**AIT GP – The First 6 Years**

World class athletics returns to Athlone Institute of Technology again tonight with the sixth edition of the AIT International Grand Prix. The event has in the past five years attracted the cream of world athletics.

**2014**
The first big headliner for the inaugural event in 2014 was the now retired Ashton Eaton, the World & Olympic Champion at the time. Six stadium records were broken as big time athletics came to Athlone IT for the first time since the opening of the AIT International Arena. This event put the AIT GP on the map internationally as word spread inside the international athletics community that AIT had a ‘fast track’.

**2015**
Three international stars, namely, Mutaz Essa Barshim, Carmelita Jeter and Asafa Powell made their presence felt in 2015. Powell unfortunately picked up an injury in warm-up and was forced out of the competition. Barshim ultimately stole the limelight as he broke the Asian indoor record with a jump of 2.41m. He then had three valiant but ultimately unsuccessful attempts at 2.44m which would have broken the world record of 2.43m set by Cuba’s Javier Sotomayor in 1989. If the AIT International GP was not already a world renowned event before 2015 then Barshim ensured that it was globally recognised.

**2016**
Big headliners were recruited again in 2016 and the novel addition of the Pole Vault event attracted world class competitors. Canadian world champion Shawn Barber battled it out with American Sam Kendricks before achieving ultimate success with a best jump of 5.77m to smash the stadium record. Barbers compatriot, and world silver medallist, Melissa Bishop didn’t disappoint the fans as she won the 800m race in a time of 2.00.60. The best however was kept for last as Ethiopian Dawit Wolde dominated the men’s mile as he also broke the Ethiopian indoor 1500m record when posting 3.37.86. This time was also a world lead.

**2017**
The women’s 60m hurdles has been a staple annual discipline on the AIT GP programme and this was no different in 2017 as former Olympic Champion Sally Pearson opted to come to Ireland to relaunch her career after injury. Pearson showed all her class & technique but only came third as Christina Manning ran a stadium and all comer’s record of 7.82. Pearson, however, progressed to the World Outdoor Championships in London where she claimed Gold. Pearson in fact named the AIT GP as her launch pad for her successful season.

**2018**
The 5th edition of the AIT International Grand Prix international and national stars took the headlines. Irish headliner Thomas Barr thrilled the home crowd with a come from behind victory in the final 40m of a brilliant Ericsson 400m men’s race. Barr was the only athlete to dip under the 47-second barrier which was an amazing time for a 400m hurdles specialist. Current world champion Sam Kendricks and former world champion Shawn Barber had a big battle which was ultimately won by the current world champion Kendricks. The winning vault was a massive 5.70m. The blue riband AIT Mile event always lifts the crowd as the ultimate event of the AIT International Grand Prix. Quite possibly there has never been a more popular third place finisher at an indoor meet in Ireland. While Ryan Gregson comfortably won the race in 3.57.86 it was former AIT scholarship student John Travers made Irish athletics history by becoming the first Irish man to run a sub 4-minute mile on home soil (3.59.40).

**2019**

No fewer that five stadium records fell in 2019. Su Bingtian (CHN) lowered the 60m record to 6.54 in the first heat and then lowered it again in the final by hitting the 6.52 mark. The 60m Hurdle stadium record was broken by David King (GBR) when he won the final in 7.66. The women were to outdo the men and three women’s stadium records fell as Ciara Mageean was the star of the show breaking the Irish 1500m and stadium standard to make the new time 4.06.76. Britain’s Megan Beesley ran 53.00 flat to break the long standing 400m stadium best while Greek Athlete Tatiana Gusin raised the stadium best to 1.87m in the High Jump. It was not a good night for Olympic champion Thiago Braz in the Pole Vault as he failed to clear a height. Finland’s Tommi Holttinnen jumped 5.45m to take the PV win.

**Gordon Brett**