

A Brief History of Scottish Universities v Irish Universities
Track and Field Matches
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Interaction between Scottish Universities and Irish Universities has a distinguished history. A long series of cross-country matches between Dublin University Harriers and Edinburgh University Hares and Hounds started in 1897. The clubs won alternately, the home team being victorious, until DUH won in Scotland in 1906. There were also home and away cross-country matches against Glasgow University and Aberdeen University. Track and Field contests in College Park, Dublin, or on tour in Scotland against Glasgow, Edinburgh, St Andrew's and Aberdeen took place through to the 1960's.^{1, 2}

The international track and field match between Scotland and Ireland at Celtic FC, Park Head, Glasgow on 20 July, 1895 is historic. It inaugurated the world's first regular series of international matches which continued in unbroken sequence through to 1913.³ The Irish Amateur Athletic Association mooted the idea in 1891. However, this initial approach was turned down by the Scots. It is said that the great Cork all-rounder Tom Donovan, who was then studying at Edinburgh University, persuaded the Scottish authorities that the Celtic nations should meet. The programme of events was that of the Scottish Championships except that the four miles was substituted for the ten miles and that in Scotland the hammer was to be thrown in the Scottish style and in Ireland under Irish rules. The Scottish style of hammer throwing was abandoned in 1897. Alf Downer (Scotland) won the 100y, 220y and 440y in the inaugural match. The Scots also took the 1 mile and the hammer throw. Ireland won the 880y, 4 miles, 120y hurdles, high jump, long jump, and shot putt to take the winner's laurels (scored on events won). Of these first 19 annual international matches, Ireland won 11, Scotland 7 and one match was drawn (1912).³

The inaugural athletics match between Irish Universities and the Atalanta Club, the combined Scottish Universities Select team from Edinburgh, Glasgow, St. Andrew's and Aberdeen, took place on the sports grounds of University College Dublin at Terenure, Dublin, on 28 June 1927.⁴⁻⁸ Atalanta was a character in Greek mythology who, having taken an oath of virginity to the Goddess Artemis, only agreed to her father's desire that she marry on condition that a suitor must beat her in a footrace, the forfeit being death. Many young men are said to have died in the attempt. The Irish Universities team was selected by the Irish Inter-University Committee which organised and ran the Intervarsity Championships. This new international event in the athletic life of both countries was mooted as a fixture that would strengthen the ties between Ireland and Scotland. The Scottish team included R.D. Allison [Edinburgh], the Scottish Universities 100y and 220y champion and ex-440y champion, Alastair F. Clark [Edinburgh], Scottish 120y hurdles champion (later taught at Methodist College, Belfast, and represented Ireland at the Olympic Games at Amsterdam in 1928 in 110 m hurdles), R.B. Hoole [Edinburgh], the Scottish 440y champion, and Dr Arthur P. Spark in shot putt and discus (placed in the first three a total of seven times in the shot, discus, hammer, and javelin at the Scottish Championships 1924-26), who was a member of the British Olympic Team in Paris in 1924 competing in the decathlon and pentathlon.

Based on Irish, British and world records, *The Irish Times* had commented the day before this contest on the backward condition of athletics in Ireland in that there were few men capable of holding their own with the front rankers of other countries and that the sole hope for the future of athletics standards lay in the development of athletics in colleges and schools.⁹ The newspaper welcomed the inauguration of the international inter-universities contest as "*an important and marked advance in the development of athletics in Ireland*".⁷ In its report on the contest the *Irish Times* further commented: "*Athletics and various other branches of sport have always received a considerable*

amount of attention in our universities and colleges, which have given to the sport athletes whose feats of skill, courage and endurance have reflected credit on their institutions... The successful launching of the [international inter-universities] contest should act a great stimulus to all who have the welfare of athletics in Ireland at heart... Thus we have in this inter-universities contest a strong incentive for our 'Varsity athletes to redouble their efforts on the training ground... And who can at the moment doubt that out of this modest beginning may emerge a regular international University contest".⁷

The outstanding performance of the Irish Universities team was that of Sean Lavan in winning the 220y and 440y, placing 2nd in the discus and anchoring the one-mile medley relay (880y, 2 × 220y, 440y) team to victory. The Scots won two track events, the one mile and the 120y hurdles, and the high jump and shot putt. The Irish and Scottish teams were entertained to supper. While the contest was scored on number of wins across the 11 events – Irish Universities 7 wins, Scottish Universities 4 wins – had the contest been scored as 2 for a win and 1 for the runner-up as in the next contest in 1929, Ireland would still have won by 18 pts to 15 pts.^{7,8}

The second meeting between Irish Universities and Scottish Universities took place on the evening of 3 July 1929 in Hampden Park, the biggest terraced stadium in the world at that time with a 130,000 capacity, which was extended by 1937 to 150,000 and only surpassed in capacity in 1950 by the Estádio do Maracanã in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. A heavy shower about one hour before proceedings started possibly affected the attendance adversely, but the weather was fine during the contest.^{10,11} For several of the Irish track athletes this was their first experience of running on a cinder track. For Irish Universities, Dr Pat O'Callaghan (UCC), Irish Olympic Gold medallist in the hammer at Amsterdam in 1928 and Los Angeles 1932, won the hammer, shot putt and discus and Michael Moroney (UCD) took the long jump and high jump for an Irish clean sweep of the field events.^{10,11} O'Callaghan failed by a couple of feet to throw the hammer completely off the grass onto the cinder track. The "Flying Scotsman" H.C. Maingay [Edinburgh] ran away with the half-mile in an excellent time of 1:58.6 and his compatriot Ian H. Boland [Glasgow], the 220y. Joe Eustace (Dublin University), who had won the 100y in 1927, made it an event double in 1929. Atalanta took 1st and 2nd in the 880y and Irish Universities, 1st and 2nd in the high jump and long jump. While the result of the contest was never in doubt by the time of the last event on the 12-discipline programme, the meeting closed with an epic battle in the mile medley relay with Patrick C. Moore (Irish Universities) and Ian H. Borland (Atalanta) on the final leg fighting stride for stride down the home straight all the way to the tape, Moore winning by inches. For the record Irish Universities won by 23 pts to 13 pts.^{10,11}

The 1930 fixture between Atalanta and Irish Universities was to have taken place on 5th July, but this date was found unsuitable by the Scots. The Scottish Universities decided that they could not field a team later in the season.¹² Consequently the Atalanta visit was postponed until June 1931. However, no record of a match in 1931 has been found. Nonetheless, a full Ireland v Scotland International match did take place at Croke Park, Dublin, on 25 July, 1931. Several Irish university athletes competed - Patrick C. Moore (UCD), Theo D. Phelan (UCD), Henry R. Davies (TCD) and Dr Pat O'Callaghan (UCC). Ireland won the match 20 pts to 13 pts.^{13,14}

The 1933 visit of Atalanta fell foul of the brewing political situation between the N.A.C.A.I., the N.I.A.A.A. and the B.A.A.B. that was to bedevil Irish and Irish Intersvarsity Athletics in the 1930's and led eventually to the removal of the N.A.C.A.I. from the I.A.A.F. as the recognised national body for athletics, the formation of a new governing body in Irish athletics (The Amateur Athletic Union of Eire), and a split in Irish athletics that would last until the formation of Bord Lúthchleas na hÉireann in 1967. The Atalanta v Irish Universities match was to have taken place in College Park, Dublin on 10 July.^{15,16} At the twelfth hour a telegram was received from the Atalanta Club stating that their visit to Dublin had been cancelled.^{17,18} No specific reason was given. However, it

was surmised that the Scottish team had been ordered to cancel their visit on instructions issued by or on behalf of the International Board, composed of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, as a consequence of the dispute between the N.A.C.A.I. and the Northern Ireland Association, and possibly also in retaliation for the ban on intervarsity competition imposed on Queen's University of Belfast by the N.A.C.A.I.¹⁹ The Central Council of the N.A.C.A.I. at its meeting on Saturday 17th June, 1933 passed the following resolution to clarify its position vis à vis intervarsity athletics: *"That Queen's University, or any Athletic Club attached thereto, be not allowed to take part in any competition, tournament or match under the auspices of the N.A. and C.A. so long as they remain affiliated to an illegal body [N.I.A.A.A.], and that all Universities and University Colleges be notified of this intention. Further that no University or Athletic Club attached to a University in Ireland be allowed to compete against Queen's University so long as they remain affiliated to an illegal body"*.^{20,21}

A further match between Scottish Universities and Irish Universities did not become possible until the rustication of the N.A.C.A.I. from the I.A.A.F. and the formation of the A.A.U.E. The Irish Universities team for the 3rd meeting with the Atalanta Club was confined to athletes from Trinity College Dublin and Queen's University.^{22,23} The three colleges of the N.U.I. were excluded because they remained members of the N.A.C.A.I. Almost all of the Atalanta athletes were drawn from Glasgow University and Edinburgh University. The match took place on 6th July, 1938 at Westerlands, Glasgow University's sports grounds, on a cinder track. Irish Universities won the five field events, three of them with 1st/2nd combinations. The individual track events were split with three wins each, although Atalanta won the 440y by default when Norman De Vere (TCD) was disqualified, after winning the race by a yard, for fouling his lane while coming up the back straight. De Vere made good his mistake by winning the 880y and by setting up an early lead in the medley relay [440y, 220y, 220y 440y] for an Irish win. Irish Universities took the 100y and 880y with 1st/2nd places. No records were set and no athlete achieved a win double. The scoring on this occasion was 1 = 3 pts, 2nd = 2 pts and 3rd = 1 pt, with 3 pts and 1 pt for 1st and 2nd in the medley relay, respectively. Irish Universities, with nine wins in the twelve events, won the match comfortably by 47 pts to 23 pts.²⁴⁻²⁶

The 4th meeting between Irish Universities, represented by Trinity and Queen's, and the Atalanta selection took place in College Park, Trinity College Dublin on 1 July 1939.²⁷⁻²⁹ Despite interruptions by rain, the meeting was completed to schedule. There were seven track events, including a two mile race, and five field events, but no relay. The javelin throw replaced the hammer throw. The outstanding performance was that of Roderic Coote (TCD) who equalled the Irish native record for 120 yards hurdles of 15.4 sec held by Theo D. Phelan of UCD, but with a following wind. Some controversy arose when R.G. Eccles, a South African studying at Edinburgh University, was called 'no jump' at 5ft 8 in [1.72 m] in the high jump competition on the grounds that his head was below his shoulder and thus he was guilty of diving. While perturbed and angry that his style was questioned, he continued in the event to win at 5 ft 10¾ in [1.80 m]. The most discussed finish occurred in the mile when David O'Neill (TCD) was given the decision on the tape from John Muir of Glasgow University. At the final bend O'Neill had little hope of catching Muir who slowed down to a virtual walk to be caught at the finishing line, O'Neill getting the judges' nod which did not receive unanimous approval. Len Horan (TCD) putt the shot 46 ft 10 in [14.28 m] for a College Park record and took a double win with the discus with 123 ft [37.49 m]. George Craigie (TCD) won the 'hundred' and 220 yards for a sprint double. J.A.M. Robertson (Atalanta) took a double in the quarter-mile and half-mile for the third double of the meeting. Tom Maguire of Trinity College, later athletics coach to the Irish team at the London Games in 1948, was the starter. The scoring on this occasion was 1 = 3 pts, 2nd = 2 pts and 3rd = 1 pt. Irish Universities won eight events, three with 1st/2nd placings [120y hurdles, 220y, javelin], while the Scots won

four events, three with 1st/2nd placings [880y, 2 miles, high jump]. Irish Universities won the match by 38 pts to 33 pts.²⁷⁻²⁹

Thirty years would elapse until the next match between an Irish Universities Select and a Scottish University (Edinburgh). The match took place at Belfield, University College Dublin, on 12th July, 1969.^{30,31} Scoring on this occasion involved all competitors – 1st = 5pts, 2nd = 3 pts, 3rd = 2 pts and 4th = 1 pt, with 5 pts and 2 pts for 1st and 2nd in the 4 × 110 y relay, respectively. The star performer at this intervarsity match was Andrew Webb, the Scottish national 400 m hurdles champion. He won the 440y hurdles in 54.4 sec, the 120y hurdles in 16.0 sec and the 220y in 22.6 sec. Another Scottish visitor to impress was Alastair Blamire, the international steeplechaser, who won the one mile, covering the final 880y in 2:01.8. The match turned into a closely contested event – Edinburgh University won 8 events, Irish Universities 7 events plus the sprint relay. Edinburgh took maximum points in four events – the mile, 3 miles, discus and shot putt – while Irish Universities scored 1st/2nd combinations in the 440y, hammer, and triple jump. Irish Universities failed to field two athletes in the 3 miles. The match went right down to the wire, giving the tallymen an arithmetic Olympiad. Edinburgh University took the honours by 86 pts to Irish Universities 85 pts.^{30,31}

On the 14th June, 1977, the combined strengths of Irish Universities, Scottish Universities, Birmingham University and a BLE President's Selection, together with international athletes for an invitational 3000 m, converged on Belfield, University College Dublin, for the inaugural athletics meeting on the first tartan track in Ireland. Women's teams were fielded for the first time in a Scottish Universities v Irish Universities match. The all-weather track cost £160,000. It was formally opened by the Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave, Fine Gael, who fired a real .38 revolver to start the first event of the evening meeting, the 3000 m steeplechase.³² It was his last shot in the General Election of 1977 which took place the following day, resulting in a crushing defeat of the Fine Gael/Labour coalition.

The almost 4,000 spectators were treated to three Irish native records in the 3000 m, pole vault and discus and a Northern Ireland native record in the 400 m hurdles during this competitive and entertaining fixture.³³⁻³⁵ Eamonn Coghlan (7:50.1) chopped almost six seconds of Jerry Kiernan's month-old 3000 m record. Liam Hennessy, an 18-year-old from Tipperary, leapt to the top of Irish pole-vaulting with 13 ft 10 in (4.22 m). The 43-year-old Corkman Len Braham added 2.5 ft to his ten-day-old national figure in the discus with 175 ft 11 in (53.63 m). Clive Beattie of Queen's clocked 52.1 in the 400 m hurdles for a NI record. For Scottish Universities Fiona Macauley won both the 100 m and the 100 m hurdles, Paula Lloyd won the 400 m, Myra Nimmo won the long jump, and A. Johnstone and D. Hood placed 3rd in the high jump and shot putt, respectively. The men's match was dominated by the BLE President's Selection (10 wins) with Birmingham University (5 wins). In the 200 m James Christie of Queen's scored the only individual win for Irish Universities, although the Irish Universities quartet took the honours in the 4 × 400 m relay. Best placings for Scottish Universities were R. Ellis (2nd in 110 m hurdles) and D. Spalding and B. Dickson (2nd and 3rd, respectively, in the 800 m). In the combined match the BLE President's Select romped home with 215 pts, followed by Birmingham University (145 pts), Irish Universities (128 pts) and Scottish Universities (100 pts).³³⁻³⁵

In June 1993 a series of annual 'Celtic' matches between Scottish Universities, Irish Universities and the Northern Ireland Athletic Federation was inaugurated at the Antrim Forum. A prime mover in this initiative was Maeve Kyle, three-time Irish Olympian 1956-1964 and a leading force in promoting women's athletics in Ireland in the 1960's. The NIAF team was an U20's team in 1993 and 1994, and an U23's team thereafter. In 1995 the contest included a visiting combined Harvard & Yale team. A feature of that evening was the pole vault contest when the bar was cleared by Jesse Stern (H&Y) at 4.90 m. While this annual contest was competitive through 1999, the size of the Scottish

contingent dwindled thereafter leading to a lopsided match. The Scottish Universities dropped out after 2003. Eventually in 2005, the NIAF decided that this contest had reached its sell by date and that the funds expended on its hosting could be better used to promote U23 athletics in Northern Ireland in other ways. Full results of these matches can be viewed on the IUAA website.³⁶

In addition to these contests an Indoors T & F match was hosted in the Kelvin Hall Arena, Glasgow, in the mid-1990's. The match was between Scottish Universities, Irish Universities, Loughborough University and Birmingham University. Unfortunately the full results of this match have not been found.

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