

Irish **RUNNER**

1992 ANNUAL

Price £2.50



GOLD STRIKE



DUBLIN MARATHON



AWARDS RESULTS

SONIA O'SULLIVAN & JOHN BUCKLEY



VETERAN

BY BRENDAN O'SHEA

The Irish veteran track and field team brought home an array of medals from the World Championships in Turku, Finland this summer. Brendan O'Shea competed with the team and reports on an Irish success story.

I was having a relaxed drink in the bar of the Listowel Arms Hotel. I noticed that the bar was less filled than usual - apparently many of the imbibers were watching the finale of the Rose of Tralee. Towards closing time a waiter returned from the TV lounge to announce to all who wished to hear, and to those who didn't, "The Cork Rose. The Cork Rose." I must admit, I immediately thought of John Buckley. No, John was not wearing a gown or swimsuit but he had been so wonderfully impressive in his running at the IXth World Veteran Games in Finland just a few weeks earlier that he was still to the forefront of my mind. Subconsciously, the combination of "winning" and "Cork" just had to mean John Buckley.

Since we became active participants in the World Veteran Games in the mid-seventies, we have enjoyed a success rate and status significantly greater than our numbers would warrant. This has largely resulted from the performances of our veteran superstar, Jim McNamara. At successive world games, New Zealand (1981), Puerto Rico (1983), Italy (1985), Australia (1987) and USA (1989) he won a basket of gold medals.

This year, Jim was not travelling to Turku, Finland for the Games, nor was Emily Dowling, who won two silver medals in 1989 and a further two golds at the Europeans in Budapest last year. We had hopes of medals of some colour from John Buckley and possibly the 0/45 marathon and cross country teams, but it was a case of hope rather than confidence.

John's opening event was the 10,000 metres, which produced gold in the fine time of 31-30 from Overland (Norway) and Hulander (Sweden). His tactics of "sit with the leading pack until half-way and then go for home" were to gain two further golds in the 5000m and the cross country.

John had been a fine athlete when competing at senior level in the 70s but was best known as a cross country runner Irish style, plenty of muck and hills, rather than as a track or road runner. I remember how I used to then marvel at his ability to run on top of wet muddy terrain without apparently dirtying his socks. He was National Champion in 1972.



PHOTOS BY RAY WHITEHEAD

• **Veteran Cheer: The Irish Team**

However a trip to Germany the following year for an international competition had a profound effect on his running career. John wanted international success, he was not content with being just a good domestic runner. To paraphrase that well-known politician, Julius

Caesar, "he went, he saw and he realised the folly of his expectations." He saw the superior facilities and support that the German, and other, athletes enjoyed and realised that he probably could never match them in international competition; so he retired, still only in his twenties, and concentrated on his working career.

On talking to him recently, he told me how he simply maintained a reasonable level of fitness in the intervening years and only started serious training once he became a vet. "I average about 100 miles a week," he said. Success was unspectacular until this year. His main goal since turning vet has been the marathon; a few times in the mid 2-30s and just one sub 2-30 were good but not exciting. "To what do you credit your spectacular improvement this year,?" I asked. In typical self-effacing manner he answered, "I don't know" and then proceeded to tell me, "I still do, on average, 100 miles a week, but I now also take care of my diet. I cut out most of the junk food. I thought I was thin (sic) but I have recently lost 5 or 6lbs and that seems to have made all the difference." Now you know what makes a super athlete: talent, 100 miles per week and a good diet. Sounds simple, doesn't it?

HIGHLIGHT PERFORMANCES

M40					
Martti Vainio	(Fin)	Gold	10,000m	29.16.88	
M45					
John Buckley	(Irl)	Gold	10,000m	31.30.42	
M40					
Camelo Vera	(Mex)	Gold	5000m	14.24.19	
M45					
John Buckley	(Irl)	Gold	5000m	15.04.07	
M50					
Rob Robertson	(NZ)	Gold	10,000m	31.01.90	
W35					
Marja Vartiainen	(Fin)	Gold	10,000m	37.46.12	
W45					
Evelyn McNelis	(Irl)	Bronze	10,000m	38.12.72	
W35					
Sally Young	(UK)	Gold	5000m	16.53.01	

GLORY

Maeve Kyle and Emily Dowling had been our only female medal winners at World Games prior to this. With no established female star travelling, our prospects looked very bleak for any additional success. But fortune was to favour us again. The twins, Dorothy McLennan and Sheila Champion, won gold and silver in the 0/55 pole vault while Evelyn McNelis from Naas won silver and bronze in cross country and 10,000m, respectively. Dorothy and Sheila can thank their foresight in entering what is still a pioneering event in women's athletics for their medals, while Evelyn had to work hard, mighty hard, for hers. Unlike Maeve and Emily, Evelyn entered the veteran scene having progressed through the "get-fit", "Mini-Marathon" ranks. By her success in Finland, she has shown that it is possible to take this path and reach the stars.

However, the World Veteran Games are not just for the elite athletes, the medal winners. If they were, then the Games would be the poorer as a result.

Michael Whelan took up athletics at the age of 50. Now 62, he competed in Turku, getting personal bests in both 5,000m and 10,000m and new 0/60 Irish records in the process. Michael was proud of his running, he was thrilled at competing on a world stage. We were proud of him, we cheered for him as loudly as we did for John or Evelyn. Success is not simply measured in me-



• *Glory Run For John Buckley*

dals. Success is a very personal thing. Success is trying one's utmost in competition, trying to reach one's own personal star in the sky. The veteran movement provides a vehicle for this fulfilment.

Whither the World Games now? Having hovered between 3,000 and 4,000 athletes for a number of Games, the numbers took a quantum jump to 5,000 from fifty-two countries in the U.S. in 1989 and added just a few more in Finland, this time with fifty-five countries par-

ticipating. To put this into perspective, it is more than the number of participants in all the sports at the recent Olympics, not just track and field. Up until now, the Games have been predominantly a western phenomenon, with just a sporadic appearance of individuals from the Communist Bloc countries. All this changed in Turku when 120 Soviet athletes arrived, the result of perestroika.

Who were these Soviets, any famous names among them? Let's start with Tatyana Kazankina, dual Olympic gold medallist (1980) and still world record-holder for 1,500m. Add in a few more Olympic champions such as Ludmila Bragina (1976), Elvira Ozolina (javelin 1960) Nina Romanskova (discus 1952 and 1960). For good measure throw in former world record holder in the shot, Alexander Baryshnikov, toss in an extra sprinkle of Olympic champions, Ganis Lysis (javelin 1968) and Juri Tarmak (high jump 1972) and you get a flavour of the Soviet arrivals.

Did they dominate their events, as one might expect, considering their past wonderful achievements at the highest possible level? Not at all, only two won gold, Ozolina and Romanskova. Apparently veteran athletics is not strong in the USSR; in fact the Soviets had been unaware of the veteran movement abroad until very recently. When they retired from international competition, they effectively retired from all competition and usually from any meaningful level of training. Interestingly, their two gold medallists, Ozolina and Romanskova, at present have "manual jobs" and so retained a significant portion of their former strength; they are both in the throwing events.

The Soviets seemed very surprised at the high standard of competition at the Games; they were curious and wanted to know more. They came ill-prepared and unfit. They will be back, fitter and wiser next time. They will add enormously to the prestige and further development of the veteran movement. Would you like to race, jump or throw with such superstars of the past? The opportunity now is there. We have a part to play, we will do it. And we will do it well, just as we have done up to now. We have the athletes, we have the talent and, equally important, we have the psyche to do it. The world of veteran athletics is expanding worldwide and we want to be part of it. Exciting times lie ahead.

Roll on Japan, 1993.

HOW THE IRISH FARED

GOLD MEDAL WINNERS

- John Buckley M45
5000m
- John Buckley M45
10,000m
- John Buckley M45
Cross Country
- John Buckley M45
Cross Country Team
- John Sheridan M45
Cross Country Team
- Brendan Sherlock M45
Cross Country Team
- Dorothy McLennan W55
Pole Vault

SILVER MEDAL WINNERS

- Evelyn McNelis W45
Cross Country
- Sheila Champion W55
Pole Vault
- Frank Hearn M50
800m

BRONZE MEDAL WINNERS

- Evelyn McNelis W45
10,000m
- Murt Coleman M45
Marathon Team
- T.J. O'Loughlin M45
Marathon Team
- Brendan O'Shea M45
Marathon Team