

## BARR TOPS THE PODIUM



### Ferrybank clubman named as Irish Athlete of the Year

Ferrybank's Thomas Barr was deservedly named Athlete of the Year at the Irish Life Health National Athletics Awards Ceremony which took place on Wednesday last at Santry's Crowne Plaza Hotel.

Thomas grabbed the country's attention with his sparkling performances at the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro which culminated in an agonising, but magnificent, fourth place finish in the 400 metres hurdles in a world class time 47.97 seconds.

Considering the injury problems he'd experienced leading up to the games and losing out on much valuable competition, his performances in Rio were superb.

"When I saw the time I was ecstatic, because 47 seconds is ridiculous territory," Thomas reflected. "The buzz it generated was insane, and at the end of the day the biggest thing is to enjoy it."

Firstly, in his heat he came second with a season's best time to easily qualify, then in the semi final which he won, he broke his own Irish record and then in the final to beat it again. Hardly surprisingly, Thomas also took the Track and Field Athlete award on Wednesday last.

Barr came out on top for the major award ahead of Robert Heffernan (Togher) for the top gong, the latter winning Endurance Athlete of the Year award with his excellent 6th in the 50km Race Walk at the Olympics.

Meanwhile, Thomas's coaches, Drew and Hayley Harrison, won the European coaching award.

"Hopefully after all the momentum of this year we'll have a big Irish contingent," said Thomas, casting an eye ahead to the World Athletics Championships which will be held in London next August. "This year made me realise I don't need to be afraid of these guys. I'm at their level."

Looking to 2017, Thomas, if hale and hearty, will compete in the World Championships and will, a few weeks later, defend his World University Games title in Taipei.

He may not be seen in competitive action again until next May as it appears he will not be competing indoors in flat races.

Last year, Thomas collected the same two awards on the strength of his win in the World University Games and some fine performances in the Diamond League meetings.

On the basis of his performances during last season and the season before with his hallmark late and strong finishes, perhaps one or two races over 800 metres indoors wouldn't be out of place for him.

Let's hope for another big year for a young man who, remarkably, didn't make the RTE Sportsperson of the Year Shortlist.