



## National Games Development Committee

### Go Games (Rule 6.26 T.O. 2012) Review

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#### **Rule 6.26 T.O. 2012 (formerly 6.27 T.O. 2011)**

##### *Under 12 and Younger Age Groups*

*Games in Under12 and Younger Age Groups shall be organised on the 'Go Games' model with teams being a maximum of 11 a-side and structured to ensure that all participants get to play in the full game.*

*At Under12 level, Competitions may also be organised on a mini-league format on the basis that the teams are a maximum of 11 a-side and that provision is made for all members of the team panel to participate in the game.*

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The above rule was passed by a large majority at GAA Congress 2010. The aim of this motion was to increase participation and ensure an appropriate, child centred games programme for children. Two motions to amend this rule were submitted at GAA Congress 2012. These motions were subsequently withdrawn in favour of a review of Go Games. This report summarises the review process undertaken by the Games Development Committee and presents an overview of the feedback received.

#### **OVERVIEW OF REVIEW PROCESS**

1. National Games Development Committee (GDC) requested all Provinces to seek feedback from their Counties relating to Go Games policy and Rule 6.26. Provincial GDCs in turn sought feedback from County GDCs. Many Counties organised Club forums to ascertain views of Clubs on this matter. Feedback was submitted to the GDC via Provincial Games Development Managers and Coaching Officers. (April/May 2012)
2. A questionnaire was emailed to County Games Development Managers (via Google Form) to ascertain the level of compliance with Go Games policy and Rule 6.26 (June 2012)
3. An MSc Dissertation was completed by GAA Child Coordinator Pat Culhane entitled; *GAA Go Games – An Exploration and Analysis of the Perceptions of Club Coaches in Munster*. Presented for a Degree in Sport and Exercise Management at UCD. ( July 2012)
4. GDC Chairman, Michael Martin and Director of Games Development and Research, Pat Daly, met with all thirty two counties to review progress in all areas of Games Development with a special focus on Go Games and the “Child” area. The County Chairperson, Secretary, Coaching Officer and County Games Development Manager (CGDM) were invited to these meetings. (August 2012)
5. GDC Chairman, Michael Martin met with a number of clubs who have expressed concerns about Rule 6.26.

## **FINDINGS/FEEDBACK**

The overwhelming majority of feedback identified that the introduction of Rule 6.26 had been a huge success. There is strong evidence that the policy is essential to the recruitment and retention of children to Gaelic games. It is clear that progress in the implementation of the Go Games initiative in recent years has been significant. There is concrete evidence of increased participation in our games, with the number of children aged 10 – 12, registered as members of the Association increasing from 39,778 in 2010 to 51,768 in 2011. In addition, the number of children attending *GAA Cúl Camps* has exceeded 82,000 in 2012 (a 6% increase) while evidence shows a significant drop in numbers in camps organised by other codes. All international research has pointed to the importance of small-sided games with maximum participation for all players as being the central plank in the development of young players. It is notable that other sporting organisations now implement a similar policy e.g. English FA, New Zealand All-Blacks.

Notwithstanding this positive feedback, problems around the general understanding of and commitment to the Go Games ethos have been identified. These issues are mainly due to the lack of effective communication in the definition of Go Games within rule and policy. The points below are not reflective of the majority but are issues that have been raised.

1. It was found that compliance at Under-8 and Under-10 was very high, with most issues surrounding Under-12. There was evidence of U-12 games being played on a 15-a-side basis following a local agreement between mentors. Most worryingly, it has been reported that a small number of clubs are only bringing the minimum required numbers (leaving others at home) so that there is no requirement for full participation, i.e. they do not bring extra players and so do not have to play them. Some Counties stated that a number of clubs gave preference for flexibility of player numbers at U-12 team (11 a-side ideal but allowing a maximum of 13).
2. There is a small cohort of Clubs who have not bought into the Go Games ethos. These Clubs have been vocal in their opposition to Go Games on a regular basis. Many are organising tournaments that are contrary to the Go Games ethos and rule. The knock on effect of these tournaments is that Clubs who are compliant with policy have become frustrated that rules are not being enforced consistently. These Clubs/Counties pointed to a need for rules to be stringently implemented. (It was suggested that the highest proportion of Clubs who are not complying with rule are large urban Clubs. Some urban Clubs are fielding multiple teams at one age grade while other Clubs with a similar population are fielding one.)
3. There are local issues over the communication of playing rules. While many Counties have successfully adopted their own playing rules within the Go Games ethos, others wanted more guidance from national level.
4. Games organised by other bodies are causing confusion and are giving justification to those who wish to depart from the Go Games ethos. While it is noted that many Cumann na mBunscol units organise small-sided games, there are some counties that organise 15 a-side games. It was stated by some counties that where Cumann na mBunscol U-13 games are 15 a-side, there is confusion for players and parents. Most Cumann na mBunscol units have modified their U-11 games programme to the Go Games model, however there are some cases where U-11 competitions exist. The Community Games competitive structure at Under-9/10 adds another layer to the confusion. Some confusion is also apparent where children are playing Go Games at U-12 and full-rules at Under 14 in the same year.

5. Many counties expressed their desire for a media campaign to promote Go Games using well known coaches and players. It was suggested that a re-launch of Go Games (Under 7-11) be completed and avoid use of the term “non competitive” in the strategy. There was preference expressed for the term “league” instead of “mini-league” at Under-12.
6. It was suggested that official referees be appointed for Under-12 Leagues and this be made the first step on the referee development ladder. Referees should have responsibility for ensuring compliance with rules.
7. It was suggested that modifications to Under-13 and 14 games be introduced to help bridge the gap and extend/graduate the developmental process.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

While the majority of feedback was extremely positive, it is hoped that the following recommendations will provide greater clarity in this area. It is important to highlight that strong leadership is required at Club and County level to ensure that all children are given an appropriate introduction to Gaelic games and that a developmental ethos prevails over a “win at all costs” attitude.

### **1. Rule 6.26 to be amended as follows:**

*‘Games in Under 11 and younger age groups shall be organised on the Go Games model. Go Games are modified small-sided games where results are not formally recorded and where all participants get to play in the full game. Teams at Under 6/7 age groups shall be a maximum of 7 a-side. Teams at Under 8/9 age groups shall be a maximum of 9-a-side. Teams at Under 10/11 age groups shall be a maximum of 11-a-side.*

*At Under 12/13 level, competitions may be organised on a league format on the basis that participating teams shall be a maximum of 13-a-side. Games shall be organised over four quarters and provision shall be made for all members of the team panel to participate in a minimum of one quarter. ‘*

2. The Association should refuse to support the playing of Gaelic games at the Community Games in its current format, i.e. 15-a-side ‘All-Ireland’ at U.9½ level, as it does not reflect best practice.
3. Cumann na mBunscol games should be organised in conjunction with the amended rule. Full time Games Development staff and local clubs should make every effort to support schools in the provision of appropriate games for children.
4. A PR, Marketing & Communications strategy to be developed to re-launch Go Games. This will be supported by a comprehensive Games Development education campaign through full-time personnel.

5. A monitoring system will be implemented whereby all CCC (at National, Provincial and County level) approved blitzes will be open to visitation by Games Development Staff to ensure adherence to rule. A blitz application form will be detailed to ensure Clubs are aware of compliancy requirements. Sanctions for a breach of Rule 6.26 should be outlined in the GAA Official Guide.
6. County Games Development Managers and County Games Development Committees to work with large urban Clubs to ensure that multiple teams are fielded.
7. The RESPECT initiative is an important part of Gaelic games and helps instil the Go Game's ethos and should be further promoted.
8. The practice of fixed amalgamations of Clubs within the child domain should be carefully examined.