

## Castlegar Athletic Club

The Castlegar Hurling Club Ladies Committee decided to hold a parish sports day on National Children's Day, Sunday, 8th June 1975. They enlisted the help of Seán Duffy and Patsy Durnin in the organisation of the event, which turned out to be an outstanding success. As a result, they decided to enter a team of 40 athletes in the County Community Games. Seán Duffy organised training sessions twice a week, a banner and a set of green and white singlets were purchased, and there was great excitement as the big day approached. This excitement reached fever pitch when Ann Fahy won the gold medal in the girls under-14 one hundred metres, and Patricia Grealish brought home a bronze medal in the girls under-12 two hundred metres.

So Castlegar Athletic Club was founded and registered with the BLE County Board. The first chairperson was Maureen Broderick from Bruckey and Maura Hynes from Ballindooley became the first secretary. Other committee members in those early years included John Coyne, Nellie Connolly, John Forde, John Joe Duggan, Tom Quirke, Ann Darcy, Noreena Ruane and Bernard Costelloe. These volunteers gave generously of their time in assisting at training, in transporting athletes to competitions all over the country and in collecting sponsorship and necessary funds.

The athletes immediately went into competition in the County Track Championships in Gort where Joe Grealish won the club's first title in the boys under-12 80m, and then went on to join Cormac Slevin, Paul O'Shaughnessy and John Fahy in winning the under-12 boys relay.

In early November 1975, the club entered the County cross-country championships for the first time and managed to beat established teams in both the boys and girls under-11 events. In the girls event, Niamh Scannell won the silver medal, and Marina Healy, Marie McGrath and Sandra Healy gave the necessary support for a team victory. It was a similar result for the boys with Gerry Broderick taking the individual title, with Gary O'Shaughnessy, Conor Slevin and Gary Walsh doing well enough to ensure another team win.

Soon they were competing in Connacht and in 1977, athletes from the club won their first Provincial team title when Bernie Grealish, Mary King, Marie McGrath, Sinéad Keaney, Niamh Scannell (who won the individual silver) and Mary Keane (who won the bronze) made up the victorious Castlegar Primary School team. The following year, Thomas Connell brought home the club's first national title when winning the under-12 600m at the Community Games finals in Mosney. He repeated that feat when taking the boys under-14 title in 1980, and in 1982, just failed to make it a hat-trick when taking silver in the under-16 1500m. Other athletes to win national titles around that time were Valerie Burke in the girls under-14 400m in 1984, Kevin Quirke in the boys under-11 60m hurdles in 1985 and under-12 hurdles in 1986.

The club continued to produce many fine athletes, particularly strong relay teams in the eighties and five event teams (hurdles, shot putt, long jump, 800m and relay) in the late 1980's and early 90's. Many of these competitors, too numerous to name here, graduated to senior level, often with great success.

In the 1990's, Kathryn Casserley was one of the top juvenile athletes in the country. She won her age group national cross country title on 4 consecutive occasions, 6 national track titles and 5 indoor titles, and she represented Ireland with distinction many times.

Up to 1995, the club had a registered membership of 60-70 athletes, but since then, due to a shortage of volunteers, it has wound down significantly with only about a dozen senior athletes on the books, and they have ceased to cater for juvenile athletes. However they are marking the 35th anniversary of their foundation with a reunion which takes place in the Clayton Hotel on Saturday 9th of October starting at 7.30pm. This function provides a great opportunity for all former athletes and their families to come together and reminisce and share memories. A distinguished Irish Olympic athlete will be guest of honour and a well known personality will be MC. Admission is by ticket only and they are available from the club secretary at 086 864 8895. It should be a terrific night, and don't forget to bring along old photographs if you have them.

Our photograph shows the Castlegar AC award winners for 1979. They are, in front; Gerardine Coyne, Teresa Crowe and Bernadette Ruane. In the centre is Rachel Joyce and at the back are David Forde, Thomas Connell and Paul Ainsworth.

TK

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