



News Release

WORLD HURDLES CHAMPION O'ROURKE TO COMPETE IN ODYSSEY ARENA

Athletics Northern Ireland and the Athletic Association of Ireland are pleased to announce that the current World Indoors champion and European Silver medallist **DERVAL O'ROURKE** from Cork will be competing at the Odyssey Arena on 26th/27th January next year.

This is the fifth Irish Indoors meeting in the North which has been made possible by the generous assistance of title sponsor Woodie's DIY and funding partners Belfast City Council and Sport Northern Ireland. Each year the occasion seems to get bigger and better; upwards of 1000 athletes will be participating, representing a mixture of local and international level competitors from Ireland, England, Kenya, Slovakia and Norway.

In the 2006 World Indoor Championships in Moscow, O'Rourke created a major upset to become the first Irish female to win a World Indoors title. During that March weekend, she broke the Irish 60 metres hurdles record twice to defeat Olympic silver medallist Glory Alozie from Spain in a world class time of 7.84 seconds. O'Rourke managed to use her speed and attacking power to ensure victory over taller and better known opponents.

O'Rourke's win came as no surprise to those who saw her performance at the Odyssey Arena in February 2006 when she defeated the current World Outdoor bronze medallist Delloreen Ennis London of Jamaica in a new Irish record time of 7.90 secs.

Earlier this year Derval's performances were affected by injury which resulted in her just failing to reach the World Championships final in Osaka last August. However the 26-year old is now injury free and will be using the Odyssey meeting as a stepping stone to the World Indoors in Valencia next March plus the Beijing Olympics in August.

Title sponsor Woodie's DIY are on board for the second year in a row. Chief Executive Ray Colman said:

“We are thrilled to continue our association with athletics on both sides of the border and look forward to an exciting year in 2008, beginning with the Irish Indoor Championships in January.”

Irish internationals also competing at the Odyssey are St. Coca's **Dave Campbell** (25) and Limericks' **Liam Reale** (24). Campbell, who competed at Osaka over 800m, recorded an impressive double victory at 800m and 1500m in the Irish Championships last July. He has PBs of 1 minute 46 seconds at 800m and 3 minutes 42 secs for 1500m.

Reale is best known for his 1500m performances where he has a useful 3 minutes 38 seconds PB. However, it was in the shorter 800m event at the Odyssey last February where he grabbed the silver medal in 1.51.19 behind Kenya's Justus Koech.

Professor Eric Saunders OBE, Chairman of Sport Northern Ireland stated:

“We are delighted to once again be a sponsor of this International event. The Woodie's DIY Irish Indoor Championships have grown year on year, helping to raise the international profile of Northern Ireland. By hosting these championships we attract world-class athletes, benefiting our local athletes, our local sports systems and the social, economic and political infrastructure. Sport Northern Ireland is proud to be associated with this prestigious event and wishes all participants the best of luck.”

Funding partners includes the Belfast City Council. Lord Mayor, Cllr Jim Rodgers:

“It's fantastic to see this major sporting spectacle back in Belfast. The Woodie's DIY Irish Indoor Athletics Championships promises to attract many top class athletes competing at an international level and Belfast City Council are proud to be a supporter of such an event. Belfast's Odyssey Arena is an ideal location and I'm sure we will witness a weekend of exciting competition.”

The event also incorporates the Phoenix "Olympic Flames' Age Group Championships and also a 'Search for a Star' Primary School Initiative with children from across the province participating in a final. In the build up to the Olympics we are actively targeting the next generation of school children and providing with them as much support as possible.

Alastair Pollock, Retail Operations Director, Phoenix Natural Gas stated:

"Phoenix has been operating locally for just over ten years and in that time we have seen a growth from zero to *well* over 100,000 natural gas consumers. Many of the competitors in the under-age athletics competitions have grown up from infancy during the same period and Phoenix is delighted to play its part in supporting this competition for talented local athletes, many of whom are aspiring to compete in the Olympic Games in London in 2012.

Phoenix has always strived to put something tangible back into the communities through which it has built its natural gas network. Further, Phoenix is currently supporting vulnerable children and their families through its work with the 'Energy for Children Charitable Trust' for which over £100,000 has been raised in the past two years. This is the second year Phoenix has supported this initiative and we hope it will go some way to helping local talent realise their dreams".

Also launched today is a dedicated Indoors website, which will provide all competitors and spectators information on the event, including the schedule, entry forms, athlete profiles, photo gallery to name a few and the facility to enter online.

Visit www.indoorathletics.net

For further information contact:

- **PRO Clare McCoy on 02890 602707/ 07841804032 or Brian Hill on 07815069697**

Notes to Editors:

1. Please ensure that the event is given its full title **Woodie's DIY Irish Indoor Athletics Championships** when being referred to.
2. It takes place on 26th-27th January 2008 in the Odyssey Arena, Belfast. Tickets are available now from Ticketmaster from Adults £9.00 and Concession £6.00.
3. The event will be covered by **RTE** and their Internet on Sunday 27th January 08.
4. The Indoors features the Phoenix Natural Gas "Olympic Flames" Age Group Championships (Ages 13-18) and the 'Search for A Star' Initiative.
5. The event acts as Irish selection trials for the European Indoor Championships in Birmingham two weeks later.
6. Top athlete Derval O'Rourke has already confirmed her attendance and will be joined by a host of international stars and local athletes to be announced over the next two months.