

Irish Universities Athletics Association

Celtic International Cross Country

Irish Universities vs. Scottish Universities vs. Welsh Universities vs.
Northern Ireland U23



TEAM MANAGERS REPORT 2003

PRE-RACE ORGANISATION

Following the IUAA Cross Country Championships on the 8th March the process of ensuring we had four full teams began in earnest. Athletes had been handed letters as they crossed the finish line confirming that they had been selected to represent the IUAA team, the Presidents Select team or as a reserve.

Over the following two weeks the majority of athletes made contact either directly or following some prompting from their Club Secretaries. This led to decisions on reserves being made at a late time, although it should be noted that despite this late notice those asked were very accommodating and appeared delighted to be given the opportunity. The decision to include a second Presidents select team in the Women's race could have led to insurmountable difficulties in contacting athletes if it was not for the assistance of Club Secretaries in a number of Colleges. This assistance was very welcome and thanks are extended to all those administrators and other athletes who helped track down the necessary athletes.

Accommodation, meal and vest requirements were all obtained and the necessary booked. Once again there was some difficulty in encouraging athletes to communicate their requirements but final numbers were eventually obtained and forwarded to Stephen who was overseeing this aspect of the event.

RACE DAY

Having spent the previous two weeks communicating by email it was a relief to have made it to Race day with five full teams. A walk around the course confirmed that D.I.T. had done a great job in preparing the course and making what would turn out to be a testing course for both races. The numbers and vests were distributed and with only one late withdrawal the teams were close to full strength. Unfortunately our competition had suffered difficulties in producing strong teams. Wales did not send any athletes and Northern Ireland did not send a women's team. This left our three teams having only two athletes from Scotland to compete against. In the true spirit of the event the Scottish team manager agreed to compete to ensure that Scotland had a team and that the team competition was more than a domestic affair. The men's race saw teams from Northern Ireland and Scotland taking on the IUAA team and the Presidents Select team.

WOMENS RACE

The race was run over one small lap followed by three large laps of the testing course. In excellent conditions the race got underway and Pamela Nicholson from the Scottish Universities made her intentions clear from the start. With the first small lap completed she had established a lead with only Ann Marie Healy representing the Presidents Select going with her. The rest of the field were bunched together and appeared to be running a controlled race.

As the first large lap concluded the gap had lengthened and the Irish Athletes were in danger of letting the gap become too large. Unfortunately the next large lap did not produce the necessary response from the athletes in the group and Ann Marie was struggling to hold the impressive front running of the Scottish Athlete. As the last lap commenced a response finally came from the chasing group as Deidre McDermott

running for the Presidents Select and Michelle Harvey running for the IUAA broke clear and laid chase to the brave Ann Marie and then to the Scottish front runner.

Unfortunately the gap was too great and Michelle and Deidre had to settle for second and third behind the impressive Pamela Nicholson from the Scottish Universities. Ann Marie held on for an excellent fourth to make the team battle between the Presidents select and the IUAA interesting. However with all of the IUAA runners finishing in the top ten the IUAA team finished as winners followed by the Presidents Select and the Scottish Universities team in third.

MEN'S RACE

As in the Women's race the weather conditions were Summer like. Hot conditions and hard ground would lead to a few blisters but the excellent First Aid cover would take care of any minor injuries.

The men running two small laps and six large laps started off at an impressive pace. It appeared the IUAA men were not prepared to let anyone get a gap and from the start a group of four IUAA athletes broke away joined by Brian McMahon running for the Presidents Select who started strongly. Throughout the race this group continued to work together and by half way the team title was effectively decided. However an intriguing battle was underway between the Presidents Select and the Scottish Universities. The NIAF team was finding the hot conditions difficult but was hanging on to the relentless pace being set by the Students. With small groups forming throughout the field it was all to be decided on the last lap.

At the front of the field the group began to break up and Gary Hynes pushed on to record an excellent victory with Peter Madsen second and Eugene O'Neill, the IUAA Captain, securing a deserved third place. Ian Chaney came through strongly to finish in sixth position and lead home the Presidents Select team. Further down the field individual battles were hotly contested as the team battle went all the way to the finish with the Presidents Select securing an excellent second place and the Scottish Universities finishing third.

The evening reception and presentation went very well. The Blooms Hotel put on an excellent meal and the presentation of medals and the overall trophy was presided over by Stephen Lipson. Athletes then dispersed to sample the delights of Temple Bar and further strengthen the relationships that had formed throughout the day.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A great deal of work by the IUAA executive sub committee was put into staging this event. In particular I would like to pay tribute to Stephen Lipson, Hon. President, whose help throughout the build up to the event was invaluable.

It is therefore disappointing that we were unable to attract a NIAF women's team or any athletes from Wales. This was also the case in 2000. This aspect will need some attention before the next staging of this event in 2005. A possible change in venue to Wales or N.Ireland may help those teams who struggle to take part. Another alternative may be to forward invites to other European nations, although the obvious financial implications

would need to be addressed. It would be very disappointing if this event was lost due to a lack of competition.

I have no doubt that our athletes are fully committed to this event. If we can develop this commitment and possibly strengthen the team we may be able to enter teams in the FISU World Championships next year with a degree of confidence.

It will be crucial that early planning is undertaken to attract those athletes who are likely to be the most successful and secure their commitment early in the winter. This will allow for a number of races to be utilised to build team spirit by entering as an IUAA team i.e. Stormont and/or the AAI International Cross Country which could also double up as a trial given the early race date.

I particularly enjoyed my role as Team Manager and would compliment all of the athletes who took part. The races were held in an excellent spirit and the athletes competed to ensure that not only did we retain the overall trophy but also we had the most successful results in the history of the event.

I would like to pass on my thanks to all those who assisted in ensuring contact was made with all potential athletes and to D.I.T. for providing the course which proved a stiff test to the athletes. Particular thanks must go to Willie Dunne and Herbert McClelland of DIT, who deserve special praise for making the day pass so smoothly. Their knowledge and consideration were a great help on the day.

Finally thank you to the IUAA executive sub committee for giving me this opportunity and in particular to Stephen for all his help and guidance throughout my tenure as Team Manager.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ian O' Neill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "I".

Ian O' Neill
IUAA Team Manager.