



*Press Release*  
*12<sup>th</sup> November 2009*  
**\*\*\*31 Days to Go\*\*\***

### Irish legends named as European Cross Country Ambassadors



Irish athletics legends Sonia O'Sullivan and Catherina McKiernan have been named as ambassadors for this year's SPAR European Cross Country Championships, which will be held in Ireland for the first time in December.

As ambassadors for the event O'Sullivan and McKiernan will help in the promotion of the Championships but also lend their considerable experience to the Irish team's preparation for the event. Sonia O'Sullivan and Catherina McKiernan are two of Ireland's most successful athletes with both having excelled at cross country level during their careers in athletics. O'Sullivan won an unprecedented gold in both the long and short course events at the World Cross Country Championships in Marrakesh in 1998, while also taking team bronze medals in 1997 in Turin and in 2002 in Dublin.

McKiernan won gold at the inaugural European Cross Country Championships in 1994 and in the same year she won silver at the world Cross Country championships. The Cavan native also took World Cross Country silver in 1992, 1993 and 1995 confirming her place as one of Ireland's greatest athletes.

Both O'Sullivan and McKiernan are delighted to be a part of this year's event. *"This is a huge event for athletics and sport in Ireland. We have never had an opportunity to host a European Cross Country event and to have it now when we have such great talent coming through the ranks it gives us a really good opportunity to do well. I am really excited to be involved and to help the event in any way I can to make it an exciting day for Irish sport,"* O'Sullivan said.

*"Cross country running has played a huge part in my life and for Dublin to be hosting the European Cross Country Championships is fantastic. I am delighted to be an ambassador for the event and to give something back to a sport that has given me so much over the years. I hope that our Irish athletes will be able to realise their potential in front of what we hope will be a great crowd on the day,"* Catherina McKiernan said.

Liam Hennessy, President of Athletics Ireland and Event Director of the SPAR European Cross Country Championships, believes McKiernan and O'Sullivan will help add to the event. *"We are delighted that Catherina and Sonia have agreed to become ambassadors for this year's SPAR European Cross Country Championships. They are two of Ireland's greatest athletes and have excelled at cross country level. With their performances they helped bring through a whole new crop of Irish athletes and we are seeing that now with the strength of the team we will have in Santry,"* Hennessy said.

The SPAR European Cross Country Championships, which take place in Santry Park on Dublin's Northside on the 13<sup>th</sup> of December, will give some of Ireland's new up and coming cross country runners the opportunity to shine for their country in front of a home crowd. Athletes like Mary Cullen, Martin Fagan and Ciara Mageean will all be hoping to fight for a podium position as part of what should be a strong Irish team across all six events.

For more information and regular updates on the event and to sign up to the mailing list for the SPAR European Cross Country Championships then log on to [www.Dublin2009.ie](http://www.Dublin2009.ie). Athletics Ireland is supported nationally in running this event by the Irish Sports Council, Dublin City Council, Failte Ireland, Fingal County Council, RTÉ and Clonliffe Harriers.

**Ends**

**For further information:**

Declan Lee – O'Herlihy Communications – 01 660 2744 / 087 695 7451

Frank Greally – Athletics Ireland – 087 256 9690