

Hartmann Collection

Sports injury guru Gerard Hartmann has opened a clinic and museum that showcases Irish athletics in spectacular fashion ahead of the 2012 Olympics. JASON HENDERSON reports from Limerick

WHEN Ron Delany won the Olympic 1500m title in Melbourne in 1956, his Irish team did not have a manager let alone the luxury of a physiotherapist. So it was somewhat ironic to see him, more than half a century later, applauding the skills of a fellow Irishman who is widely regarded as the world's premier sports injury expert.

The occasion was the opening of a new clinic run by Gerard Hartmann, the physical therapist with the reputation of being the man with the Midas touch when it comes to curing athletics ailments. Delany was the guest of honour and in addition to the clinic, the launch also saw the unveiling of a magnificent sporting museum called the Hartmann Collection.

With more than 500 items signed



Gerard Hartmann (left) introduces some of his memorabilia to the 1956 Olympic 1500m champion, Ron Delany

Pictures: Press 22

by a who's who from elite athletics and Irish sport, the Hartmann Collection is a unique display that makes this much more than your ordinary sports injury clinic. The only theme is that every contribution comes from someone who Hartmann has treated or befriended. It's quite a list, too.

There are spikes, vests, race

numbers, books and posters from athletes such as Kelly Holmes and Paula Radcliffe, Irish legends such as Sonia O'Sullivan, Eamonn Coghlan and Frank O'Mara, plus international stars such as Haile Gebrselassie, Grete Waitz and Carl Lewis. *Athletics Weekly* even has a presence – with a front cover shot of Colin Jackson

above some of the memorabilia given by the sprint hurdler to the man who got him back up and running on more than one occasion.

The focal point of the Hartmann Collection, not surprisingly, is dominated by Irish athletes. There is O'Sullivan's Olympic 5000m silver medal from Sydney; the vest

is a work of art

and shoes worn by Coghlan during his sub-3:50 world indoor mile record; and the world indoor gold medals won by Limerick's favourite athletics son, O'Mara.

Such is the grandeur of the Hartmann Collection – not to mention the mild bias toward the No.1 Olympic sport – a yellow jersey from the Tour de France is tucked away in one of the bottom corners of the main room. It is signed "Gerard – Kick ass" by a certain cyclist called "L. Armstrong".

In addition to Delany, guests at the launch last week included O'Sullivan and Coghlan, while the Irish flavour was reinforced when Father Liam Kelleher, a local priest, blessed every room in the clinic to ensure future visitors benefit from not only Hartmann's seventh sense for sniffing out injuries, but also the healing powers of God himself.

"It is a maze of memorabilia – you can almost get lost in here," said O'Sullivan, who has worked with Hartmann for 16 years and among other things donated the vest she wore in Gothenburg in 1995 when she became the first Irishwoman to win a world athletics title.

She added: "I'm not giving something here, but sharing. So many people saw me win the Olympic silver medal, for example, and I



Olympic gold medallist Ron Delany with the University's Don Barry (centre) and Gerard Hartmann

appreciated their support. Now they can see it here too."

"A treasure trove," is how Professor Don Barry, the president of the University of Limerick, where the clinic is based, described it.

While immensely pleasing for Irish athletics, the Collection will bring mild embarrassment to fans of British athletics who have long since called for a national museum of track and field memorabilia – with no success. Maybe the answer in the UK is for an individual to take the initiative, as Hartmann has in Ireland, otherwise the sport will continue to fail to showcase its history.

"The uniqueness of this collection," Hartmann explained, "is that it is a private and personal collection with each item being authentic, each photo and artefact was given to me by a sports person who is, or was, a patient or personal friend of mine."

Why do so many top athletes consult the Irishman? Such is Hartmann's reputation, many athletes regard themselves as cured the moment they manage to secure a place near the front of his lengthy waiting list. Kenyan athletes such as Moses Kiptanui and Daniel Komen simply call him 'daktari', or doctor. All around the Hartman Collection, the athletes' messages are glowing in their thanks and praise.

"I would never have achieved what I have without you," Radcliffe

has written in a copy of her book that sits in the clinic.

"You have given me hope when I've been at my lowest and belief when I am back running and that is the most important thing you could ever give an athlete," says Holmes, the 2004 Olympic 800m and 1500m champion.

"I will always run to your healing hands," says Douglas Wakihuri, the former world and London Marathon champion.

Hartmann is a former elite triathlete who won the Irish title seven times. But he said last week: "All those years I chased my dreams through my athletic talent believing my feet were my greatest asset, all the time not knowing that my true God-given ability was in my hands.

"My feet never took me to an Olympic Games as a competitor – the triathlon became an Olympic event nine years after I retired – yet my hands have given me the opportunity to work at four Olympic Games and to treat so many great sports stars.

"Little did I know I would eventually work with 54 Olympic medal-winners, numerous world champions, from various sports and from 17 different countries, and through my gift impact their lives and assist so many to reach their potential."

After working initially in the United States, Hartmann has been based in recent years in Limerick city centre

Ireland gears up for 2012

Yet greater success could come just before, not during, the London Games

THE chief executive of Athletics Ireland, Brendan Hackett, and its coaching director, Gary Ryan, were at the launch of the Hartmann Collection, but the governing body's new director of athletics, Max Jones, was instead in Portugal – getting to know the Irish team that he is poised to lead toward the 2008 and 2012 Olympics.

With the exception of sprint hurdler Derval O'Rourke and distance runner Alistair Cragg, though, the nation carries very few genuine medal hopes into the near future. Yet when it comes to hosting national teams, the country has very high hopes.

"It is not a hope but a serious reality," says Ron Delany, Ireland's 1956 Olympic 1500m champion.

Indeed, the University of Limerick itself, which last week hosted the launch of a sports injury clinic and museum run by Gerard Hartmann, has facilities as impressive as anywhere you will find in the United Kingdom.

On one side, Hartmann's clinic overlooks a 50-metre swimming pool that is used by the Irish national team. On the other side, the clinic looks down on to a 250m indoor running track and separate Mondo sprints straight, plus state-of-the-art gymnasium. Outdoors, there is an athletics arena and the whole area is surrounded by picturesque running trails.

"Most teams do not like basing themselves in the host nation on the eve of an Olympic Games because the atmosphere is too intense," says Hartmann, who describes London as Ireland's "back doorstep".

"With Shannon Airport and the world-class facilities in Limerick, the youth of Ireland will be able to benefit from the build-up to the 2012 Olympics."

The University of Limerick's motto is "excellence and relevance" and when it comes to sport and the run-up to 2012, their set-up could not be more excellent and relevant.

using his parents' jewellery shop – which he converted into a sports injury clinic – a building that has been in his family for more than 130 years.

For years the world's premier athletes – including top Britons such as Holmes, Radcliffe, Jackson, Ashia Hansen, Jason Gardener, Mark Lewis-Francis and many others – have flown into Shannon Airport to visit Hartmann's Limerick clinic.

Now, they will simply have a slightly longer cab journey to the university campus and as well as having their injuries treated they will have the chance to marvel at what is undoubtedly one of the best athletics museums in the world.

The Hartmann Collection includes a maze of memorabilia



Craig Mottram's singlet from the 2004 Athens Olympics is part of the Hartmann Collection

- Carl Lewis's 1984 Olympic blazer.
- Steve Ovett's 1976 Olympic vest.
- A letter written by Kelly Holmes to UK Athletics in the summer of 2000 begging to be given leniency with regards Olympic selection due to her injuries. Eight weeks later she won a surprise 800m bronze in Sydney and later praised Hartmann for getting her to the startline.
- Race horse shoes and equipment worn by jockey Kieren Fallon and the Aiden O'Brien-trained horse George Washington.
- Sean Kelly's Tour de France green jersey.
- Haile Gebrselassie's signed spikes and autobiography.
- Paula Radcliffe's race numbers from the 2002 World Cross in Dublin and 2003 London Marathon – both of which she won, the latter in a world record of 2:15:25.
- Colin Jackson's spikes – like most items in the Collection, they are signed.
- Craig Mottram's Australian singlet from the 2004 Olympics, plus signed spikes.
- Sprint shoes worn by Ireland's world indoor 60m hurdles champion Derval O'Rourke.
- Lance Armstrong's yellow jersey, together with shoes, gloves and shades.
- Sonia O'Sullivan's kit, shoes and posters include one personal message that reads: "Thanks for your time and patience and hard work you have given me – without which I would find it impossible to run so fast and win so many races."
- Douglas Wakihuri's signed marathon race shoe.
- There are also items signed by distance women Catherina McKiernan, Liz McColgan and high jumper Steve Smith.



Help from above: local priest Father Liam Kelleher blessed every room in the clinic