

## Report of the Honorary President 2002/2003

The last twelve months have been fast moving. The IUAA has set significant markers in what it has done this season, of which it can be proud. It also showed some obvious failings, but all in all the service offered and delivered to the membership last season, has been well received and much appreciated.

Progress has taken place on a range of issues that have been of interest to the development of the IUAA. Our relationship with the new AAI (post May 2002 congress) has been positive, progressive and of mutual benefit. To date two formal meetings have taken place at which a wide range of topics have been discussed. Several informal exchanges have also taken place. The three most significant decisions taken were (1) to allow the AAI send a technical representative to the IUAA championships, (2) to work with the IUAA in setting the race calendar and (3) that whenever possible that the IUAA and the AAI would submit a joint nomination to CUSAI for positions relating to World University Games and Championships. The championship dates for the 2003/2004 season and the appointment of Mr Ian O'Neill as Team Coach for the 2004 cross country are a direct consequence of our two organisations working together. Further meetings with the AAI are planned and the IUAA looks forward to working closely with the AAI to build for the future. In addition to the AAI, the IUAA has also spoken with the ISAA (Irish Schools Athletics Association). The main outcome of this meeting was that all reasonable efforts should be made to keep young people in athletics and sport in general when they enter third level education. It was agreed that as a first step the best way was to provide increased awareness to the schools' athletes that there is structured athletics available to them at third level. To this end a notice was placed in the program of the National Schools T&F providing details of the IUAA's activities. It is hoped to maintain and develop more such initiatives over the coming years.

As part of our ongoing investment in the IUAA championships and their infrastructure, the IUAA introduced race numbers at the 2002/2003 Indoor championships. These numbers have been hugely successful and were welcomed by the athletes. They have also been the main contributory factor in the increased traffic through the IUAA website in the last ten months. Additionally we have been continuing to invest in Information Technology and this investment has contributed significantly to the improvement of service offered by the IUAA to both its member colleges and athletes. The IUAA is continuing with this investment so as to develop and improve our services. I would like to take this opportunity to thank, on behalf of the IUAA executive, Mr Brian Foley who has contributed significant amounts of his time and talents to the IUAA on this project and to add that the IUAA is indebted to him for his services over the last number of years.

The most significant achievement over the last number of years has been our ability to make the IUAA championships attractive to athletes of all abilities within the vast majority of Irish Colleges. This task has been by no means easy, but a large proportion of it has been achieved through getting the fundamentals right. However with the rotating nature of the IUAA championships, getting the fundamentals right year in year out is a very repetitive task that mustn't be overlooked. The presence of many of Ireland's top young athletes at IUAA championships is a testament to the

quality of our championships. However the true test of whether a championship is properly constructed lies in the ability to attract athletes of all abilities to the championship. This has clearly been achieved over the last number of years and was particularly evident at the Road Relays and the Cross Country this season. It is essential that the IUAA proceeds so as to build on this hard work. Development and adaptation are vital to our future.

Hosting an IUAA championship is no small undertaking. The time and commitment required by a host college is substantial. The IUAA is working to reduce this work load and to standardise certain aspects of the championships while still leaving room for a host college to show some creativity. The hard work of the host colleges last season was recognised by both the membership of the IUAA and the Executive and I am certain that everyone will join me in thanking, NUI-Maynooth, DCU and NUI-Galway for the excellent work that they put into the championships last season.

Before moving away from the topic of IUAA championships there is one very important topic that is all too often overlooked and that is the tireless work of the officials at Championship weekends. The majority of these people contribute significantly more than most people realise. Their selfless actions are the backbone of IUAA championship weekends and without them the efforts of the host member would be lost. On behalf of the IUAA Executive I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed their time and experience to the IUAA and to assure you that it didn't go unnoticed and was greatly appreciated by everyone involved.

The Celtic Cross Country was successfully held for the first time in three years. As the main event coordinator, I was very happy that everything that could have gone right on the day did go right. However despite the apparent success of this year's event I must warn all concerned parties that it will be impossible for this event to go ahead in two years time without considerable outside financial investment. This year's event may have only cost the IUAA in the region of €2500, the cheapest Celtic to date, but this figure is artificially low due to the limited number of athletes from visiting teams and the unusually high percentage of Dublin based IUAA athletes which significantly reduced accommodation costs. The real cost should have been in the region of €5000+, which represents 50% of the current annual income of the IUAA. This figure is, I believe, too high a price to justify for such a small number of IUAA athletes, keeping in mind that this money is provided by the membership for the membership. The nature of this event doesn't however lend itself to private investments unless it comes from a contact. For this event to take place in Spring 2005 significant time and effort is required along with an outside investment of €4000+ euro. This is a tall order and one that for the moment I feel is beyond the reach of the IUAA. Maybe I will be proved wrong, but for this event to continue significant change and commitment will be required from the IUAA Executive.

The World Student Games in Korea provided six IUAA athletes with an opportunity to gain invaluable experience of top level athletics. The deliberate clash of the championships with the IAAF World Championships may have marginally reduced the number of athletes and the standard of athletics at the Games, but this was to the advantage of the Irish athletes and it gave them the opportunity to progress through a number of rounds. This type of experience is far more valuable to upcoming athletes

than just one round of competition. Having spoken to one of the Irish athletes about their experiences, I am certain that this type of competition is invaluable to young Irish athletes.

Trophies pick up minor knocks annually which usually go unnoticed, but which over the passage of time combine to significantly degrade the overall appearance of a trophy. Being presented with a trophy that is in need of repair is not as rewarding an experience for the recipient as it should be. The IUAA has embarked on a repair program for its trophies. In the last twelve months a number of repairs have been performed, most notably the purchase of a replacement lid for the J. P. O'Sullivan Cup. The cup was also regulated and a temporary base inserted. The 130<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Intervarsity athletics in Ireland was fittingly marked by the restoration of this trophy. Over the next two years, repairs are planned for other trophies as well as the purchase of bases for the older trophies to replace the ones lost in the distant and not so distant past.

There are a few people that I would like to say a special thank you to for their help and support over the last twelve months. I would like to thank Michael Hillery, Eric Brady, Cyril White and Cyril Smyth for all their very sound and at times invaluable advice on a range of difficult issues during my first year as President. Also the latter two for performing starting duties, hail, rain or snow at the IUAA championships. Noel Pollock for the outstanding job he has performed as treasurer over the last three years and for not crumbling under all the additional demands that I placed on him over the last twelve months. Ian O'Sullivan not only for reading the emails that I sent him but also for performing all the essential tasks listed in them. His efforts kept my head above water on a number of occasions during the year. Ian O'Neill for all his efforts in relation to the Celtic Cross Country and the Antrim International. I would also like to thank the three undergraduate members on the IUAA executive for their contribution. However I do feel that with the commitments undergraduates are already committed to in relation to their studies, training, competitions and college athletics clubs, that serving on the IUAA executive is one commitment too many, in most cases. The IUAA should be moving away from a situation whereby we have undergraduate members on the executive, as their ability to commit to core responsibilities on championship weekends can be severely compromised.

I was under no illusions of the tasks facing the IUAA when I took on the position of President twelve months ago. There were a number of outstanding issues that needed urgent attention so as to ensure the IUAA didn't come an irrelevance in the twenty-first century. An urgent sense of identity was required. However what took me by surprise was the range of issues that arose through what I would classify as inappropriate actions taken by people who had no interests in the implications of their action other than to ensure the issues benefited them. This deeply disappointed me during the year as it severely compromised the IUAA on a number of occasions.

A very negative paragraph you might say, but when you are aiming for the utmost in professionalism and are satisfied with nothing less it is all too often you find yourself asking questions you shouldn't need to be asking. The sheer number of issues facing the IUAA is bordering on alarming. These include, in no particular order, how to address the fact that several of the Institutes of Technology don't seem interested in sending athletes to all the IUAA championships. How can we increase the number of

athletes, of all standards, competing in our championships? The difficult issue of athlete eligibility and in particular from students in colleges who don't currently fit the IUAA eligibility requirements, of which there are a lot. Athlete eligibility within the current membership. Being ready to deal with the influx of membership applications from small colleges looking to affiliate for one athlete and the administration nightmare associated with this. The ongoing problem of finding competent officials and finding a way to fund them, as regrettably the days of people volunteering their services for free is limited. The issue of guesting in what are a closed championship. The problems that emerge as a result of increased awareness. Finding a source of finance that will enable the IUAA to deliver on a level never previously envisaged. Finding people who are prepared to take responsibility and the workload associated with it. To raise the level of professionalism in all aspects of the association. To forge closer ties with the Athletics Association of Ireland and the Irish Sports Council. The upcoming merger of the ISSA and CUSAI and its implications for the IUAA. To be able to withstand the pressure exerted by outside people, who think the IUAA is there to provide a platform for their ideals without first researching their proposed actions. To resolve the issue of electronic timing and its inability to deliver in Irish athletics.

The list goes on but there is one focus that the IUAA is missing. Where are we going? What is our purpose? Who are we? A strategic plan is needed to define our road into the future. These however don't just appear out of fresh air. I committed myself to launching the strategic plan at this years AGM. On this front I have failed. The motions before you today are designed to lay some of the foundations for the future but are a long way short of what is required to secure our place in Irish athletics. Looking back and reflecting on the last twelve months, a lot has been achieved, that has moved the IUAA further along the road than it was at the start of the year, but a lot still remains to be done. Looking forward to the future, there is a lot of hard work needed and hopefully we can come out the other side better for it. We should be setting the standards that all other organisations are striving to achieve. We should be pioneering in everything that we do. Unity, focus, commitment, desire, ingenuity and hard work are prerequisites for this way forward. If the IUAA fails to deliver in any of these areas then our immediate and long term future is in serious doubt.

Yours truly,

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Stephen Lipson  
Honorary President 2002- 2003.

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Report proposed by

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Report seconded by