

Report of the Honorary Competitions Secretary 2002/2003

‘Officials’. Every year we find ourselves talking about this issue and yet again it was an issue that needed talking about this season and warrants being the topic of this opening passage. The distinct lack of competent officials and for that matter volunteer assistants, is an issue that no athletics body in Ireland is currently immune too, however considering the nature of IUAA championships it is an issue that I feel we should be best placed to deal with. It reflects badly on us as an association that this issue is still ongoing. Our championships are suffering as a result of this, but more importantly the athletes are suffering, a situation that is unacceptable. The onus must be on the IUAA, as a whole, to ensure that this issue is turned around quickly and is one that the incoming incumbent of this position, with the support of the executive committee as a whole, must urgently address and ensure that effective short and long term workable solutions are put in place.

The road relays in November, in NUI-Maynooth, proved to be the best to date in many areas of its organisation, attendance and participation. Twenty two teams were placed in the men’s race, representing participation from thirteen colleges, the largest numbers in the history of the event. The women’s race too had large numbers with eleven placed teams, however this only included representation from five colleges. This must be of concern to the governing body and questions need to be asked about what initiatives need to be taken to increase the number of colleges sending female representation to these championships. The men’s race saw QUB winning their first road relay title in a number of years with UCC and TCD taking second and third respectively. DCU took their first championship trophy in winning the women’s race, with UCC and TCD taking second and third respectively. NUI-Maynooth is to be congratulated and thanked for yet another well organised championships. Attendance at the post race dinner in the old dining hall was high and capped off what had been an all round successful event.

The Indoor Championships in early December incorporated a number of new events and a new timetable. Both changes proved a success. The weigh for distance for both men and women delivered in its prime objective of providing more than just a shot putt for athletes who compete in throws and increased the number of such athletes who attended the championships. The addition of the combined events and its incorporation into the timetable over the two days increased recovery periods, thus providing athletes with the opportunity to compete in additional events. The moving of the start time on the Saturday back one hour also worked well. The cold climate in the stadium had little effect in chilling the atmosphere, in particular the exceptionally close competition between UL and TCD in the women’s championships with UL taking the trophy by one point. UCC were placed third. The men’s championships proved easy picking for UL with UCC and QUB filling a distant second and third respectively. In total thirteen colleges were represented in the women’s championships and fifteen in the men’s with representation from sixteen colleges in total. As in previous years all colleges were required to provide assistants to help the championships run efficiently. This system has been in place for a number of years now and the number of colleges who actually turn up at their designated events is increasing, but still a long way off what it could be. Hopefully over time this will improve, but until it does there will be delays in starting events. Additionally the

requirement for athletes to check-in one hour prior to their events is being pushed to the limit by a number of colleges. This practice is unfair and will be stamped out by the IUAA. All athletes must ensure that they arrive at the championships is adequate time, as athletes can't have the best of both worlds if they don't respect the rules that are there to ensure the championships are run professionally and in the interest of the athletes and the sport. The indoors also saw the introduction of the new IUAA race numbers and based on their success they will be in place at all championships for next season. In conclusion, despite the pre-Christmas date the numbers attending were high, the competition strong and the atmosphere sporting. Based on the success of the championships over the last number of seasons these championships have a strong future.

Spectators and athletes couldn't have asked for more. DCU had provided them with infrastructure that was bordering on the ideal. Large sections of the course were put in place specifically for the championships and received the approval of the athletes. The course provided nearly all round spectator access, and with the excellent new sports complex less than 100m away the scene was set for an excellent championships. Neither race disappointed. In the women's race Kathryn Casserly of NUIG was the runaway winner from the defending champion Suzanne McCormick of QUB with Katie Duggan from the host college completing the individual medal placings. Mark Kenneally of TCD comfortably won the men's race from David Kelly of NUIG and Gary Hynes of DIT who had both traded positions throughout the race. DCU, UCC and UCD was the finishing order in the women's team championships while in the men's it was TCD, DCU and NUIG. These results represented the first cross country title ever for DCU and the first team win for TCD men since 1982. In the overall championships the strength and depth of DCU in both races just edged them in from of TCD with UCC taking third position. Looking at the results one notices a number of very hearting bits of information. Firstly the number of competitors in both races represented the largest numbers competing in over a decade. Secondly the vast majority of the top athletes within the Irish third level sector were competing for their respective colleges, in this intervarsity event. Thirdly there were ten complete teams in the men's race with representation from thirteen colleges in total, while in the women's race there nine complete teams with representation from twelve colleges, a significant improvement on the numbers competing in the women's race at the Road Relay championships. The overall championship saw seven complete teams, a number which indicates the strength of cross country running within the IUAA. On behalf of the IUAA I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate DCU on a job well done.

The T&F championships hosted by NUIG was the final championship of the 2002/2003 season and yet again the overwhelming majority of the athletes who partook, departed contented. Ultimately this is one of a number of ideals that the IUAA championships are organised to achieve. It should however be pointed out that a number of problems did arise, which were outside the control of the host college. The Special Olympics unfortunately had an official's orientation day on the same weekend as the championships, which prevented officials who would normally have made themselves available from doing so. A problem with the electronic timing delayed the heats of the 100m and lead to qualification problems for the final. It also resulted in the timetable falling over one hour behind. Based on the lessons learnt from this and previous years the IUAA is implementing a number of new work

practices that are designed to improve the situation for all parties. These should be evident at the upcoming championships. The late date for the championships due to Easter also caused problems for most colleges due to the close proximity of exam starting dates. This proved an additional time pressure for athletes. The Pole Vault was also an issue that proved sensitive for a number of colleges. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the IUAA to provide events for athletes who wish to compete. The holding of the pole vault in an alternative venue did limit the possibility for a number of athletes to double in certain events but this situation would still have arisen even if the pole vault had been held at an alternative venue within Galway city. The possibility for athletes to double in events is dictated by the timetable. The timetable change in Galway prevented certain doubling combinations that had been possible in previous years but other timetable changes could feasibly have resulted in the same scenario. For the first time in five years a new name appeared at the top of the podium in the men's championship, with TCD taking the trophy off UL. UCC finished third. In the women's championships UL held on to the trophy, with TCD and UCD taking second and third respectively. The overall championships went to UL with TCD and UCC finishing second and third respectively. In total eighteen colleges were represented in the women's championships and nineteen in the men's with representation from nineteen colleges in total. This is testament to the strength and depth of athletics within all the member colleges. NUI-Galway staged an excellent championship and should be congratulated for their efforts, especially seeing as their exams started on the Monday morning. Thanks should also be extended to Enda Fitzpatrick who devoted his entire weekend to providing excellent race commentary from the PA trailer.

After a three year gap the IUAA held the Celtic Cross Country for the third time. As in previous years invitations were sent to the Scottish and Welsh University Associations and to the Northern Ireland Athletics Federation. IUAA athletes were selected based on the results of the Intervarsity cross country. The new DIT campus at Grangegorman was chosen ahead of a number of other worthy courses. This was in keeping with the IUAA policy of exploring new and alternative courses for the competition. Regrettably, after responding to the initial invitation no further correspondence was heard from the Welsh. Due to the different structure within Scottish university athletics, there was difficulty trying to assemble a full team and in an effort to accommodate them the number of scoring athletes was reduced to five and three for men and women respectively. As in the previous holding of this event the Northern Irish Federation chose not to send a women's team. These three events combined to significantly weaken the competition, although not the standard of athletics on display. The course proved to be very spectator friendly, this coupled with the excellent weather, large number of spectators, the superbly marked course, the onsite facilities, the city centre location and the superb underfoot conditions, no race organiser could have asked for more. The IUAA teams proved too strong for the Scottish and the Northern Irish teams, however the Scottish won the women's individual race. An excellent time was had by all, and special thanks must be extended to DIT for all their efforts in ensuring the success of this great event.

The second international of the season and the final event on the calendar was the annual T&F meeting in Antrim with the Scottish and the Northern Irish. This event is one that the IUAA looks forward to every year and in the last number of years there has been a noticeable increase in interest among IUAA athletes regarding this event.

This is noted in the fact that this year's team was possibly the biggest to travel to date and also the easiest team to put together due to an eagerness to compete within IUAA athletes. The initial team was announced later than intended despite the best intentions of the IUAA. The publication of the team on the web followed by an email contact with all colleges resulted in quick confirmations on athlete availability. Upon leaving Antrim this year the IUAA brought back with it something it had never brought back with it before from this trip: All three trophies. This was achieved through the hard work of all the IUAA athletes and team management, all of who should be very proud of this achievement. Regrettably for the second consecutive year UL chose not to fully support this event, instead deciding to concentrate on an alternative race meeting. Considering what UL gets out of Intervarsity athletics, it is very disappointing that they aren't prepared to support the IUAA in this International event.

Moving away slightly from the public front to IUAA championships, it should be pointed out that there were some behind the scenes issues at all the IUAA championships that were caused by the actions of a number of individuals acting in their own interests or to a personal orientated agenda. These issues were dealt with in a manor that didn't spill directly over into the public domain. These issues acted to highlight how the selfish actions of people can use up IUAA resources that could be better expended on the IUAA championships. In an effort to limit the impact of such issues on IUAA resources in the future the IUAA is making efforts to close a number of loopholes that will allow for a quicker processing time for such issues.

The participation and atmosphere at all IUAA championships this season has contributed immensely to their success and hopefully we can look forward to more of the same and better for the coming season.

Yours in sport

Stephen Lipson
Acting Honorary Competitions Secretary July 2003-October 2003.

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