



**THE
CAMOGIE
ASSOCIATION**
An Cumann Camógaíochta

TELL THEIR STORY





About the Author

Alanna Cunnane is a freelance sports journalist, reporter and broadcaster from Sligo with previous features on Off The Ball, Virgin Media Television, HerSport and League Of Ireland TV.

She also has written features for print media with the FAI, GAA, the Sunday Business Post as well as local newspaper outlets.

Twitter: @acunnane10



Louise Keane

Player Welfare and Inclusion Coordinator

Email: louise.keane@camogie.ie



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Kevin Hanly: Making the big bad world a more inclusive place one step at a time



By Alanna Cunnane

10 years ago, Kevin Hanly was in a very different place to where he is today. The Tipperary man hadn't yet been involved with media teams for the county's intercounty teams, nor had he featured in a Supervalu TV campaign or worked with As I Am in crucial representation for autism awareness.

Nope.

10 years ago, 18 year old Kevin Hanly had just left school early, and was admirably fighting bravely every day in search of both belief in himself and for his place in society.

At 28, those idealisms which once seemed out of reach are now indisputable actualities in the confident, media savvy and charming man's life, helped greatly by one thing- Gaelic Games





Through following Football, Hurling and Camogie, Hanly found a way to silence the naysayers, from the stand if not on the pitch itself.

“There were a lot of people would have said, ‘you can’t do this’ growing up, or put you in a box because you were different” he says.

“People didn’t really think there were many opportunities for people who had a disability...I knew myself I didn’t really have the skills to play GAA, but I wanted to be involved.

“Being autistic, having friends and socialising can be quite challenging but I felt when I went to Tipp matches, especially when I was young, that I

found a community in a way. One where people understood me.”

Explaining that the aspects that go into creating a team and those surrounding them are similar to wheels on the bus in that everyone has a part to play, Hanly goes on to describe how that inclusion led to increased faith in himself.

“Before I got involved I was very withdrawn, you kind of think and overthink things. You think if I say this I’ll sound silly, or no one likes me, or the mind can go places like that” he says.



“People kept seeing me there at the matches and supporting. They saw something in me and that I was actually making a difference.

“I just kind of took it step by step, and started to get that belief in myself because of that. Then people began to take me under their wing and I felt a part of something, a part of the team.

“When I think about 10 years and what I’ve done and what I’ve achieved, back then I didn’t really have many friends, I didn’t have a positive outlook and I didn’t have belief in myself that I would have today, but I always had the GAA.”

Far from that fifth year student now, Hanly has since realised that the “big bad world” is far from big or bad at all, and rather a much more accepting and helpful place than he had anticipated at the time.

“When people know my challenges they’re very open and that was a good surprise.

“You know in school your own peers would have looked at you differently, but in the real world the majority of people are actually very supportive and want the best for me as well.”

Having experienced various roles during his tenure now from supporter to kit man, Hanly is now proficient at another cog in the machine in his role as media officer, a responsibility he relishes in.

He completed a course in the area in Limerick College for Further Education, he’s worked with RTE, Tipp Fm and Tipperary Camogie, showing every day that “it can be done and that everybody has a place in society.”

“You realise as well how much work goes on behind the scenes. There’s players but there are also managers, officials, PROs/media, supporters and everyone has a part to play. Without one of those things the experience isn’t the same, and it wouldn’t be the thing we all love,” he says.

Now busy with podcasts, posters, social media and interviewees,

Hanly hopes the trust and self belief Tipperary Camogie have placed in him will translate to the field of play.

Hanly was also a SuperValu ambassador for the last four years with the 'Community Includes Everyone' campaign, something that went a long way in making him "feel part of the team."

"I still pinch myself that a big company believed in me and gave me responsibility to feature and be part of the campaign. I wasn't just just one of the faces, they actually made me feel part of that SuperValu team," he says.

Hopeful for "many good days ahead" in that regard, he insists that "every team has their own achievements and there's always success in different ways", an attitude that seeps into his own life too.

While "there isn't any secret" to transforming your life like Hanly has in the past 10 years, he does offer one piece of advice to anyone seeking it.

"Never give up" he says, "keep knocking on the door because not every day is gonna be a good day, and there's gonna be downs as well, but it's how you come back from that and how you take that on the chin."

"If you take things individually and with small little goals there's always opportunity, and you never know where it will take you."

With the heights Hanly has reached in that time, all with a smile on his face and a pep in his demeanor, there's no limits to what might lie behind the next door he chooses to open.





Tell Their Story

