

Mrs Hayley, J^W 17/1/89
To note + return please.
WJ

Damen. Please PA
on use of /mat kill.
Reference J.M. 23/1

Read
From
JAS
20/1/89

FROM: R A JOHNSTON
Security and Operations Division

cc Mr McMullan
Mr D Stanley
Mr N Johnston (for
file)

JANUARY 1989

TO: MR J STEPHENS
Regimes Division

GAELIC FOOTBALL AT HM PRISON, MAZE

1. I have seen Dennis Stanley's minute to you covering the letter from Governor Jackson to a Mr McGrattan at the Sports Council about Gaelic Football. Coincidentally, Mrs McMillan has also written about the forthcoming civil actions brought by the 2 prisoners who alleged discrimination in respect of their national language and sport. On the whole I would have thought that the public discussion implicit in Mr Jackson's letter was entirely inappropriate at this stage.

2. Besides the difficult issues of Irish Culture policy, to which I will refer later there are practical difficulties associated with the introduction of Gaelic Football. And this applies equally to other sports which may have a limited following within the prison population. As I understand it, Gaelic is not a game suited to the all-weather surfaces provided in our establishments. Rather it should - as it is in the wider community - be played on grass pitches. In such a physical game, the level of secondary injuries sustained by contact with the gravel surfaces found in our prisons would be (unacceptably) high. Maghaberry prison would be the only one capable of providing the pre-requisite conditions. The question of training instructors and refereeing of games is also relevant: GAA rules may preclude the training of a prison officer in the coaching and refereeing skills required as he may be seen as a member of HM Forces. As a result Governors could not fulfill their responsibilities for the care of prisoners if unsupervised Gaelic games were permitted. The question of cost must also be a factor when considering the introduction of a limited-interest sport or activity. Even if finance to fund the provision of Gaelic in our prisons could be found from within our already limited cash resources, there is precious little space available for expansion into grass pitches at all but one of our prisons.

3

The choice of soccer as the single physical outdoor sports activity is defensible for the good reasons already pointed out by Dennis Stanley. Players of all abilities, and more importantly of all religious persuasions, can participate. Over and above that, however, soccer has no measurable level of association with either of the 2 main communities in Northern Ireland. Regrettably no such claim can be made for Gaelic Football. Whilst we may wish it to be otherwise, the reality is that Gaelic has clear connections with Nationalist aspirations and has few if any adherents within the Protestant community which lays no claim to a particular national sport. Gaelic could be described as a minority sport in more than one sense whereas soccer is a sport which has no significant connotations of nationality or religion (apart from Cliftonville and Linfield) but it has widespread appeal encompassing both the passive and active.

4

It seems to be that to concede to the demands from a section of the Maze population would not only be a short term expedient but it would also add to the already difficult segregation problem and no long term advantage would accrue to the Department.

a. Johnston
11.1.89

R A JOHNSTON
Security and Operations Division

PS. Being an ex-rugby player myself I would have thought there could have been an equally good case made for rugby at our prisons - at least there is an all Ireland inter-denominational team!