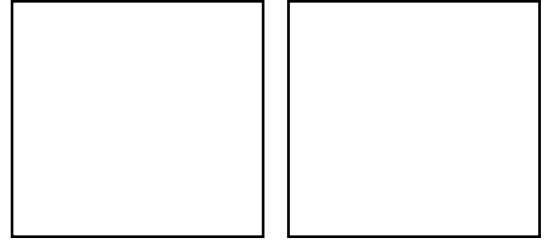


Leitrim Guardian Person of the Year 2013

Leitrim's Olympians — Colin Griffin & Laura Reynolds

In the wake of London 2012, it is with great pride and delight that the Leitrim Guardian announces as joint recipients of the Person of the Year award 2013, our two Olympians, Colin Griffin (Balinamore AC) and Laura Reynolds (Mohill AC): two individuals who have not only raised the profile of athletics in the county of Leitrim in the past few years, but who have also raised the profile of Leitrim at national and international level in 2012. And perhaps, more importantly, what we would like to acknowledge in honouring these two individuals, is everything they embody as athletes and as individuals: their strength of spirit and determination, their commitment and unrelenting work ethic, their sense of national pride. Here, we give an overview of the career highlights and successes (to date) of these two exceptional individuals and briefly chart their journey to Olympic participation.



Colin Griffin

The son of Pdraig and Patricia Griffin, Ballinamore, Colin attended Ballinamore Boys' National School and Fatima & Felim's Secondary School and has a degree from the University of Limerick in Public Administration. Some of his early successes include: Winning the Schools International Racewalk in England in 1998; Coming 7th in the World Youths (U-17) 10K Walk in Poland in 1999; Winning the Irish Schools Senior Racewalking 3000m title in 2000 (in the process, setting the record, which still stands), and; Coming 9th in the European Junior 10K Walk.

Since then Colin has competed in World and European Cup Competitions. In May 2012 he finished 15th in 50K walk at the World Cup in Saransk, Russia, and achieved the Olympic Standard. He won the final two British AAA Track Walks in 2005 and 2006 when the famous AAA Championships were held for the last time after over a century and a quarter. He was the only Irish athlete ever to win an AAA senior track walking title. Has won numerous Irish titles at schools, universities, under age and senior levels.

Of course, the London 2012 Games were not his first Olympics. Colin competed in the 2008 Games in Beijing, as well as the 2010 European Championships in Barcelona where he finished 11th in the 50K event.

Colin has also been coaching Laura Reynolds for 10 years, since she began in the sport.

Laura Reynolds

Born in 1989 to Jim and Catherine Reynolds, Eslin, Mohill, Laura was educated at Mohill National School and Marian Community College, Mohill. She has a degree from DCU in PE, Science and Biology. Her early achievements include: Winning the National Community Games Under 13 Walk in Mosney in 2001; Representing Ireland in the World Youths (Under 17) Championships 2005; Winning the all Irish Schools Walking Championships while in Secondary School and; Winning University Championships while at Third Level. She has also represented Ireland in the World Junior Championships, European Under 23 Championships and in the 2011 World Student Games.

Over the past few years, Laura has represented Ireland in World and European Cups on a yearly basis. Her big breakthrough came this year when she achieved the Olympic Standard over 20K in the Grand Prix Event in La Coruna, Spain, in early June and achieved a magnificent 20th in the London Olympic Games.

Colin & Laura's Olympic Journey

The County Track and Field Championships in Manorhamill-

ton on Sunday May 13th were memorable for the news which came earlier that morning when Colin Griffin, who had won the National 30k Walk title in February, took a magnificent fifteenth position in the 50K event at the World Cup of Racewalking in Saransk, Russia, with a time of 3:52.55 well inside the Olympic Qualification. Further great news on the evening of Saturday June 9th from the Spanish town of La Coruña when we heard that Laura Reynolds had also achieved the Standard with seventh place in the 20K Walk in a personal best time of 92.34 to give Leitrim two Olympians for London 2012.

The excitement between then, and the start of what has been widely regarded as the best ever Olympics, was unbelievable, and the support from Leitrim people for the two athletes has been outstanding. In July Colin returned from training in Spain to win the AAI National Track 10K for the first time. Great numbers of Leitrim people prepared to travel to London for the two races, which, quite unusually, were programmed for the same day, Saturday August 11th. Although Stadium and other venue tickets were quite difficult to get there was great demand among Irish supporters

and on the day of the races huge numbers of Irish supporters thronged the Mall circuit where the racewalks took place.

Colin's 50K race commenced early in the morning and roared on by a massive crowd of supporters in favourable weather conditions the event was an outstanding contest. Colin himself said, "the support around the course was electric." He walked well and kept to a plan which brought him through the field with the objective of finishing strongly as in Saransk in a personal best time and a somewhat similar position to that achieved in Saransk. Unfortunately, at 38 kilometres after walking two hours and fifty minutes he was disqualified.

Of course, this was a huge disappointment for Colin, who wrote very frankly and openly on his blog of this bittersweet experience, saying that in spite of everything, he "enjoyed the whole Olympic experience," and "was proud to be part of the team at our most successful Games since 1956."

But as Colin was also and uniquely coach to Laura Reynolds, he took his place at the coaches' table

only a few hours later, as sixty three women faced the starter for the ten lap 20K where massive Irish support had assembled to urge on Laura and her experienced team mate Olive Loughnane. After the first lap Laura was 53rd and when they came around again she had gained three places while Olive battled around twelfth position. Successive laps saw Laura 46th, 46th 41st, 33rd, 29th, 25th and entering the last lap 22nd. The Mohill athlete who was walking a magnificent race was not yet finished and she took two more scalps to cross the line in an unbelievable 20th position in another great personal best time of 91.02. Team mate Olive Loughnane, who was seventh in Beijing and won the silver medal at the 2009 World Championships, finished 13th in 89.39.

It was all in all a great year and the achievements of these athletes on the world stage gave heart to people overwhelmed by daily problems arising from the economic situation. The support of Leitrim people and organisations, both at home and in Britain, was of immense value to the two athletes who will continue to do Leitrim and Ireland proud over the next few years.