

MARK OF DISTINCTION

BY LIAM MOGGAN

If Mark Carroll longed for company while he logged up his 2,000 training miles in 1991 he certainly made up for it during his Christmas holidays. Home in Knocknaheeny in Cork after his first term at Providence College he received a heap of prestigious awards in recognition of the wonderful performances he strung together last year.

Carroll certainly came good in '91 and Christmas was a time to look back and enjoy the memories. The outstanding junior athlete of the year, and indeed for many a long year before, he deservedly was chosen as the EBS Young Athlete of the Year. He also picked up his second Irish Runner/Seiko award as well as one of the monthly awards presented by Jury's of Cork.

Carroll is no overnight star. Yet neither is he one of those who particularly shone through during his juvenile days. Not much was waged on young Mark in the ante-post betting. Injury has regularly plagued his progress, but whereas muscle and bone may have yielded to the strain of his efforts, his ambition and his belief in his own ability never wavered. It was this belief that shortened his odds of success.

Winner of his first BLOE C.C. title in 1989, it was his performance in the Schools C.C. Championships during his time in North Monastery CBS that indicated a performance curve steadily on the rise. Tenth place in '87 to eighth in '88 and '89 before finally taking gold in '90 and '91 show the tireless apprenticeship he clocked up perfecting his talent. They say that 'talent will always out'. However talent does not develop by accident and gold medal performances are not achieved on flimsy dreams and neatly planned schedules. The gallops along the footpaths of Harbour View Road and in the school-fields around Our Lady's Mount as well as the odd quick dash around the tartan lanes of the Mardyke have moulded a middle distance runner with the equipment to take on the very best.

Add to this mould the ingredients of a supportive home, the coaching of Der O'Donovan, the



• Mark Carroll, Mgt. O'Connor and Pat O'Reilly, M.D., EBS

guidance of Bro. John Dooley, the friendship of fellow Leevale athlete Declan O'Callaghan and

the camaraderie of the lads from 'the Mon' and the recipe for real progress was complete.

His coach Der O'Donovan sees 1989 and particularly the second placing in the Munster Juniors as the turning point in Carroll's career. "When he transferred from Eagle Track Club I didn't know of him. The Leevale squad was built around Ken Nason at that time and so we took no special notice of Mark. However his performance behind John Murray that day was gutsy. I told him that he would make the team for the World Juniors and that turned him on. His greatest asset is his ability to handle pressure, he doesn't crack up and nothing or nobody frightens him. He has great ability, is very committed and my one hope is that he develops patience."

Mark Carroll was always interested in running. His mother, Anne, remembers him racing around the local square in competitions with his friends as they lapped around the block in opposite directions. "He has always been extremely dedicated and worked hard to prepare properly for every race," she pointed out. "The tension on the day he was competing in Greece at the Europeans was fierce, it was a beautiful day, and during a long walk, his father, John, and I talked and wondered about how he was getting on. It was John who first heard the news on *Sunday Sport*. It was certainly the greatest moment in our lives."

The story of the historic win in Thessalonika told so well by Bro. Dooley in the *Irish Runner Annual* completed a marvellous five weeks of top-class running by Carroll. During that time he won Irish Championship U/21 gold and Senior silver at 1500m, he finished just out of the medals in the British AAA 3000m, won the European gold, and ran two splendid PBs. His 3.43 1500m ranks him third in the All-Time Junior list behind Ray Flynn and Enda Fitzpatrick (athletes also guided by Bro. Dooley), while only John Treacy's 8.06 is rated faster over 3K.

Mark Carroll has carved out a unique part in the history of Irish athletics and many more achievements are no doubt on the cards for the likeable, modest young man from Knocknaheeny.

Main Cross Country Achievements

	National BLOE	All-Ireland Schools	National Juniors	World Juniors
1989	1st U17	8th	2nd	103rd
1990		1st	2nd	19th
1991		1st	2nd	35th

Annual Progression

	1500m	3000m	5000m
1988	4.09.00	8.54.00	
1989	3.55.25	8.36.40	15.13.00
1990	3.52.50		14.32.00
1991	3.43.36	8.09.40	14.09.00