

# Setting his sights on the World Junior Athletic finals

**G**ALWAY City Harriers 800m runner Keith Fallon insists he is an athlete transformed – ever since he claimed the €12,000 prize package as winner of the inaugural BUA Emerging Sports Talent Award last year.

In the middle of a tough training regime, Fallon is currently aiming to secure his place on the Irish team travelling to the 14th IAAF World Junior Athletics Championships in Barcelona in July.

Although the Headford Road native – going on last year's official PB – is three seconds outside the qualifying time, he still hopes he can book his place when the national qualifiers roll around in Tullamore next month.

"I have to run a time of 1:51 to get there," outlines Fallon. "I ran 1:54 last year but as the man says, I am a complete different animal in training now. I just want to get out and race. I have only a couple of weeks left of real hard work and then it is 'Go Time!'"

No doubt, the 19-year-old athlete has transformed – even reinvented – himself over the past 12 months, with the €12,000 prize package he secured through the BUA Award scheme last year allowing him to train full-time in pursuit of his goal.

The Award scheme, itself, was the brainchild of Keith Gildea of Ocean Fitness and it incorporates significant inputs from Trish Strelieff of Bailey Point Physiotherapy, Maeve Gacquin Nutrition Consulting, Sarah Thornton Personal Training, Dr. Aideen Henry of the Galway Clinic and Niamh Fitzpatrick, Sports Psychologist.

"It (the sports programme) start-

## TALKING SPORT



STEPHEN GLENNON

*BUA award has made a world of difference to promising Galway 800m runner Fallon*

ed after my Leaving Cert. in June, which was great because it gave me a chance to study and meant I wasn't trying to do two things at once. It was perfect and I got enough points then to do [primary school] teaching," says Fallon, who is currently taking a year out from his studies.

"My nutrition wasn't bad but I wasn't properly fuelled. I didn't have enough carbohydrates, wasn't hydrated, but now I know I am eating the proper stuff and have enough energy to get me through the day. That comes down to the advice I have got from Maeve Gacquin.

"With the strength and conditioning, I am bigger and I am stronger and hopefully that will translate, particularly in the last 200m of a race. If I have much more power, obviously, I will finish quicker and that, ultimately, is the aim. Sarah Thornton does the strength and conditioning.

"My physio is Trish [Strelieff]

and she is brilliant. She is always keeping me going; I am always in and out to her with different niggles or whatever. I was going to her before the BUA award and she knows me inside out by now, which is great. So, if I was to pick one physio in Galway, it would have been her. That was brilliant and she keeps me healthy."

In addition to opening up other opportunities to Fallon – who has the option of taking up a scholarship next year at the California University of Pennsylvania if he so wishes – the BUA Award also granted him access to Ocean Fitness in Salthill, where he does his gym work. "It is the best gym in Galway by far," says Fallon.

"It has got everything and it is not crowded. You are never waiting for machines. You can relax or work as hard as you want. To be honest, I nearly live down there. After training, you can go there to relax. I was in Limerick for a while and the gym in UL was almost always crowded. There's no comparison."

In any event, Fallon underlines that aside from the serious amount of money it has saved him in pursuing his dream, he has found the professional advice invaluable. "Just knowing that you are doing the right things!" he exclaims.

"You can read all the stuff and you can probably find out what to do on the internet but being told and advised on the best way to do things by someone who knows is totally different. Besides, every athlete is different but they (experts) really get to know you.

"So, it (BUA scheme) will change the sort of athlete you are and if nothing else it will encour-

age you to be a bit more professional. When you have all this, it really motivates you to go out on the wet days and run through the muck."

The former St. Mary's College student subsequently goes through his training programmes for Winter and Summer – which do not even include the three weekly gym sessions – and both schedules are nothing less than grueling. "Fridays, though, I always take off. I get up at a ludicrous hour and do nothing for the day," he laughs.

Indeed, the affable youngster has a great sense of humour and this shines through many times throughout the interview, particu-

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larly when it comes to detailing what he does with his free time. "There is not a whole lot you can do. You can't really live the college lifestyle and go out. So, it's pretty limiting in that sense.

"I watch a bit of Friday Night Lights and I am a couple of seasons into that now. I still have friends who have similar interests and they understand that you can't be going out and setting wheelie bins on fire or whatever they do get up to!" he jests. "Honestly, though, you've got to be disciplined."

Under the guidance of GCH

coaches PJ Coyle and Matt Lockett, Fallon now hopes his efforts will pay off in the coming weeks. "At the end of this month, it is all systems go and training will be relaxed and I will be racing pretty much every week. I will then be jumping into races right up until June 22, which is when the trials for the World Juniors take place in Tullamore."

However, he realises it will not be easy to secure qualification, highlighting that due to the resurgence of these events in Ireland in recent times there will be a plethora of genuine competitors bidding for the two places available.

Still, Fallon – who has played soccer with Hibs and Mervue United and hurling with Liam Mellows – will have some measure of where he is at when his season gets underway in earnest next week, with his first 800m race taking place shortly after, on May 27, in Wicklow.

Chatting to the teenager, you would mistake him for a seasoned pro, but, remarkably, he outlines that he only started running at the age of 15 four years ago, when he qualified for the Community Games finals in Mosney.

"I finished, I think, in sixth at Mosney, but I never had that much work done to be any way competitive out there, in comparison to the guys who were at the top at that time. I began to take it a little bit more serious every year after that though and, obviously, I am hoping 2012 will be my biggest year. I have focused fully on it without [pursuing] any other sports or school distractions."

That said, as he turns for home, Fallon highlights that he does



Keith Fallon, Galway City Harriers, who is hoping to qualify for the World Junior Athletic Championships in Barcelona in July.

work part-time in Centra in Lough Atalia in Galway from time to time. "Just so you don't think I am watching Saturday Night Lights all the time!" he adds with a smile.

In any event, come June 22, the only name he wishes to see in lights is his own.

● A son of Frank and Ann Fallon,

Sandyvale Lawn, Headford Road, Keith has two brothers, Alan – married to Fiona, with one child Emily – and Enda. For more information on the BUA Emerging Talent Award 2012, log onto [www.BUASportsAward.com](http://www.BUASportsAward.com). Applications will be accepted from May 21 with the closing date for entry Friday, June 15.