

EURO

The 5000m gold medal performance by Mark Carroll at the European Junior Track and Field Championships in Thessalonika in August was one of the most impressive achievements in years by an Irish junior athlete. Brother John Dooley gives the background to Carroll's training build-up for the European gold strike.

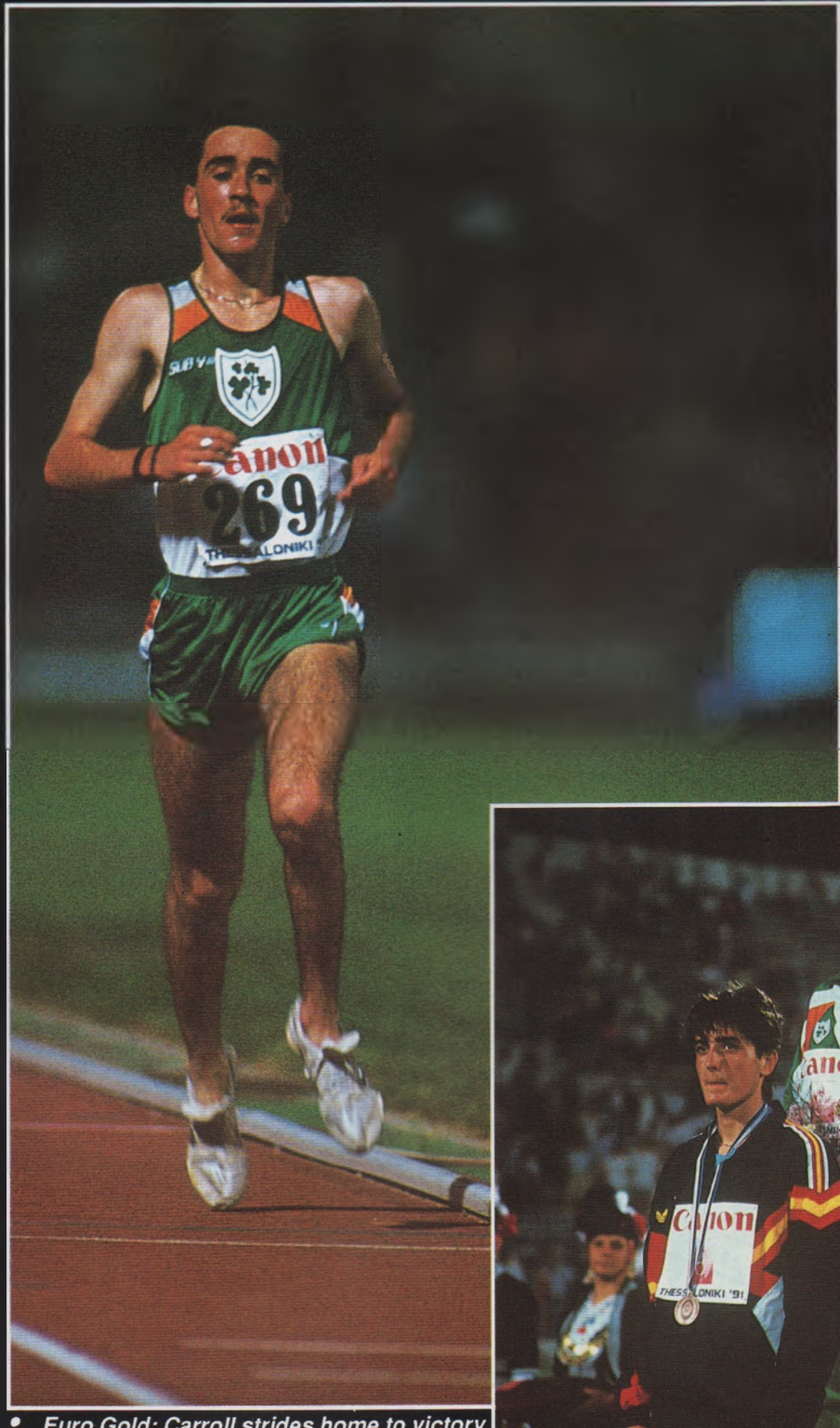
Mark Carroll's outstanding achievement in becoming the first Irish-based athlete to win a European athletics championship (junior or senior!) merits close examination and analysis. While each athlete is an individual and what works for one may not work for another, the basic principles of middle distance training and racing apply to all. Mark's path to glory (including its pitfalls) may light the way for other talented, disciplined and 'hungry' athletes. Talent without "B & B" (Brains and Bottle) never won a major championship.

Obviously talent is necessary for international success. Mark Carroll, before the European Juniors, had run 3:43.36 / 8:09 / 14:09 for 1500m, 3K and 5K, respectively. He had finished 19th in the World Junior Cross Country Championships in 1990. More important than his impressive times was his ability to race and win when the going was at its toughest, e.g. the Irish Schools Senior Cross Country Championships against John Murray in Belfast after John had 'hammered' him in the B.L.E. Junior in Plassey three weeks earlier and the B.L.E. U/21 1500m against Bobby Farren in Tullamore, when Bobby appeared to have made the winning break and was 10m clear entering the home straight.

This talent emerged quite gradually. Mark never won a B.L.O.E. title, even though he was competing from the age of eleven. He won his one and only club cross-country title in his last race in B.L.O.E. (U/17) in Mullingar in December 1989.

From then on Mark gained rapidly in strength and confidence. Der O'Donovan, his coach at Leevale, planned his training and racing programme so that he trained regularly and progressively and raced sparingly and intelligently. His second placing behind the year older Paul Logan (Limerick / Providence) in the B.L.E. Junior Cross Country Championships in Killenaule in February 1989 demonstrated a mental and physical toughness which have become his hallmarks.

The 1989 World Junior Cross Country Championships in Stavanger were nearly a disaster. A somewhat overawed 17



• Euro Gold: Carroll strides home to victory

GOLD

year old never got to grips with the demanding muddy course and flying Africans, and consequently finished a deeply disappointed 103rd. Time, sound advice and encouragement gave perspective to that experience and made Mark more determined than ever to succeed internationally.

The 1989 track season gave an indication of things to come. Munster U/17 1500m and 3000m titles were won in new record times of 3:55.25 and 8:36.40. At national level Nigel Brunton proved too strong in the 3K, winning in 8:29.16 from Mark's 8:36.41, and P.J. O'Rourke reversed Munster placings with a 3:55.0 win in the 1500m.

Heavy academic demands were the norm during the '89-'90 season as Mark prepared for an honours Leaving Certificate. Now, two more of his outstanding talents blossomed - his singlemindedness and his self-discipline. Mark analysed the situation and planned his study, training and social life carefully. From the first school day in September he applied himself diligently to both academic and athletics excellence. He trained every day in September and October, running 188 and 214 miles at 7-6:30 min. pace per mile. Two sand-dune sessions and two minor races were included in October.

November sessions comprised 23 easy/steady runs of 4 to 12 miles at 6:45 to 6:15 pace, two sand-dune sessions and two races.



December heralded the big breakthrough at national level, with victory in the B.L.O.E. U/17 Cross Country Championships over John Murray, P. J. O'Rourke and Nigel Brunton. Confidence soared and another impressive win in the B.L.E. Inter-Counties Junior Cross Country Championships at Dundalk Racecourse established Mark as the outstanding junior in Ireland.

Total Mileage 185 miles. Weight 58kg.

January's mileage increased to 210 miles and Mark began to experience slight strains in hamstrings and tendons. Physiotherapy and home icing appeared to cure the problem. Mark noted in his diary that he "felt tired at times", so he increased his sleeping hours.

▼ **From the first school day in September he applied himself diligently to both academic and athletic excellence.** ▼

February produced one of the great Junior C.C. races in the B.L.E. championships with an epic struggle between Mark and defending champion, Paul Logan (returned from Providence). Paul finally prevailed, and for the second year in a row Mark had to be content with the runner-up spot and a place on the World C.C. team. **Total Mileage 164 miles.**

Weight 60kg. Quotes from Diary: "eased down this month, but sharpened up - raced well - National Juniors toughest race of year - felt good during month - very happy."

March was an incredible month with an easy victory in the Irish Schools Senior C.C. Championships in Boyle and a 19th placing in the World Junior C. C. Championships in Aix-les-Bains. Once again Mark had prepared methodically and maintained his composure and concentration when the pressure was greatest. **Total Mileage 142 miles. Weight 60kg. Quotes from Diary:** "World C.C. the best race of my life - felt super - sore all over for three days afterwards."

April brought the reward of a two weeks warm weather training camp in Yugoslavia. It was an invaluable experience - coping with a different climate, strange food and basic living conditions. Relating with management and seniors was another significant experience. Bernard Dunne (Exercise Physiologist) and Physiotherapists Siobhan Treacy and Shirley Roycroft provided an excellent service which heightened Mark's appreciation of professional back-up. This Olym-

• **A proud moment on the rostrum**

pic Council-funded venture was one of the best athletic educational experiences international athletes could have had.

Total Mileage 191 miles. Weight 61kg.

May was made up of steady runs 5 to 11 miles, 2 quality track sessions weekly, i.e. 10 x 400m in 64 secs, with 1 to 2 mins recovery and 3 sets of 4 x 150m fast with 150m jog recovery. Highlight of the month was 1st in Munster Schools Senior 1500m in 3:52.5. This was followed by shin soreness which had not cleared up for the Irish Schools Championships.

June was a month of rest, ice and swimming. Orthotics were prescribed and procured, and by the end of June they appeared to be solving the problem.

July saw Mark back in training and still hoping to make the qualifying time for the World Junior 5000m.

An impressive 14:32 behind Noel Richardson in Tullamore in early **August** indicated a quick return to fitness. Unfortunately, an ill-advised senior 4 mile road race which Mark won brought about a return of the shin soreness. Further treatment and an active rest from athletics for the rest of August and all of **September** was the prescribed cure. **(Weight 63kg.)**

October was a month of great frustration. Despite taking all the precautions and maintaining a high degree of fitness through swimming and cycling, the shin soreness persisted. Visits to Dr. Mick Molloy failed to bring about any apparent improvement. Now negative questions began to persist. Am I going to be permanently injured? Even if it does clear up will it return as soon as I put pressure on it? How can I go to Providence if I'm so injury prone? Will I lose my scholarship? I'm running out of time to get fit for the cross-country season. Will I miss the World C.C. Championships? Ray Treacy's regular letters and his encouraging words "you don't lose talent. I'll honour your scholarship next August whether you are injured or not" were an invaluable support during this period of darkness.

A visit to Dr. Brendan O'Brien (B.L.E. Hon. Medical Officer) at the end of October was the first light at the end of a dark tunnel. His obvious interest, careful

examination and reassuring words greatly relieved Mark. The bone scan in the Blackrock Clinic showed no stress fracture but highlighted hot spots on the shins which indicated "resolving shin splints."

Brendan O'Brien recommended two to three weeks rest from running but to continue with stretching, swimming and use of exercise bicycle. By the end of **November** Mark felt sufficiently recovered to start back running (**Weight 65kg**).

The first week of **December** Mark daily ran 3-4 miles easy on grass; 4-5 miles the second week, 5 miles the third week and 6 miles the last week. Once weekly he did an aerobic session in the pool, i.e. 8 x 70 secs. Running across pool wearing flotation jacket with 1 minute recovery. **Total mileage 117 miles. (Weight 64kg).** *Quotes from Diary:* "Learned a valuable lesson in December. A gradual comeback is much more effective and safer than rushing it. Didn't seem as if I had missed six months - feels good to be back - injury not fully healed yet."

January saw the steady runs increase to 5 to 10 miles, with weekly pool sessions as in December. The first race was a low-key Senior C.C. League on January 13th (when established seniors were racing in Limerick). Victory did wonders for confidence. The second race was a week later in the Munster Junior C.C. Championships. A second placing behind John Murray after a spirited battle for 3 miles signalled further progress. **Total Mileage 150 miles. Weight 63kg.**

February provided the supreme test of Mark's return to fitness with the National Junior C.C. Championships in Limerick. Another 'head to head' with John Murray was decided after one mile when an inspired John broke clear and won comfortably. Mark ran on strongly for a satisfactory second placing. While there was disappointment at losing, Mark was delighted with his level of fitness on less than three months training, and especially with the way his shins stood up to the test. Racingwise he was rusty and he accepted that he would improve with every race. The following Saturday he easily won the Munster Schools C.C. from an off-form John Murray. **Total mileage 187 miles. Weight 63kg.** *Quotes from Diary:* "Two good races - strength beginning to return - enjoying being back with the group - felt super in the Munster Schools."

March was an incredible month, highlighted by the memorable win in the Irish Schools Senior C.C. in Mallusk, Belfast after an epic head-to-head race with friend and team-mate John Murray. An added bonus was leading the North Mon. to their third senior team title in a row (March 9th).

The North Monastery had been invited to take part in the High Schools Distance Medley Relay (1200m, 400m, 800m,



• **Mark Carroll battles with arch rival John Murray**

1600m) at the famous Penn Relays in Philadelphia. A condition of their acceptance was that they run a qualifying time (sub 10:30) before April 1st. The only suitable date was Wednesday, March 13th! With Sean Naughton's co-operation a race against Nenagh Olympic was arranged in the Nenagh indoor track where Mark ran a 4:20 mile to bring North Mon a qualifying time of 10:20.

Having decided that the European Junior 5K was the No. 1 goal for the year and with less than four months training behind him Mark raced cautiously in the World Junior C.C. and was quite pleased with his 35th placing. The last week of the month consisted of four runs of 5 miles, a 10 miler, 18 sand dunes and a 14 miler. **Total mileage 181 miles. Weight 63kg.** *Quotes from Diary:* "Enjoyable month - excellent runs in Schools - had a comfortable 4:20 indoor mile and a 35th place in W.C.C. - altogether a great month - I'm back."

April was both a fantastic and a frustrating month. On April 4th Mark stood on a stone and strained ligaments in his ankle. Penn was only three weeks away. Physiotherapy, ice, exercise bicycle and swimming pool were used until the 18th when Mark ran an easy six miles on grass - ankle sore but improving. Relaxation tape and exercises were also a positive factor. Flew to Philadelphia on 24th, ran 4:17 for the 1600m leg at Penn, bringing North Mon from 5th to 3rd and the bronze medals in the last 100m. **Total mileage 109 miles. Weight 60kg.** *Quotes from Diary:* "Disrupted month, good start but got ankle injury - Penn Relays boosted me up this month."

[Writer's note:- On the plane journey home from Penn, Mark and I discussed his preparations for the European Juniors. I felt that he needed six weeks of uninterrupted training if he was to be at his peak in Greece. He had never won a Schools track title and was both hungry and the favourite for the 5K. The North Mon. had never won the College of

Science Shield and, after Penn, had the team to do it. What to do? Mark reflected for a while and then decided that he would miss the Schools and concentrate on his build-up for the Europeans. I believe that this decision was one of the key elements in the magic formula that produced European Gold.]

May consisted of 30 days training - 28 steady runs (6 to 12 miles) at 7 mins to mile pace, 1 exercise to exhaustion on treadmill and 1 Fartlek (1 x 800m; 1 x 400m; 6 x 150m) on grass. **Total mileage 256 miles. Weight 60kg.** *Quotes from Diary:* "It's taken 12 months to get back into a regular uninterrupted schedule. This month was excellent. All runs at 6:45 - 7 min. pace. I now feel I can have a good summer and winter to come."

June saw Mark hungry for racing and counting the days until June 18. The steady runs continued, 2 fartleks and 2 track sessions on grass, e.g. 4 x 400m plus 4 x 300m and 8 miles (55 mins) on June 17. Cork Senior 5K on 18th - a cool windy night not suitable for a sub 14:25. Mark took the lead during the first lap and front ran 14:16 for an unchallenged victory. June 20th right tendon sore, back to treatment, exercise bicycle and swimming pool until July. **Total mileage 189 miles. Weight 59kg.** *Quotes from diary:-* "Month began well - some quality fartleks. Right tendon became inflamed - cycled hard and swam well for a week. I believe now it was a good mid-season break.

On arrival in Thessalonika on **August 5th**, the primary task was to adjust and get into a routine as similar as possible to the normal one and which would be suitable as preparation for the race. Heat and food not a problem - humidity not a major factor - accommodation satisfactory, Mark and John (Murray) shared - major disruption caused by the hotel's nite club which 'boomed' into action every night at 11pm and continued 'booming' until 3.30am. Bedroom

windows opened out on to the bandstand - [close windows and you were in danger of suffocating]. Car park did not clear until after 4.00am.

John and Mark were quite upset and switched rooms next day. 22 mins easy run after sundown."

Wednesday 7th Technical meeting - no heats in 5000m (only 14 entered) or 3000m. s/chase (18! entered). Mark and John rose at 11am. and went for a relaxed 20 min. run - joined us for lunch (their breakfast). {Note:- Here I must pay tribute to Sean Naughton and Joe Doonan who allowed the athletes the freedom to work out a routine that suited them and enabled them to retain their control and confidence.} They rested/slept for a few hours in the afternoon - 20 min. run - dinner - enjoyed the nite club - bed 2.30 - slept 4.30.

Thursday 8th 11.30 to stadium - a relaxed track session 2 x 200m; 2 x 400m, strides - Mark bouncy and perky again. 6pm. Impressive opening ceremony.

Friday 9th 11.30 20 min. run - 7pm to stadium 30 degrees C. - Mark 'dozed' on terrace - "wrecked" - 9pm 25 mins run on Esplanade - "refreshed, felt good."

Saturday 10th 25 min. run "felt good and bouncy." 6pm to the stadium, watched some early events. At 7.30pm Mark accompanied John to the warm-up area. John was tense but in control. As race time approached John became more tense. He cleared the practice hurdle on the track almost 20 times before the delayed start of the race. At the 'gun' he shot into the lead to avoid trouble in an 18 man field but ran a 63 sec. opening lap! John stayed with the leaders until the penultimate water jump which he took badly and consequently missed the 'break' by the three leaders. In a matter of 50m the medals were decided and John finished a dejected 7th in 9.02.94. The winner, Loucaides Georgios, Cyprus [now a freshman in Washington State University] set a new Games record of 8.49.24 and 2nd Brandis, Germany 8.50.1 and 3rd J. Svendy, Norway 8.50.02 were also inside the old record of 8.54.83 in a temperature of 35 degrees C.

Sunday saw Mark follow same routine. He rose at 11.30, went for an easy 1 mile run, lunched, relaxed with tapes, hatted briefly about the race and assured me that he was both in control and in form. At 6.15pm we departed for the stadium, watched events until 7.30 and then proceeded to the warm-up area. As it was still very warm (32 degrees C) Mark decided to sit in the shade and relax to the "Mission" tape on his walkman. I sat silently nearby watching his valves burning up energy in vigorous arm-ups. He did a 15 min. gentle warm-up, proceeded to the call room at the 1st minute and gave the thumbs-up sign as he walked out onto the track.

The race itself was tactical, with the opening kilometre covered in 2.58 (4,71,33). Mark stayed at the rear for

the first lap, cruised up to third spot on the second lap and stayed in the leading five through the second kilometre (3.00), third kilometre (2.49) and fourth kilometre (2.53). The next lap (11th) was covered in a steady 69 secs. With 600m to go Gomez (Spain) made a decisive break and at the 'bell' was 10m. clear, with Mark and Belester (France) giving chase. Mark increased his pace and joined Gomez with 300m to go. He then 'changed gears' and in 50m opened up a 10m lead which he maintained round the bottom bend and into the home straight. A victory salute 50m from the finishing line was reminiscent of Eamonn Coghlan in Helsinki in 1983.

A historic victory had been achieved by the athlete who had "kept his head when all about him were losing theirs." (apologies to R. Kipling). The presentation ceremony, the hoisting of the Tricolour and the playing of Amhran na bhFiann were magic moments treasured by the Irish team and management, but especially by Mark Carroll, European Junior 5000m Champion 1991.

Note:- A well-deserved tribute is due to BLE not only for the memorable wel-

come home reception but, and more importantly, for the international competition they provided for Mark Carroll during the past three years, competition which opened his eyes to the international scene and which gave him the experience and confidence to aim for success in the European Juniors. Christy Wall was one of the first to recognise Mark's exceptional talent and was especially supportive during the injury and recuperative period.

The BLE cross-country squad sessions in Clonmel organised by Michael Guinan, Paddy Marley and Eamonn Harvey were another important element in Mark's education for international competition. Eamonn's approach and relaxation exercises were a very positive influence in Mark's 19th placing in the World Junior C.C. 1990.

Without the Cospoir grant (£1,000), it is doubtful that Mark would have been able to avail of the intensive and prolonged treatment (physiotherapy, swimming, exercise bicycle) which were vital for his return to health and fitness in time for the Europeans.

TYPICAL FINAL BUILD-UP

July was when everything came together and each performance surpassed the previous one. It began with four days of steady running (5,10, 8, 5 miles) 5th Cork City Sports Senior 5000m. Mark ran evenly and strongly to clock 14:09 (second fastest ever by an Irish junior behind John Treacy's 14:04.6).

6th - 12th: steady 8-10 mile runs at 6:45 pace, with one 15 mile run in 1:43 and one track session; 6 x 400m in 58-56 secs.

13th: 1st in 1500m heat (3:50 PB) in B.L.E. Championship.

14th: 2nd to Frank O'Mara in 3:43.36, (third fastest ever by an Irish junior behind Ray Flynn 3:41.5 and Enda Fitzpatrick 3:42.65).

15th - 20th: 4 steady runs (8,10, 8, 6 miles at 7 mins. pace), one 15 mile run in 1:42 and one track (grass) session; 6 x 400m in 59-56 secs.

21st: 1st B.L.E. U/21 1500m in 3:47.21 ("won on the line; toughest race of season.")

22nd: 9 1/2 miles in 64 mins. "Felt good"

23rd: 12 miles in 81 mins. "Felt good"

24th: 6 miles in 41 1/2 mins. "Felt wrecked"

25th: 8 miles on trails in 53 mins. "Felt O.K."

26th: 5 miles on trails in 35 mins. "Felt O.K."

27th: A.A.A. Senior 3000m 4th in 8:09.5 (second fastest ever outdoors behind Brian O'Keeffe's 8:06.3).

28th: left tendon tight - rested.

29th: 10 miles on grass in 69 mins; "Leg better, felt good".

30th: 4 miles warm-up, 2 miles fartlek, 2 miles cool-down. "Tired"

31st: 3 miles 25 mins. "Tired".

Total mileage 247 miles. Weight 59kg.

Quotes from diary: "Excellent uninterrupted month - four quality races on the trot - full of confidence with 3:43 - tired at end of month - tapered off and recovered."

August was the golden month.

1st - 3rd. relaxed easy running and strides.

4th. Fartlek.

5th. Flew to Thessalonika [left Knock-naheeny at 6.45pm - arrived Hotel Philemon at 9am on Tuesday 6th, breakfast, bed]. "Wrecked".