

Report of the Honorary President 2003/2004

The second twelve months of my two year term as President have been slower moving than the first, yet despite this, progress on a number of key issues has been achieved. As with the previous season, the service offered and delivered to the membership was largely respected, although not as complete or properly executed as I would have liked.

The progress mentioned includes both internal restructuring and external development. Our contact with the AAI has continued and the three key points outlined in last years report were implemented again this season. Other issues have been discussed, including ISC funding and strategic planning, and although some differences may exist, our relationship with the AAI is becoming stronger, to the benefit of both associations, without compromising the here to now independent nature of the IUAA. Contact with the ISAA has continued. The continuation of our efforts to increase awareness of third level athletes to leaving certificate athletes has received positive feedback. In addition the ISAA has offered some sound advice and support in relation to ISC funding and strategic planning, that the IUAA is very appreciative of.

I wrote last year about our ability to make the IUAA championships attractive to athletes of all abilities within the vast majority of Irish colleges. I emphasised how this was not an easy task and that to achieve it involved getting the fundamentals right. To this end a significant change in ideology was required by the IUAA. For too long the host colleges believed that the championships belonged to them and this was never seriously questioned, never mind challenged by the IUAA. Over the last two years the IUAA has been addressing this situation to the benefit of both the host and the IUAA. The championships have been rebranded as '*IUAA Championships*' through the use of race numbers, IUAA URLs and email addresses. The Guidelines for hosting an IUAA championship have been heavily revised in the last twelve months, to give the IUAA ultimate control over its championships while still allowing host colleges room to be innovative. The IUAA is continuing to build on this hard work, so as to ensure that our championships are attractive to athletes of all abilities. Hosting an IUAA championship is no small undertaking. The time and commitment required by a host college is substantial. The IUAA is continually working to reduce this work load. The hard work of the host colleges last season was recognised by both the membership of the IUAA and the Executive and I am certain that everyone will join me in thanking, NUI-Maynooth, IT-Carlow and UCC for the excellent work that they put into the championships last season. I would also like to take this opportunity to apologise to IT-Carlow for the absence of championship medals on the day.

The moving of the indoor T&F championships to the Spring from its traditional December date was in response to ongoing requests from the membership over the years. Unfortunately this move turned out to be very unwise as the numbers competing were down significantly on previous years, with a distinct absence of both top and novice athletes. This impacted dramatically on the traditional varsity atmosphere that is usually present in the arena, and left many feeling disappointed with their trip to these championships. A tough lesson was learnt last February and with the availability of dates being limited due to other bookings and exams, the

options open to the IUAA are limited. For this coming season the decision to go with the traditional December date was taken by the membership. Let us hope that it will result in the same high numbers and atmosphere previously associated with these championships.

Another issue that has proved difficult to deal with over the last two years is the splitting of the T&F championships between the main venue and an auxiliary venue. The last two such championships have involved this, and on both occasions strong views have been expressed for and against the concept. The question of host college / venue relationships is a difficult issue and one which very soon will require host colleges to be brave enough to take a step forward and use an alternative venue not directly linked to them, and for the IUAA to be equally as brave in not only supporting, but enforcing the move.

Before moving away from the topic of IUAA championships there is one very important topic that is all too often overlooked and that is the tireless work of the officials at Championship weekends. The majority of these people contribute significantly more than most people realise. Their selfless actions are the backbone of IUAA championship weekends and without them the efforts of the host member would be lost. On behalf of the IUAA Executive I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed their time and experience to the IUAA and to assure you that it didn't go unnoticed and was greatly appreciated by everyone involved.

The Celtic Cross Country is an event that the IUAA would like to see held again this Spring. Unfortunately as detailed in last years report, the IUAA can't afford to host the event. A number of options are currently being considered, however there are no guarantees that they will be in place in time to successfully host the race this coming Spring.

The World University Cross Country Championships were held in Turin, Italy on the 28th March 2004. Although the strongest team possible wasn't sent due to injury and senior international commitments, the team that did travel must be commended on the commitment and dedication that they showed. I continue to believe that this type of competition is invaluable to young Irish athletes and would encourage all potential athletes to seriously consider committing to them, as the experience gained is invaluable. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank both Ian O'Neill (Coach) and Louise Cavanagh (Manager) for the commitment they gave to their respective positions pertaining to this event.

There are some members of the executive that I would like to say a special thank you to for their help and support over the last twelve months. I would like to thank Cyril Smyth for his commitment to starting duties at all IUAA championships and for all the trouble he went to this season to ensure that the IUAA medals were available for presentation. A task that isn't quite as easy as one might think. Cyril White, who despite my best efforts to persuade him otherwise, insisted on turning up at several of the championships to assist with starting duties. Also to three of the new executive members, Enda Fitzpatrick, Gavin McBride and Rebecca Haworth, who all showed a commitment and willingness to assist the IUAA. I hope that you can all continue your commitment to the IUAA for a number of years, prior to making any decisions to

move on. However there is one point that I raised last year which I would like to reiterate (the full context of which is detailed in last years report) and that is that the IUAA should be moving away from a situation whereby we have undergraduate members on the executive, as their ability to commit to core responsibilities on championship weekends can be severely compromised. There is one additional person who I would again like to thank, and that is Brian Foley, who continues to assist, develop and support all the IUAA's IT software. Without this help the running of the IUAA would be severely compromised.

At the Antrim International T&F this year, a number of events took place that shamed the IUAA. To put it bluntly the standard of behaviour of a number of IUAA athletes, in the hostel, was unacceptable. Multiple members of the IUAA delegation including the innocent felt the repercussions of these actions. For the first time since its formation in October 1990 the IUAA executive is prepared to put forward a motion to suspend up to five member colleges, three of whom would fit into the big college category. This is a very serious situation that has the unanimous support of the executive, and is a decision that I as President stand firmly over.

The disillusionment I felt at the end of my first year as President was replaced with one of optimism following last years AGM. The newly elected executive had only five names remaining from the previous year. This injection of new blood was a promising sign for the future. It very quickly became apparent that this year's executive was focused on delivering core issues for the benefit of the membership. There was a distinct air of unity within the executive, and this coupled with an absence of external interference, made my job significantly easier. In my time on the executive I have strived to modernise procedures and build platforms on which the IUAA can function effectively and efficiently. Significant strides have been taken in this direction which enabled me to cut my work load over the last twelve months without significantly compromising the service offered by the IUAA. Also for a number of reasons I wasn't able to put the same time commitment into the IUAA over the last twelve months compared with the previous, and this did lead to problems at some of the championships. The problems were relatively minor but none the less they shouldn't have arisen and I apologise to those who were affected by them. One issue that has dominated the IUAA agenda in my years on the executive is *Guesting*. On occasion it has dominated affairs to the extent that the member colleges have suffered. This is something that I feel is unacceptable. To rectify this situation the IUAA executive has compiled an all encompassing '*Guesting Guidelines Handbook*' that it will be implementing for the coming season. This handbook is designed to standardise all aspects of the guesting process so as the process is fair and consistent, and to shift the burden of work and responsibility on to the applicant as opposed to the executive.

Last year I detailed a list of issues facing the IUAA that I said was bordering on alarming. A number of these issues have been addressed including: the issue of guesting in what are a closed championships; the upcoming merger of the ISSA and CUSAI and its implications for the IUAA. Other issues that are currently being addressed include: being ready to deal with the influx of membership applications from small colleges looking to affiliate for one athlete and the administrations nightmare associated with this; forging closer ties with the Athletics Association of Ireland and the Irish Sports Council; To be able to withstand the pressure exerted by

outside people, who think the IUAA is there to provide a platform for their ideals without first researching their proposed actions; To resolve the issue of electronic timing and its inability to deliver in Irish athletics; To raise the level of professionalism in all aspects of the association; Finding people who are prepared to take responsibility and the workload associated with it; How can we increase the number of athletes, of all standards, competing in our championships. Other issues are still outstanding and moves will be made to start processing them in the coming year. These issues include: How to address the fact that several of the Institutes of Technology don't seem interested in sending athletes to all the IUAA championships; The difficult issue of athlete eligibility and in particular from students in colleges who don't currently fit the IUAA eligibility requirements, of which there are a lot; Athlete eligibility within the current membership; The ongoing problem of finding competent officials and finding a way to fund them; The problems that emerge as a result of increased awareness; Finding a source of finance that will enable the IUAA to deliver on a level never previously envisaged. As can be seen progress has been made but not at the pace that I would have hoped. Contributing to the IUAA doesn't have to come through membership of the executive. There are other ways to assist and any member of the executive would be more than happy to talk with anyone who approaches them regarding this and other issues.

The next twelve months represent a big leap for the IUAA. The core focus of the next executive must be to assemble a strategic plan that represents everything that the IUAA is trying to achieve. This objective is ambitious but easily achievable if everyone unites and works for the IUAA as one. The plan will serve the dual purpose of enabling the membership to critically analyse the performance of their elected representatives but will fulfil a major requirement for Irish Sports Council financial support. I'll close with the same words that closed last years report. *'Looking forward to the future, there is a lot of hard work needed and hopefully we can come out the other side better for it. We should be setting the standards that all other organisations are striving to achieve. We should be pioneering in everything that we do. Unity, focus, commitment, desire, ingenuity and hard work are prerequisites for this way forward. If the IUAA fails to deliver in any of these areas then our immediate and long term future is in serious doubt.'*

Yours truly,

Stephen Lipson
Honorary President 2002- 2004.

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