

Report of the Honorary President 2004/2005

A new era beckons for Irish Athletics. Last May the Irish Sports Council appointed Gary Owens as acting CEO of the AAI. The IUAA executive has met twice with Gary allowing both sides to present their directions and visions for Irish Athletics. As a direct result of the shared vision of the IUAA and the AAI, under Gary Owens, coupled with the vested interests of athletics and both organisations, it has been agreed that unity within Irish Athletics is the correct and best way forward for all concerned. The IUAA executive has provisionally agreed, pending ratification at the AGM, to enter a twelve month integration process with the AAI. The end objective is to enable the IUAA to provide a better service to our membership, our athletes and to athletics.

The IUAA has in its fifteen year history been independent and evolutionary. From being self financed to being the first athletics organisation to introduce online entries for our members. Our objectives have always been to ensure that our management of third level athletics has ensured participation by and for all, and that our procedures are continually reviewed and amended to ensure the best and fairest competition. We have been a progressive and open-minded organisation always striving for improved professionalism and openness. We have come a long way in fifteen years and to offer a significant improvement in service over and above what has been achieved in recent years was always going to involve conceptually radical strategic change. The proposed integrating with the AAI is just that.

The radical change being instructed from the very top of the ISC coupled with the visions and planning of Gary Owens, means that the face of Irish Athletics is fast changing and for the IUAA it is time to decide whether to join together with other athletics organisations and work collectively for the interests of third level athletics and athletics in general, or to continue what we are currently doing, but in increased isolation and in parallel with a radically new, professionally managed and heavily financed AAI. For the IUAA executive there is only one path to take that will keep us as a relevant organisation in Irish Athletics and which will enable our organisation to continue to deliver and develop its objectives. This decision ultimately rests with you, the membership of the IUAA. Exercising your vote at our AGM is vital for the future direction of the IUAA.

The last twelve months saw the IUAA continuing to develop and introduce a number of new concepts and ideas to enable the more efficient, practical and above all fair operation of our organisation. The best example of this would be the new guesting handbook and guidelines, introduced to close inconsistencies in an area that has proved very difficult over the years. Another development that was first put to the membership at the 2003 AGM was the introduction of a trophy for middle distance. This trophy was presented for the first time at the T&F in 2005. Noel Carroll Jnr., son of the late Noel Carroll, after whom the trophy was named, made the presentation. The warm reception that he received provided a good indicator as to the value and relevance of the award. The trophy was funded by past members of UCDAC whom had been coached by Noel.

As has been the norm for the last number of year, the hosting of IUAA championships showed 100% commitment from the host colleges. 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, QUB and DIT for the excellent work that they put into the championships last season. The developments and changes in the way our championships are run and branded have seen significant improvements in the quality of service offered to our membership. This is clearly reflected in the views expressed over championship weekends, at the captain's meeting and championship dinners. The only significant concern that I would have is the slight drop off in the numbers competing last season. Hopefully it was an anomaly, but if not the root cause will need to be quickly identified and addressed.

The Indoor T&F reverted back to its traditional pre-Christmas date, but due to a number of factors the numbers competing didn't revert back to the level of two seasons ago. The hosting of this championship on a Friday/Saturday again posed logistical problems on the Friday. This season, in an effort to both make the championship more accessible and to circumvent the logistical problems, the event is being held on a Saturday/Sunday.

I spoke last year about the use of auxiliary venues at the T&F championships and the need for both the host college and the IUAA executive to take brave decisions. Again this year due to the last minute politics associated with hammer throwing, DIT were denied throwing rites. Their fast response to this must be commended. For the future I am optimistic that the new outlook for Irish Athletics will bring about changes in the politics associated with hammer throwing at the majority of the T&F venues around the country, and that in the near future the varisty hammer throwers can compete and win in front of their fellow athletes in the championship stadium, which is as it should be.

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 World University Games took place from 15th – 20th August in Izmir, Turkey. The team was managed by Patsy McGonagle. The games proved to be the most successful ever from both an Irish team and Irish athletics perspective, with a total of five medals being won between six athletes (relays), of which four were IUAA member athletes. The run up to the event however wasn't without its issues. Ian O'Neill resigned as assistant coach over athlete eligibility concerns. In my capacity as President of the IUAA I too was contacted by athletes whom had concerns over the eligibility of a number of athletes who went on to compete for Ireland at the games. The matter was compounded by a number of ambiguities and technicalities within the system, which hopefully can be clarified prior to the next University Games.

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. Enda Fitzpatrick who has proved the work horse of the IUAA and Gavin McBride for chasing up membership

fees. There are some additional people that I would also like to thank. Cyril White, who keeps insisting on turning up at championships to assist with starting duties, Pat O'Leary who assisted with starting for both the indoor and outdoor T&F, Larry Kelly who provided timing for both the indoor and outdoor T&F and Brian Foley, who continues to assist, develop and support all the IUAA's IT software. Michael Hillery, the IUAA Vice President and former President (1993-1997) has informed me that he will be stepping down from the IUAA. Michael was one of the founding members of the IUAA and has worked tirelessly for the IUAA throughout his fifteen year involvement. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his commitment, dedication and enthusiasm and to wish him all the best for the future.

The last twelve months has been a comparatively quiet time for the IUAA executive. A number of us, myself included, started new jobs that meant a shift in priorities. This impacted on the executives' ability to continue evolving the Association at the same rate as in recent years. Despite this the executive continued to address the issues raised in my previous two reports. A number of these have been addressed, the most significant being our relationship with the AAI. If the proposed integration is passed at the AGM all other outstanding issues will be tied down in the coming twelve months as part of the constitution integration and strategic plan for the third level sector. This will be a challenging task but the AAI integration is the corner stone to ensuring that they are successful addressed within the broader context of a structured plan for Irish Athletics. These changes will ensure a bigger, better and stronger IUAA.

Irrespective of the outcome of this years AGM the next twelve months represent a big challenge 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, be this with or without the AAI. Both routes will be challenging. Three years on and the closing words from my first report now have a lot more urgency and meaning to them, so as in my previous two reports, I will close with the following words. *'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- 2005.

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