

## DCH AC – Women's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ball

Good evening, DCH President & Chairperson Kevin, Athletics Ireland Life Vice President Dermot, Former President of BLE Mick, Club Captain Cliona, DCH club members past and present and friends,

It is a huge honour to be here tonight to celebrate 50 years of the Dublin City Harriers and, in particular, the incredible women who have been the heartbeat of this club. As President of Athletics Ireland, it fills me with immense pride to see a club not only celebrate a half a century of achievement, but a club that has stood the test of time and continues to thrive with remarkable success.

Looking back through the archives of Irish athletics, the achievements of DCH athletes are immense across all aspects of athletics – track, field, cross county and road. I would be here all evening to detail all the brilliant achievements so I will attempt to summarise with a few snippets of excellence of the DCH women athletes over the last 50 years.

The name Dublin City Harriers is synonymous with excellence. The achievements of the DCH women are a testament to dedication, teamwork, and an unyielding competitive spirit that lies at the heart of your club

DCH women's achievements have shaped Irish athletics history especially in women's cross country. The year 1985 stands out, when the Dublin City Harriers Women's Cross Country team travelled to Madrid for the European Clubs Cross Country Team Championships. Competing in a European Club Championship would not have been the norm for Irish clubs at that time and demonstrated exceptional vision from your club leaders at that time. With a masterful performance, DCH women became European Club Team Champions, securing first place with just 34 points. I would like to acknowledge the incredible athletes from that day: Louise McGrillen, Anne Hilliard, Greta Hickey, Deirdre Nagle, and Eithne Kenny. You set a standard of excellence that still inspires us

today as Irish club teams compete in the European Inter Club stage.

The following year, in 1986, this team demonstrated that their 1985 achievement was not a fluke. At the European Club Cross Country in Portugal, you once again stood on the top step of the podium as Team Champions. The dedication was clear in every stride, from Anne Hilliard's fantastic 8th place finish to the determined performances of Greta Hickey, Deirdre Nagle, Ailish Smyth, the late Ursula Noctor, and Eithne Kenny. I remember, as a young athlete myself, being so inspired by this team. I can clearly recall as a young juvenile athlete seeing the victorious 1986 European Club Cross Country team on the front page of *Irish Runner Magazine*, on a snow covered course in Portugal and thinking to myself –‘my goodness, they are an amazing team!’.

The story of DCH women’s athletics isn’t just about two superb European club titles. It is a story of national dominance, a dynasty built on consistent hard work. The sequence of 16 consecutive National Senior Women Club Cross Country titles, from 1977 to 1992, is simply staggering. It is a feat of endurance and talent that may never be matched. And to see that fire rekindled in recent years, with titles in 2022 and 2023, bringing the total to an incredible 18, demonstrates the enduring spirit of DCH club.

Over the years, DCH have had many individual stars who shone so brightly on the national stage, lifting the club to glory. The names of Deirdre Nagle, our National Senior Cross Country Champion in 1975, and Louise McGrillen, a two-time champion in 1983 and 1985, are rightfully etched into the annals of Irish sport.

The DCH women’s athletics story isn’t just about cross country, or two incredible European titles. The club's legacy of outstanding athletes spans the full spectrum of athletics events. Exceptional athletes such as Ciara Sheehy and Patricaia Ammond 100m & 200m, Emma Nicholson and Karen Shinkins in the 400m, Nadia Power in the 800m, Una English in 1500m 3k and steeplechase, Adrienne McIvor 400m hurdles, and Catherine McManus in the sprints and hurdles, Siobhan Treacy, Mary McKenna and Jodie McCann all come to mind. I recall as a young juvenile athlete admiring the achievements of Bridget Corrigan in

the high jump, the youngest athlete to have ever been capped for Ireland , Lorraine Shaw in throws, Terri Horgan in the long jump and Lisa Sheridan in race walks, all demonstrating the strength and depth of your club. Deirdre Nagle remains the 3<sup>rd</sup> most capped athlete for Ireland with 32 representations in our green singlet.

And to bring us full circle to the present day, what a statement DCH AC made in 2022 by winning all available Cross Country team titles at both National and Leinster level. This proves that the legacy you honour tonight is not just a part of history—it is a living, breathing, and thriving force in Irish athletics today.

I would like to thank the wonderful women in DCH who have given back to our sport in a coaching and administrative capacity within DCH , at Dublin County Board level and at National level. I especially thank my friend, Greta Hickey who I have worked closely with at Board and committee level in recent years. Hello also to another friend Laura Brennan, a new member I believe of DCH who I have worked with at Board level in Athletics Ireland. And while it is a night where we are celebrating the wonderful women within DCH, beside all these women are also remarkable men who have contributed hugely to the success of the club and to Athletics Ireland . Well done to all those gentlemen also.

So to all the women of Dublin City Harriers, past and present, congratulations. You have not only achieved at the highest levels, you have paved the way. You have inspired generations of young girls and women to lace up their shoes and chase their dreams.

I wish you all a wonderful night, you have lots to celebrate and another 50 years of leading the way and lots success, both on and off the tracks, fields and roads. Thank you.