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Configuring Irishness through Coaching Films: *Peil* (1962) and *Christy Ring* (1964)

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The sports coaching film has a long history, dating from at least 1932 with the production of Paulette McDonagh's *How I Play Cricket* which featured the legendary Don Bradman. However, coaching films dedicated to indigenous Irish sport, or Gaelic games, are a more recent development, emerging in the late 1950s. This article considers two such films – *Peil* (Louis Marcus, 1962) and *Christy Ring* (Louis Marcus, 1964) – dedicated to Gaelic football and hurling respectively and produced by the Irish-language cultural organisation Gael Linn. The principal concern in undertaking this examination is to identify the process by which these films configure Irishness, not just through the depictions of the indigenous sports themselves but also through the manner in which these depictions are framed. In ‘configuring Irishness’, I am referring specifically to the manner through which these films articulate Irish identity and its constituent properties, particularly in terms of language, geography, politics and religion. The relationship of sport with national culture and identity is a complex yet crucial one in understanding the popularity and passions that sport evokes internationally. A key force in the promotion of nationalism is culture; as Ernest Gellner notes ‘culture is now the necessary shared medium’ (Gellner, 1983, pp. 37–8) and sport is one of the most popular of such cultural activities, contributing considerably to citizens’ identification with particular nations. Moreover, in emphasizing the banality of nationalism as a ‘natural’ and often unnoticed part of everyday life, Michael Billig has argued that modern sport has a social and political significance that ‘extend[s] through the media beyond the player and the spectator’ (Billig, 1995, p. 120) by providing luminous moments of national engagement and national heroes whom citizens can emulate and adore. As Billig’s remarks suggest, the mass media (including the cinema) has had a crucial role to play in the popularisation of sport and, indeed, in asserting its political significance. Film’s potential as a powerful vehicle for the articulation and affirmation of the nation has been recognised in critical studies (Higson 1995; Hjort & MacKenzie 2000). Susan Hayward in her study of French cinema identified how film may function

as a cultural articulation of a nation ...[it] textualises the nation and subsequently constructs a series of relations around the concepts, first, of state and citizen, then of state, citizen and other ... a ‘national’ cinema ... is ineluctably ‘reduced’ to a series of enunciations that reverberate around two fundamental concepts: identity and difference (2005, p. x).

This article will examine, through close readings of *Peil* and *Christy Ring*, precisely this process whereby these coaching films ‘textualise’ the Irish nation.

Coaching Irishness through Film

As Hills and Kennedy have noted, representations of coaching in films do more than provide us with an opportunity to examine the various masculinities (the predominant focus) constructed in particular sporting contexts; they also offer a means ‘to understand the ways that, as an audience, we are being asked to make sense of the relationships between them’ (Hills and Kennedy, 2013, p. 41). For the purposes of this study I wish to consider the manner through which both *Peil* and *Christy Ring* configure Irishness and the role they may play not only in coaching young people in how to play Gaelic games but also ‘coaching’ viewers – and particularly impressionable children and young adults who would have been a principal target audience for these films – on the nature of Irishness itself as an identity construct, including in terms of language, geography, politics and religion. As noted above by Hills and Kennedy, I similarly wish to ‘understand the ways that, as an audience, we are being asked to make sense of’ Irish identity as constructed in these films. Such representations, of course, cannot be separated from larger social processes and indeed are part of a process which (in Hayward’s terms) ‘textualises the nation’ (2005, p. x). Film has a crucial role in this process, in the manner through which cultural identity is framed and depicted for popular consumption. Coaching films in particular provide fascinating texts to examine in this respect, as much for the manner in which they locate and contextualise a particular sport within a given society as for the instructions they may provide for the sport itself. With respect to *Peil* and *Christy Ring*, this is particularly evident in the manner through which these films reflect the position of the Catholic Church as the moral authority (with considerable effective political influence) in Irish society in the mid-twentieth century.

Post-Independent Ireland, the media and sport

A further emphasis identified by Susan Hayward in national cinemas, ‘identity and difference’, was a recurring concern of the Irish political and cultural establishment from the emergence of the Irish Free State in 1922. Particularly in the decades immediately after independence, an array of organisations promoted indigenous Irish culture and institutions and asserted the distinctiveness of Ireland from Britain politically, economically, religiously and culturally. Simultaneously, considerable efforts were made – most obviously through the Censorship of Films Act (1923) (one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the newly independent Irish Free-State) – to control the

distribution and exhibition of material considered potentially counterproductive to this goal (Rockett, 2004). As this project developed apace, the growth in popularity of organized sport, particularly Gaelic games in Ireland acquired a particular importance. With the rapid rise in membership and attendances at its games across the country, the Gaelic Athletic Association (or GAA, the organisation which administers Gaelic games in Ireland) emerged as the most popular mass movement for the expression of independent Irish identity. The association's principal games, hurling and Gaelic football, established a reputation as the definitively Irish national sports as the nation building project of the Irish Free State developed (Crosson and McAnallen, 2011).

The print media and radio played a crucial role in underscoring the centrality of Gaelic games to Irish life at this time, but film would also play an important role, particularly with the establishment of the National Film Institute of Ireland (NFI) in 1945 and through the institute's films of all-Ireland finals in Gaelic football and hurling produced from 1948 until the late 1960s (Crosson, 2013). From 1959 to 1963, Gael Linn, an organization devoted to the promotion of the Irish language and culture, included Gaelic games among the subjects covered in its weekly 'Amharc Éireann' newsreel series. Indeed, sport and the cinema were in some respects complementary forces in the rise and development of Irish nationalism in this period. As Mike Cronin has argued in *Sport and Irish Nationalism*, sport, by virtue of being 'low culture and the passion of the many', is an ideal vehicle to use to understand popular Irish nationalism (Cronin, 1999, pp. 18-19); and cinema likewise appealed across all sections of society and acquired a large following particularly among the working classes (Beere, 1935/36). Hence, throughout the early to mid-twentieth century, nationalist Ireland repeatedly used sport, and particularly in the immediate post-war era, the cinema, to encourage support for its cause.

Gael Linn, Gaelic games, and Film

The decision of the Irish-language cultural organization Gael Linn to film Gaelic games was inseparable from the overall concerns of the organization. While there was undoubtedly a public interest in the sports the 'Amharc Éireann' series featured, more important still for the series producers was the distinctiveness of the sports depicted and their recognition as authentic aspects of Irish culture (Pratschke, 2005). As the title of the organization indicates – a play on Irish (Gaelic) words between 'Irish pool' and 'Irish with us' – Irishness was indeed a defining characteristic of Gael Linn from its inception. Above all, for Gael Linn's founders, the Irish language, its preservation and promotion, was a central concern. However, the beginnings of Gael Linn were also inseparable from Gaelic games; the organization began as a fund-raising project to support initiatives to promote the Irish language and culture, organizing a weekly 'pool' or sports lottery

based on predicting the outcome of matches in hurling and Gaelic football on the model set by the football pools in England.¹ Within a few years of its formation, Gael Linn was sponsoring several Gaelic games competitions including a Gaelic football senior tournament,² while the major provincial competition for elite level players of camogie – the female equivalent of hurling – has been the Gael Linn Cup since 1956.

Gael Linn was founded in 1952 by Dónal Ó Móráin, and under Ó Móráin's guidance, the organisation recognized that film could be an important tool in the promotion of the Irish language. Ó Móráin contacted filmmaker Colm Ó Laoghaire, whom he had known from University, in early 1956 and after some discussion they decided to produce a monthly newsreel series concerned with Irish subjects and exhibited with Irish commentary. The first monthly *éagrán* or edition appeared in June 1956 and a total of 36 episodes were produced reaching an estimated audience of approximately quarter of a million each month (O'Brien, 2004, p. 105). In 1959, the series increased to weekly multi-item editions and 160 episodes were produced before its eventual discontinuation in July 1964, due both to declining cinema attendances and the arrival of television in Ireland with the opening of the national broadcaster Telefís Éireann on New Year's Eve, 1961 (Pratschke, 2005).

Inspired by the success of their weekly newsreel, Gael Linn also began to develop longer productions, beginning with the two Gaelic games coaching films, *Peil* (1962) and *Christy Ring* (1964). These films can be viewed in common with the films produced by the NFI as part of what has been described as a second cultural revival which began in the immediate post-war era (Pratschke, 2005, p. 36). This revival was evident with the increased engagement by the Irish public with indigenous aspects of Irish culture, including sport. Gaelic games experienced record attendances in this period, increasing dramatically to over 85,000 for All-Ireland hurling final day in the mid 1950s and over 90,000 for the All-Ireland football final by 1961 (Corry, 2005, pp. 371-412).³ This engagement with indigenous culture occurred significantly at a time of considerable challenges and ultimately great change in Irish society. While the 1950s was a decade of record unemployment and emigration, the 1960s was a period of considerable economic growth following a fundamental change in policy by the Irish government. The appointment of Seán Lemass as Taoiseach (Prime Minister) in 1959 heralded a new era of economic expansion and cultural change,

1 For further on this, see Gael Linn's own website here: <http://www.gael-linn.ie/default.aspx?treeid=256>

2 For a notice for a game between counties Leitrim and Roscommon in the Gael Linn senior football tournament see the *Leitrim Observer*, Saturday, September 18, 1965, p. 8.

³ The All-Ireland finals (hosted normally at Croke Park Stadium in Dublin) are the final games of the principal competitions, the All-Ireland championships, held for both codes annually.

inspired by the economic expansionist plans of the secretary of the Department of Finance, T.K. Whitaker. This change of focus, from the economic nationalism associated with previous premier Éamon de Valera, also accelerated the transformation of Ireland from a primarily rural society to an increasingly urban one while opening the country to new economic, political and cultural influences, including following the launch of Ireland's first indigenous television channel, Telefís Éireann (today known as RTÉ). While Lemass's policies brought economic success in the 1960s, Terence Brown has documented the 'much concerned, even heated, discussion' which the rapid changes in Irish society prompted. Central to this debate was the issue of national identity, 'in circumstances', as Brown continues, 'where many of the traditional essentialist definitions – language, tradition, culture and distinctive ideology – were widely felt to fly in the face of social reality' (Brown, 2004, p. 255).

In summary, while Irish society was undergoing a period of considerable change, a growing engagement with traditional culture, including sport, became evident in the 1960s (Brown, 2004, pp. 262-263). '“Tradition” as Simon J. Bronner has noted, 'guides and safeguards continuity in a world of change' (Bronner, 1992, p. 1). Gael Linn's coaching films were produced and distributed, therefore, within a context in which Irish identity was a recurring concern. This context ensured that these productions would ultimately constitute much more than just coaching films for Gaelic games' enthusiasts; they were important renderings and affirmations of Irish identity.

Peil (1962), *Christy Ring* (1964), and coaching Gaelic Games

The importance of coaching films such as *Peil* and *Christy Ring* was underscored by the scarcity more generally of coaching materials for Gaelic games in the early twentieth century. With the exception of former Kerry captain Dick Fitzgerald's *How to play Gaelic football* (1914) and an instructional manual by former Kildare footballer Larry Stanley (circulated only among fellow Garda (the Irish police force) members in the 1940s), limited instructional material existed prior to the 1960s (Corry, 2010, p. 3). In 1958, the legendary Kerry coach Dr. Eamonn O Sullivan produced the influential work *The Art and Science of Gaelic football* and the following year the first film work dedicated to coaching Gaelic games, Father Moran's *Skills of Gaelic Football* (1959), was produced. *Peil* and *Christy Ring*, therefore, were produced in a context of increasing focus on the importance of instructional material for Gaelic games.

The films were produced by Gael Linn in 1962 and 1964 respectively and each was directed by Louis Marcus. Initially Gael Linn planned to produce two coaching films on Gaelic football and hurling respectively on 16mm that could be used as coaching aids in schools but eventually it was

decided to produce the two works on 35mm and in colour for cinema distribution, due to the popular interest in Gaelic games across Ireland (Marcus, 2008). 16mm copies were also produced for circulation to schools and colleges across the country (Hickey, 1962, p. 17). The premières of both films were major national events attended by the political leaders of the day and given wide coverage in the national media. President Éamon de Valera attended the première of *Peil* on Saturday November 24th 1962 at the Metropole Cinema on O'Connell Street, Dublin (Marcus 2008). Also present were the Minister for Social Welfare, Kevin Boland TD, the leader of the Irish Senate, Thomas Ó Maoláin and the Chief of Staff of the Irish Army, Leut. General John McKeown ('Football Film'). *Christy Ring* had its première at the Savoy Cinema in Cork city on 16th October 1964 and in attendance was the then Minister for Industry & Commerce (and future Taoiseach), Jack Lynch TD, who was a former team mate of Ring on the Cork hurling team (Marcus). Also present were the Lord Mayor of Cork, A.A. Healy, as well as members of the Dáil (Irish Parliament, lower house) and Seanad (upper house), including Senators T.T. O Sullivan and S. Dooge, Fine Gael TD Sean Collins, and leading members of the Cork business community ('Premiere of "Christy Ring" film in Cork'). These premières were also described in the media as more than just occasions for the launch of coaching films; they were events of national importance in the promotion of Irish culture. D. R. Mott (General Manager of the films' sponsors, tobacco company W.D. and H.O. Wills) congratulated Gael Linn at the premiere of *Christy Ring*, not just for producing the films but also for 'the progress they are making in supporting all things Irish' ('Premiere of "Christy Ring" film in Cork'). In the figure of legendary Cork hurler Christy Ring, around whom the hurling film is based, commentators found a figure not just exemplary as a sportsman ('the very personification of hurling' (Puirseal, 1964, p. 19)) but as an Irishman. The remarks of Padraig Puirseal in the *Irish Press* following *Christy Ring*'s première are indicative of the response in the Irish media more generally to both Ring as a person and the film itself:

To those of us who remember the decades when 'Ringey' bestrode the whole hurling world a Colossus poised on a flashing ashen blade it is truly amazing how, through brief flashbacks to matches, to newspaper headlines, to 'still' pictures, Louis Marcus recaptures the aura not along (sic) of greatness but almost of invincibility that the Maestro from Cloyne carried with him onto so many fields through so many years ... To me, as to most of those present in the Cork Savoy last Friday and who had like myself, been reared on the hurling fields, those instructional sequences were nothing short of sensational for, in them Christy Ring goes far beyond the basic skills of hurling. Here the sorcerer goes near to revealing the very sources of his own magic, the Maestro lays bare, to a remarkable extent, the secrets of his own success (Puirseal, 1964, p. 19).

Foregrounding the Irish Public

A significant feature of both *Peil* and *Christy Ring* is the recurring focus on the crowds attending the Gaelic games featured in each production. Following the opening credits, *Peil* begins significantly not with a shot of a game, players, or even a playing pitch, but rather with a shot of the crowd attending a Gaelic football match. Indeed, the majority of the opening scenes consist of crowd shots rather than play. While foregrounding the popularity of the sport featured, these images also indicate that what we will encounter in this film has resonance beyond the game itself; resonance for an entire culture and society. As the commentator remarks in Irish, ‘The crowd is gathered, the stands are full, every eye directed on the playing field’. *Peil* and *Christy Ring* each foreground repeatedly the social and cultural life around Gaelic games, as much as the games themselves. In *Peil* we are brought into the bars and the conversations of men (and only men are depicted here): we are told that the games live on in argument, memory and folklore. This is the field of memories and opinions; here the players of old take on the men of today. This contention is made and confirmed in an expository style as the narrator’s words are confirmed in footage of players from previous decades on the screen, superimposed over middle-aged suit-wearing men talking in an Irish bar. These scenes include footage from All-Ireland winning teams from the past parading and playing in Croke Park, footage taken from highlights preserved by the National Film Institute of Ireland. In the focus of this section, the film places considerable stress on the reception of Gaelic games, on memory, and indeed the role that film can play in this regard, in recalling and preserving.

Christy Ring also foregrounds the social context around hurling, moving from a survey of Irish legend and history (and hurling’s role in it) to its contemporary importance. The film begins with an introduction to the game of hurling, as the narrator (over shots of inter-county encounters) highlights the game’s distinctiveness, reputed antiquity and its centrality to Irish history and identity. It is, we are told through Irish, ‘the fastest field sport in the world, a game played on the fields of Tara and in Eamhain Mhacha ... the games of the Fianna and Cúchulainn’ referring to the seats of Kings of Ireland and Ulster in Medieval times, as well as legendary figures in Irish mythology. Beyond its connection with these legendary figures, the narrator also draws parallels between the history of hurling and that of the Irish people themselves under colonialism, underlining hurling’s political significance as a sport banned by the Normans (who invaded Ireland in the 12th century, conquering large parts of the country) but reflecting ‘the resilience of the people that almost perished before the spirit of the country revived’. In this introduction and these words,

hurling is presented as much more than a popular Irish pastime; it is a sport that represents the Irish people, their turbulent past and challenging present.

Christy Ring moves from an introduction to the sport, country and player to the buildup to a game featuring Ring, at the Athletic Grounds in Cork (Ring's home county) for a hurling encounter between Cork and Tipperary, 'two counties' as the legendary broadcaster and commentator Michael O'Hehir remarks on the soundtrack, 'famed in history, famed in song and famed in story as the greats of hurling'. A strong emphasis is placed on the engagement of Irish people with hurling as an important part of their life. As with *Peil*, considerable time is given in *Christy Ring* to the rendering of the buildup to the hurling game featured, including the arrival of crowds, foregrounded repeatedly as the credit sequence roles, and at the pre-match ceremony. We watch supporters making their way, stopping occasionally for cups of tea as they travel by car, van, bus, foot, and boat (crossing the river Lee to the stadium) for the game featured.

As an important point of identification for Irish audiences watching each film, these crowd scenes engage viewers still further with sports they are already familiar with and enthusiastic regarding. However, this foregrounding of the crowd ultimately involves more than just identification with the sport itself, as very quickly becomes clear in the footage presented in *Peil*. Within the first minute of the film, we are presented not just with shots of the crowd but with a prominent shot of their moral and political leaders in Irish society at the time. While the commentary in Irish reminds us that every age and class is present, 'clergy, politicians, teenagers, farmers, housewives', we are presented with a shot of the President, Taoiseach (Prime Minister), and a senior Catholic Cleric (fig. 1) in the VIP section of the Hogan stand at Croke Park. In one image, the film renders the political and moral establishment of the country and affirms the significance of what we are to encounter beyond the field of sport.



Fig. 1. (from right to left) President Éamon de Valera, Taoiseach Seán Lemass, and a senior unidentified Catholic cleric. *Peil* (1962).

Demonstrating the Skills

Once the context and social importance of both Gaelic football and hurling are established in both films the focus moves to demonstrations of the distinctive skills of each sport. In *Peil*, the skills are presented by leading contemporary players from counties across Ireland, and significantly for a Gael Linn film, this section was available with both English and Irish narration (as well as titles in both languages), indicating that the Irish-language organization could be practical as to the need to have English available for this section to ensure people could understand the rules presented. Each individual skill is presented in scenes shot in an empty Croke Park but accompanied by footage from previous Gaelic matches to demonstrate the skill in action in an actual game.

While *Peil* features a range of Gaelic footballers from counties across the island (including several from county Down, the All-Ireland champions at the time of the production of the film) demonstrating the skills of the game, *Christy Ring*, as the film's title suggests, focuses principally on the life and skills of a legendary figure in the history of hurling. It is Ring who demonstrates the skills of the game (with each skill introduced with wide shots of the particular skill evident during hurling games in Croke Park) and the film is an important record in this respect of one of the finest exponents of hurling. While the narration continues in Irish, Ring's own introduction and comments on each skill are delivered in English. The titles are also provided in both English and Irish. As with the introduction to the film as a whole, this skills demonstration is not without political resonances, however; it is accompanied by a marching instrumental version of the popular nationalist song 'Clare's Dragoons', also featured in the opening credit sequence of *Peil*. 'Clare's Dragoons' was composed by Thomas Osborne Davis (1814-1845), a poet and the principal organizer of the nationalist Young Ireland movement in the mid-19th century. The song itself is an ode to a battalion which fought during the Williamite War in Ireland (1688–1691) with the Catholic forces under King James II against the army of William III of England.

In addition to the political resonance of the accompanying music, the instructional approach adopted to the skills of each game featured remain with the viewer throughout both *Peil* and *Christy Ring*, even where skills may not be presented. Admonitions such as 'if done correctly', 'should be made only', 'it is vital', 'should be reserved', 'should be kept', 'never think in terms', 'should be practiced' (as delivered by a player of the stature of Christy Ring in his presentation of the skills of hurling) arguably continue to inform viewers (particularly young audience members learning the skills of Gaelic games, a principal target for these films) as they encounter other aspects of Irish

society and culture, including the respect and status accorded to markers of Irishness depicted in the film, as well as social and religious leaders in Irish society.

Uniting the Nation

Following the demonstration of the skills, both *Peil* and *Christy Ring* return to the depiction of a match in each code. In *Peil*, the match featured is the 1960 All-Ireland football final between Kerry and Down. As with previous sequences, this coverage focuses again as much on the social occasion and those attending the game as on the game itself. This includes several minutes depicting the buildup to the game outside the stadium, including supporters arriving by foot, by car and by match day buses to the stadium with the narrator informing us in Irish that ‘today more than ever this is the centre of Ireland, they are here from every place, from North and South, crowds from the West and the midlands’.

When we finally enter Croke Park stadium, the commentary changes to a combination of Irish and English by broadcaster Michael O’Hehir. Our arrival in Croke Park is again significantly focused initially and repeatedly on the ‘huge crowd’ (as O’Hehir describes it) in attendance and their responses to the events unfolding. The attendance at this all-Ireland was indeed ‘huge’ exceeding all previous finals with almost 90,000 people present (Corry, 2005, 371–412).

A considerable focus is given in both *Peil* and *Christy Ring* to the ceremony which precedes major Gaelic football and hurling encounters, including the arrival of the teams onto the pitch, the photographing of the teams by the many photographers present, and the attendance of senior figures in Irish society. In *Peil*, this sequence includes a further shot of the VIP section which again foregrounds political and moral leaders in Irish society, including President Eamon de Valera and then patron of the GAA, Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, Dr Thomas Morris. A striking feature of this extraordinary shot is not just the prominence of red (also the colour of non-liturgical dress of Cardinals in the Catholic church) velvet furnishing but the large number of religious present in the VIP section (evident by their white collars) (fig. 2). In microcosm, this captures a crucial aspect of Irish society visually in a powerfully suggestive manner; such was the authority and influence of the Catholic church in early 1960s Ireland that few questions would have been asked of the position accorded them at such games.



Fig. 2. *Peil* (1962) Still of VIP section at 1960 All-Ireland football final with President Éamon de Valera to the foreground surrounded by senior religious figures including then patron of the GAA, Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, Dr Thomas Morris (to de Valera's right).

The moral authority of the Catholic church is also foregrounded in *Christy Ring*. In addition to the commentary in Irish, the review of Ring's career in the early section of the film is relayed via photographs, newspaper cuttings, and short extracts from films produced by the National Film Institute of Ireland. Included among the images of Ring is a photo of him kissing the ring of a Catholic Bishop prior to the start of a game (Fig. 3), a practice that continued for major Gaelic games in Croke Park until the end of the 1960s.



Fig. 3. *Christy Ring* (1964). Still of Christy Ring kissing the ring of a Catholic bishop prior to the start of a game.

Peil's depiction of the pre-match ceremony includes the parade of the teams participating behind the Artane Boys band (a regular feature of All-Ireland final days) and the singing of the Irish national anthem, with all players standing to attention and facing the Irish national flag, captured flying over the Hogan Stand while the anthem is sung. This foregrounding of the anthem (a particularly nationalistic and militaristic piece) and Irish tricolor in *Peil* is not merely the rendering of a pre-match ceremony; it has important political connotations. This was only the second All-Ireland final in which a county from 'across the border' in the disputed Northern Ireland region participated, then as now a part of the United Kingdom and subject to a different flag and anthem. Whether intentional or not, the depiction of this ceremony affirms a nationalist reading of the Irish nation (contributed to by the earlier comments by O'Hehir on the soundtrack regarding the nation encompassing people from North, South etc.) which ignores the political realities on the ground while promoting a utopian vision of a 32 county country that arguably could only be sustained (if at all) through sporting contest. While foregrounding this utopian political narrative, this depiction simultaneously reaffirms the place of the Catholic church as the moral arbiters of Irish society as it is the then patron of the GAA 'the most reverend Dr. Morris' (O'Hehir's commentary) Archbishop of Cashel and Emly who gets proceedings under way by throwing the ball in among the players, a practice that was the customary beginning to All-Irelands until the late-1960s.

The footage of the game featured in *Peil* is also noticeable for its focus on the crowd and, frequently, members of the clergy attending. Many of the crowd shots at half time also feature children. Their inclusion no doubt again reflected an important intended audience of the film – children learning the skills of Gaelic football – and the hope that such shots might provide a point of further engagement for this potential audience. It is noticeable that the majority of the individuals featured in crowd shots are men and boys. While a number of women are featured, girls are noticeably absent. For a contemporary audience, the movement from shots of children, to adults, and priests, affirms the centrality and (given the elevated authority of the Catholic church in Ireland in this period) the status of the sport featured, as well as the hierarchical structuring of Irish society in the period. Here again this audience is being coached not just in the skills of the sport featured in this film – Gaelic football – but in the structures and functioning of authority within their culture.

In *Christy Ring*, the demonstration of skills section is also followed by a return to the game that opened the documentary featuring a hurling encounter between Cork and Tipperary. Here also a considerable focus is given to the pre-match events and the crowd attending. As commentator Michael O’Hehir remarks, ‘whoever wins, whoever loses, thousands have come to see Christy Ring’. And as with the footage in *Peil*, the playing of the national anthem is also featured prominently with players and supporters standing to respect the flag and anthem.

In *Peil*, to close both the final match footage and film as a whole, the documentary ends with the presentation of the trophy, the Sam Maguire Cup, to the captain of the winning team, Down. In this ceremony, church and state come together (in the person of Archbishop Morris and President de Valera) to affirm the role of Gaelic games in Irish life while simultaneously confirming the political and moral order in Irish society, as evident in figure 4, one of the final moments in the film.



Fig. 4. Closing Still from *Peil* (1962) featuring the presentation of the All-Ireland trophy to the Down captain by President Éamon de Valera. In the centre of the still is then patron of the GAA, Archbishop of Cashel and Emly, Dr Thomas Morris.

Conclusion

Film has grown in importance as an important aid in coaching since the first coaching films appeared in the early 1930s. Though coaching films dedicated to Gaelic games arrived considerably later than those focused on more international sports such as cricket and association football, both *Peil* and *Christy Ring* offer nonetheless an important record of the skills of Gaelic football and hurling respectively, as demonstrated by leading exponents of both sports in the mid-twentieth century. However, these films simultaneously function as much more than opportunities to coach Irish youth in the skills of indigenous sport; they are crucial tools in coaching these same children in Irishness itself, its features, and Ireland's political and moral leaders. If film may function, in the words of Susan Hayward, as 'a cultural articulation of a nation', contributing significantly to its 'textualization', then productions such as *Peil* and *Christy Ring* represent some of the most relevant and influential examples. *Peil* and *Christy Ring* present uplifting visions of Irish culture and society, foregrounding repeatedly the Irish nation, its language and culture, and social, political and religious hierarchy within a utopian configuration of a 32-county united Ireland. The role assigned to the Catholic church within such a configuration is substantial and unquestioned. These films were arguably all the more affective as they are not didactic (with the exception of those passages instructing viewers in the skills of each sport) but rather present these features as natural, established and unquestionable aspects of Irish identity and society, thereby providing crucial affirmations of Irish society and culture at a point of considerable change and transition in its history.

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