**AIT International Grand Prix Event Review 2016**

The third annual AIT International Grand Prix proved to be a resounding success. With fields deeper than ever each event lived up to pre-hype expectations. Highlight of the night from an Irish perspective was Rose-Ann Galligan’s qualification for the World Indoor Championships in Portland. The Newbridge AC athlete ran a PB of 4:11:07 with a very strong and brave run in the company of some very big hitters in the 1500m.

Eight stadium records fell on the night and these included a world lead for 1500m, the Ethiopian Indoor men’s mile record and the Canadian Indoor women’s 800m record. Meet Director, Professor Ciarán Ó Catháin, said that, “the third annual event has brought the grand prix to a new level. The fields were full of talent, world championship standards were achieved in numerous events and to have national Ethiopian and Canadian indoor records set is phenomenal. Rose Anne Galligan’s qualification for the World Indoors 1500m is proof that this event is worth hosting, it doesn’t get much better than an Irish athlete reaching these standards at an event in their own country. Our feedback from the competing athletes is very positive and many have expressed a wish to return again to AIT. This bodes well for the 2017 event. "

**Pole Vault - Men**

World Champion, Shawn Barber (CAN), had to hold off the challenge of Sam Kendricks (USA) in the first Pole Vault event held at the grand prix. Kendricks had defeated Barber in Boston on the previous Sunday but he could not repeat that feat as Barber cleared 5.77m to take the spoils. This was a stadium record but three attempts at 5.89m failed to see the bar raised any higher. Kendricks also put in a class performance reaching 5.71m before failing at 5.83m but he did go on to win the Olympic Bronze medal in Rio last Summer.

**60m Hurdles - Women**

This event included two heats and a final. Shakira Nelvis (USA) was back to defend her title won in 2015 but she was beaten by one hundredth of a second in the final by Kristi Castlin (USA) who had a time of 7.92 (stadium record). Castlin, like Kendricks above in the Pole Vault, went on to win Olympic Bronze in Rio in her favourite 100m Hurdles. Sarah Lavin equalled her PB with a decent 8.25. Lily Ann O’Hora was just three hundredths of a second outside her PB while Catherine McManus had a solid run over the hurdles.

**60m – Women**

Barbara Pierre (USA) lived up to her favourite tag with a stadium record of 7.12 in the final having run 7.19 in the heat. A month later she became the World Indoor Champion in Portland for the 60m. Ukrainian Olesya Povkh took second place in 7.23. Any Foster was just one hundredth of a second outside her PB as she came third. Phil Healy, Ciara Neville, Niamh Whelan and Catherine McManus (again) got a taste of competition with the big names. AIT scholarship student and Mullingar Harrier Vicky Harris also gained invaluable experience here.

**Triple Jump – Men**

Fabian Florant triumphed in the Triple Jump despite picking up an injury. His first jump of 16.34 was enough to win the event and write a new stadium record. Karol Haufman (POL) was two centimetres behind with 16.34. Favourite for the win was Ukrainian Victor Lastrebov but he was well shy of his PB of 17.73 as he could only manage a distance of 15.89 for third place.

**60m – Men**

Three heats in the men’s 60m were used to decide the places for a final later in the night. D’Angelo Cherry (USA) who holds a blistering PB of 6.49 was fastest into the final with a 6.63. Indeed, the second fastest to qualify for the final also came from heat three which was a fine 6.69 by Ramon Gittens (NED). Gittens went to the World Indoor Championships and claimed Bronze after his exploits in AIT. Harry Aikines-Aryeetey and Diondre Batson won the first and second heats respectively in a time of 6.69. The fours athletes mentioned above all posted faster times in the final with Cherry first across the line in another stadium record of 6.58. Baston 6.62 and Gittens with a PB of 6.65 made up the podium. Irelands Craig Lynch ran a PB in the second heat with a time of 6.81.

**1500m – Women**

The women’s 1500m metres turned out to be one of the best races of the night for many athletes in the field. Five of the field ran under the standard for the World Indoor Championships which was 4:13:00. The big success in this race from the Irish perspective was Rose Ann Galligan’s fine third place with a PB of 4:11:07 that booked her spot on the flight to Portland, Oregon for those World Championships. No fewer than ten athletes that took the start line had PBs faster than Galligan who ran an incredibly brave race. Nancy Chepkwemoi (KEN) won the race in yet another stadium record of 4:08.46 with the 2015 winner Gesa Krause (GER) in second place. Alison Leonard (GBR) and Kristiina Maki (CZE) were the other athletes to dip under the world qualifying standard.

**800m – Women**

One of the headline athletes for the meet Melissa Bishop was a red hot favourite for the 800m race and she didn’t disappoint with a great 2:00:60 to break the Canadian 800m indoor record. It was a solid performance by the world outdoor silver medallist. Adelle Treacy (GBR) 2:02.34 was second while Anastasiya Tkachuk (UKR) took third place in 2:02.44. Kelly Neely and Katie Kirk had good races while Sinead Denny was pacemaker in both the 1500m and 800m. Race winner Melissa Bishop finished an agonising fourth at the Rio Olympic games last Summer.

**800m – Men**

The British contingent dominated the 800m with four GBR vests across the line first. Michael Rimmer was the winner in 1:48.13. Guy Learmonth 1:48.20 just edged out Jamie Webb 1:48.30 for second place. James Browness was the only other athlete under 1:48. Irishman Kiernan Kelly went sub 1:50, crossing the line in 1:49:48.

**400m – Men**

World Indoor champion Pavel Maslak (CZE) was a welcome late addition to the field for the 400m race. Three heats were organised with the fastest times being used in place of a final to decide the podium spots. Maslak stamped his superiority on his heat by winning in 46:07. Former world champion and three time Olympic medallist, Chris Brown, ran 46:96 to claim second place. Patrick Feeney (USA) who has ancestral links to count Galway came home third by winning his heat in 47 seconds flat. Brian Gregan will have been happy with his early season 47:62 when coming second to Maslak in the first heat. Timmy Crowe ran 48:18 in the third and slowest heat. Maslak retained his World Indoor title in March at the Portland Championships.

**Mile – Men**

Late withdrawals by Ben Blankenship and Ciaran O’Lionard didn’t damage the quality of the men’s mile. James Ledingham paced the race very well and opened the door for Ethiopian Dawit Wolde to break the Ethiopian indoor mile record and the stadium record. In March Wolde finished fifth in the World Championships. The event organisers also had timing equipment clocking the 1500m times of the competitors for world championship qualification purposes and Wolde’s time of  3:37.86 became a world lead over the distance. Wolde thrilled the packed arena with a virtuoso display of front running while Filip Sasinek (CZE) and Moses Lewis (GBR) chased hard to put down times of 4:00.07 and 4:02.40 respectively. Eoin Everard came fourth but actually was third fastest over the 1500m metre with a great 3:45:15.

**Gordon Brett**