There have been many great days in the history of Dundalk St Gerard’s AC since the clubs establishment in 1982, but there can hardly have been any greater than what the last few weeks have brought. The performances of the clubs athletes past and present at European level have been nothing short of astounding. To have an involvement with one athlete at this level is fantastic but for a small provincial club three is beyond brilliant. The fact that we can see the events unfolding before our very eyes, and our own personal relationships we have established with the athletes over the years, in many ways desensitises us to how great their achievements really are. It may well only be in the fullness of time that we can reflect and realise the magnitude of what these young girls have done. While it is difficult to compare different sports, for three girls from the same town to represent their country at the same time at continental level could realistically be compared to three players from your local amateur football league signing for a top premier league club at the same time, basically it is beyond the norm and statistically unlikely.

In the blazing sun and 30 degrees of heat former club member Gina Akpe-Moses produced one of the great performances in Irish underage athletics history to storm to a thrilling victory in the 100m at the European Junior (U20) athletics championships in Grosseto, Italy. This was Ireland's first ever sprinting gold medal at an international championships and a truly wonderful achievement. Gina currently resides in Birmingham and trains with Birchfield Harriers the biggest club in the UK under the guidance of Andy Paul while representing Blackrock AC when she competes in Ireland. At the age of 18 this was Gina’s last opportunity to compete at the biannual championships and she signed off in style as she moves towards her full senior career.

Also in action in Grosseto was the youngest athlete in the competition, 16 year old Kate O’Connor in the seven events of the heptathlon over two days. The multi events are demanding at the best of times but the added difficulty of the heat and high level of competition for such a young girl made the task even more demanding. First up in the 100m hurdles she was in the process of running a great race when she clipped the eighth obstacle but luckily stayed on her feet to finish outside her best in 15.06 seconds. With two brilliant PB’s in the high jump (1.78m) and shot (12.90m) and a time of 25.24 seconds in the 200m she moved up to 10th place at the end of day 1. Day two commenced with the long jump and Kate performed solidly with a best of 5.75m. However it could have been so much better but for a marginal break on jump two on what would undoubtedly have been a new PB and well over 6m. Nonetheless it was a good effort and she followed that with a throw of 43.30m in the javelin to move into 8th going into the final event, the 800m. Another PB of 2:15.87 consolidated her 8th place finish. Such was the strength of the competition that the first 3 places were filled by the 1,2,3 in the 2015 world youth championships. Her final score of 5759 points was a national youth record (even with senior implements) and would have been a EE senior record but for Elizabeth Morland’s fantastic 5801 point fifth place finish. The score was her second qualification standard for next years Commonwealth Games and likely to be well within the requirements for the World juniors also.
As the junior championships were finishing up Patience Junbo-Gula celebrated her 16th birthday by travelling to Gyor, Hungary with the Irish team for the European Youth Olympic Festival. In the 100m she started impressively with a win in her heat in a new PB of 11.94 seconds, dropping under 12 seconds for the first time. Later on she went even better winning her semifinal in another PB of 11.74 seconds. The final was a very exciting affair and with little separating the top contenders it was always going to come down to small margins. Being a tall athlete the start is always a part of the race that Patience has a disadvantage over most of her rivals. With a slower reaction time she gave up valuable hundredths of a second to her rivals but stormed home strongly to flash across the line in a brilliant third place in a wind assisted 11.59 seconds, with very little separating the medalists. This was a fantastic achievement for Patience and could easily have been even better had she not incurred an injury in the early part of the season which curtailed her training. Nonetheless she has proven herself a championship performer at the highest level. If that wasn't enough she then went on to anchor the Irish 4 x 100m team to another bronze medal with another superb performance to collect her second medal of the games.

The girls can now look forward to a well-earned rest before they recommence training for their next season and also prepare for the small matter of returning to school after the summer holidays.

Back on the home front despite the main holiday period being in full swing a large group of the club's young athletes took part in the Setanta Games in Drogheda.

Representing the club were Enya Silkena, Grainne Moran, Andrew Rosbotham, Caitlin Mulholland, Cara & Leah Miele, Chloe Cheshire, Ben and Adam Eccles, Rían Mc Crystal, Éire Mc Crystal, Doireann Conlon, Nicole Mulholland, Lucy Rosbotham, Andrew Rosbotham Hayden Mulholland, Emily Moran Rachel Culligan, George Maas and Joe Lennon. The athletes all performed well and look forward to the next completion, Boyne Ac open sports at the same venue in a few weeks.

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