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No Antrim sanctions for Hunger Strike rally

(Catherine Morrison and Keith Bourke, [Irish News](#))

The GAA's Antrim County Board will not face sanctions over its decision to allow a Hunger Strike rally to be held at Casement Park in west Belfast, *The Irish News* has learned.

At a meeting of the organisation's central council at the weekend it is understood the issue was raised briefly and it was decided that the board should not be penalised.

Last August thousands of people attended a rally at the stadium off the Andersonstown Road to mark the 25th anniversary of the 1981 Hunger Strike.

The event, featuring a number of Sinn Féin speakers, was in breach of the GAA's rules and was held in defiance of a ruling by the organisation in Dublin.

The central council told Antrim County Board, which runs the west Belfast ground, that the rally should not be held there as the use of grounds for political events is outlawed by the association's rules. Any use of a venue for non-sporting purposes must be approved by the central council.

The GAA's Rule 7 states the organisation should be non-party political.

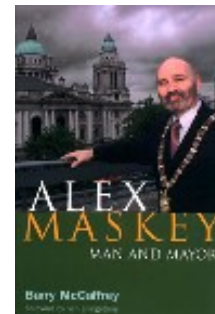
At the time GAA president Nickey Brennan said it was a matter of regret that the decision from Croke Park was ignored.

Chairman of the Antrim County Board Dr John McSparran yesterday (Tuesday) confirmed that he had attended Saturday's meeting.

"I was present at the central council meeting. The issue was raised very briefly but that was it, there was no sanction or punishment," he said.

"As far as we're concerned that's an end to the matter."

A spokesman for the GAA would only say: "The central council meeting was held in camera in Croke Park. The matter was addressed by central council in line with their



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by Barry McCaffrey

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previous decision."

However, the GAA did punish Sinn Féin for its part in the controversy by refusing party members tickets for the All-Ireland football final.

The party accused the association of acting "childishly" and Martin McGuinness said he had been inundated by offers of tickets from clubs all over Ireland.

Up to 20,000 people attended the rally in August to remember the 10 IRA and INLA inmates who died in the protest over political status at the Maze Prison.

Relatives of the hunger strikers and Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams were among the speakers.

DUP assembly member Gregory Campbell criticised the central council for "doing nothing" to punish Antrim County Board.

"It appears that the GAA have completely capitulated in the face of those who want to continue to politicise Gaelic sport and that has to be deplored," he said.

SDLP assembly member Alex Atwood said: "What has to happen is that the county board has learned a lesson and that is that. It cannot dictate to the GAA what does or does not happen."

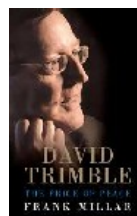
October 5, 2006

This article appeared first in the October 4, 2006 edition of the [Irish News](#).

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