

Major Award for Sean Naughton

Sean Naughton was awarded the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award at the National Athletics Awards last Saturday, 14th of November. The awards, in association with Woodie's DIY and Waterford Crystal, took place in the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Santry and saw 14 awards given out on the night.

It's difficult to know where to start when attempting to assess the vast contribution Sean Naughton has made to Irish athletics for more than half a century. The Nenagh man has been steeped in the sport since his teenage years, and a much longer account than this would be required to do justice to his achievements. In his prime, he was a national standard sprinter (a 9.8 seconds man for the 100 yards on grass), and once he hung up his spikes, he threw himself into coaching and administration with an enthusiasm that's still burning brightly.

He got his first taste of coaching when he attended a course at Loughborough University and two years later he was one of eight athletes who revived athletics in Nenagh 'by establishing Nenagh Olympics AC.

It was during the 1970s with Nenagh that Sean's talents as an administrator and coach really began to blossom. He helped start Community Games athletics in Nenagh in 1972, and the success of that project in turn bore fruit for Nenagh Olympics AC who won eight national club team titles in the 1970s, with Sean's sprinters and hurdlers leading the way for the rest of their club mates. By the mid 1970s, Sean had begun to coach at a national level and his expertise helped Nora O'Grady set a series of national records between 1976 and 1980. In more recent times, Gary Ryan, Brian & Shane Cullinane, Timmy Flannery and Eoin Naughton have benefitted greatly from Sean's tutelage.

He has the ability to imbue athletes with the same self-belief that had characterised his own running career, and from 1987 to 2003 he was an ever-present as a coach or manager with Irish teams at Olympic Games, World Indoors, World Outdoors, and European Championships at every level. Sean was seen by his charges as very much an 'athlete's man' whose attention to detail helped them perform to the best of their abilities and the proof of this was in the succession of personal bests, national records and medals secured by athletes under his watch.

All the time, though, his thoughts were never far from Nenagh, and in the mid-1980s he helped drive the construction of an indoor stadium in the town. Developed to international standard in three phases between 1984 and 1990, the Nenagh arena has made a massive difference to competitive standards at all grades in this country. On the administrative front, Sean has been elected as a member of the management and executive committees of the national athletics' governing bodies every year since 1989.

As an administrator, coach, manager and mentor, Sean Naughton has devoted his life to Irish athletics with a unique dedication and enthusiasm that makes him a most worthy recipient of this year's Lifetime Achievement Award.

On receiving the award Sean said: 'I am truly surprised and honoured to be receiving this award. I have played many sports over the years but without a doubt Athletics is the greatest sport of all'.