

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 30)—Michael J. Creed
of Elton.

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

MICKY CREED, of Elton, whose smallness of stature made him a warm favourite on athletic fields, was by no means a lesser light among the jumping luminaries of what might be called the "Leahy era."

He was equally good at all the jumps, but it was his magnificent performances in the flight for height that drew the greatest applause of the crowds that thronged the sports fields of those memorable days in Irish athletics.

And so deeply was the Bishop of Killaloe, Most Rev. Dr. Fogarty, impressed by his high and long jumping, at Ennis sports on one occasion, that he presented him with a special gold chain and a beautiful Rosary Beads.

Creed had a habit of closely examining the ground near the jump so as to ensure a favourable take-off. The examination was slow and deliberate, and the crowds seeing that the crossbar was several inches higher than the contestant's head, were unstinted in their applause when he jumped many inches more than his own height.

JUMPED 6 FT. 4½ INS.

As already mentioned, he was small of stature—5 ft. 6 ins. or a shade less, and he actually jumped 6 ft. 4½ ins. at a famous G.A.A. meeting at Shawn's Park, Belfast, on one occasion.

"Carbery," whose book, "Fifty Years of Irish Athletics," is the recognised authority on championship performances, was a close friend of Creed's, and as he resided for some years in the Kilmallock district, had many an opportunity of judging his worth. This is what he had to say about him in the autumn of 1940:—

"Writing of great high jumpers reminds me that I saw one of the most remarkable of these at the All-Ireland hurling final between Limerick and Kilkenny. Himself no mean wielder of the caman, Michael Creed, of Elton, was blessed with a magnificent spring.

"Just 5 ft. 6 ins. in jumping shoes, Mick Creed was beautifully built. He first shone as a hop, step and leaper, where he was good for 48½ feet. His high jumping was a joy to see. He was a regular rubber ball in action. Running straight in he gathered fair pace before the spring. Straight up he shot into the air in the old Irish style, and levered his neat body across gracefully to land facing the lath.

EIGHT INCHES MORE THAN HIS OWN HEIGHT.

"Six feet two inches was easily within Creed's compass—eight inches above his own height. His performances often roused loud acclaim. He shared the Irish title with T. J. Ahearne at Thurles in 1907, and beat 6 ft. 3 ins. before going to America, where he was an immediate favourite in indoor gatherings. So popular was he that 'the Irish bounce' was brought from city to city. On his return to Ireland, Mick appeared at Shawn's Park, Belfast, where he astonished spectators in clearing 6 ft. 5 ins.—almost a foot above his head. There was a sag in the lath and the record was not approved.

"Creed was a very skilful man with greyhounds, and a fine slipper. We coursed a lot together in the old days—the Bruff carcasses, Dromin, Knockaron, Crummall and Knockaney, at Cush and Ardpatrick. Settling down to business at Bruff, this fine athlete flourished all the time continuing a keen follower of outdoor sport."

WON A MUNSTER TITLE IN 1901.

M. J. Creed donned togs for the first time at a sports meeting on 19th August, 1900, the venue being Kilmallock. He was then barely seventeen years old, and although he won nothing, his performances were most creditable. He certainly started in good company, for Paddy Leahy swept the boards at that meeting, winning the high jump at 6 ft. 0½ ins., the long jump at 22 ft. 4 ins., the hop, step and jump at 47 ft., and the pole jump at 9 ft. 9½ ins. Other famous figures com-

peting that day included Con Leahy, John Flanagan, M. Hynan and Jim Condon.

The following June Mick had his first recorded success, the venue being Ennis, where he won the Running High Jump Championship of Munster at 5 ft. 9 ins., and was also successful in the running long jump event at 20 ft. 8 ins. Three weeks later, at Bruff, his figures improved to 5 ft. 11½ ins. and 22 ft. 10 ins., respectively, yet he had to be content with a pair of "seconds" on this occasion—Joe Lynch winning the "high" at 6 ft. 1 in., and Con Leahy taking the "long" at 22 ft. 10 ins. Back in Ennis on July 9th, he won the high jump at 5 ft. 10½ ins. and was third in the 120 yards hurdles.

BRILLIANT HURLER ALSO.

In the All-Ireland Championships at Limerick on September 29th, Creed was second to Con Leahy in the high jump. As well as his deeds on the athletic field, he found time for participation in several hurling games and was soon recognised as a brilliant performer with the caman. He first played with Knockaney (Galteemore) Hurling Club, and when that team broke up he joined the famous Staker Wallace Hurling Club, with whom he won many successes. Always a great follower of hurling, he rarely missed a championship match wherever the Limerick team was engaged.

It would be obviously impossible to follow his athletic career step by step, but some idea of the successes he gained can be judged from the fact that the day he celebrated his twenty-first birthday his home at Elton contained over seven hundred prizes won by him.

He made several efforts to gain the coveted All-Ireland medal and we meet him at Cork Athletic Grounds on July 23rd, 1905, where he tied with J. J. Bourke for second place in the high jump (5 ft. 10½ ins.), the title being won by Con Leahy at 6 ft. Three Limerick men took running hop, step and jump placings—J. J. Bresnihan, first (48 ft. 11 ins.), Con Leahy, second, and M. J. Creed, third.

REMARKABLE TRIUMPH FOR LIMERICK PROWESS.

The twenty-second annual G.A.A. Athletic All-Ireland Championship meeting at Thurles on July 28th, 1907, was a remarkable triumph for Limerick athletic prowess. Just study the results: 100 yards flat, Jim O'Connor (10 2-5 secs.) won; 220 yards flat, Jim O'Connor (23 4-5 secs.) won; 120 yards hurdles, Joe Leahy second; running high jump, M. J. Creed and T. J. Ahearne tied at 5 ft. 11 ins. for first place; running long jump, T. J. Ahearne (23 ft. 2½ ins.) won; running hop, step and jump, T. J. Ahearne (48 ft. 4 ins.) won, M. J. Creed second; three standing jumps, Jim Fahey (35 ft. 2 ins.) won; standing hop, step and jump, Jim Fahey (31 ft. 4 ins.) won; 16 lbs. hammer (circle), Paddy Ryan (150 ft. 6 ins.) won; 28 lbs., M. Heelan, Caherelly (34 ft. 3 ins.) won; Paddy Ryan, second; 56 lbs., Paddy Ryan (32 ft. 8½ ins.) second.

HIS GREAT POPULARITY IN CANADA.

A few months later, Micky Creed emigrated to Canada, taking up his abode in Hamilton, Ontario, where his friend, Tom Flanagan, brother of the great weight throwing John, of Kilmallock, got him under the control of Tom Eck, who had trained John L. Sullivan, the world famous boxer.

Indoor jumping was all the rage in Canada at the time. Mick, of course, never did any of it in Ireland and when he first visited the

local arena he was permitted to "have a go." The unnatural conditions were so strange to him that his early efforts were a pronounced failure.

He actually failed at 4 ft. 8 ins. and fell awkwardly and was soon the butt of many jokes. Goaded by the taunts, he laid several bets that he would clear six feet by a certain date. As this would have been an amazing jump for a man of his stature nobody thought he had a hope of achieving it.

He had, however, remarkable grit, and the will power to persevere. The following morning he was at the rink before any of the others, and, after several efforts he cleared 5 ft. 8 ins. By the appointed day he had all the practice he needed.

ACCEPTED ALL OFFERS

When he was about to jump for his bet, he found many more eager to bet something on the issue. He accepted all offers, and then to the utter amazement of all present he just glided over the lath at the astonishing height of 6 ft. 1 in. I need hardly add that it was not long until he set new record figures for the Canadian indoor arena.

When Canada were preparing to pick the players to represent them at the 1908 Olympic Games some athletes expressed opposition to Creed's inclusion, on the grounds that he was only nine months resident in Canada.

In a letter to the Canadian newspapers, dated 15th May, 1908 Creed declined participation in the Olympic Trials. Stating that his intention on leaving Ireland was to make a home in Canada, and take part in Canadian sports as much as possible, he said he would find it quite easy to get his place on an Irish Olympic team and he had no reason to go to Canada to get on their team. He would not compete in the trials, but when the selected ones returned from the games he was prepared to meet and defeat them all. And, to prove his worth he actually jumped that day, 6 ft. 2 ins. in the high; 22 ft. 6 ins. in the long and 48 ft. in the hop, step.

CREED THE MAIN ATTRACTION.

Reporting on an athletic sports organised by Miss Jeanette Lewis in aid of her Hospital Fund, at Hamilton Jockey Club grounds in August, 1908, the "Hamilton Spectator" had this to say: "The meet was a wonderful success, the crowd was something never dreamed of and the competitors the best ever. The whole afternoon fairly bristled with features, but the main attraction was Mick Creed's beautiful high jumping, the little Irish champion clearing the bar at 6 feet in face of an unusually stiff wind which caught the competitors square in the face. Porten, of New York, saw him jump and stated that he was the liveliest jumper he ever saw and that there was not a man in America who would beat him."

Micky made many friends in Canada, amongst them a host of athletic celebrities, including such men as Jack Johnson, coloured heavy weight champion of the boxing world, and Tom Longboat, noted Indian marathon runner. A patriotic Irishman, he never really settled in the land of his adoption, and it was no surprise consequently when he returned to the native sod in the summer of 1908. He was obviously delighted when he reached Ireland again. "I am back in dear old Ireland," he said, "and that fair land is greener and lovelier than ever."

WON I.A.A.A. CHAMPIONSHIP IN 1911.

In 1911 Creed won the running

high jump Championship of Ireland, under I.A.A.A. rule, the height returned being only 5 ft. 6 ins., indicating lack of stimulating opposition, rather than any fault of the jumper.

The Elton man proved this at Belfast, where he set up the best figures of his career. The "Dublin Saturday night" dealing with the performance on that occasion said: "The appearance of M. J. Creed, the famous Elton jumper, at Whiterock Road last Sunday, gave a very decided fillip to the Gaelic Sports there. It is reported that Creed jumped 6 ft. 4½ ins. which if correct would tie with P. J. Leahy's record. I was not present at this particular meeting and cannot say positively whether the jump was made under conditions that would be properly recognisable. The ground is certainly not suited to record breaking form at all, which makes the feat all the more remarkable. He is undoubtedly the natural successor to Leahy."

When Micky pulled off his spiked shoes for the last time and said good bye to the active athletic arena, he settled down in Bruff to a business career that proved almost as colourful and successful as his years on the track. As a conversationalist he was second to none and he had many interesting and amusing stories to tell of his athletic days.

A sterling Irishman and genuine Gael, his passing just ten years ago removed one of the most lovable figures of his time.

No. 31—P. J. Rea, of Kilfinane.