

Chapter 4 - THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

John Hegarty of Carrignavar celebrated the new decade with yet another term of office as vice-chairman of the County Board. This was his fifteenth year in that very position and still, in 1993, vice-chairman he remains very much the elder statesman of athletics in the County. Although somewhat camera shy his counsel and advice reflect the many years of administrative experience at this level.

1990

Sonia O'Sullivan scored the most notable victory of her still blossoming career when she won the American Collegiate 3,000 metre title at the NCAA track & field Championships. These were held in Durham, North Carolina in early June. Her time of 8;56,74 was a personal best and was then the third fastest time over that distance by an Irish woman.

On her return 'home' she duly ran away with the National 1,500 metre title (4;09,44). At these Tullamore Championships Terrie Horgan, now in the DCH colours, won the long for the third time in a row with a jump of 6,31 metres. The steeplechase provided much excitement and there was the spectacle yet again of three Cork athletes battling it out. On this occasion Kieran Stack of North Cork had the better of Liam O'Brien, East Cork, and John Murray, Leevale.

Terrie Horgan and Sonia O'Sullivan both enjoyed victories at the West Athletic International in the long and 3,000 metres respectively. Marcus O'Sullivan was joined by Sonia for the 'Europeans' in Split, Yugoslavia. Running in the 5,000 metres Marcus was 5th in his heat, clocking 13;43,74. Sonia ran well in her debut Championships returning 8;52,65 for the 3,000.

1991

Donncha O'Mahony of East Cork was the new County cross-country senior Champion and was joined on the winner's rostrum by Susan Jenkins of Leevale who took the women's title. For Susan there was even further glory that winter as Cork won the National inter-county Championship. Joining Susan on that scoring quartet were Valerie Vaughan, Blarney/Inniscarra, Joan Hough, St Finbarr's, and Anita Philpott, North Cork

On the indoor circuit there was much excitement from the Cork viewpoint. The Nenagh Indoor Complex was officially opened with a 'meet' at which there were victories for Sonia O'Sullivan, Valerie Vaughan, Terrie Horgan and Darren Haddock. At the National Indoors Terrie Horgan and Billy Oakes dominated the horizontal jumps. At the World Championships in Seville, there was some disappointment that Marcus did not retain his World 1,500 metres title. Such were the expectations that few doubted his ability to win yet again. He was fourth in 3;44,79 - just out of the medals, and again another superlative performance. In America Sonia was running very well too. She captured the Collegiate cross-country title and added to her Collegiate collection at indoor level as well. In late January Sonia returned a time of 15;17,28 for the 5,000 metres at the Boston College Terrier Classic - a new World Record. The previous mark stood to Lynn Jennings at 15;22,65.

At the World 'vets' Indoor Championships two Cork athletes did very well. Hugh McSweeney of Eagle took two bronzes - in the 60

metre sprint and in the long jump. His clubmate Mick Kiely struck gold in the 800 metres and the 1,500 metres and added a silver in the 400 metres to round off a very profitable weekend in Budapest.

A team from the 'North Mon' travelled across the Atlantic to take part in the famous 'Penn Relays' in April. The squad of John Murray, Mark Smyth, Ken Nason and Mark Carroll went on to the bronze medal position, much to the delight of their coach and mentor, Brother John Dooley. Trevor Foolkes also made the journey and although a reserve and not on the team on the day he nonetheless ran in a 3,000 metre race, clocking 8;58.

At the World 'vets' Championships in July John Buckley struck gold - four times. Competing in the over 45 category he won the 5,000 in 15;04 and the 10,000 in 31;00. There was double gold in the cross-country event - individual and team. Later that year he added further medals through participation in the World 'vets' road races, held in Venice. On the World stage one Peter Maher, formerly of North Cork, was 13th in the marathon at the World Championships in Tokyo. The Seoul Olympian returned a time of 2;20,31.

In November Doctor Pat O'Callaghan died and with him passed one of the few remaining links with that golden era of Irish athletics. An outspoken figure in later life he would be sorely missed by those who sought advice and encouragement on the state of athletics in modern Ireland.

Sean Dollman, Leevale, and Sonia O'Sullivan were among the Cork athletes at the World cross-country Championships in Boston. Sean was 64th and was a scorer on the men's team. For Sonia there was a 7th place finish behind Cathriona McKiernan's great silver. The women's team were just behind the Ethiopians who filled the bronze position.

The 1992 County Convention was held in April to facilitate the 'new' BLE year. Ted Murray retired from the 'chair' and was replaced by Paddy Hickey of Blarney. There was a new secretary too as Catherine Murphy of Eagle replaced Eileen Vaughan, Blarney/Inniscarra. The subject of track & field athletics in the County was of particular concern to the delegates present. A track & field sub-committee was formed with John Hayes, Togher, Colm Murphy, Eagle, Tom Stanton, St Finbarr's, and John Riordan, Blarney/Inniscarra.

Recommendations followed and the County Board acted on all; a County 'B' Championships was instituted, the County Seniors again had a full programme, more events were added to the County 'vets' Championships and the structure of coaching in the County was thoroughly examined. For the first time in several years two National Event coaches were based in Cork. Ray Shanahan has charge of the middle distance and Colm Murphy, who previously worked with the discus throwers, the triple jump.

Among the other innovations at County Board level is the publication of the NEWSLETTER. This is sent on a monthly basis during the winter and spring to all Cork athletes 'abroad' - whether Dublin or Boston, London or Melbourne. Athletics news and gossip is covered with special emphasis on Cork.

Officers of the Board met with their counterparts of the County BHAA to ascertain the feasibility of co-operation in arranging a programme of fixtures among other matters. The outcome was a more streamlined calendar with no clashes of fixtures. A six week moratorium for track & field athletics was readily agreed and in May/June this year no road races were held in the County - the first time in almost a decade.

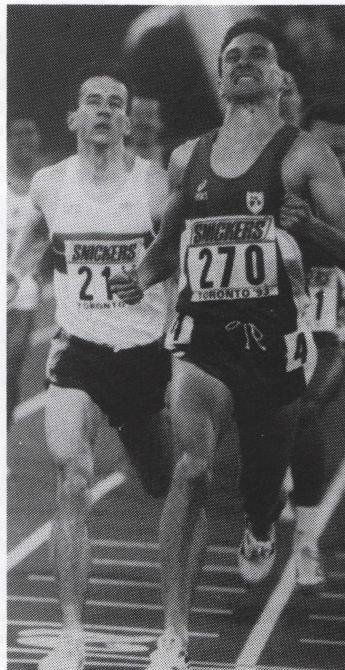
At the 1992 National Championships in Belfield there were Cork doubles in both the 800 and the 1,500 metres. Marcus and Sonia won the two 800 metres and Garret Barry of North Cork and Valerie Vaughan took the 1,500 metre titles. Liam O'Brien retained his steeplechase title and in the javelin Paddy Moore created history through taking the bronze. The evergreen Leevale man had won a Championship medal in the 'sixties, 'seventies, 'eighties and now the 'nineties!

Three Cork athletes were in the Irish team at the Barcelona Olympics. Marcus narrowly missed out on a final placing in the 1,500 metres; Sonia ran a brilliant 3,000 metres and was just out of the medals and Sean Dollman ran in the 10,000 metres. Throughout the Summer Sonia O'Sullivan was proving herself to be among the very top women runners in the World. Her tally of victories was quite something else as was the new list of National records as she continually ran personal best times on the tracks of Europe. At the end of the year Sonia held the Irish record in the 1,500 metres (4;01,23), the mile (4;24,23), the 3,000 metres (8;37,92) and finally the 5,000 metres (14;59,11). There was also a 2;03,39 800 metres which was just outside Caroline O'Shea's National figures.

This past winter Marcus was back to his winning ways in the World Indoors. He faithfully delivered his third World Indoor title in Toronto, Canada. One could only marvel at one who surely ranks among the top middle distance men of the past decade. Three World Titles and quite a few 'finals' at World Championships and Olympic Games singles Marcus out as among the all-time greats in athletics.

At 31, Marcus' mastery of the art of indoor running had certainly not diminished. His determination to win was very evident in this particular gold medal winning performance.

He left a very strong field in his wake as he gritted to that particular win and a very rare hat-trick of major Championship successes.



The promotion of track & field athletics remains a concern of the County Board. Besides the efforts made to rejuvenate this all important area of the sport the County Decathlon was again held this year - after a break of several years. A County veterans' multi-events was also held proving very successful. The County Championships was the best for many a year with strong and full fields in practically all the events. Through these promotions this particular branch of the sport can only grow and will once again thrive.

The support of the 'local' media continues to improve and the CORK EXAMINER gives what is regarded by many as the best athletics coverage by any newspaper in the country. In June 1992 a two page spread was devoted to 'local' athletics in the EVENING ECHO.

The EVENING ECHO Ladies' mini-marathon continues to attract much attention. The 1992 race attracted an entry in excess of two thousand two hundred women runners. The event provides a good run for the top athletes in the country yet for many in the race there is the simple aim to complete the course. In addition the event provides many with an opportunity to raise money for charity. The event is as much a social occasion as it is a competitive run for the top athlete.

Athletics continues to be a quite popular sporting activity in the county. The exploits on the international scene of Marcus O'Sullivan, Anita Philpott, Valerie Vaughan, Mark Carroll Sonia O'Sullivan, Liam O'Brien, Garret Barry, Valerie Vaughan and Brid Dennehy to name but a few ensures that athletics remains very much in the limelight. The junior and juvenile athletes in the County are of a high quality and in this regard the coaches, mentors and administrators of the many clubs can justifiably look to the future with confidence. There are many who can expect to reach international standard in the future.

Within the county at present there remains much talent - talent that is spread throughout the whole range of track & field athletics. The junior and juvenile elements in the County have never been at a stronger level and the County BLOE Board are ensuring that progress in this area will continue unabated.

The future looks very bright provided the effort is made to ensure that the senior athlete is looked after - both the International and the local 'star'. Both have their place in the sport and great care must be taken to ensure that the athlete who remains in Cork is catered for in his training and through adequate competition. Athletics has a very broad base; the County enjoys tremendous success in cross-country and road racing. National and International Championships have been secured on a regular basis in these. Yet the area of track & field has to be further examined to ensure that Cork will once again rise to the pre-eminence it enjoyed a decade ago.

The first twenty five years have provided many an enjoyable spectacle and thrill; no doubt the next quarter century will be equally as successful for all concerned in the sport of athletics in the County.