Gaelic Games

INDIGENOUS GAMES, some dating back thousands of years, play an important part in contemporary Irish culture.

Hurling (Irish iománaíocht) was the favorite sport of the legendary Iron Age hero Cúchulainn. Played by teams of up to fifteen hurlers with wooden axe-shaped sticks (“hurls,” “hurleys,” or camán) and a small hard ball (sliotar), it is one of the world’s fastest, most exciting field games. Camogie, the women’s version, is also popular.

Gaelic football is best described as a combination of soccer and rugby. Opposing teams attempt to carry the round ball, which is slightly smaller than a soccer ball, across one another’s goalposts.

Handball and Rounders—ancestors of American baseball—are also popular Gaelic Games.

Since 1884, Gaelic games and other forms of traditional Irish culture have been nurtured and regulated by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). With over 2,500 clubs in Ireland alone (500 of which are in Northern Ireland), the GAA organizes Club, County, and All-Ireland Championships that draw enormous interest throughout Ireland, as well as from GAA clubs and fans throughout Northern America, Europe, and Australia.

The Smithsonian Institution thanks the Ulster Council of the Gaelic Athletic Association (Comhairle Uladh Cumann Lúthchleas Gaeil) for assistance with this display.