

Jessie and Thomas Barr competing in Santry.
BRENDAN MORAN/TOMAS GREALLY



Brother and sister team share life's little hurdles

Having won the 400m hurdles at the senior championships, Thomas and Jessica Barr believe training and living together has helped forge their success, writes **Eoghan Young-Murphy**

DUBLIN

There is hardly a brother-sister combination around as close as the Barrs. Thomas (19) and Jessie (22) picked up the men's and women's 400m hurdles titles respectively at the Woodie's DIY Senior Track and Field Championships last weekend.

As well as both excelling at the same track discipline, they also train together with Drew and Hayley Harrison's renowned squad at University of Limerick (UL).

Jessie is a graduate of the college and Thomas is a current student.

They have also shared a house in the Treaty county this summer as they vied for the London Olympics qualifying standards, which narrowly eluded them.

"We train together pretty much every session," says Thomas, who has just

completed the second year of a mechanical engineering degree.

"We train together all season, all the way through. Pretty much the only time it's broken up is now, at competitions, because we are off in different areas at different times.

"Other than that, we train together nearly every day.

"We are both living in Limerick at the moment — we have a house down there, with Niamh Whelan as well, another athlete."

Hailing from Dunmore East in Waterford, they picked up the sport at the same time.

"I took up athletics at 12 and he was nine," says Jessie, who graduated from UL last year with a degree in psychology.

"He joined before me in Ferrybank AC and I joined a week after. I thought: 'That kind of sounds like fun — I will do that.'"

Jessie enjoys having her brother as a regular training partner.

"I really like having him around because we get on really, really well," she says.

"I would see him as more of a friend now than a brother."

With such great athletic ability coursing through their veins, you wonder from where they inherited the sporting genes.

"My mum, Martina, would even tell you herself that she was never sporty," says Thomas.

"My dad, Tommy, used to do 800m races when he was younger. He went to school in Wales and competed for a school there."

The other member of the Barr family is 18-year-old Beckie (18), who has just completed her Leaving Cert, but, it seems, she will not be following in Thomas and Jessie's footsteps.

"No, she is not interested in hurdling," says Thomas. "She is into music and she was playing hockey for a long time as well."