

PRESS RELEASE

MINISTER HONOURS SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS IN IRISH SPORT

31st May 2011, Aviva Stadium:

Eleven dedicated volunteers who have made outstanding contributions to sport in Ireland were today honoured by the Minister of State for Tourism and Sport Michael Ring T.D., at an awards ceremony which took place at the Aviva Stadium.

The 'National Awards to Volunteers in Irish Sports', celebrates the contributions of volunteers to Irish sport. There are over 400,000 people throughout the country who voluntarily dedicate their time every year through their involvement with sports clubs and organisations.

The national awards are an initiative of the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport in conjunction with the Federation of Irish Sports, which represents some 68 sports in Ireland. The scheme is also supported by the Community Foundation of Ireland and the Irish Sports Council.

Among the recipients of the awards was Jim Aughney who is responsible for both the establishment and development of the Dublin Marathon and Race Series which now attracts a field of over 11,000, including in excess of 3,000 international participants each year. Brian Craig from Dublin also received an award for the major role he has played in the development of sailing in Ireland, specifically in Dún Laoghaire. The youngest person to receive an award was 24-year old Doireann Ni Mhuiri from Cork, who has been involved in coaching at Blackrock Camogie Club since the tender age of 14.

Also amongst the award winners is Gerry Fleming, Head Coach of Neilstown Boxing Club, whose involvement with the club started some 31 years ago and who counts Olympic Silver Medalist Kenny Egan amongst the many boxers who have passed through his hands. Speaking about Gerry's impact on him Egan said:

"Gerry is not only my coach but a great friend. He has pushed so hard in getting Neilstown its own Boxing Club. It has been over 20 years coming and is finally here thanks to the hard work of Gerry and his coaching staff. He has travelled the world supporting me which I am very grateful for and has helped me out anyway he can. I hope one day, when I'm at the end of my career, to take my place in the coaching staff back at the club."

The award winners were selected by a committee chaired by Olympic Gold Medal Winner, Ronnie Delany, alongside representatives from the Federation of Irish Sports, Irish Sports Council, The Irish Times, RTÉ and the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport.

Speaking at the presentation of the awards Minister Ring said. *"The contribution of volunteers in supporting Irish sports people at every level, from when they first engage in sporting activity right through to developing elite athletes, should not be underestimated. Indeed, the army of volunteers who dedicate their time and commitment to each sport in Ireland assist in building strong and healthy communities, while giving everybody the opportunity to be the athletes they are."*

"In presenting these awards today I wish to not only congratulate the 11 volunteers who truly deserve their honours, but I would also like to acknowledge all of the 400,000 people who help to ensure Irish sport is in such a healthy state. Quite simply sport in Ireland wouldn't function without their incredible efforts, and as a nation we would undoubtedly be worse off."

Also speaking at the awards, Sarah O'Connor, Chief Executive of the Federation of Irish Sports, said:

“The vast number of hours devoted by volunteers is invaluable to sport in this country, and it is great that we are able to recognise some of the individuals involved here today. It is important that we are aware of the contributions made by so many people who freely offer time and expertise right around the country every week. This voluntary investment has been estimated to have an economic value equivalent of between €322 million and €582 million each year. Even more important however is the reality that without this voluntary investment in sport by so many there simply would not be the same opportunities for the 1.7 million Irish people who actively participate in Irish sport, nor indeed would we have the many success stories that Irish Sport continues to produce year on year.”



The full list of award winners is as follows:

| Winner | Sport | County |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------|
| Doireann Ni Mhuiri | Camogie | Cork |
| Gareth Grundie | Hockey | Antrim |
| Gerry Fleming | Boxing | Dublin |
| Catherine Murphy | Ladies Gaelic Football | Cork |
| Jim Aughney | Athletics | Dublin |
| Tony Farrell | Swimming | Galway |
| Pam Beacom | Special Olympics | Wicklow |
| Breda Christie | Athletics/Community Games | Tipperary |
| Brian Craig | Sailing | Dublin |
| Desmond Butler | Gaelic Games | Dublin |
| Paddy Walsh | Gaelic Games | Dublin |

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