

## THE CONVERSATION

A taste of  
Irish sports  
in our midstBy CINDY HOEDEL  
The Kansas City Star

Paul Cope, an attorney for Kansas National Guard by day, is chairman of the Kansas City Gaelic Athletic Club (find them on Facebook). The club plays two Irish sports — Gaelic football and hurling — at St. Margaret's Park in Kansas City, Kan. Cope got hooked on hurling after seeing a match on television in a pub in Ireland, which he visited on a mid-tour leave while stationed in Kuwait in 2011-12. After returning home, Cope joined the local club.

After hearing about the sports for the first time at the Kansas City Irish Fest, I wanted to learn more so I sat down with Cope at World Cup Coffee in Topeka, near his office. Our photographer caught up with him at his home near the Legends in Kansas City, Kan.

**Your official club T-shirt says, "It takes more than balls to play hurling. You also need a big stick." What exactly is hurling?**

It's a pretty ancient sport. It's kind of a cross between hockey, baseball and lacrosse.

It's played with a wooden or synthetic stick and a ball that looks kind of like a baseball. The stick is shorter than a hockey stick and broader at the paddle end. The only protective equipment we wear is a helmet with a face mask.

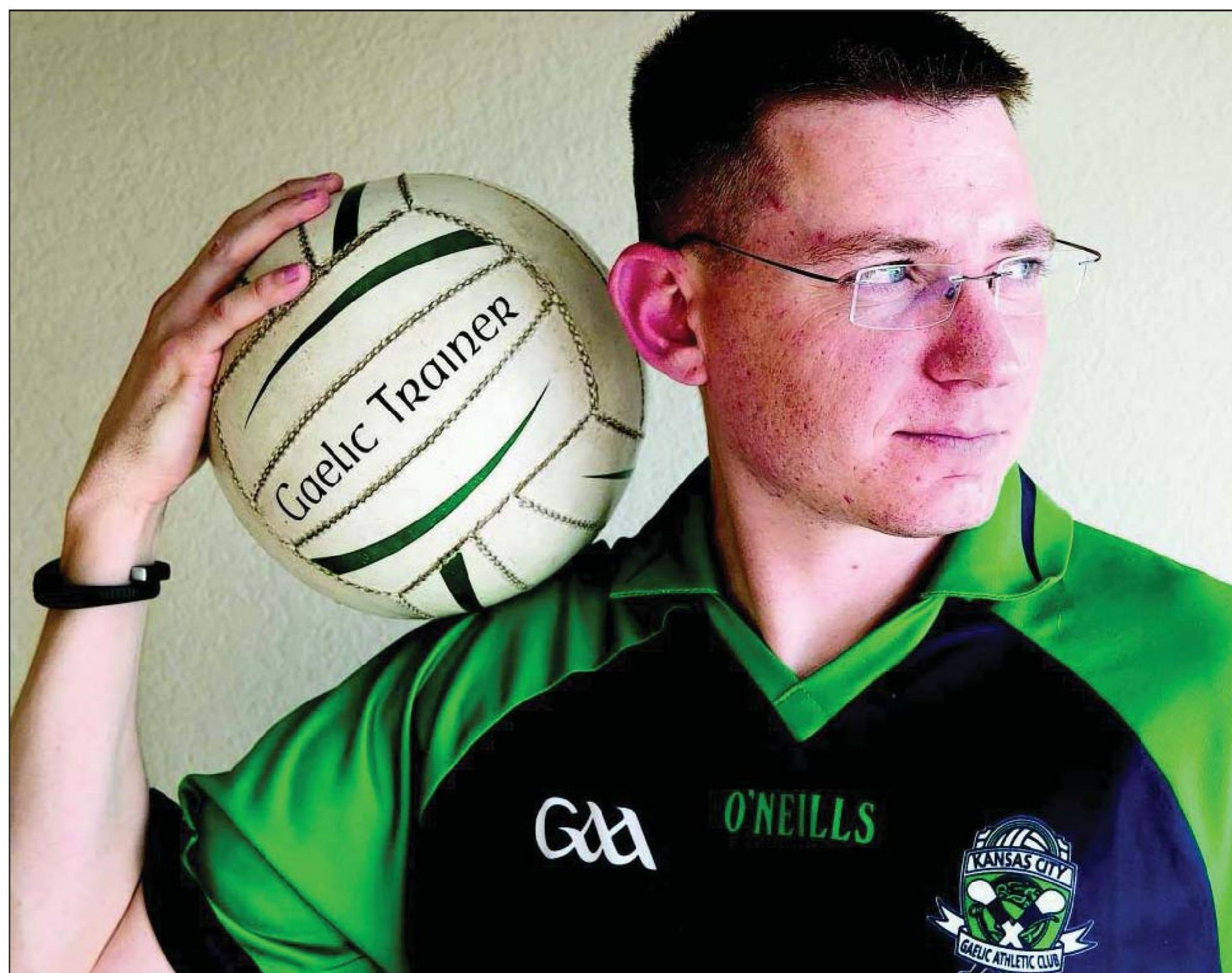
It's a high-scoring game. You can hit the ball with a stick or pass it with your

hand. The goal looks kind of like football uprights — you get three points for getting the ball into the net below the crossbar or one point for getting it through the uprights.

**And what is Gaelic football, which you also play?**

The scoring is the same, and it's played on the same field, which is larger than a soccer field. It's a big, big pitch, and you play 15 on each side, same for hurling.

Gaelic football seems more familiar because it has elements of rugby, soccer and football in it. It is played with a ball that looks like a volleyball but is much har-



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der. There are no sticks, and the only protection is a mouth guard. It's hard to get 30 out at a time, so sometimes we shrink the field if there are only seven or 10 guys or guys and gals per side.

**You have women who play?**

Yes, we are co-ed. Some of the women we have come out are very, very good players.

**Are there any Irish natives on the teams?**

Yes. Some are here on work visas, some are here as students. Our hurling director is from Ireland. Having those guys is great; they teach us the sport and the culture.

We travel quite a bit throughout the year to other cities for tournaments. Last year we went to Madison, Wis., for hurling and to Texas for Gaelic football. We've gone to St. Louis, Denver, Chicago. We also welcome spectators — it's a

good time. It's usually wives and girlfriends or husbands and boyfriends, but everyone is welcome. Just know that if you come out to watch you might get drug out onto the pitch (laughs). Everybody is subject to play.

**Rugby players are known for their enthusiastic post-match socializing. Does anything like that go on after your matches?**

Absolutely! We go to a local pub after matches and practices. We also get to-

gether to watch matches going on in Ireland. We participate in the St. Patrick's Day parades and the Irish Fest, so the social aspect is certainly important.

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