

# Marathon



16-page souvenir supplement



Sean Hehir of Rathfarnham WSAF crosses the line to win the men's race in a time of 2:18.19. Right: Women's race winner Maria McCambridge, Dundrum South Dublin AC, punches the air as she approaches the line in a time of 2:38:51. PAT MURPHY AND STEPHEN MCCARTHY / SPORTSFILM

# Hehir and McCambridge complete All-Ireland glory

Cliona Foley

**WHATSOEVER is in the water in Clare they should start bottling it!**

A month after Banner hurling captain Pat Donnellan lifted the Liam MacCarthy Cup, his primary school classmate became the first Irishman in 20 years to win the Airticity Dublin Marathon.

"We were in the same class, it's just a small coincidence," said Sean Hehir (28) from Kilkishen, near Tulla, after making some more sporting history for the blue and saffron yesterday. The Inchicoore-based primary school

teacher has plenty of roots in Clare hurling himself as his father Sean played half-back for the county alongside Ger Loughnane and Sean Stack and won National League honours.

Hehir's younger brother Diarmuid was a recent Clare U-21 hurler, his sister Cushtia Og plays camogie and runs for the county, and there to greet him on the finish line yesterday was his mum Cushtia, who is a former junior international runner.

"Patrick Donnellan is from the same village," Hehir explained. "I met him at the East Clare 10km this year and I was in Croke Park for

both All-Ireland finals.

"Yes, it has been a good year for Clare," he agreed.

Hehir's historic victory added to the Banner's sporting roar as he breasted the tape in 2:18.19 to become the first Irishman to win the Dublin Marathon since John Treacy in 1993.

He was 13th overall last year and was helped by the fact that the race included no foreign elite runners this year, but still had to survive a ding-dong battle with Dundrum South Dublin's Joe Sweeney, and also had a very narrow escape with a cyclist in the final few miles.



Clare hurling hero, and Sean Hehir's former classmate Pat Donnellan

Hehir's coach Dick Hooper, a three-time Dublin winner himself, scored a

big double as he also coaches Maria McCambridge of DSD, who was the first Irish winner of the women's race since Sonia O'Sullivan in 2000.

Fears of a hurricane had forced the organisers to pull out all contingencies, including having tree surgeons on standby in case any trees came down in the Phoenix Park, but conditions turned out to be far better than expected.

And despite the absence of international invitees, huge crowds turned out to cheer on the 14,500 participants, and many felt the atmosphere at the 34th Dublin Marathon was the best in years.

**ON THURSDAY: Don't miss your Dublin Marathon special in Fit magazine**

# DUBLIN MARATHON RESULTS

From left: Kerry footballer Colm Cooper with Miall O'Loingsigh, from Tralee, and Kerry team doctor, Michael Finerty, from Tralee; Diane Jordan, left, and Florrie Swords both from Westford celebrate as they cross the line; Race winners Maria McCambridge and Sean Hehir

BARRY CREGG, RAMSEY CARDY AND STEPHEN MCCARTHY / SPORTSFILE



# Hehir reigns in throwback to Irish golden age



CLIONA FOLEY

WITH two runners coached by a pair of Irish distance legends going head-to-head for yesterday's 34th Aitricity Dublin Marathon title, it always promised to be a classic and did not disappoint.

Clare native Sean Hehir (28), who runs for Rathfarnham WSAF, took the spoils.

The Inchicore primary school teacher was disappointed with his winning time (2:18:19) because 2:17's needed for next summer's European Championships, but to become the first Irishman in 20 years to win Dublin more than made up for that.

And DSD's Joe Sweeney (28), runner-up with his brave 2:19:26 debut, contributed just as much to their enthralling 26-mile tussle which recalled fond memories of their mentors' great rivalry.

With sponsors Aitricity only coming on board mid-summer, Dublin's organisers had no budget this year to invite foreign elites.

What transpired indicated that nothing much was lost by their absence and, perhaps, much more was gained.

The Irish championships are now run in conjunction with Dublin's city marathon and Hehir's 2:17:19 debut left him runner-up, nationally, last year.

For 20 years the front of Dublin's Bank Holiday field has been dominated by foreign professionals, forcing Ireland's best to play mere supporting roles, but domestic athletes were finally given centre stage again yesterday.

They had a shot to not just win the Irish title but also the Dublin crown, which had not been won by an Irishman since Olympic silver medalist John Treacy in 1993.

As Hehir admitted: "We knew we

had the chance of a lifetime." Both were also carrying a metaphorical baton.

Dick Hooper, a three-time Dublin winner and Olympian who won the inaugural event back in 1980, coaches Hehir. Sweeney is coached by Jerry Kiernan, another legendary Olympian and 2:14 man who helped put the nascent Dublin race on the map, winning it twice - and 10 years apart - in 1982 and 1992.

Their charges' predicted two-man shoot-out emerged within the first mile with an immediate four-man breakaway that included pacemakers Colm Rooney and Brian Maher. Rooney dropped out after six miles, Maher was gone by 10 and then all eyes focused on the fascinating cat-and-mouse game between the more compact but experienced Hehir against the callow six-footer Sweeney.

## TESTED

At mile nine the rookie tested the water with a 5:06 mile surge but they had slowed down to 5:20s by the time they went through halfway together in 68 minutes and 25 seconds, when a sub-2:17 was still possible.

Sweeney made another 5:08 surge in the 15th mile, which opened up a nine-second lead up Milltown Road.

But by the time they had reached Clonskeagh Road, Hehir was back on his shoulder and then made his own key move, switching inside to run on the footpath in that pivotal 20th mile and extending his lead to 30 metres by the time they turned for home off Foster's Avenue.

Both men were suffering by then and slowing down but Hehir pushed better through the pain barrier.

"With athletes of this calibre, a guy who was fifth in European Cross-Countries and a 2:15 runner (the personal best of eventual third-placed Sergiu Ciobanu, the well-known Moldovan

who runs for Clonliffe Harriers) - you have to respect that and it wasn't until I got to within 30-40m of the finish line that I could relax," Hehir said.

He revealed that a talk given by Treacy to the 'Marathon Mission' group two weeks ago formed part of his inspiration.

"To be the first Irishman to win it since him in 1993 is really a special feeling. Working with Dick has instilled a new sense of self-belief in me. I've done things I never thought would be possible," Hehir admitted, including running on the Irish team with Sweeney at last year's European Cross-Countries.

Sweeney admitted to paying the price late on for making his move too early, something not uncommon for marathon debutants.

"The message from Jerry was to run smart. He said everyone will have good and bad patches and just to roll with the bad ones. He also said he'd kill me if I dropped out and that was in my mind the last five or six miles!" Sweeney quipped.

In the absence of foreign opposition, the women's race also had a thrilling climax.

Defending Irish champion Maria McCambridge was the long-time leader, coming through halfway in 79 minutes and 25 seconds, but Cork mother-of-three Claire McCarthy (nee Gibbons) stalked her throughout and when the DSD star stopped for a toilet break around 18 miles the Leevala woman overtook her and pulled 10 seconds clear.

McCambridge, who was unlucky to miss out on Olympic selection two summers ago, came back strongly and overtook her in the penultimate mile, winning in 2:38:51, just over half a minute clear of McCarthy's big PB (2:39:27), with Tullamore Olympian Pauline Curley adding another podium finish (2:42:57) to her many honours.

