

Wheelchair Hurling



Hurling is one of the primary games of the Gaelic Athletic Association, the largest sports association in Ireland, and is played throughout the country.

In order for the game to be enjoyed by everyone regardless of their physical ability, wheelchair hurling was set up by GAA member, Tim Maher, in 1994. It was created to better enable those with disabilities to fully participate in the GAA games and open our games to people of all abilities. This ethos is part of the GAA's wider inclusion strategy which states that disability is not a barrier to sport and highlights that regardless of ability, there is something for everyone to enjoy in the GAA.

Wheelchair hurling required an adaptation of the rules of standard hurling, a field-based, full contact game involving 15 players per team and a panel of up to 30 players. In wheelchair hurling each team is made up of six players and four substitutes and operates with similar rules to field hurling.

Both men and women of all ages can take part on the one team; it is a game for everybody. The competition also releases an All-Star team (made up of the best players in the country) at the end of each season, echoing the professional standard that wheelchair hurling sets for its members and players.

The organisation has hubs rather than clubs with the province of Ulster seeing the greatest growth with their four hubs, and it's getting bigger year after year. Wheelchair hurling is part of Disability Sports NI and Ulster GAA's 3 year plan to develop the Gaelic games for people with disabilities. The country of Ireland is broken down geographically into four provinces: Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connacht.

For the purpose of wheelchair hurling, Dublin has its own division due to its high population. Currently in terms of hubs, there are: Ulster-4; Leinster-1; Dublin-1; Connacht-1; Munster-1. It is hoped to grow the number of hubs in each province significantly.

One of the barriers to wheelchair hurling are its lack of members to date: the sport by definition is aimed at a minority population which makes it harder to recruit members. The low number of hubs in each province may also pose as an access barrier as people may have to travel long distances for training and matches.

However, for those enjoying the game they report feeling empowered and enthused to be able to express their skills on the field of play.