TICKETS for the SPAR European Cross Country Championships, which will take place in Santry Demesne, Dublin on 13 December, have gone on sale in Ireland through Ticketmaster outlets nationwide and www.ticketmaster.ie.

Two of Ireland’s most promising young athletes, Charlotte and Rebecca Ffrench O’Carroll, were on hand with Athletics Ireland President Liam Hennessy to launch the sale of tickets for next December’s championships, the first time that Ireland will host the SPAR European Cross Country Championships.

Tickets for the event are priced at €20 for adults and 10 for U-16s, while a special family ticket, which will admit two adults, and a maximum of four children is available for 40.

Liam Hennessy, President of Athletics Ireland, believes hosting the European Cross Country Championships is a momentous occasion for Irish athletics. “This is the first time we have had the honour of hosting a European Athletics championships and to be able to host such a prestigious event is a great honour and challenge for us,” he said.

Anne Keenan Buckley, Athletics Ireland Team manager for the SPAR European Cross Country Championships, is confident the Irish team will give the home fans plenty to cheer about.

“The European Cross Country Championships in Ireland could not have come at a better time for our athletes. We will have top class runners in each of the groups, including the likes of Mary Cullen, Fionnuala Britton, Martin Fagan, Alistair Cragg and the Ffrench O’Carroll twins. It is a long time since Ireland had such a great range of athletes in cross country and it will provide very exciting viewing for everyone at Santry Demesne in December,” she said.

Tickets for the European Cross Country Championships can be purchased through Ticketmaster outlets nationwide or through www.ticketmaster.ie. More information on the Championships can be found at www.dublin2009.ie.

*Athletics Ireland is supported in hosting the European Cross Country Championships by the Irish Sports Council, Dublin City Council, Fingal County Council, RTÉ and Clonliffe Harriers.

Athletics Ireland has begun the countdown to the SPAR European Cross Country Championships, which will take place in Santry Demesne, on the 13th of December.
IRISH athletes hoping to be selected for the European Cross Country Championships in Santry on December 13th next have been encouraged to avail of as much top class track competition as possible during the summer months.

Irish Team Manager, Anne Keenan Buckley hopes to have the strongest teams possible available when Ireland hosts the championships for the first time and she believes that it is essential that all athletes hoping for selection have a successful track season. "There is nothing like some good track performances to boost your confidence and it will also be very important that our Irish middle distance athletes work hard at developing their speed over the next few months," she said.

"The IAAF World Championships in Athletics in Berlin in August should see a number of top Irish athletes like Alistair Cragg and Martin Fagan in action and they should also be the type of athletes who will be leading the Irish team challenge in Santry in December. Mary Cullen should also be back to her best by December and she will be eager to improve on her gallant fourth placing in the women's event in Belgium last year.

"Athletes who do not qualify for Berlin should make a very serious effort to get the most competitive races possible on the track during the summer. They will then be very well prepared for a tough autumn training build-up leading to the European Cross Country Championships," continued the Irish manager.

Anne Keenan Buckley is herself a vastly experienced former athlete who fully understands the challenge Irish teams will face in Santry. "We have a great chance of doing well in the men's and women's team events provided we have all our best athletes fit and healthy on the day," she said.

The Laois woman has been greatly encouraged by the recent performances by Alistair Cragg, Martin Fagan and Andrew Ledwith in America and she enjoyed meeting some of Ireland's overseas-based athletes at the recent National Championships in Santry. "The National Championships provided us with a great opportunity to get all our top middle distance athletes together and start implementing a plan for the European Cross Country Championships," she added.

"We also want to concentrate a lot on developing a strong junior men's and women's team for the European Championships. "Our junior women's team finished third in Belgium and three members of that team- Ciara Mageean and the Ffrench O'Carroll twins, Charlotte and Rebecca, are still eligible to run in this year's championships."

Meanwhile, Athletics Ireland President, Liam Hennessey, believes that hosting the European Cross Country Championships is a momentous occasion for Irish athletics. "This is the first time we have had the honour of hosting a European Athletics championships and to be able to host such a prestigious event is a great honour and a challenge for us," he said.

"This will be a huge boost to athletes across the country and with our proud tradition in cross country through athletes like John Treacy, Catherina McKiernan and Sonia O'Sullivan, hosting the European Cross Country Championships gives Irish athletics the opportunity to take centre-stage on December 13th."

KENYAN distance running legend Paul Tergat recently took part in a Q&A session with a captive audience at the Athletics Ireland Endurance Squad session.

Held in the relaxed surroundings of the Clonliffe Harriers’ club bar, Tergat spoke about training in competitive groups when younger in Kenya, the sudden realisation that he had a talent and also his philosophy of never giving up.

He spoke passionately when reminiscing of what many regard as the greatest finish in Olympic history when Haile Gebresallasie deprived him of gold by the narrowest of margin in Sydney in 2000.

Tergat also believes that passion and heart added to the consistency of training are a driving force in the African dominance of distance running at the moment.

He would welcome a partnership that would see athlete training exchanges between Ireland and Kenya.

The full interview is available at the Athletics Ireland Youtube account at: www.youtube.com/tergat
Ciara Mageean and Mark Christie's current form suggests both athletes could well be to the fore at the European Cross Country Championships in Santry next December, writes Feidhlim Kelly.

CIARA MAGEEAN’S continued success on national and international stages marks her out as one of the leading Irish prospects for the European Cross Country Championships in Santry Demesne, Dublin on December 13.

To date this year, the precocious Lisburn AC athlete has won a silver medal at the World Youth Championships in Italy, clocking 2:03.07 to beat the existing championship best and knock another two seconds off the Irish Junior 800m record of 2:05.38 she set in May at the Irish Schools Championships when she bettered Sonia O’Sullivan’s 1987 record of 2:05.72.

Mageean’s time in Italy also stands as an Irish Youth record and propels the 17-year-old into the top 20 all-time Irish rankings in the 800m. The Portaferry (Co Down) youngster, who attends Assumption Grammar School, Ballynahinch, had a hugely successful Track and Field season in 2008 when she finished 9th at the World Junior Track & Field Championships, running a personal best of 4:21.20. She then went on to win a bronze medal at 1500m in the Commonwealth Youth Games in India.

She set a National Junior Indoor record of 4:20.88 for the 1500m in February, and then improved on this time with convincing victory in 4:18.52 at the Manheim Junior Gala in Germany on June 14 – clocking a new Irish Youths record, less than a second off the National Junior 1500m record of 4:17.84 set by Natalie Davey in 1991.

Mageean also has a good pedigree over cross country, finishing 17th in the Junior Women’s race at the European Cross Country Championships in Brussels last year.

MARK CHRISTIE’S victory over 3000m in 7:50.23 at the Golden Spike meet in Leiden, Holland on June 13 was a welcome breakthrough for the Westmeath distance runner.

Christie’s previous fastest indoor 3000m (7:58.12) was set two years ago in Belfast, and he followed with his fastest outdoor time, 8:01.39 in last year’s European Cup.

But the Mullingar athlete’s huge potential has been largely untapped over the last couple of years due to various reasons.

His talent is unquestioned, however. He set Irish Junior records in the 3000m, and finished 5th and at two European Cross Country Championships (2003 and 2004) – the latter performance leading Ireland to Junior team silver medals.

Christie’s recent form, which also includes winning the 1500m Irish Milers Club Invitational Race at the All-Ireland Schools Track and Field Championships, suggests he will be in good form for the European Cross Country on December 13 in Dublin.

The course in Santry Demesne is not unknown to Christie who finished second there in the National Inter-Club Cross Country Championships in 2006.

Christie is looking forward to the Championships and building on his recent success: “I think it is great that the Europeans are on home soil and I’m looking forward to racing in Santry. I think we can do well if we get it right on the day.”

ATHLETICS IRELAND has signed off on final approval for the course for next December’s European Cross Country Championships at Santry Demense, Co Dublin.

Approval was reached in June following detailed consultation between Athletics Ireland, the European Athletics, lead broadcaster RTE and production company Observe.

A European Athletics delegation visited Dublin at the beginning of June and expressed satisfaction that all operational details are on target. The final logistics’ arrangements for the championships will be confirmed following a second European Athletics delegation visit to Dublin next September.

Pictured above are the European Athletics delegation and Athletics Ireland officials walking the championships course in Santry.

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