



The design of the €7.2m Drogheda pool consists of two overlapping curved structures, with a roof that maximises natural light

Pool is a minnow at design awards

■ Colin Coyle

IT has all the ingredients of a classic Wembley stadium giant-killing: a plucky underdog on a shoestring budget taking on the might of English football for the ultimate prize. This time, however, the goal is not the FA Cup but an important engineering award.

Drogheda swimming pool in Co Louth has been shortlisted for the Institution of Structural Engineers (IStructE) 2006 award for best sporting structure. The 25-metre pool's daunting opposition includes Wembley, the most expensive stadium ever built; Arsenal's Emirates ground in north London, and the University of Phoenix stadium in Arizona, which will host next year's Superbowl.

The budgets of the shortlisted projects highlight the David v Goliath battle that Drogheda pool faces. While the pool cost €7.2m to build, the final construction bill for Wembley was a record-breaking €1.2 billion. At €574m, the 60,000-seater Emirates stadium's budget also dwarfs the Irish entry's construction bill, while the home of the

Arizona Cardinals, another 60,000-seater, cost €330m.

Gavin Arnold, of Newenham Mulligan & Associates, the pool's architects, said: "We are certainly in heady company but although our project is on a tiny scale compared with Wembley, the award is for structural principles, so the budget shouldn't influence the result."

Cian O'Donnchadha of Arup, the pool's structural engineer, said smaller projects had won structural awards in the past. "It was a huge surprise, especially given the worldwide competition," he said. "Stadium construction is increasingly at the cutting edge of design and engineering"

Last year the Lingotto Speed Skating Oval, built for the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, won the award. Bayern Munich's €340m Allianz Arena, nicknamed the "inflatable boat", was runner-up.

The Drogheda pool's design is based on overlapping curved-timber structures. The roof maximises natural daylight but avoids glare by reflecting southerly light. The building also houses a sauna, steam room and gym. The pool's communal changing rooms have been praised for design features such

as heated tiles in the dressing areas.

Wembley, designed by Norman Foster, has a capacity of 90,000 and is the second largest stadium in Europe after Barcelona's Camp Nou. It also has the most toilets, 2,618, of any building in the world. The building's signature arch, the world's longest single span roof structure, is 133m high and visible from 12 miles away.

The Emirates stadium was designed by HOK Sport and built by Sir Robert McAlpine — on time and under budget, despite opposition from several residents' and business groups.

The Arizona stadium has a retractable roof and roll-in natural grass field, and was named as one of the 10 most impressive sports facilities in the world by BusinessWeek magazine.

The IStructE has members in 105 countries. Its awards, established in 1968, are the world's most prestigious engineering honours. This year 151 projects entered, the highest number ever, with 46 making the shortlist. There were eight entries in the sports category.

The winners will be announced on November 14 at a ceremony in London.



Wembley cost €1.2bn



Emirates seats 60,000



Phoenix: Superbowl host