Dear friends,

Welcome to the 2008 Annual General Meeting, I thank each and every one of you for making the effort to be with us today.

Recently our community has been hit by a tragedy of the worst kind. Any loss of life is a tragedy however the death of a young person is all the more devastating.

Sarah Alford was a bright, bubbly, determined & energetic member of our organisation – she, like all of us present here today, shared a passion for the sport we all love.

As an international representative of two disciplines Sarah was the embodiment of all that was good about our sport.

Her contribution to Irish Gymnastics, her club and to the people who loved her will never be forgotten.

Our thoughts are with her family and friends at this difficult time.

I would ask you to now stand for a minutes silence in honour & celebration of the life of Sarah Alford.

1 MINUTE SILENCE

It is difficult to move on when tragedy hits as in the case with Sarah however as members of Irish Gymnastics we have a duty to ensure the sport she cared so much about develops and evolves to build on the contribution Sarah gave to us and with this sentiment I move on…

The face of gymnastics in Ireland is changing for the better.

For many years our organisation has struggled to find its place and identity within the Irish Sports community.

While we have always had a strong and dedicated membership and community of volunteers, we have lacked the central direction necessary to take us to where we all want to be – in a position of central importance to all sport in Ireland and a strong gymnastics nation on the international stage.
Over the past few years the foundations have been laid - the Board of Management sitting here today, have dedicated, at great length, our time and efforts and have assembled a dedicated team of staff who have worked tirelessly to provide the organisation with the structure and clarity of direction that is necessary for us to take our rightful place as one of Ireland’s lead National Governing Bodies of sport.

Great work has been done and huge progress made and I would like to welcome & thank Siobhan Leonard, head of the Irish Sports Councils’ NGB unit for joining us today to endorse our recent developments and efforts.

I would also like to take this opportunity to publicly welcome our new Springboard Development Officer – Aimi Baker to the team. Many of you will know Aimi from her involvement in the Acrobatics discipline of our sport, she now joins the coach education team of Sally Filmer & Garrett Buckley to develop a new initiative that is aimed at establishing Irish Gymnastics as the ‘FUNdamental’ sport in Irish Sport – Ciaran will explain more in his presentation.

For Irish Gymnastics 2008, as agreed with the Sports Council, has been and will continue to be a year of Strategic planning and development. In the coming months we will be ‘going on the road’ so to speak to actively engage in a consultation process with our Technical Committees, Regions, Clubs and members.

The aim is that come autumn, with the support of the membership we can adopt and launch our new Strategic Plan to provide a road map for our membership highlighting where we as a sport are heading in the coming years.

While looking to the future it is important not to forget the present & I would like to point out that the great achievements of those within our sport this year has not been overlooked, there have been too many to mention individually however a few standout performances include…

- In Acrobatics, Kim O’Brien and Leigh Lehane qualifying for finals in the 11-16 age group at the European Age Group Championships in October
- In Men’s Artistic, Matthew Cosgrave’s 2 apparatus titles on Floor & Pommel Horse at the Northern European’s in November, I must also say what an outstanding success the Northern Europeans and indeed the Celtic Cups were with Daniel Fox claiming Irelands 1st men’s medal in the latter event.
- And a very successful year for Irish Tumbling with Aoife Kiely’s silver medal at the World age group championships in November, a 5th place team result topped off with an individual 6th place overall from Gillian Clarke at the Junior European Championships in May.

I feel that we have built a healthy organisation, and from looking at the promising results above we have an exciting time ahead, I along with my colleagues on the Board of Management look forward to engaging with the membership through the strategic planning process in the coming months.

On a personal note this year more than any other year has been a particularly hectic year for me and I was unable due to business and work commitments to devote as much time as I would have liked to my position as President and I would like to express my appreciation to my colleagues on the Board of Management for their support during a difficult period.

My thanks to all our Disciplines, members of the Board of Control, all our Regional Committees and all our Staff for the hard work and dedication throughout the year. I would also like to extend my congratulations to Natasha Preston and husband Stephen on the birth of their daughter, another future gymnast I’m sure, and wish them all the best for the future.
We have a brilliant sport and we have finally got the structures and personnel in place to achieve our goals for the future.

Finally I would like to thank John Treacy and his team at the Irish Sports Council for their ongoing support and encouragement, also our sponsors Tony Preston and Cuan na Ri.

Jim O’Leary
President Irish Gymnastics.