

JOHN TREACY "ON THIS DAY" 30 YEARS AGO RETAINS HIS WORLD CROSS COUNTRY TITLE IN LIMERICK.

The following articles recall a famous day in Irish athletics history when John Treacy from Villierstown, Co. Waterford retained his world cross country title on the Limerick race course amid a throng of hysterical fans. John had the previous year won the first of his two world crowns in Bellahouston Park, Glasgow. March 25th 1979 is a day that many Irish people can still recall with pride and passion, as can be witnessed in the famous photo taken as Treacy came into the finishing chute by renowned Dungarvan photographer Rory Wyley which we are delighted to have included with this article. John of course went on to record many great achievements in his illustrious career which included an Olympic silver marathon medal in Los Angeles in 1984. However, many will arguably claim, that particular day in Limerick in 1979 cannot be equalled by any other in Tracey's career. It was a proud day to say you were from Ireland, or better still from Waterford or even better still again Villierstown and there were many -"The world had to know". One could write about the occasion all these years later but why not rerun the written word as it appeared in the local press recalling the moment because these reporters were the ones on the ground who were there when it all happened. For those who witnessed the occasion it will bring back happy memories and for the present generation who were not even on god's earth, here's a little bit of history recalling one of the greats -John Treacy and more importantly remembering that he is "one of our own". The following articles are taken from local press reports of that great day and it is only rite and proper that 30 years on we should take a look back at what was a remarkable achievement. When one asks the question today,-when will another Irish man win a world cross country title, indeed it could be asked when will a non African athlete ever again win a world cross country title? Not in my life time I bet.

HIGH NOON IN VILLIERSTOWN AND THE PRESSURE GROWS ON JOHN TREACY. (FRIDAY MARCH 23 1979)

Two days to go to that faithful day on Sunday March 25th 1979 when a young man called John Treacy from a little known village called Villierstown in Co. Waterford in the south of Ireland set the athletics world alight for the second time in twelve months, read on.

Villierstown, Co Waterford (population 210), is the home of World Cross Country Champion John Treacy and his brother Ray, two key members of the Irish team for Sunday's test in Limerick. Our athletics correspondent reports on a day he spent with the talented brothers.

It's high noon but the village is deserted. Not a soul on the move. A terrier dog breaks into a trot as he crosses the road. With the Postal Strike, it means less people than usual are frequenting Treacy's shop. The doors of the one local pub are still closed. The second one, owned by a farmer, has not been opened for business in more than a year.

You could almost sense that the last thing John wanted to talk about was the possibility of successfully defending his title in Limerick. "I'm in good

shape", was all he offered at first. "He's in great shape", added Ray. But then Ray was the early leader. In fact, had it not been for Ray, John might have never taken up running. "About a week after I started to run in Juvenile events John was running too, recalled Ray, currently on leave from the bank while he attends Providence College where he's now in his first year.

John has sacrificed much of the indoor season to reserve himself for this race. "I'm a year older (22) and a year stronger, I also increased my weekly mileage from September to December from the previous year. In fact all my plans have worked out to perfection under my coach at Providence, Bob Amato. John went outside to stretch his feet and Ray, quizzed about his brothers capabilities and strong points said, "He's got a deceptively long stride but most of all he's got fierce guts and determination. He never gives up and always seems to be able to produce it on the day".

The Treacy brothers enjoyed a normal boyhood upbringing, nothing special. They walked to and from the local National School but John began running the five miles to and from Cappoquin Secondary School at the age of 16 and maintained it until he graduated in 1974 with an honours Leaving Cert. John and Ray provide strong moral support for each other. One seems to take pride in the achievements and improvements of the other. They both know the effort, which each of them is putting into athletics and no one would be happier than Ray to see John retain his title. Likewise, John would be delighted were Ray to fulfill his capabilities and get a place worthy of his talents. "Ray has done the work. He will give the Irish team a great lift", says John. Either way both of them will be putting every ounce of their strength into giving Irish supporters something to cheer about in Limerick come Sunday.

KING JOHN RETAINS WORLD CROWN

This piece was superbly written in a local paper recalling the actual race itself.

John Treacy, the frail looking young man from Villierstown who surprised everyone with a magnificent victory when he won the World Cross Country title at Bellahouston, Glasgow, last year, has again become the toast not only of his native Villierstown and County Waterford but all of Ireland and indeed wherever cross country running is discussed.

With a performance of pure class John glided over the 7½ mile mud churned course at Greenpark, Limerick on Sunday last to make mince meat of the big field of the greatest distance runners in the world, representing 23 countries, and just as last year, in the pouring rain and blowing wind, he made it look easy with a performance that has already, so early in his young career, put him up among the all-time greats. In taking the world title for the second successive year, the 21-year-old Treacy has made history as the first man ever to achieve this. Last Sunday's performance was a truly regal one as King John retained his crown and while John again won the gold, the Irish team captained by the veteran Donegal postman, Danny Mc Daid made it a remarkable performance for the host country when they took the silver medals with second place behind England in the team ratings. Apart from Treacy's absolutely fantastic run, Mc Daid in finishing 11th, at the age of 38 was

one of the heroes of the Irish team while another Waterford man Gerry Deegan, although not performing as well as expected, nonetheless played a big part in Ireland's fine team rating when he finished 43rd. The other Irish placings were M.O'Shea 46th, D. Walsh 47th, T.O'Brien 50th , E. Coughlan 70th, Ray Treacy (John's brother) 79th and Eddy Leddy 127th.

GOING WELL

Treacy was away with the leaders but he elected to drop back deep and let the eager Nick Rose of England and the Belgian, Leon Schots, hammer out the early pace. The Irishman, tracked early on by teammate Gerry Deegan, bounced between 12th and 20th place for the first 400 metres. "I knew at 400 I was really going well. I knew I felt good", he explained.

He passed the stands deep in the pack as Christoph Herie (Germany) went up to Rose and Schots, who were headed momentarily. Herie hit the front and was chased by Tony Simmons who took over the lead momentarily with Treacy now a definite 12th and the field settling into the type of forceful running that is the hallmark of the world championship.

Schots again surged to the front with Rose on his shoulder and Treacy loping along comfortably, picking up another seven places. He raced into top gear and in less than 20 strides was third. Then it was Schots with Treacy on his shoulder and the big Belgian, looking back was clearly worried by the Irishman's surge to the front line

"AFRAID OF ME"

Turning to come back around towards the stand they split up. Schots ran wide and Treacy hugged the other side of the track. "He wanted to be away from me," Treacy explained afterwards. "I moved back in to him. I had 30,000 Irish people behind me."

Treacy then took command up front. Schots moved out to his right shoulder and already Rose, a young Nat Muir, heading for a splendid run, and Tony Simmons began to lose touch as did Steve Jones, who had been up all the way and now laboured under considerable pressure.

And so it remained from there on as Treacy continued to open the gap between himself and the rest of the field. However disaster loomed around the horizon as he swept around the bend to tackle the second last lap. "You have this race won John. I said to myself. But then I slipped. I went down on my hands but I bounced back up . I only lost a couple of seconds," was how Treacy described the incident which left some spectators breathless.

He did have the race won at that stage. All opposition was now virtually out of sight but a new threat loomed. Frenzied spectators breached the barriers, climbed through the wire and stormed across the course to urge on their champion. Flag waving fanatics ran along the outside of the course with him.

"SCARED"

"I was really scared," he said, "That really scared me. I did not know what was going to happen." Now the crowds who earlier lifted him with their cheers were a real threat. But he weathered the storm and smiled all the way round the last lap before crossing the line with his hands held high in that

now famous victory salute.

MIGHTY CHEERING

The crowd estimated at more than 22,000 braved the terrible weather conditions and went wild with excitement as John crossed the line to the echoes of their mighty cheers. He had covered the 10,000 metres of the gluepot course in 37 min. 20 secs., nine seconds in front of the Pole, Bronislav Malinowski while the Russian Antipov who was 2nd to Treacy last year was forced into 3rd place with Simmons (Wales) 4th and Schots (Belguim) 5th.

FACT FILE.

John Treacy -born June 4, 1957 in Villierstown near Dungarvan, County Waterford.

College Education: Providence University, MBA degree.

1974 & 1975 3rd place junior events World Cross Country championships

1978 (Glasgow) & 1979 (Limerick) World Cross-Country champion

1979 Silver medal: European Junior 5000 meters.

1984 Silver medal: Marathon, Olympic Games in Los Angeles (2:09.56).

Winner of the Irish 5000 metres between 1978 to 1984 and 10000 metres

between 1985 to 1987. Irish track records 3000 metres 1980 (7:45.22), 5000

metres 1984 (13:16.81), 10000 metres 1989 (27:55.80) & 20000 metres 1987

(61:10.1)

Texaco Sportstar Award for Athletics 1978, 1979 & 1984 and Supreme Sportstar 1979.

1992 (Los Angles) & 1993 (Dublin) Marathon winner.

He is one of four Irishmen to have competed in four Olympic Games and the first sportsman to be given the freedom of Waterford City. He is also an Honorary Fellow of Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

He is currently chief executive of the Irish Sports Council. He is married to Fionnuala and they have four children, Caoimhe and Deirdre, Sean and Conor.

COME RUN WITH THE LEGEND.

This coming May 17th why not join with Waterford County Council, Waterford Sports Partnership, West Waterford AC, Waterford AC and John's local community along with hundreds of running enthusiasts in celebrating John's achievements by taking part in the John Treacy race or fun run and help to raise funds for John's nominated charity Concern, You have a choice of two distances the classic 10 mile course or to join family and friends along the route of the 5k fun run/walk. This year sees the 30th anniversary of John's famous IAAF World Cross Country Championship victory in Limerick in 1979 why not come along and celebrate the achievements of one of our very own. Make a date for your diary for the John Treacy 10 Mile Classic or bring the whole family along and join in the fun of the 5k Fun Run/Walk. The event takes place on Sunday 17th May 2009 at 12:30 p.m. in Villerstown, Co. Waterford. Check it out on line at www.johntreacyclassic.com
SEE YOU AT THE GATE.!!

(Compiled by james veale)