



Colm 'Gooch' Cooper

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Donny Mahoney

Teaching Guide

By Peter Heaney

RATIONALE & THEMES

GAA football offers competition at several levels, and depending on their skill, players can compete for club or county.

Their training and camaraderie create lifelong bonds that bind players together to their local clubs.

This biography charts the career of Colm Cooper, a Kerry footballer whose local club developed his talent and supported him as he achieved every available accolade in his sport.

The themes explored are:

- Friendship
- Bereavement and loss
- Rivalry
- Sportsmanship
- Perseverance
- Winning & Losing

SUMMARY

Colm 'Gooch' Cooper is the youngest of five brothers who play for Dr Crokes in Killarney.

Joining the club at eight years old, his first experience of the magic of Croke Park is as team mascot when they win the All-Ireland club title.

Developing, training and playing through the club teams, he considers himself fortunate to be involved with his local club in his beloved Kerry.

When his skill comes to the attention of the county scouts, Colm is invited to trial for the development squad. Although he impresses the coaches, his slight build raises concerns and they decide not to include him.

Training and playing with Dr Crokes soothes his disappointment and as his strength develops he is invited onto the county minor panel and begins to establish his reputation.

However, it is with his club that he claims his first silverware, when they beat a much favoured An Ghaeltacht to lift the Kerry club

trophy.

A phone call from the legendary Páidí Ó Sé marks his promotion to senior county football and heralds a sporting career that sees him win at All-Ireland level, represent Ireland in the Aussie rules series and secure several All-Star nominations.

When his dad and mentor dies suddenly Colm's world is shattered. However, the family of club and county provide the support that helps him to cope.

In an illustrious career, only one trophy eludes him and when he lifts the All-Ireland club trophy with Dr Crokes, he is able to bring the curtain down on a career that has secured every trophy available.

APPROACH

This biography highlights the determination that is needed for any sporting skill to develop and illustrates how participation in sport can encourage resilience.

It appeals generally and provides many opportunities for discussion around the pivotal points in the story.

The themes sit firmly within the remit of the SPHE and PDMU guidelines.

Development can be more effectively facilitated with small group discussion.

The guide has been divided into three sections to reflect the development of the story.

Section 1 Always a Dr Crokes Man Pages 7 - 60

SUMMARY

Following in his brother's footsteps, six-year-old Colm attends his first U-8 GAA blitz at his local club, Dr Crokes, where his father introduces the club as the core allegiance in the GAA and he acquires his distinctive

sobriquet, 'Gooch'.

However, GAA is not the only sport that Colm follows. Playing soccer with his brothers he learns a valuable lesson on being competitive.

Colm reveals his ambition to score an All-Ireland win for Kerry to everyone who will listen and his mum and dad encourage him to dream.

When the family sit down to watch the replay of a match they have just attended, Colm's determination drives him back onto the green to practise and imagine Croke Park glory.

When Dr Crokes reach the All-Ireland club final, Colm is the team mascot, the Croke Park atmosphere reinforcing his determination to return as a player.

Colm learns his craft, growing through the club development structure, and appreciates the deep well of voluntary support from the local community that sustains it.

As captain of the U-14 team he finds it frustrating when the team are unable to match his skill or commitment and learns to respect all his players regardless of their talent or motivation because they represent his community.

An invitation to join the Kerry U-16 development squad brings great excitement, offering the opportunity to secure a place on the minor panel. However, despite his best efforts, he isn't selected.

His disappointment is almost overwhelming until his father consoles him with the advice that irrespective of whether he plays for Kerry or not, he is a member of Dr Crokes, his local club and that club participation with his local community is the real beating heart of the GAA.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (**Read p8**): Colm is the youngest in a family of seven. He has four older

SUMMARY

Colm has secured his place on the Dr Croke's senior team and although the team is struggling he is thrilled to be training with his heroes.

His progress with the Dr Croke's team is attracting attention and he is invited to a minor trial. Though still smarting from his previous experience, he seizes his opportunity and secures a starting position on the county team.

Starting his first Dr Croke's championship match against South Kerry proves a baptism of fire. However, a spectacular goal from Colm makes the difference at the whistle and his father beams with pride when his five sons pose for the winner's photo.

Winning through to the play offs, Dr Croke's face a star-packed An Ghaeltacht in the final and no one outside Killarney gives them a chance.

However, drawing on something deeper than their training, the experience of the older players fuses with the younger players to create a belief that spurs them to a tremendous victory.

When Kerry reach the All-Ireland minor semis, hopes are high; however, they are unable to break down an impressive Dublin team. Their disappointment is then compounded as they watch the senior team suffer a rout from a rampant Meath side.

Colm's dismay is short lived, however, when he learns that he is being considered for a place on the Kerry senior team and gets a call from the coach Páidí Ó Sé inviting him to train with the team.

Training hard with the senior squad, Colm earns a start in the league final against a tough Laois team as Páidí begins to introduce new players and build towards a successful championship team.

Colm impresses with a score that makes the difference between winning and extra time.

He secures his place on the championship team and finds himself in Dublin preparing to face Armagh in his first All-Ireland final.

They were favourites to win. However, the tenacity of Armagh proves impossible to overcome and Kerry lose by a point.

Colm is consoled by family and friends and as the season ends is shocked to learn that he is one of only two Kerry players to win an

brothers who play for the Dr Croke's senior team. What advantage does Colm have as the youngest in the family? Are there disadvantages for him? Which position in the family is best to be?

- (Read p23): Colm asks Maurice Fitz to autograph his shirt. Many people take selfies and collect autographs from sportspeople. What is the point of this activity? Explain why you might try to collect selfies?
- (Read p37): There is a carnival atmosphere in Killarney for weeks after the club win. Why do we only celebrate wins?
- (Read pp49-52): After his mum and coach Pat talk to him, Colm's attitude towards his team mates and playing seem to have changed. What did Colm realize after these conversations? What did he seem to learn?

ACTIVITIES

1. I'm Excited (Read pp7)

Colm is described as being *'over the moon'* with excitement.

Compile a short list of 5-10 similar metaphors to describe great excitement.

Choose your favourite three and then use them in a short sentence to describe Colm. You can add a simple illustration.

2. A Kerry Blessing (Read pp9-10)

Colm's dad explains that because he was born in Killarney, he has been blessed in ways that are not available to people born in other counties.

In small groups, consider where you were born and then create a scroll detailing all the benefits that you enjoy uniquely because of this.

3. The Postcard (Read p19)

There is magic in the air in Killarney ahead of the final and the tourists are enjoying the excitement.

Patrice, a young French girl is there to learn English and decides to send a postcard in English to her parents to describe the atmosphere.

Create the card she sent. Don't forget a picture.

4. My Local Club (Read p39)

Dr Croke's GAC in Killarney is at the heart of the community. Everyone is involved and knows the history and significance of the

club.

The GAA have announced a celebration for younger club members across Ireland and beyond to research and present a profile of their own club. The title is *'My club and why I'm proud of it'*.

Submit a single A4 sheet illustrated entry for your club.

5. Lonely Planet Must See (Read p41)

Colm looks up from his training to see the MacGillycuddy Reeks in the distance and believes that he is living in the most beautiful place on earth.

Pick a spot to stand where you live that you think the view will beat Colm's into second place. Describe the view in a way that will convince everyone who reads it that **YOU** are standing on the most beautiful place on earth.

6. An Athlete (Read p42)

As the coach and team discuss how each part of a footballer's body plays a different role, they try to decide which is the most important.

In small groups choose six different sports and then draw a blank outline of an athlete. Identify and mark on the outline the two most important parts of the athlete's body for each sport?

Was coach Pádraig correct?

7. Captain's Lead (Read p51)

During a particularly frustrating game, coach Pat reminds Colm that it is his job to lead. What does he mean by this?

Work in small groups to help Colm understand his role and responsibilities.

Make a list of Do's and Don'ts that a good captain should be aware of and then choose the three most important of each to create a little reminder card.

8. Disappointment (Read pp59-60)

When he isn't selected for the development squad, Colm is disheartened and doesn't want to talk to anyone. It is only when he sees a photo of himself as the club mascot that he is comforted.

Dealing with disappointment is an important skill for everyone.

In small groups create an illustrated poster to advise the top three strategies to help deal with disappointment.

All-Star award that year.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p63):** Dr Crokes has a range of players on their panel. Some are experienced, while others are younger. Which is the most important quality a team needs, youth, experience, skill or commitment? How can these qualities be developed if they are missing?
- **(Read pp73-74&107):** Colm has been deliberately fouled twice and the referee has tolerated a violent reaction to the fouling. Has violence become an accepted part of GAA sport? How should the sport governing body deal with this?
- **(Read p92):** Colm admires the athleticism of Kieran Donaghy who is originally a basketball player, but whose skills the management think are transferrable to football. Are good athletes born or made? Can you learn to be a great GAA player? What other skills do you need to be a great footballer that are not possible to teach?
- **(Read p94):** Páidí Ó Sé has to sit quietly and listen without commenting to the criticisms coming from the supporters around him. Do they have a right to comment and criticize? Win or lose, the same preparation is made by managers and players. What should the role of the supporters be if their team loses? Is there a difference between being a supporter and being a spectator?
- **(Read pp114-115):** Colm finds that he is recognized more easily and this has begun to cause problems. What rights to privacy should sports people have? Is it reasonable for strangers to feel that they can approach and speak to a sports person simply because they are well known? How available to the public should sports stars be?

ACTIVITIES

1. Belief (Read p64)

Roland, the Dr Crokes captain, calls the squad into a huddle and tells them that they have to believe that they are the best team in Kerry.

The club needs a motivational poster for the noticeboard that will inspire the players each time that they see it.

Create a poster for them.

2. The Coopers (Read. Pp71-72 & 75)

Before the match against South Kerry, Vince remarks that all five Cooper brothers play for

Dr Crokes. When they win, a photo is taken for the *Kerryman* newspaper.

The newspaper needs a short comment piece to accompany the photo describing the match and acknowledging the brother's contribution.

Choose an effective headline and write the piece.

3. Goal for Dr Crokes (Read p74)

Radio Kerry are broadcasting the Dr Crokes v South Kerry match live.

It is very exciting and the commentator is trying to create a sense of the atmosphere for her listeners.

Create and perform a twenty-second audio clip of the commentary covering the play when Colm scored his goal.

4. Probably (Read p78)

Dr Crokes are not expected to win their match and the betting odds of 8/1 reflect this.

What does 'odds' mean? What would the odds be if Dr Crokes were favourites or if no side was favourite?

This area of Number is called probability. Click on the link below to try some interesting probability activities.

nrch.maths.org/9033

5. Tá sé againn (Read p84)

Vince predicted correctly that a more determined An Ghaeltacht team would face them in the second half. This was due to the team talk during the interval.

The author thought that he might include a short paragraph here to describe what happened in the An Ghaeltacht dressing room and what was said.

Can you compose the paragraph (in English or in Irish) that he needs to include?

6. Croke Park (Read pp59 & 91)

Croke Park holds a special place in the ambition of every GAA player and Colm is aware of the excitement associated with the stadium.

For some of the players, this will be their one and only time playing on the pitch.

To acknowledge this, the GAA has given each of the players a special individual Croke Park commemorative scroll outlining the history and some of the interesting facts about the park. Can you create a copy of the scroll?

crokepark.ie/stadium/about

7. The Kingdom (Read p91)

The Kerry colours are green and gold, but why is the county known as 'The Kingdom'?

Do each of the 32 counties have a special name?

How many of them can you discover?

Compile a list of all the counties' names including their colours and a brief explanation for their special name.

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Irish_county_nicknames

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaelic_Athletic_Association_county

independent.ie/regionals/wicklowpeople/sport/other-sports/county-nicknames-are-weird-wonderful-and-a-bit-absurd-27828599.html

8. Diet (Read p99)

Colm is encouraged to eat more potatoes in order to add weight and muscle bulk. Is this a healthy way to eat?

Working in small groups, research a healthy diet for Colm? Which foods should he eat more of and which should he eat less of?

Now create a healthy diet for yourself, identifying which foods you should eat and which you should avoid. Include suggestions about the amount of exercise you should take.

www.healthpromotion.ie/hp-files/docs/HPM00796.pdf

Section 3 The Final Trophy Pages 121 - 171

SUMMARY

The All-Ireland semi delivers a rude awakening for Colm as Tyrone employ a blanket defense, smothering Kerry by a margin of six points.

This was followed by an unexpected U-21 defeat to outsiders Waterford in the Munster final. At twenty-one, Colm was learning just how fickle the game could be.

The following season, the memories of the previous defeats to Armagh and Tyrone still rankle and when they meet Mayo in the All-Ireland final, their determination not to be denied again is steely and they win by eight points with Colm delivering a Man of the Match performance.

Facing their nemesis, Tyrone, the next year in the final, Colm knows that it will be the hardest game of the season. Despite a fluid

display giving them an early lead, Kerry are unable to resist a physical, 'close to the line' Tyrone assault and succumb to a single-point defeat.

A trip of a lifetime takes him to Australia to represent Ireland in the Aussie rules series. A concussion and a reluctance from the Aussies to observe the rules convinces him that his future is with Kerry.

Back home again and anticipating a home match against Dublin, Colm receives news that his father has taken ill at work.

Rushing to the scene, a paramedic tells him that his father has died. It is a tremendous shock for the family and the funeral passes in a blur of grief.

His mam suggests that he play the Dublin game, both as a mark of respect for his father and to help distract his grief. It is a gesture that the team respects.

After winning the National League, they stumble against Cork and then face an unpredictable Longford in the qualifiers. Colm takes the captain's armband from an off-form Declan and attempts to coach Kieran in the finer points of being an effective full forward.

The tactic works and they use it successfully again against Armagh in the quarter final.

Next up is Cork in the semi-final. Declan is restored as captain and Colm resumes his playing position as they successfully negotiate their way to the final. When they beat Mayo in the final, Colm is surprised when Declan insists that they both lift the trophy together.

With the wheel on its final click, Colm, now 33, is back at Croke Park in the club final with Dr Crokes. It is the only trophy that has eluded him so far.

Looking around the team, Colm realizes that these boys are part of his family and when the final whistle confirms that they are champions, an impressive career can be celebrated as he announces his retirement.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p127):** On the train home after the Tyrone match, Dara advises Colm that you can learn more from a defeat than from a victory. What lessons do you think that you can take from a defeat that you can't take from a win? Are these lessons more useful?
- **(Read p139):** Kerry were beaten by a Tyrone team that were accused of playing 'puke football'. Were Tyrone correct to play in a way that prevented Kerry playing to their strengths? Is it better to

win or play stylishly and lose?

- **(Read p145):** It is a terrible shock for Colm when his father dies unexpectedly. Would his grief have been different if his father's death had been expected? What did Colm mean when he said that nothing would be the same anymore?
- **(Read p150):** Colm is shocked to hear the fans boo as Declan is subbed. When Kerry play well, the fans are expected to cheer so why does he object if they boo when things go wrong? Should fans be allowed to show their disapproval in this way?
- **(Read P163 & 166):** The author uses a number of military terms (soldiering & rout) throughout the book to describe matches. Is team sport a battle? Is sport a less violent form of war? Does this suggest that we need to be aggressive and sport is an acceptable way to demonstrate this?

ACTIVITIES

1. The Same Match (Read pp124-126)

The Kerry-Tyrone match has been reported in both the *Strabane Chronicle* and the *Kerryman*.

How similar do you think these reports will be beyond the date of the match and the name of the venue?

In pairs, compose the headlines and write the match reports that you think might have appeared in each of the papers.

2. The Dummy (Read pp132-133)

Colm's goal against Mayo has become a classic example of how to lose your marker, dummy the defense and score.

The GAA are thinking of introducing a short series of tactic cards to illustrate excellent play for coaches and managers.

Using illustrations, diagrams and short comment boxes create a tactic card to explain clearly what Colm did.

3. Q & A (Read p135)

After the match, the celebrations are hectic and Colm has agreed to an interview.

The RTÉ producer needs a list of questions for the presenter to ask.

Compile a list of five questions that the fans might ask and then work in pairs to compile what Colm's answers might be.

You can perform these for the class.

4. Postcard from Oz (Read p142-143)

Colm had many experiences in Australia.

While he was there he sent two postcards, one to his mam and the other to his Dr Crokes team-mates. How were these different?

Make a copy of each of the postcards. You can add illustrations or photos.

5. Life Ambition (Read p170)

Colm has achieved his life's ambition winning an All-Ireland club title with Dr Crokes.

Describe in detail what ambition you would like to achieve and how you think you could achieve it.

6. Listen Lads (Read pp157-159)

Colm realizes that as captain he needs to inspire the team before they take the field and also during the interval.

As he is a man of few words, a lengthy speech is not his style.

Create two short speeches to help him inspire the team?

7. Suddenly (Read p145)

One of the regrets people have when someone close to them dies suddenly is that they never got the chance to say all the things they might have wanted to.

Colm decides that he will write a short letter to his father to tell him all the things he wanted to say but didn't get the chance.

Can you help Colm to write the letter?

CLASS PROJECT

This story is the first in a series of sporting biographies that offer the opportunity to explore a diverse range of topics including

- Healthy diet
- Importance of good social networks
- Good mental health
- Importance of resilience.
- Importance of positive self-image.

You can use the sample worksheet here obrien.ie/media/SportingHallofFame.pdf

These activities ask pupils to examine the qualities outlined for each of the sports people and to prepare a proposal for them to be inducted into a fictional O'Brien Press **HALL OF FAME**.

The activities also ask them to consider how they themselves can aspire to inclusion, encouraging them to identify and celebrate their own strengths.