

## Barr Heads Irish Challenge for European Championships



Thomas Barr is a realistic medal hope at the upcoming European Championships.

Ferrybank's Thomas Barr is hoping he can go the distance on the European stage, after delivering the Irish 400m hurdles title at the Morton Stadium in Santry last Sunday.

Barr posted a time of 50.04 in front of the biggest attendance at the North Dublin venue since 2008, to finish first home and secure a place on the 30-strong Irish team to compete at the European Track and Field Championships in Zurich next month.

Barr, who turns 22 this Thursday recently broke the Irish record for the 400m hurdles when he clocked 49.61 in Belgium. Despite the relatively slow time on Sunday the Ferrybank athlete was thrilled with the race win.

"It was massive to smash the record," he told the Munster Express in Dublin yesterday.

"That was something that was on my radar last season. To get it in my second race of the season was massive. It took a long time to sink in and then I broke it again a couple of weeks after and then I got more hype off of that. It just went from strength to strength."

"I was in touching distance of it last year, just 0.5 of a second off it, but it didn't happen in the end. This year I did it in style. I went with more than just a fraction of a second."

Barr's equally thrilled with the turnaround in his fortunes, after injury halted his progress last season.

"It has been a phenomenal season so far considering I am coming off the back of an injury, but it's a distant memory at this stage after running well. Even after the indoors when I was injured I was just looking to get back on track and trying to get back running and to come out with a couple of national records and a couple of personal bests is a bonus."

Barr's victory was his second in as many weeks, having taken the scalp of current World Champion Jehue Gordon from Trinidad

at the recent Morton Games.

“Coming over hurdle nine I saw him stumble, so I was thinking ‘if I can just make these last two hurdles smooth I have him’ and it just paid off in the end.

“It (the atmosphere) was amazing. I’ve never heard Morton Stadium as loud. Usually you wouldn’t pay attention when you are running to the crowd. People are always saying ‘did you hear me shouting for you’ and I’m like ‘no’. Sometimes you might say ‘oh yes I did’ – just to humour them. You are focussed on the race, but that time it was hard not to focus on the noise. It drives you on then from there.”

And Barr is also hoping for a good team performance in Zurich, as part of the Irish relay team aiming to retain their title, and includes Brian Gregan, Richard Morrissey, Mark English, Craig Lynch and Brian Murphy.

“It’s brilliant. We have a massive pool of athletes to choose from for the relay. If we can go out there and get through the heats and get to the final. We were second behind the Belgians in the European Team Championships – there’s a record breaking team there if we want it.”

“We are showing current form and everyone is running quick. We are running times that are fast enough to get us to these Championships so if we can put it together in the team and get a baton in the hand getting it around we’ll see what happens.”

Barr’s also thrilled to see fellow Ferrybank member Kelly Proper as part of the Irish squad.

“Kelly got the standard recently enough and so it will be a home from home.”