

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: **MR FINBARR McCARTHY**,
GAA Correspondent, 96FM & 103FM, on 7 September 2012, on the occasion of the
conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Arts, *honoris causa*, on **MARY O'CONNOR**

A Sheansailéir agus Clarathóir Coláiste Naisiunta na h-Éireann, Doctúir Micheál Ó Murchú, Uachtaráin, Coláiste na h-Ollscoile Chorcaí agus a chárde uiligh go léir, sé pribhléid mór domsa bheith anseo inniu ar an ócáid speisialte seo, chun Mary O'Connor, Iomání agus Peiladóir den scoth a chuir in aithne díbh.

Cómhghairdeachais Mary as ucht an onóir seo, tá sí tuillte agat. Cómhghairdeachais freisin do Brian Cody, Denis Irwin, Aidan O'Brien agus Ronan O'Gara, níl aon dabht go bhfuil na grádam seo tuillte agaibh freisin.

It is only right, first of all, to commend and congratulate UCC and the NUI on this wonderful occasion to honour these outstanding sportspeople who have consistently enthralled us all with their spirit, determination and, of course, their level of skill over many years.

Mary O'Connor throughout her career in both Camogie and Ladies Football displayed all the above traits in abundance; she has of course won many honours, but the manner in which she played the game was equally important. At all times Mary never gave less than 100%, displaying a level of sportsmanship that was a credit to herself and of course her family.

To play and be a success in both codes at the highest level for so long demands huge commitment, tremendous sacrifices, especially for an amateur sportsperson. In this regard Mary's family were a constant support in good times and bad. Her parents Mary and Dermot, her sisters Helen and Ann, brothers Martin, Derry, Finbarr, Kevin and John must be, and rightly so, very proud here today, while somewhere up there in the big 'playing field' in the sky, her late brother Rory, is looking down on us all with equal pride.

Camogie was Mary's first game and it was obvious from a very young age that she had a special talent quickly recognized by everyone in the Killeagh Club. It's a club that has always been close to Mary's heart, she has served Killeagh with distinction, even to this day, as Mary is the current Chairperson (while still playing), combining that position with her role as Acting Ard Struthoir of Cumann Camogiochtha, based in Croke Park - what is it they say? If you want something done, give the job to a busy person!

There are many strings to Mary's bow, and she has played a prominent role in the Development of Camogie in many counties, notably in Kerry, while she also served as GAA Development Officer in LIT. Mary has also dipped her toes in the world of coaching, acting in that role for the UCC Camogie team a short few years ago, in their quest to capture the famed Ashbourne Cup.

Playing the games at the highest level brought many honours and in camogie Mary is the holder of 7 All-Ireland senior medals, 2 All-Ireland club medals, she has won 3 All-Star awards and was also named Camogie Player of the Year in 2006, along with winning Cork County Championship medals.

Ladies Football has grown in popularity over the last number of years and Cork has, as we always like to do, been to the forefront in this growth. Initially, Mary played her adult club football with Donoughmore, as Inch Rovers only catered for under-age teams at the time - I should explain that Inch are the football arm of the Killleagh Camogie Club.

It was not long before Mary's medal tally increased as Inch captured the All-Ireland Intermediate Club Championship, a senior medal was quickly added, they sit neatly alongside the 2 Senior Club medals won with Donoughmore.

Which brings me nicely to her Inter-County career in Ladies Football. Sunday next is All-Ireland Hurling final day, and the greatest team in that game will be playing, well Cork has produced a team that has brought Ladies Football to a new level.

In a glorious era, they created new records every year, winning national titles at will, including a historic five in a row of Senior All-Ireland titles, and we all know how hard it is to win five in a row!

Mary was a key part of that team and a measure of her spirit is that despite having picked up a very serious injury in 2007, an injury that many would not have recovered from, she did and was back to play a key role in the win of 2008. In all, Mary has five All-Ireland senior medals, as well as one each in Junior and Intermediate, along with one Ladies Football All-Star.

In the next seven days, the two teams that were an integral part of Mary's life for so long, play important matches: an All-Ireland semi-final tomorrow in Football and the Camogie All-Ireland Final on Sunday week, I am sure that Mary would still love to be

part of those teams, but one thing is certain; they will both have one nervous former player willing them to victory.

Having watched Mary on many occasions, what struck me most was her ability to always make the right decision, when in possession, or to be in the right position at a vital time to either avert danger or to execute a score, that is the sign of a class player.

Encouraging younger members of her team is another valuable asset Mary brings to the teams she played (plays) on, that too was seen to good effect in many a crucial encounter - you cannot buy experience, but you can certainly use it.

I am sure Mary will be the first to acknowledge that over a long and distinguished career the many coaches that helped her develop into the outstanding player and competitor she was, they too will recognize that with Mary on their team, their chances of winning were greatly enhanced.

When Mary finally called time on her inter-county career, she did so without fuss, just like she played the games. It was as if to say, my time here is done, time for others to assume the mantle, always nice to move on when you have played your part in ensuring Cork Camogie and Ladies Football remains a force in the coming years.

With a bit more time on her hands, Mary can indulge in her passion for reading and walking, and supporting her other team Manchester United, which I am sure will please Denis!

Brónnam gach dea ghuí Mary sna blianta atá romhainn agus míle buíochas ar son na gcuimhní iontach a thug tú duinn, go h'áraithe nuair a bhí tú ag imirt san gaenssaí cáilliúl dearg sin. Geansaí bródúil Chorcaí.

I was going to end this introduction, and it has been a privilege to be asked to introduce you, with a quote, but I felt this might be more appropriate:

Mary, you were a fantastic player for Cork and in this, an Olympic year, I have no doubt were Camogie and Ladies Football Olympic sports, we would now be saluting a double gold medal winner.