



Press Release
3rd March 2009

Irish team meet ahead of European Indoor Championships

Members of the Athletics Ireland team for the European Indoor Track and Field Championships met in Dublin today ahead of flying out to Turin tomorrow for the first major athletic Championships of the season.

The 18-strong team will be hoping for success in Italy and all eyes will be on David Gillick to see if he can repeat his remarkable performances from 2005 and 2007 when he took gold in the 400m. The Dundrum runner had a good season in 2008 breaking his own 400m record but failed to live up to expectations at the Olympics with a disappointing performance. He was back to his best in Dusseldorf in February and is currently ranked third in Europe.

Gillick is looking forward to the Championships and a chance to show everyone what he can do. *"I'm looking forward to getting out and competing. I'm not thinking about previous years, this is a new year and I have to prove myself all over again and I'm just can't wait to see what I can do out there."*

While many will be watching Gillick, the team has several other medal hopefuls including Olympic semi-finalist Paul Hession and Sligo's Mary Cullen. Hession was one of Ireland's star performers at the Beijing Olympics and will be hoping to go one step further in Turin when he competes in the 60m.

Cullen has been Ireland's in-form athlete over recent months. In December, the Providence based athlete came an agonising fourth at the European Cross Country Championships in Brussels, narrowly missing out on a medal. Since then she broke Sonia O'Sullivan's 3000m indoor record and came within a second of O'Sullivan's 5000m record. Cullen will go in the 3000m in Italy and will be pushing for a medal place.

Another athlete who many will be watching in Turin is Leevale's Derval O'Rourke. O'Rourke has had a couple of difficult years since her gold medal at the World Indoors but has shown glimpses of her true form this season. This included breaking 8 seconds in Prague last week for the first time since 2006 and she will have eyes on a final spot in Italy.

Patsy McGonagle, Team Manager, pointed towards Ireland's excellent record at the European Indoors. *"We have always done well at the European Indoors with David (Gillick) in 2005 and 2007 and Alistair (Cragg) in 2005 also. Even before that we have always medalled or been very close and with the strength of the team this year we are very confident that we can come back with a medal or two again,"* McGonagle said.

The Irish team will also see some of Ireland's most promising athletes testing themselves against Europe's best. This includes Kelly Proper, Niamh Whelan and Zoe Brown who have all been in impressive form over the past few months.

Kelly Proper has established herself as Ireland's best long jumper. She currently holds the Irish record at senior, junior and U-23 level at both indoor and outdoor. Along with this Proper also recently took gold in the 200m at the Woodie's Indoor Championships in Belfast where she defeated Olympic champion Christine Ohuruogu.

Zoe Brown has had an impressive start to 2009. In winning at the Celtic Cup in Cardiff two weeks ago Brown broke the Irish Pole Vault record for the third weekend in a row by registering 4.20m and she will be hoping to continue this form in Turin.

Niamh Whelan is another of Ireland's young guns and she has been making huge waves in the athletics world. The Ferrybank runner will compete in the 60m in Italy, an event she is already national champion in at junior and senior level and recently set a new personal best of 7.49 while winning at the Celtic Cup in Cardiff.

Mary Coghlan, CEO of Athletics Ireland, said *"This Irish team is a combination of experienced and emerging athletes. For many athletes on the team this will be their first time to compete at a major senior championship and demonstrates how our development programmes are working to identify talented athletes and develop them to their full potential. These championships will be an important stepping stone*

for them in their athletic career and will pave the way for many of them to 2012.”

Liam Hennessy President of Athletics Ireland was optimistic at the announcement, *“Ireland’s record of success at the European Indoor Championships has been significant. One of the great occasions in the recent history of our sport was David Gillick winning the 400m title for the second time at the European Indoor Championships in Birmingham in 2007 with a new Irish record.”*

The European Indoor Track and Field Championships take place in Turin, Italy from the 6th to the 8th of March.

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Irish Team - European Indoor Championships

60m - Paul Hession (Athenry AC)

60m - Ailis McSweeney (Leevale AC)

60m - Niamh Whelan (Ferrybank AC)

400m - David Gillick (Dundrum South Dublin)

400m - Marian Andrews (Togher AC)

400m - Bronagh Furlong (Slaney Olympic AC)

800m - David McCarthy (La Cheile AC)

1500m - Roisin McGettigan (Sli Chulainn AC)

3000m - Deirdre Byrne (Sli Chulainn AC)

3000m - Mary Cullen (North Sligo AC)

60m H - Derval O’Rourke (Leevale AC)

High Jump - Deirdre Ryan (UCD AC)

Pole Vault - Zoe Brown (Unattached)

Long Jump - Kelly Proper (Ferrybank AC)

4x400m Relay - Marian Andrews (Togher AC)

Bronagh Furlong (Slaney Olympic AC)

Gemma Hynes (Galway City Harriers AC)

Claire Bergin (Dundrum South Dublin AC)

Christine McMahon (Ballymena & Antrim AC)

Jessica Zebo (Leevale AC)

Ends

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