2009). Given the indigenous nature of Gaelic games the findings need to be interpreted within this context. In addition, the respondents are current/experienced players who have been assimilated within the amateur model. This may change for future generations. Nevertheless, the players were aware of the implications of transfer systems and player mobility. While they did not dismiss the implications of these in the longer-term, they did not want to countenance the notion. None of the players interviewed intimated that they would transfer. Player 1 (hurling) stated categorically, in relation to a transfer system: “my answer to that one is definitely no!” Furthermore, Player 3 (hurling) equally expressed his worry: “so, if you are a professional player with X and you want to go to Y that will happen under the Bosman? Jesus! I would hate for that to happen; that would be terrible”.

Nonetheless, this trend is changing, particularly in the Dublin clubs and other urban areas as the findings suggests that in recent times some players have decided to transfer their playing allegiance. Player 4 (football) highlights this point:
I have heard of a couple of things all right… with players getting tied up in Dublin clubs and being looked after, you would be talking €5K or €10K, I have heard of those kinds of figures.

Another salient feature that emerged in relation to the discussion on professionalism was the re-orientation of the player opinions when the issue of player transfer and mobility is discussed. The respondents, who favoured the implementation semi-professionalism at a superficial level in terms of direct payment, were uneasy with the notion of player transfers. For instance, Player 7 (football) commented: “The GAA should re-define some of the rules and some of the regulations yeah! Now, I think it is not as easy as I am making it sound, but contracts and Bosman that is not the way of the GAA”. Player 4 (football) stated: “If they masked it [pay for play] in another way… you might be able to get around all that kind of stuff”.

However, there were some differing opinions on introduction of a transfer system between the executive members of the GPA who were interviewed. As GPA Executive 1 argued, “I think it would just lead to problems. I think you will lose what is really good about the GAA, that parochial, localised situation that has benefited the GAA greatly over the years”. GPA Executive 2 offered a different opinion and commented:

I think there is a very strong argument for a transfer system in hurling… In my opinion there is a very strong argument. You have many players in Kilkenny that are not playing for Kilkenny, that would lift a team elsewhere and bring something positive in that regards. In football it is not quite as prevalent, but it is not something I would be averse to.
As the results demonstrate the loyalty of players to their home or first club and County has enabled the Association to develop a very successful model of amateur sport. Tadhg Kennelly from Kerry, who played Australian Rules football with the Sydney Swans professionally for six years and returned to Ireland in 2009 and won an All-Ireland football medal in the same year and subsequently returned to the Australian Rules game for 2010, alluded to the loyalty issue and stated: “I’ve seen the game the way it is set up in Australia. There is no loyalty” (O’Brien, 2009). Thus, young players start their careers at their home Club or first Club where they are developed. In time some players progress to inter-County level. This model has served the Association well and continues to do, as the sense of identity associated with playing for their home Club and County is still an important motivation for many players.

If the GAA adopted either a semi or fully professionalism model, the issues of transfer systems and player mobility will merit careful consideration. The legal precedent established by the Bosman judgement would enable senior inter-County GAA players to discuss and negotiate their own deals with their current or new employer. Therefore, “any decent player in a smaller County would be gobbled up. Players would be moving and you couldn’t blame them” (Lanigan 2006). Thus, the top GAA players would be in a powerful negotiating position within their own County and with other Counties when their contracts are nearing the end.
4.2.2 Player Contracts

One issue that is inextricably linked to the transfer system/player mobility is player contracts. As the literature on rugby union demonstrates, the advent professionalism and the ensuing contracts allied to the proliferation of professional employees at various administrative and management levels within game changed the focus within rugby. In a short period, the control of the administrative and playing matters by the amateur members as well as the values of amateurism became diluted. They were replace with an administrative and financial culture that reflected a professional environment (O’Brien and Slack, 1999; O’Brien and Slack, 2004a).

As mentioned, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) centrally contract all the players to prevent the ownership of the game being dissipated among various private interests owning different Club. In an Irish context, the professional era did not dismiss all of the values of the amateur game (Fanning, 2007). Professional sides in England and France are dominated by privately-owned rugby club franchises with non-national players. These teams do not command the levels of support and identity of the Irish Provinces (McGurk, 2009).

While wealthy clubs can buy the best players, there is no guarantee of success. Professional rugby in England has created clubs which lack support or tradition. In France, the French federation are considering the adoption of a wages ceiling and a limit on the numbers of foreign players playing with the French Club. The southern hemisphere is not immune. In New Zealand and Australia, spectator interest is low. This highlights that money does not solve all the problems, and thus some the legacies of amateur rugby may have been dispensed with too readily (McGurk, 2009).
If the GAA adopt pay for play, the exposure to the professional environment would radically alter the current structure of the Association through a proliferation of franchises and or corporate ownership of a number of inter-County teams. Therefore, the County Boards which currently manage the administrative and financial affairs within each County are in danger of being marginalised as was the case with rugby union. Surprisingly, only one of the respondents made reference to this matter County Administrator 1 commented:

The very minute that you have payment for play at inter-county level the organisation as we know it is gone…some Counties would not be able to survive, there would be an opportunity for someone to buy the County and set up the team and ultimately buy an All Ireland [Championship]. That does not happen at the moment. There is the danger of professionalism.

As was the case in relation to the transfer system/player mobility there was a further re-orientation of the player opinions. The findings indicate that those who favoured payment for play did not necessarily wish to sign a contract, which indicates that when payment for play is explored in detail, the players again become circumspect of the implications. Player 7 (football) for instance, stated: “that would be a big issue, but, I think the whole pay for play issue has to be addressed through expenses…that is where it gets difficult and it could be made much simpler in terms of expenses”.

Generally, the responses highlight certain problems that could percolate down to club activity. While the implications of the professionalism for GAA in the context of club
activity will be discussed in the next section, the effect on club came out strongly in many of the responses. Administrator 3, for example contended:

If you bring in professionalism then obviously they are going to be contracted to the County and the club becomes obsolete. What you would have is that your club produce the best players in the County and then the club would not have the use of those players once they become a top class player. How are the County [Club] championships’ going to work? I do not know… I would think it is going to be a difficult one – there are lots of things that need to be sorted out before you go down that road

Furthermore, an agreement would have to be reached as to what unit within the GAA would be responsible for the payment of the player’s contract. Currently the individual Counties within the GAA reimburse the players within their own County for any legitimate expenses incurred. If pay for play was adopted, all of the respondents intimated that any payments to the contracted players should be administered, managed and paid by Croke Park. Many of the Counties are operating within a tight financial budget and would not have a surplus funding available to pay players under a professional model. In 2001, nearly half the Counties expended over fifty per cent of their income, with some Counties expending over eighty of their income on preparation of inter-County teams. This level of expenditure has a negative impact on the funding available for coaching and games development activities as well as future capital development projects within the Counties (Strategic Review, 2002).
In 2005, the average cost to the 32 County Boards on the preparation of inter-County teams was €518,000. This represents an increase of fifty five per cent over a three year period (McEvoy, 2006). In addition, twelve out of the 32 County Boards were operating at an overall loss (Lanigan, 2006). One County chairman commented, “Counties will not be able to sustain costs and you talk about professionalism” (McEvoy, 2006). Thus, the onus for the payment of players is likely to reside directly with administrative headquarters in Croke Park.

When respondents, particularly those with favourable disposition towards professionalism, were asked to reconcile these opinions with the structural ramifications of professionalism, particularly transfer systems and contracts it was once again evident that professionalism within the GAA is not simply about direct payment for playing games. The findings demonstrate that the respondents’ hope that this situation can be avoided. However, these responses may only reflect the traditional values and ethos that they have grown accustomed to as members of the Association. In the longer term, if players at inter-County level only have experiences of being contracted to a County, then these attitudes are likely to change. Nevertheless, these are the ramifications that the GAA needs to consider. The implications of player transfers/mobility and player contracts would seriously alter the landscape within which the organisation currently operates.

### 4.2.3 Implications for the Club

The implications for the club activities are an important and relevant consideration within the debate. Therefore, this is an area that was examined with all the respondents. The opinions of the interviewees were divided. Administrator 1 identified that club allegiance was likely to be adversely affected and stated:
If we resort to pay for play at inter-County level, the immediate aftermath would be that club will no longer hold any players, and the players will no longer be considered a club player, because he is earning a living no matter how small at County level.

Player 3 (hurling) expressed his concerns in relation to picking up an injury while playing for their club and the implications for his contract:

If we got injured playing for the club instead of playing with the County, would they [GAA] take money off you or would you be in trouble... There would be more bitterness – the players would not be available for their Club.

However, not all the respondents subscribed to the negative impact for the Club, owing to the focus on senior inter-County playing activities within the amateur model, many clubs are currently disenfranchised. Player 2 (hurling) identified this concern, when he argues:

I could not see how it could be any more detrimental than it is… It is farcical, the situation with clubs [in my County], we played the first round of our championship the third week in May and the second round wasn’t until third week in July. So there was 8 weeks clear until your next game, to me that is in an amateur set up and how could it be any more farcical than that.

Similarly, GPA Executive 2 was also unconvinced and stated:
Clubs are at the mercy of the inter-County scene at the moment. Despite all the great oratory from the top table [Central Council] it is not going to be any other way, and I think the club are probably better off knowing where they stand. I know from my own experience this year, I would rather know where I stood. You get [County] players back in ‘rag order’ as well.

Under the amateur model, the GAA has continually reinvested their income within various units of the Association. In 2008, Croke Park distributed over forty five per cent of the total revenue of €64,317,933 among the Counties for games and infrastructural development (Annual Report, 2009). The GAA have invested a lot time and finance in developing playing pitches, dressing rooms and other facilities at club level. In addition, the Provincial Councils and County Boards developed a number of stadiums throughout the country to host inter-County games. The ability of the GAA to do this is enabled by the fact that at inter-County level, the GAA is a well supported spectator sport. In 2008, the overall gate receipts amounted to €26,354,710. Despite a €5million reduction in 2008, the monies accruing from gate receipts accounted for forty one per cent of total revenue (Annual Report: 2009). While the scope of this research does not include a financial analysis of the sustainability of pay for play, it is clear that the GAA has been able to develop on the basis of the revenue that it generates being used for the overall administration and development of the games.

At another level, if professionalism was introduced within the GAA, it would only be only a matter of time before the principle of payment would percolate down to club activity and in this instance the richer clubs within a County could start to attract the better players. This would be one of the unintended consequences/outcomes for the
GAA. Thus, it is inevitable that the club or parish structure which is the corner stone of the Association would be compromised. Currently, all senior inter-County players play with their clubs (on a restricted basis) throughout their County’s involvement in the senior inter-County championship season. If pay for play was introduced and players were contracted to their County, this situation would change and clubs would not have the same access to their players as they have under the current model.

Using the case of rugby, the implications for club are apparent. Since the advent of professionalism in 1995, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), which pay the wage bill for a fixed number of players who are contracted to four provinces – Connacht, Leinster, Munster and Ulster or the IRFU (Cronin, 2006). These players are seldom given the opportunity to play with their ‘home’ club owing to their involvement in the Magners League, Heineken Cup and international competitions. In addition, the IRFU can take international players away from the provinces prior to international games (Cronin, 2006). While professional rugby is now embedded at provincial and national levels. In rugby union, the emphasis has moved away from club competitions to provincial and international activities. This is a trend that the GAA needs to consider within the pay for play debate. Player 5 (football) alluded to this issue: “the buzz is gone in terms of the all-Ireland [Club] league, ok... the profile of rugby has never been higher but the [club] product has never been worse”.

Additionally, if pay for play was adopted, and allowed to percolate down to the club, they would have to set aside a percentage of funds that they currently generate through fund raising to finance their football and hurling teams from underage up to senior levels. A large proportion of the revenue that all GAA Clubs generate comes from people or businesses within local communities that are willing to provide
financial assistance to a club to which they are loyal. It is a matter of conjecture whether or not these clubs would be able to generate similar amounts of income from the local communities. Local benefactors and sponsors would be conscious that some of the funds were being used to pay a small proportion of the players within a club. In essence, the benevolence that many people/businesses have towards their local club could become eroded. As Administrator 3 has responded:

There would be a knock on effect to that. The concept of people doing things for nothing would go. It would have a detrimental effect on the club, and a knock on effect on the community at large if the club scene was to be downgraded in any way… Clubs need to be careful that they do not go to the wall [encounter financial difficulties] you hear all types of stories about the [club] bars paying for the players and all that kind of thing.

Of considerable significance is the role of volunteers within clubs, which According to the Irish Economic and Social Research Institute Report in 2005 has made the GAA a major generator of volunteers in Irish sport (Watterson, 2005). Most clubs possess a cadre of members who are willing to provide an input into their club at a coaching or administrative level, and currently, they give freely of their expertise and time without any financial compensation. While some of the respondents believed pay for play at club level for a small percentage of the players could create a degree of tension within Club. It can be argued that this may well be a generational issue and pay for play could become the norm over time within Club.

There was not a consensus on the negative impact on volunteerism amongst the respondents, for example Player 3 (hurling) stated:
No – I could not see how there would be, I think it is up to the teams to ensure they are successful – the more successful you are the more people you will have lending out a hand and it is the same with club and everyone else.

Furthermore, GPA Executive 2 provided the example of Australian Rules football, which is also an indigenous sport, argues:

In Aussie rules, lawyers, businessmen and consultants came in and structured what I believe is one of the greatest sports in the world in terms of marketing and promotion. They nurtured an amateur game, a semi-professional game, and a professional game without damaging the integrity of the grass roots level… so I think this is the only model to look at, as this probably the closest model and it works very well.

4.3 The Gaelic Players Association

The previous thematic sections discussed the first three research questions. This section explores the role of the GPA and acts as a precursor the final research question relating to a further review of amateurism. The advent and consolidation of the GPA as the formal players’ representative body has presented the GAA with an additional variable. Whether the GAA administration agrees or disagrees, the amateur-professionalism debate cannot occur without the input of the GPA.

The literature highlights that player associations provide a conduit for interaction and representation between the elite players and their governing body. In Australian rugby union, the emergent players’ body reached agreement with the ARU on the
distribution of television monies (Dabscheck, 2003). The co-operation between the players’ association and the ARU provides a pertinent example of an agreement that has enabled administrators and players to jointly maximise revenue for the sport.

Since the foundation of the GPA, there has been a continuing tension between the GAA and the GPA. In 1999, a former GAA president Joe McDonagh took umbrage at what he saw as the “fledgling organisation's presumptuousness” (Moran, 2006) to represent GAA players. While the GPA has continually tried to distance itself from the issue of payment for play, stating: “we're looking for the basic requirements to participate as players within an amateur game” (Moran, 2006). The findings explicitly and implicitly point to the existence tension between the GAA and the GPA. Administrator 3 expressed his opinion in this regard as follows:

I think the reason for the GPA coming into existence was that in some ways from a GAA administrator point of view that we are too blasé about our relationship with players. We did not actually react to what was happening and were too slow to react to it. Maybe people used their power to keep players down. A lot of what is happening now is due to the way players were treated in the past.

Player 6 (football) confirms hesitant nature of the relationship between the GAA and the GPA:

I think they are suspicious of each other to an extent and that their relationship has improved over the last couple of years, but, they were suspicious of each other. They are putting their differences aside for the betterment of the GAA.
Despite the fractious nature of their relationship, the representatives of GPA and the GAA began to develop a working relationship with both parties meeting regularly, to discuss player welfare matters (Cummiskey, 2005). The GAA has gradually acknowledged the GPA as the voice of the elite players and the representatives of the elite inter-County players; the Chief Executive of the GPA was appointed as ex-officio member of the GAA Central Council. (Cummiskey, 2005)

Evidently the GPA is here to stay and there has been a gradual acceptance of this in more recent times. In a Sunday Tribune newspaper poll, three quarters of the 29 chairmen polled believed that “the GPA had a worthwhile role to play in terms of player welfare” (Lanigan, 2006). Furthermore, the GPA/UCD survey 2005 highlights the virtually unanimous belief that the GPA should be formally recognised by the GAA as the de facto players’ representation body. In addition, no fewer than eighty eight per cent of respondents agreed that the GPA should be represented at key GAA committees, namely; County Boards, management committee and central council (Hooper et al., 2005).

It is pertinent to highlight the role of the elite players association in terms of developing commercial revenue streams to benefit senior inter-County players. One of the main reasons for the advent of the GPA has been the failure of the GAA to fully utilise the commercial potential of Gaelic games to benefit the players. Thus, the GPA identified this niche and decided to set the agenda for the GAA. This was illustrated when the GPA unveiled a television advertisement for the sports drink Club Energiser, which is endorsed by the GPA. Owing to the success of television advertisements, the funds generated from the sale of this sports drink are used by the GPA (O’Riordan, 2006c).
The GPA has evolved from being simply a players’ representative agency. The GPA has enabled their membership to become commercially astute in utilising their profile as elite players. Furthermore, the absence of funding from the GAA means that the GPA had little option other than to seek commercial sponsorship (Moran, 2006a). The GPA has a great deal of expertise in relation to player issues. GPA Executive 2 quite clearly emphasised the player association’s relevance:

There is an acceptance now that the GPA is not going away. Commercially, we have been quite successful and that is really by virtue of GAA ineptitude in that particular area. I think they are improving all the time, but, there was a vacuum there that allowed us to create a commercial programme that has funded the [players’] association.

There was a general view shared by both administrators and players that the emergence and consolidation of the GPA has made the GAA seriously reconsider the issue of players’ welfare as well as other existing concerns that had been neglected, especially as players are primarily responsible for generating much of the revenue for the organisation. GPA Administrator 1 states:

I do think that we [GAA] handled it [the GPA] issue badly; we handled it so badly, we probable made them stronger. I have no problem with an organisation representing players, being strong, but I would have a problem with it being outside the organisation. They should have a part to play in the promotion and development of the game within the organisation.
Nevertheless one of the respondents believed the GAA should firmly resist any direct payment for play. Player 5 (football) suggests that:

The GAA does need to take a stand if they feel in any way that the traditions, the values, the culture, the founding principles are being changed beyond recognition or taking a different form altogether. I think they should step in and be strong about it and say no, this is what we stand for.

In terms of the GPA’s strategy, namely, whether they are only concerned with player welfare or have a longer term strategy in relation to professionalism, remains to be seen. The opinions expressed by non-GPA respondents on this issue were evenly divided, as four respondents said pay for play was on their agenda, and another four disagreed, with the remainder being unsure. None of the respondents believed that full professionalism was on the agenda. According to Player 5 (football):

There are certain people… in the organisation [GPA] who would certainly advocate the pay for play, certainly would welcome it, and definitely would not reject it, because they would stand to benefit…pay for play is certainly on the table or on their agenda in the long run or some form of it.

However, Administrator 2 argued that: “The GPA is there for the welfare of the players, I know that they have mooted pay for play, but, they are not pushing it as hard as some people think. In my opinion, they are not”.

In April 2006, prior to meeting with GAA, the GPA clearly emphasised the welfare agenda and ruled out any agitation for play for play; “this is what the GPA is about.
There's no reference to semi-professionalism and no reference to [full] professionalism. This can be taken at face value… we're not looking for pay-for-play” (Moran, 2006b).

The longer-term strategy was explored in detail with the executive members of the GPA. While both respondents stated that it was not currently on the GPA agenda, they did not rule out the possibility that pay for play will move towards the top of the GPA agenda in the future. They highlighted that the players will dictate the agenda on the issue of pay for play. GPA Executive 1, when asked about this issue responded: “I can see younger generations of players coming through who have a different mindset to the current generation, so if that trend is set to continue obviously there will be serious questions asked and serious challenges for the GAA down the line”.

The “generation” issue view appears be consistent with views of some of the players who were interviewed and indeed GPA Executive 2 made a similar comment: “No, it is not on the agenda at the moment… so I think we are at the bottom end of the bell curve, but attitudes will change as generations move on…I think players will at some point start to ask”.

Clearly, the GPA is a crucial stakeholder in the amateur-professional debate. The players’ association, through numerous commercial activities has created awareness amongst inter-County player of their marketability. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence that tensions have existed within the GPA in terms of the pay for play issue. The original founder and former commercial manager of the GPA Donal O’Neill stated that the issue of pay for play will not go away. “It is happened in every other sport. GPA or no GPA, players will be paid at some point, I've no doubt in my mind”
Foley, 2008a). Dessie Farrell, the current Chief Executive Officer of the GPA, disputed that pay for play was on the agenda stating that: "these are just his personal opinions and I think they are almost irrelevant as he has moved on [from the organisation]" (Foley, 2008a).

4.3.1 Player Grants/Welfare

In April 2008, the GAA annual congress agreed to sanction the payment of the Annual Team Performance Scheme (player grants) through the Irish sports council. It is unclear if the government are prepared fund this scheme in the coming years as recent indications suggest that the present economic uncertainty may result in the scheme being halted (Keys 2009a). While some of the interviews were conducted prior to the final agreement on the Annual Team Performance Scheme, the context of the discussions are still relevant. The findings highlight the unintended consequences associated with the payment of the Annual performance scheme. Some respondents viewed the payment of monies from this scheme as move towards professionalism, Administrator 1 stated: “If the grants were implemented it could bring in professionalism by the back door, believe it or not, even though it is a state payment”.

Whilst other respondents believed that the grants may enable the issue of professionalism to be set aside for the time being. When the idea of the player grant payments being a precursor to professionalism was explored, a number of responses indicated that the payment of the grants may enable the pay for play issue to be parked for a while. County Administrator 3 responded: “It may actually keep professionalism away, it may be a precursor to it, it is another step if you like, but at the same time it is ensuring that players are compensated”.
Similarly, GPA Executive 1 commented: “No I do not, if anything, I can see it offsetting the drive to semi-professionalism”. GPA Executive 2 concurred: “I think it will certainly push out any debate that may emerge or may be about to emerge or gain momentum on the whole issue of remuneration for players”.

Although players were in favour of the grants, some did acknowledge that the grant issue cannot be viewed in isolation and is potentially linked to the overall issue of pay for play. In response to whether the payment of grants was a first step towards professionalism, Player 6 (football) stated: “It is a big issue in the broader picture, where does it stop?” Player 7 (football) stated: “If it did not stop at grants, what about it. It is crazy... pay for play is not going to go away”.

Clearly the establishment of the GPA has generated both a negative and suspicious reaction amongst some GAA administrators. Nevertheless, there is a perception that the GPA has ultimately improved standards of player welfare. Given the perceived apathy towards the general playing body that tended to exist within the GAA prior to the formation of the GPA, it is unsurprising that the GPA has successfully mobilised players. More recently during meetings with the GAA hierarchy the issue of formal recognition and distribution of commercial monies has come to the fore. The GPA has campaigned on an ongoing basis for formal recognition. This campaign was stepped up when the GPA indicated that their members will be not available for promotional work and interviews during the championship season (Boyle, 2009). As future payments of the Annual Team Performance Scheme are no longer guaranteed, this has created an additional variable. The GPA have identified that the player welfare initiatives can be funded from the commercial revenue generated by the GAA (Keys, 2009b).
This development is unsurprising as results from this research indicate that ultimately the GPA believe that the GAA should fund GPA player welfare from their own resources. With this in mind, the GPA has suggested that five per cent of funding from all player related revenues generated from gate receipts, TELEVISION rights and sponsorship should be provided to the GPA to spend on player welfare. The revenue accruing from these areas in 2008 was approximately €40million (Keys, 2009b).

There is evidence that the GAA and GPA have gradually moved forward together since that latter’s formation in 1999. In November 2009 the GAA and GPA reached an interim agreement in relation to formal recognition and funding of the player welfare initiatives for 2010, (approximately two and half per cent of commercial income) to be administered by the GPA (Moran, 2009b). This interim agreement will enable negotiations on a comprehensive agreement between the two parties to continue with a view to reaching agreement in autumn 2010. This agreement demonstrates the interdependency between the GAA and the GPA and thus a recognition that both parties need to co-operate with each other in terms on the amateur-professional debate.

4.4 Reviewing Amateurism

This section addresses the final research question and analyses the extent to which a further review of amateurism is necessary for the Association. The aforementioned findings demonstrate that the organisation has made concessions in relation to amateurism that have increased the expectations of players. One important theme that
arose unprompted from the first interview conducted with one administrator was the
issue of reviewing amateurism. Administrator 1 offered these candid views:

I am sorry if I am repeating myself, [we need to] define what we mean by
amateur status firstly, in great detail, and enforce it. If that means throwing my
County out of a championship, throw them out, full stop. But who is going to
have the ‘balls’ to take it on. That includes, by the way dealing with the issue
of manager payment as well, it is not just players. It is manager payment as
well.

Arising from this initial interview, this theme was explored in the subsequent
interviews with the administrators, players and GPA. The findings in relation to this
issue are revealing, as the respondents believe that the GAA should undertake a
comprehensive review. In Australian Rules football there is a retirement fund
contingency whereby a percentage of the monies accruing the television rights income
are paid into a fund on an annual basis. The fund is administered by the players’
association. Currently Australian Football League (AFL) players’ receive nearly
€9,000 for each season that a player competes in the AFL. While a similar scheme for
GAA players may create controversy, this initiative has been suggested to the GAA
(O’Brien, 2009).

The views highlighted provide clear evidence that a review of amateurism is
necessary. Player 1 (hurling) responded: “it would certainly help, that would help in
some cases…glorified expenses, would mean that it [pay for play] would go way for a
while”.
Player 5 (football) expressed a similar viewpoint:

Yeah absolutely… it is gone to the point now where certain players and I would say... would be less than five per cent have agents, but, there are certainly there is a lot of activity out there… I think they should maybe get rid of the word itself, because, by strict definition, the GAA is not amateur.

Player 7 (football) had this to say:

It is total contradiction in terms to describe the GAA as being amateur. I mean there is too much money involved to describe it as amateur. It is only amateur because the players are being described as amateur. Sure it is a big business. The GAA could free up some money for County Boards, they could increase mileage expenses.

GPA Executive 1 stated:

I think it is very difficult in this day and age for an ambitious County or County Board with ambitious players…to retain the services of those individuals without contravening the amateur ethos. So I think certain components of the amateur ethos need to be reviewed. I am not for one minute condoning the advent of professionalism but, I am saying that to eradicate the hypocrisy that exists currently within the game that needs to be looked at.

Similarly GPA Executive 2, was adamant that a review of amateurism “was as an absolute necessity”
In terms of a review of amateurism, the respondents were asked how this issue could be dealt with, as was demonstrated by some of the responses in previous sections the respondents believe that mileage/travelling expenses is one avenue that could be examined. Player 1 hurling commented:

It would certainly help, that would help in some cases you would have the question can everyone drive? If everyone could drive and claim a €1 per mile that would definitely help because there would be money in it at the end of the month.

Player 7 reflected on this issue and stated:

What could you do? the GAA [Croke Park] could free up some money for the County Boards, they could increase mileage expenses or they could increase the rate of expenses.

In terms of the enforcement and implementation of a review of amateurism, Administrator 1 stated:

If the [agreed] expenses are €1 a mile, I have no problem with a player getting them…I am saying that they should be properly remunerated for what they do, or, for what it costs them....an amateur status report [1997] came out and it was the greatest farce of all time. I said that it did not go far enough…

The interviews were concluded prior to the April 2008 agreement by the GAA congress to endorse the payment of the Annual Team Performance Scheme to senior
inter-County. Therefore, this research did not discuss the outcome of the decision. Nevertheless, it is important to outline the subsequent developments that have taken place since this decision. The player grants were approved despite strong opposition from a group within the Association called *of the one belief*. This group contended that the payment of the Annual Team Performance Scheme and the Annual Support Scheme for the Development of Excellence in Indigenous Sports was in breach of the Rule 11. Subsequently, the group exhausted the GAA internal disputes process and took a case against the Association’s Central Council on the issue, to the Disputes Resolution Authority (DRA) which is the final arbitrator. The DRA (20 page judgement) in April 2008 ruled that the player grants were not in breach of Rule 11, Section 60 which states:

> the absence of clear definitions as to what constitutes eligible expenses gives rise to a concern that the Scheme will be misused, and that the Schemes do not adequately police what they *[of the one belief]* term the murky overlap between pay and expenses. In the final analysis, however, it cannot be said that any present features of the Schemes breach Rule 11 (DRA, 3/2008).

Ironically, after making the decision on Annual Team Performance Scheme, the Association recognised the need for a review of Rule 11. It is possible to speculate that this DRA decision, particularly section 60 of the judgement, may have influenced decision of the GAA to establish a committee to review Rule 11, as well as addressing illegal payments to managers/coaches. Just days after the Annual Congress of 2008, former GAA president Brennan highlighted what many had suspected, which is that the GAA is not ‘strictly’ an amateur organisation:
I have felt Rule 11 is very loose and bland at the moment and I think we need to re-define it in the context of amateurism today and what we mean by it… There is also been much debate about the payment of managers. The reality is that there has to be some compensation for being a team manager, for example, because there are genuine costs associated with that task… clearly, when it is loose, people put their own interpretation on that and amateurism is being eroded (Foley, 2008b).

While the approval of the Annual Team Performance Scheme and the Annual Support Scheme for the Development of Excellence in Indigenous Sports has created some disquiet amongst those committed to the amateur ethos, there is a counter balance. As: anyone with a passing interest in the machinations of the GAA would acknowledge that rule 11 leaves much scope for interpretation and is “a priceless piece of work - even allowing for the national [Irish] willingness (indeed, preference) to tolerate laws and regulations that have long ago ceased to have any connection with reality”(Moran, 2007c).

Currently, the GAA allows players to accept money for commercial endorsements, promotional appearances, media commitments, third-level education bursaries and generous expenses when travelling overseas in relation to certain Gaelic games activities. These activities are payments in cash, in conjunction with the playing of Gaelic games (Moran, 2007c).

The 1997 amateur status report approved various ways in which individuals might benefit from their status as inter-County GAA players. While the recommendations contained in that report were approved by GAA Central Council, “Rule 11 in the
Official Guide was never adequately amended to reflect those recommendations” (Moran, 2008b). In 2008, Former GAA president Nicky Brennan stated:

I will be initiating a re-examination and evaluation of the realities of what is happening today, to reaffirm and ensure that our association's amateur status is retained as a core tenet of what we do and what we are about (Moran, 2008b)

Despite this assurance a formal organisation-wide review of amateurism has not taken place to-date. In addition to the aforementioned the public utterances, the findings provide clear evidence that review of amateurism is a necessity. As well as the issue of expenses, other innovative ways of improving player welfare need to be examined; these could include a review of mileage/travel allowances, the establishment of a player’s trust fund, and the payment of match fees for league and championship games.

The 2009 interim agreement between the GAA and the GPA has laid the foundation for this review. Thus, the review will have to be undertaken in conjunction with the GPA. Nevertheless, some ground rules have to be established for this to be successful. From the GAA’s perspective, it is explicit and implicit from this research that they do not wish to concede the basic tenet of direct payment for play; from the GPA’s perspective they need to make it clear to the GAA what exactly they expect from the Association in terms of player welfare.
4.5 Summary

The chapter highlighted the attitudes and opinions of key stakeholders within the GAA towards the amateur-professional debate. Furthermore, it identified that the Association is experiencing similar preconditions that existed in other sports that undermined amateurism. The findings locate the GAA on the amateur-professional continuum. There is clear evidence that within the findings on the structural ramifications of professionalism and the role of the GPA that Association must undertake a further review of amateurism. The conclusion of the research will suggest how a review of amateurism will contribute to the ongoing debate.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

In a broader context, the sustainability of professionalism within Irish sport has been subject to much debate. The financial difficulties in maintaining the professional status of Irish soccer clubs in the Republic of Ireland who compete within the League highlights the vagaries attached to professionalism. In 2008, a High Court examiner was appointed to oversee the financial future of both Cork City and Drogheda United Football Clubs respectively. These are not the only clubs to encounter financial difficulties, other Club, such as Cobh Ramblers, Sligo Rovers, Galway United and Kildare County experienced liquidity problems during the 2008 season (Malone, 2008a). The precarious nature of the financial situation of the aforementioned soccer clubs provide the GAA, particularly the administrative leaders, with the perfect riposte to those who argue that the GAA should adopt some form of professionalism. This chapter will suggest how the GAA can deal with amateur-professional debate, as it will continue to be an on-going issue.

5.1 Reviewing Amateurism in a Modern Sporting Context

As demonstrated in the introduction and throughout the results and discussion, the GAA has conducted a number of internal reviews on amateurism. The recommendations emanating from these reviews reveal how the organisation has progressively adjusted their stance in relation to amateurism to reflect a modern sporting context.
An overview of the findings highlight that in terms of the attitudes and opinions of amongst the key stakeholders there is a consensus that full professionalism is financially unsustainable within the GAA. Furthermore, and unsurprisingly, the research demonstrates that there is little or no demand for a fully professional model. In terms of semi-professionalism, the findings identify that at a superficial level, namely, direct payment of money to senior inter-County players, there is a belief amongst the players that the GAA should consider adopting a semi-professional model. The administrators do not share this viewpoint. This is not remarkable as the loss of control and power experienced by their counterparts in rugby union is likely to have influenced their opinions. There is broad agreement from the respondents that the adoption of semi-professionalism is unlikely to occur within the next five to ten years. While the reader may conclude that the above findings are somewhat predictable, this does not convey the complete picture as the other results summarised below reveal the complexity of the debate.

It is significant that the research provides clear and irrefutable evidence from all the stakeholders that the GAA is experiencing similar circumstances that undermined amateurism in other sports. The opinions of the respondents in the interviews clearly demonstrate examples of indirect or veiled payment to senior inter-County players and managers, this reinforces the anecdotal findings that have been regularly alluded to in the course of the Association’s internal reviews of amateurism. The findings identify that the payment of coaches and managers are pervasive at both inter-County and club level throughout the Association. In the context of the discussion this issue has to be addressed, as it is a key driver in the amateur-professional debate.
Furthermore the evolving commercialisation of the GAA, particularly, over the last two decades has created an environment that has enabled the elite players to benefit financially from their commercial activities. Therefore unwittingly the Association has increased the awareness and expectations amongst the players that they can generate some income from these activities. In term of the amateur-professional continuum; the GAA has gradually shifted away from the amateur end of this continuum as it has adopted many of the characteristics of a professional sporting organisation.

The findings relating to the structural ramifications of professionalism are significant and identify that the amateur-professional debate is not just a case of pay for play. Player contracts, player transfers/mobility and the implications for the Counties and club have far-reaching consequences for the Association. While at a superficial level there is some demand within the GAA for semi-professionalism. More fundamentally, the responses reveal a key issue, namely, that when those respondents who are favourably disposed towards professionalism are asked to reconcile their opinions with respect to the structural implications of professionalism they reconsider and re-orientate their initial responses and provide conflicting answers. In essence, those who favour semi-professionalism clearly want some financial recompense for their commitment to Gaelic games. Nevertheless, their opinions demonstrate that when the structural implications of pay for play are examined, they become circumspect about the ramifications.

If the GAA adopt semi-professionalism and the elite players sign a contract, then on balance the model of senior inter-County activity that currently exists will be challenged. This may result in a slow diminution of player loyalty to both their club and County. Indeed, if player contracts were introduced then the overall structure of
the GAA would be exposed to the advent of franchises and/or corporate ownership of some inter-County teams. While the aforementioned changes represent the worst case scenario for those who remain steadfast their belief that the GAA should remain amateur, these possible outcomes must be seriously considered.

The role of the GPA cannot be underestimated, since 1999; the GPA has made the GAA reflect on how the association deals with the elite players by continually championing issues of player welfare. Initially, there was a degree of ambivalence towards the players’ association and possibly an expectation that they would disband in failure, therefore progress has been slow. The findings demonstrate that the GPA has remained resolute in their quest for formal recognition and the GAA has reacted to the constant lobbying from the GPA in relation to player welfare issues. Furthermore, the findings highlight that in terms of the structural implications of professionalism, the opinions executive members of the GPA are at variance. Thus, it appears that players’ association believe that semi-professionalism may not be a realistic option.

The payment of the player grants in 2008 is an acknowledgement of the commitment of the elite players. Nevertheless, the continuing payment of the player grants in an economic downturn remains problematic. However, the recent interim agreement in November 2009 between the GAA and the GPA in relation to the formal recognition of the latter as well as the distribution of a percentage of commercial income to the GPA indicate that the GPA remains resolute in terms of the deliverance of the overall player welfare agenda. This agreement provides both parties with an opportunity to address the issues of player welfare in the context of the amateur-professional debate,
and avoid the public disagreements that were prevalent in the media during the player grants debate.

The findings and discussion illustrate that this is an opportune period for the Association to undertake a further review of amateurism. There are two key aspects that distinguish the GAA from other sports, firstly, the indigenous nature of the games and secondly, the skew towards amateurism. It can be argued that as an indigenous sporting organisation in a country with a relatively small population, the games will never truly evolve on a worldwide stage. While this maybe viewed in a negative manner, it may prove to be the crucial factor that enables the organisation to remain one of the last bastions of amateur sport, albeit in a diluted form.

The findings provide clear evidence that a review and amendment of the rule pertaining to amateurism should be undertaken. There is clear agreement from the responses from the representatives of the three groups that a review of amateurism should be undertaken. This review should reflect the developments that have taken place in modern sport, owing to the fact that the results provide evidence that the GAA has not been immune to these changes. Any amendment to Rule 11 should recognise that a sporting organisation can have many rules in relation to amateurism, but unless these rules are fully enforced and implemented throughout the Association, they are meaningless.

This research demonstrates that current rule on amateurism is clearly and constantly breached and/or loosely interpreted by members. Thus, much of the erosion of the amateur ethos experienced by the organisation over the last number of years is attributable to the fact that the Association has turned a ‘blind eye’ to activities such
as, payments of cash and benefit in kind which have contravened the amateur status of the Association. To-date, no member of the Association has been suspended for breaching the amateur code. Thus, if the GAA continues to adopt a reactive approach that reviews and relaxes the rules on amateurism, with little commitment for strong enforcement, the organisation will continue to operate within a disquieting environment characterised by laxity where ‘the tail is wagging the dog’.

There have been numerous public utterances from senior officials within the Association in relation to the adherence to the ethos of amateurism, Nevertheless, these same officials have been apathetic in implementing the existing rules on amateurism. Thus, they are contribute to the diminution of the amateur values that they continually espouse. The GAA have reviewed the concept of amateurism on a number of occasions. Indeed, the aforementioned amendments made over the last two decades, have had unforeseen consequences, in that they are enablers of incremental professionalism that pervades the organisation.

Both the amateur status report 1997 and the GAA strategic review 2002 do not anticipate a professional game evolving. Thus, any proposed change to amateurism should consider two main areas which have been highlighted and discussed. Firstly, will it facilitate or impede the survival of the GAA as a community/parish-based organisation? Secondly, will it facilitate or impede the survival of the Irish indigenous games? Professionalism is unlikely to facilitate these two key tenets of the Association. The reason is that survival in the face of competition from both media and sponsor driven international sports, means that the GAA at the community/club level needs to ensure that it spends their money shrewdly on coaching, promotion and development. Thus, GAA needs to distribute their revenue to the various units within
the Association, while ensuring that the players who are a key driver in the promotion of the games receive the appropriate recognition.

The experience of other sports provides evidence that paying inter-County players would undermine the culture and values that have made the GAA unique over the last 125 years. The identification with the club, parish and community are fundamental to the GAA. As discussed, the club would be seriously undermined by direct payment to the players. The predictability of human nature would ensure that gradually the players would change allegiance and follow the money. Professionalism will precipitate contracts; contracts will lead to disputes and thus legal redress. The inevitable transfer market will always favour the stronger and the wealthier Counties and club. While regular player movement is likely to erode the identity within Counties and clubs and thus the cornerstone of the GAA will be radically altered.

Bearing in mind these issues, it is important to make a distinction between player welfare and pay for play. Those who favour professionalism continue to highlight the excessive demands on players’ time. While the number of competitive games is not an issue; the requirements for training and preparation can be. The GAA and the GPA need to find commonality. They should examine and investigate training regimes with the aim of reducing the over emphasis on inter-County activity and restore the critical balance between club and inter-County activity. However, there are external factors, the commercial revenues generated from the senior inter-County games are a direct outcome of the product and any reduction in the quality of the games may have an adverse effect on commercial income. This argument can be counter-balanced, by the
reality that in times of economic recession; finances accruing from advertising and sponsorship are likely to be eroded.

As discussed in the findings, player welfare can be examined through restructuring and regulation. However, any breaches of regulations should be addressed. Currently, inter-County players can benefit from the glory, the status and the commercial spin-offs. While inter-County games generate revenue for the Association, the revenue accruing from these high profile games enables the organisation to continually develop. Clearly, the issue of professionalism can not be examined solely in terms of payment for play, but in broader terms. It is important to take cognisance of the long-term good of the Gaelic games, the players of the future and Irish community life. In essence, it remains debatable if payment for play is a valid alternative.

While the relevant findings from the GPA/UCD quantitative survey (2005) indicated that over seventy per cent of players want a move to some form of professionalism, this survey does not provide the complete picture. Furthermore, the survey does not provide respondents with an option of reviewing amateurism. This research explored the opinions of the players and administrators at a deeper level. The findings emerging from the research illustrate that when administrators, players and the GPA reflect on the structural implications of professionalism they are unsure about whether they want the GAA to move towards even a semi-professionalism model. Indeed when the option of reviewing amateurism in a modern sporting context was discussed in terms of the overall debate on pay for play, all the administrators, players and GPA agreed that this was a realistic and viable option.
5.2 Limitations and Recommendations

Before concluding the discussion, it is necessary to identify the limitations of this study and make some recommendations for further research in this area. While this research has responded to the research questions, the small sample size of the study is limiting. Nevertheless, it is quite revealing, as opinions were sought from the key stakeholders, namely, administrators, players and the GPA. However, the generational disparity of the participants interviewed has limitations. The interviews were conducted with senior administrators and inter-County players and GPA Executive members, who have grown up in an environment where the GAA has been an amateur organisation. It would be interesting to see if these attitudes correlated with the next generation of administrators, players and GPA executive members who have been exposed to the continuing debate on the viability of the amateur model.

The financial ability of the GAA to maintain professionalism is a constant theme that resonates in many discussions on pay for play. This is one area that provides some scope for future research. In the course of the research, nearly all the respondents were unsure whether the Association had the financial capacity to sustain semi-professionalism, let alone full-time professionalism. However, this issue needs to be explored in greater detail as there are organisational and structural implications if any of the revenue that the organisation currently generates was used to finance payment for play.

The financial repercussions of pay for play warrant thorough examination. Indeed, within the context of a review of amateurism, the feasibility of the payment to coaches and managers and the increased mileage or other expenses must be explored in conjunction with the financial obligations that would placed on the County Boards. As
has been highlighted, the overall cost of preparation of the inter-County teams represents a large percentage of the annual expenditure incurred by the County Boards.

A quantitative research study that involves the broader membership of the Association such as, administrators, players and members involved at both club and County level and not just the elite players should be undertaken in order to canvass the views of the overall membership of the Association. The GAA and the GPA should agree on the contents of the survey. As well as being disseminated as a postal survey, the survey should be made available one-line to a sample population. In order to ensure the validity of the survey access should be on a restricted basis. Furthermore, the availability of an on-line survey would enable the collection and analysis of a large volume of primary data.

This survey could be supplemented with qualitative information from a larger sample of semi-structured interviews. As has been discussed, any further research should not focus specifically on the issues of direct payment to players and player welfare. Instead, the research should examine the financial and structural ramifications of professionalism. The findings and outcomes from the study should provide the Association with comprehensive and documented evidence as well as compelling mandate to address the amateur-professional debate.

5.3 The Way Forward

While the ideal outcome for the research is to provide some clear cut findings, this is not always possible when dealing with qualitative analysis pertaining to such a complex issue. The findings illustrate that the amateur-professional debate is, and will
continue to be, a ‘live’ issue for the Association to grapple with. Having considered and examined the issue, and bearing in mind that the last major review of amateurism was in 1997, the conclusion emanating from this research suggests that an all encompassing review of amateurism should be undertaken by the Association. There are a number of reasons for this conclusion. In relation to the potential solutions mentioned below the issue of tax compliance would have to be examined within the context of any agreement.

Firstly, taking into account the interdependencies that exist between the stakeholders within the organisation, and in order to avoid the furore that occurred in relation to the approval and disbursement of the player grants scheme, The research provides sufficient evidence that there has been a gradual shift in the traditional power balances with the Association, away from the GAA administrators towards the players and the GPA, which has created tensions. Therefore, unlike the previous internal reviews, any future review of amateurism cannot be conducted in isolation. In more recent years the GAA and GPA have developed a less confrontational working relationship, this provide both the GAA and the GPA with an opportunity to work together to resolve this ongoing issue.

This review should be conducted in conjunction with the players, the GPA, and the wider membership. The 2009 interim agreement between the GAA and the GPA represents the first step in the process in formally recognising the GPA as the formal players’ representative body within the Association. Furthermore, within this agreement the GPA make an explicit commitment to the voluntary and amateur ethos of the GAA. Cleary this agreement provides a framework for the future discussions on amateurism.
As part of this process, the GAA should request that the GPA integrate within the Association’s administrative structure and allow them to champion the interests of player welfare from within formal structure of the Association. While it can be argued that the GPA as an external body is more powerful by remaining outside the official umbrella of the GAA, the recent interim agreement indicates that both the GAA and the GPA are moving towards a pragmatic solution in relation to their future relationship. Furthermore any future disagreement can be conducted in a less confrontational manner and outside of the public arena.

Secondly, the evidence from this research highlights that the payment to coaches and managers must be addressed, and, as mentioned in the annual reports to congress, these expenses/payments need to be regularised. A rate of expenses agreed by the GAA and the GPA should be implemented and paid to managers and coaches. Furthermore, these expenses/payments should be administered and managed by Croke Park, thus, taking the financial burden away from the County Boards.

Thirdly, the findings from the interviews suggest that payment of regularised mileage/travel expenses is one possible way of moving the amateur-professional debate forward. Currently, the GAA pays a mileage allowance of 50 cent per mile to both administrators and players. In the context of the overall discussions on payment for play with the interviewees there was a general consensus that an increase in the mileage expenses/payments to players could be explored. A limitation of this recommendation is that not all players own or drive cars, thus an allowance would have to be afforded to players in this category. As demonstrated in the results section there are other ways the issue could be addressed which were not explored in the
interviews. This could include the establishment of a players’ fund administered by the GPA. In this instance a player could receive an agreed pro-rata payment when their inter-county career is completed. Another possibility is the payment of appearance/match fees, in this case, players would be paid an agreed amount for each league and championship game that they play during a season.

Fourthly, the commercial activity associated with Gaelic games has been recognised and to some extent the GPA identified this niche and generated revenue from it. In terms of a review of amateurism, if the interim agreement between the GAA and the GPA is fully implemented, then GPA as the formal representative body can continue their commercial activity on behalf of the players in conjunction with the GAA. This will create a synergy between both organisations which can be enabling, as they can work together to enhance the commercial income for the players and the Association.

The amateur-professional debate could be addressed in terms of the overall distribution of a percentage of the monies accruing from sponsors and television into a player welfare scheme, similar to the player trust fund adopted by the southern hemisphere in rugby union in 1991. Any revenue generated can be used to offset the aforementioned any increase in mileage expenses and out of pocket-expenses or contributions to players fund. In addition, any breaches of agreed rules should be dealt with by enforcing the penalties as per the official guide. Essentially, the GAA needs to review the question of amateurism but also ensure that it shows leadership on the issue. The future direction of the organisation must include an alliance with the players and the GPA. The Association must avoid the reactionary manner that has pervaded the decision-making process, particularly during the last two decades.
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