

Pipe Band Championship will be held in Limerick next June

Festival highlight recalls great contest of the 1880's

ONE of the highlights of the Limerick Sports Festival next June will be the Munster Pipe Band Contest, in which ten bands from Dublin and fifteen from Munster are expected to take part.

It will be the first contest of its kind ever held in Limerick, and is organised by the Limerick Pipe Band in conjunction with the Munster Pipe Band Association. The event brings to mind a grand band contest of the 1880's—also the first of its kind here—during which the judges were locked in a roofless railway wagon and exposed to pouring rain for five hours!

The contest was held in the Corn Market on Sunday, October 5, 1886, and was a finale to the greatest sports cavalcade ever held in the provinces.

Incidentally, the sports fixture was the first ever held under the rules of the G.A.A. and I.C.A. in Limerick. It opened at the Markets Field on Sunday, September 19, was continued on the following Sunday, and concluded with the band contest of October 5. The sporting events attracted the cream of Ireland's athletic talent, including such champions as Mitchell of Emly and the great R.I.C. cyclist, Lowry.

The festival had visitors from areas as far distant as Waterford and Tuam, and it marked the first occasion on which a great band contest was held in the city. The band contest movement in Ireland originated in Dublin; by 1886 it had spread widely, and promised to become quite as popular as in England, where it had already existed some years.

It served at least one good purpose, as two Limerick promoters, a Mr. O'Connor and Mr. S. Elliott, through its instrumentality, enriched the music of Ireland with one or two airs which they unearthed and rescued from oblivion.

And a contrast—some members of the Band of the Black Watch in Limerick,

1895.

Regiment, Dublin.

While the playing continued, the judges were confined in a railway wagon, which was open only from the roof and thus could not identify the bands by name.

The competition

Six bands competed—two from Cork, one each from Waterford and Newcastle West and two from Limerick.

They drew for places, and played in the following order: The Butter Exchange Brass Band, Cork (conductor, J. Sigerson); Blackpool National Brass Band, Cork (conductor, J. Lynch); Newcastle West National Brass Band (conductor, J. P. McAllister); T. F. Meagher National Brass and Reed Band, Waterford (conductor, W. Tihen); Victuallers' National Brass and Reed Band, Limerick (conductor, W. Trowdell); No. 1 National Brass Band, Limerick (conductor, H. Stewart).

Each band was required to play, as a test piece, a Grand

Fantasia of Irish Melodies, the introduction, ensemble, modulatory passages and finale of which were composed by Stanislaus Elliott, Professor Music, Limerick. In addition to this, each band had to play a piece of its own selection.

The winners

The No. 1 National Brass Band, Limerick, although drawing last to play, was the first mentioned when the rain-soaked judges popped their heads over the railway wagon in which they had been enclosed for about five hours.

This band was not excelled in a single point by any of the competing bands, and was only equalled by the Butter Exchange Band in expression. It showed a wonderful knowledge of detail and technique, and its performance was undoubtedly the best of the day.

The decision was greeted by wild cheering, and the conductor of the winning band was hoisted shoulder high by the crowd.

It was the opinion of the judges that this Limerick band

would take honourable mention at the major contests in Dublin, Manchester, Liverpool and London.

It was composed entirely of working men who had little time for practice. The high order of intelligence of the players, together with their great perseverance, was recognised by two prominent Limerick men, Ambrose Hall and Charles McKern, who launched a public appeal for funds to enable the band to compete at contests in Ireland and England.

That evening, the committee, stewards, judges and other officials dined together at the Treaty Stone Hotel, where the host and hostess, appropriately named Mr. and Mrs. Tucker, served a magnificent dinner in grand style. The toasts were: The Limerick Gaelic Club, the Judges, the Press and the Guests.

Most entitled to honourable mention were, perhaps, the judges. Their feat in submitting to five hours confinement in a roofless railway wagon, in drenching rain, might be an idea for some of our musical marathons of to-day.

Limerick C.B.S. Pipe Band making their first appearance at Croke Park on the occasion of the All-Ireland Colleges final last year.



Never take a chance...

