



ON THE Dollar Trail...

When Jerry Kiernan engaged Brendan O'Shea as his coach back in 1982 the long-term plan which they formulated included a sampling of the American road-racing circuit.

In July this year that ambition was fulfilled when the two flew out of Shannon on the first leg of a five-race itinerary. Jerry did himself, O'Shea and us proud over there, winning three of his races in magnificent style. But did the trip yield a financial bonanza?

O'Shea himself takes up the story with Jerry's final race and discusses dollars and dimes.

Jerry's fifth and final race was the AFC half-marathon in San Diego, California, which necessitated a six-hour flight. This race is one of the most prestigious in America and is superbly organised. As such, it always draws a strong field, and this year was no exception.

Jerry produced, in my opinion, the best performance of his career to date winning by more than a minute from Thom Hunt, who is a previous winner of the World Junior Cross-Country Championships and is now at his best. The likes of Ron Tabb, Benji Duden and Kirk Pfeiffer, all 2.10 marathon men, were more than three minutes back.

Emily Dowling had a really fine race here also, finishing third in a very competitive field.

And how many thousand went into the Kiernan bank account as a result of this win? Zero is the answer.

There is no prize or appearance money for this race. It enjoys very high prestige because of its tradition and organisation and is used by many of the top American runners to impress their sponsors with a good performance.

However, Jerry did receive a custom-made mirror as a trophy, which I thought was appropriate considering his famous head of hair.

What lessons, if any, did we learn that could be of benefit to Irish runners having thoughts of sampling the American road scene? In particular, is there big money to be made there?

Well, Jerry's record in recent years indicates that he is by far the best road runner in Ireland. Even though we aimed specifically for the prestigious money races, he still totalled only 4,500 dollars (about £4,000), a trophy and a mirror!

Established American athletes can usually expect

appearance money in addition to possible prize-money; but Jerry did not get so much as a cent, since he was almost totally unknown. This would be generally true of the Ireland-based runners.

Obviously, it would be quite different for the likes of Coghlan, Treacy and Flynn, who are American-based.

And what of expenses? Out of our own pockets we paid £2,200 for air-fares and another £300 for surface travel; while living expenses came to more than £1,000 for the eight weeks of our stay. It would have cost five times that but for the hospitality of some American friends. Mike Long in San Diego and John and Sharon Dunne in Connecticut (both Sharon and John, incidentally, ran the recent Dublin City Marathon and enjoyed it immensely). Our expenses, therefore, totalled £3,400, which leaves a balance of £600, one mirror and one trophy.

So, is Kiernan the millionaire that some people think he is? If he is, it is not as a result of his American campaign. You won't buy much with £600 these days.

However, we view the trip as having been very successful because our prime aim was to establish Jerry as one of the best road runners on the American scene and that we succeeded in doing. Money, while always wel-

come, was secondary.

Is there, then, no money to be made on the roads of the U.S.A.? I would say very little for the Ireland-based athlete, who cannot command appearance money. The competition in most races is so keen and deep that it is extremely difficult to get into the top three.

The weather is often very oppressive (moist and humid) and immediately places the Irish runner at a great disadvantage.

Most races from 5k to 20k (three miles to half-marathon) only give buttons to placers outside the top three. Many, such as the AFC half-marathon, give no money at all, even to the winner.

On the other hand, there is big money to be won in marathons, some of which have huge budgets (a million dollars in Chicago, for example). These will have cash prizes for the top ten or 20 finishers. But how many Irish marathoners would qualify?

Most race-organisers will not offer travel expenses to any but the top elites. On the other hand, they will usually provide a few days' free accommodation.

So, all-in-all, there just ain't too many dollars growing on them that American roads and waiting to be plucked by adventurous Irish runners. Or, if there are, Jerry and I were unable to find them.