

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 43)—Tom Flanagan of Kilmallock

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

THE subject of our sketch this week—Tom Flanagan of Kilmallock—had the unique distinction of being honoured by the Six Nation Chiefs, by being formally admitted into the tribe—the first time that ever a white man was so honoured in a like ceremony off the reserve.

I have before me as I write a Press report which reads:—

"Canadian track and field sports in the neighbourhood of Toronto are undergoing quite a boom just now, and the main cause of the stir is Tom Flanagan, a brother of John Flanagan, the famous weight-thrower. He organised the Irish-Canadian A.C. only a few months ago, and during its brief existence the Club has done wonders towards the revival of athletic sports in the lower part of the Dominion. Three big meets have already been held and a host of New York athletes attended.

"Flanagan is President of the Club, and as he is one of the wealthiest men in Toronto he has every opportunity to boom the sport. Flanagan is very friendly with the Cayuga tribe of Indians, and only recently was made one of the tribe, an honour never before conferred upon a paleface. The initiation ceremony took place at one of the club functions and the full tribe of Cayugas was there.

THE CEREMONY.

"Exhibitions of war dances, corn dances, snake dances and maiden dances were given, after which Flanagan came up for admission.

"To the rumbling of the tom-toms, and the flashing of the bowie knives the Irishman was marched round and round in front of the Chief, while the tribe crooned the song of death. Then the wampum keeper turned Flanagan over to the medicine man, who rubbed him with the medicine bag. He was next taken before the Chief, who placed upon his head a tiara of eagle's feathers and declared him a member of the tribe. In order to really qualify Flanagan had to spend a night in the Cayuga camp. He did so and had a real smell of the wild, for he lay all night in the tepee with the moon peeping through the wattles over his head, yet he neither saw the Great Spirit nor dreamed of the Happy Hunting Grounds. Flanagan's Indian name is "Hiawatha," which means literally "he who keeps awake."

In an effort to find out what manner of man he was, I turn the pages of an old scrap book and find a "write up" concerning him, under date 1902. Here is what it says:—

"Tom Flanagan, younger brother of the famous John, of that ilk, who has startled the athletic world by his prowess in hammer throwing, is at present on a two months holiday from Toronto, Canada, to his native place, near Kilmallock. Tom is also a weight thrower, and what is not generally known about him in this country—because he has left us since his youth, like so many of our grand fellows, for the greater Ireland across the seas—is that, in the manipulation of certain weights, he has outstripped his renowned and elder brother. To the ordinary observer Tom Flanagan's appearance does not suggest the marvelously strong man that he really is. He has a studious air, and at first glance strikes one with his clean shaven, clean cut and handsome Celtic features, as a clerical novice. Tall, for he is over six feet high, slightly, but symmetrically built, in his dark walking attire, he does not show any indication of the bone and muscle which proclaim themselves when he enters the arena in athletic costume.

"But he is really all muscle, hard and well developed muscle—in a word, the man exemplifies the saying: 'That appearances are deceptive.' The man in the street would hardly believe that the slim, boyish looking young man could hurl a 12 lbs. hammer over 171 ft., which feat created a world's record.

AT BRUFF SPORTS MEETING.

"It was at the recent sports in Bruff that I had the opportunity of first meeting this marvellous young Irishman, and had the pleasure of a talk with him. Tom Flanagan, having left his native heath when but a youth, some eight or nine years ago, is in consequence but comparatively little known in his own country, and through his records in the athletic arena, is liable to be mistaken for the great champion, his brother John. Tom has made Canada his adopted home, where he has been for the past four or five years, previous to which he spent some few years in the United States.

"Needless to say, having gone to such a go ahead country while yet in his teens, he has naturally become acclimatised. He has all the dash and go of a typical American, and though he has acquired the mannerism of the Americans, yet he has all the instincts of a thorough Irishman, and one can occasionally detect in his interesting flow of language the mellow Munster accent mingling with that of his adopted country.

"Those in Bruff who had the pleasure of meeting him on the day of the sports, were proud of their young countryman, and it need hardly be said, his performance with the hammer was eagerly looked for, and his display that day was marvellous. He actually threw the 12 lb. hammer with one hand from a seven foot circle, without moving his feet, a distance of 127 ft. 9 ins., thereby beating his own Canadian record under similar conditions by 5ft. 2ins. There is the distinctive trait in this manner of throwing the hammer—he delivers after a triple turn from the seven foot circle, instead of a double turn from a nine foot circle, as in the case with Irish athletics.

"His performance at Bruff was loudly cheered by the vast crowd assembled on the grounds—the grand feat naturally being all the more appreciated by reason of the fact that the champion was 'one of themselves.'

INTERESTING STORY.

"Asked for particulars of his athletic career, Tom had an interesting story. He comes of a well known family of athletes. His father, during his early days, was one of the first men in the field of sport, having created records in hammer throwing and jumping. He threw the 56lbs. weight 23ft. 9ins., and in three standing jumps covered the distance of 37ft. His son, John, as we know, followed his example, and became the champion hammer thrower of the world. With his father and elder brother setting an example, it was only to be expected that Tom should develop the same prowess, and right well has he sustained the reputation of Ireland. He has 'gone in' for athletics since his childhood, but it was principally in America that he showed his worth. There he underwent a severe course of training, with the result that after many feet in the athletic field as a weight thrower and a jumper, he created a world's record with the throwing of the 12lb. hammer a distance of 171ft. 4ins. He also gained the scholastic record by throwing the hammer a distance of 159 ft. while his delivery of the discus to a distance of 111 feet made him a new record. Besides these he broke many college and other records in various branches of athletics, and when he gets back to Toronto he will compete for the Canadian championship.

"Just to show that he is in good fettle, Tom lightly jumped over two chairs, standing one behind the other, while he was talking. Flanagan is a fine fellow in every sense. In a photo he looks a trifle grim, but when he speaks you see the flash of the Celtic eyes, which light up his striking face. He thinks hurling, which he saw in Limerick recently, much better than lacrosse, and considers Kiely, Hogan and Leahy the greatest living athletes."

AMERICAN PRESS NOTICES.

Now for a few typical extracts from American Press notices of his career:—

"Thomas Flanagan, a brother of John, the champion hammer thrower, who is but eighteen years old, threw the twelve pound hammer 163 ft. 4 ins. at the Catholic Club games at Baldwin Park, Jersey City Heights. The record, 164 ft. 2 ins., is held by W. L. Condon, having been made November 5th, 1892, at Elkton, Md. It will be seen that Flanagan is only ten inches short of it.

"Young Flanagan bids fair to become a marvel at hammer throwing, and the knowing ones who saw his style predict that the fame of his brother at this speciality will be short lived.

"Next Sunday the promising athletic wonder will attempt to break the record for two running hops and a jump, now held by Dan Shanahan of Limerick, which is

50 ft. 1½ ins. He has also entered into negotiations for a match with T. F. Kiely, of Carrick-on-Suir, who is the amateur all-round champion of Ireland, and acknowledged the peer of any man in the world. Young Flanagan proved some of his all-round ability yesterday, as he was close to the leaders in both runs, and would, no doubt, have won the running high jump from scratch had he not strained his ankle slightly.

From "The Buffalo Courier."

"Fully, 10,000 spectators watched the contests for the all-round championship of the A.A.U. in the Stadium at Buffalo, N.Y., yesterday (including a large following of Canadians). The Toronto visitors had two strong cards up to wit: forty-eight hours of the whistle in the first event, but champion Gill's entry was refused, and in the actual competitions, Thomas Flanagan, while in a fair way to land the premier honours, was thrown out by an unfortunate accident in the hurdle race. Hall won the event in the ordinary time of 18 2-5th secs., a performance time and again eclipsed by Flanagan. At the time Flanagan had compiled 3,070 points—taking first place in the 16lb. hammer and the 56 lbs. lbs. weight and being third in the 100 yards run, the 16 lb. shot and the running high jump.

BROKE TWO WORLD RECORDS.

From the Toronto Star: "Tom Flanagan broke two world's records for throwing the 12lb. hammer, standing throw, at Embro on Monday. The one hand throw was 122 feet 8 inches, and two hand throw 123 feet 7 inches. The former record was 116 feet 0½ inches for one hand, and 124 feet 11 inches for the two hands. Both records were held by Conlon of Maryland. The weight of hammer, 12 pounds, was verified by Mr. O. Courier."

From "The New York World": "Over 10,000 persons attended the 38th annual sports and outing of the United Camps of Clan na Gael of King's County, which was held yesterday at Ridgeway Park. The summaries: 100 Yards Dash, scratch—Final heat won by Thomas Flanagan, Long Island City. Time, 10 4-6 seconds. Running High Jump, scratch—Won by Thomas Flanagan, with an actual jump of 5 feet 8 inches. Exhibition throwing the 16lb. hammer for distance by Thomas Flanagan, who sent the missile 166 feet 11 inches.

From the "Toronto Sunday Morning": "The annual handicap sports of the Irish Canadian Athletic Club was held at Rosedale on Saturday, and were a huge success, the big grand stand being filled with enthusiastic friends of the Club. Tom Flanagan was the surprise of the day, the energetic President capturing the all round championship. Tom was first in the broad and high jumps, second in the hundred and hurdles, and third in the 56lbs. weight. Tim O'Rourke and Osborne were tied for second place, with nine points each, and on the toss big Tim won. The prizes are: First, Claud McDonnell's Silver Cup; second, the Gaelic League's Cup; third, the Club Trophy."

MOST VALUABLE MEDAL.

From the "Toronto World," October 7th, 1905:

"The City of Toronto is now the resting place of the most valuable medal that has ever been contested for. The medal, which is called the Dowling Trophy, and is worth something over 1,500 dollars, was brought here yesterday by Tom Flanagan, proprietor of the Grand Central Hotel, from New York where it was presented to his brother, the far-famed John Flanagan, champion weight thrower of the world, by Judge Dowling of New York, and is emblematic of the championship of the world in weight throwing. It weighs about four ounces and is made of solid gold exquisitely modelled."

From "The Globe," Toronto, August 18th, 1907:

"Tom C. Flanagan is the moving spirit of the Irish-Canadian Athletic Club and the pronounced revival of field sports in Canada owes much to his untiring energy and ever ready attitude towards making a meet a success no matter how much it costs, or whether he has to pay for it himself or not. He is a brother of J. J. Flanagan, and is the typical jolly Irishman. He has been in Toronto nine years, and is joint proprietor with Tim O'Rourke of the Grand Central Hotel. He is holder of the 12 lb. hammer record from the stand."

From "The New York Journal": "Five years ago, John Flanagan champion hammer thrower of the world, invented the double hand piece, and soon had the world's mark all to himself, and has been invincible at the game ever since.

"Now brother Tom has further improved the device. Champion John writes from New Haven, where he is training the Yale students, that it means 15 ft. more to his own record. The improvements are roller handles, ball bearing, joining of handle and weight, and a spring attachment that telescopes the stem. The invention can also be applied to the 56 lbs. weight."

TRAINER OF WORLD BEATER.

I cannot leave the career of Tom Flanagan without some references to his great successes as a trainer of world beaters. He was manager and trainer of Jack Johnson, the famous negro boxer, who was world's heavyweight champion; of Tom Longboat, the great Indian marathon runner; of John Flanagan, and a host of other great athletic figures. Founder and manager of the Irish Canadian A.C. at the height of its strength; managing director of the National Sporting Club of Canada Incorporated; athletic coach of Mercersburg, Pa., University, and founder of Scarbon Beach seventy-five thousand dollars athletic field. He was special athletic and ring correspondent of the "Toronto Evening Telegram" and "Montreal Star" for many years.

During the first world war Flanagan was head of athletics of the Canadian army, and his system of making the soldier's work play, or competition, was adopted for the allied armies, and is now in vogue in the American army. Flanagan is also the man who, with Colonel Dick Greer of the Canadian army, went to Washington D.C., when the United States entered the war to confer with Government officials for athletics in the American army. When the talk was over the appropriation was made—a cool one million dollars. And Tom Flanagan was the man upon whose judgment the United States Government was willing to spend this huge sum.

As already mentioned, Flanagan had not only been a great athlete himself, but he had discovered and handled some of the world's greatest athletes, professional as well as amateurs, and as he said, he had yet to take his first dollar for training a professional athlete.

Of the amateur athletes Flanagan handled, the most notable, perhaps, was Tom Longboat, the Indian runner, who later turned professional, Flanagan, in fact, was the discoverer of Longboat, and is also the man who made him. In the days when long distance running was of international interest Flanagan was closely associated not only with Longboat, but with Shrub, Johnny Hayes, Dorando, and nearly every other long distance runner of the period.

Flanagan trained Jack Johnson for the latter's fight with Jim Jeffries at Reno, and for practically every other fight Johnson had after he returned from Australia, and until he left America a fugitive from justice.

And in the "Toronto World" of July 5th, 1910, following Johnson's defeat of the great Jim Jeffries, we find this comment:

"The Indians raised Tom Flanagan to the rank of Chief because of his success with Tom Longboat, and it remains to be seen what the coloured population will do for Jack Johnson's manager, remembering that there's nothing too good for the Irish."

WHAT J. L. SULLIVAN WROTE.

And in the "Toronto Telegram," the famous John L. Sullivan wrote thus:

"I want to tell you people here that you have a man in your town that is to be given a lot of credit for Johnson winning the championship. Tom Flanagan was up against a pretty tough proposition, but he made many friends for Johnson and himself by his amiable manner. Give Flanagan all the credit coming to him, because he had as much to do with the winning of the championship as anybody outside of Johnson."

I cannot conclude without a reference to the great reception Tom got following Longboat's world's championship win. Read about it in the "Toronto Daily Star" of February 8th, 1909:—

"Talk about your receptions! Tom Flanagan got his to-day when he arrived in Toronto, and the crowd of a thousand people who were at the Union Station to greet him handed it to the great Irishman. Three cheers for Tom Flanagan they shouted, and right on the heels of the hurrahs Tom was seized, elevated on the shoulders of half a dozen, and they rushed pell mell up Simcox Street and stormed the Grand Central Hotel. The crowd charged the main door, and rushed like a turbulent stream into the corridor, and dropped Flanagan down behind his own desk. Outside, the crowd, which could not get inside, blocked the street, and roared: 'Speech! speech!' Flanagan obliged. He said: 'Boys, I'm delighted to get home. Tom Longboat won a wonderful victory. I'm proud of him, and you are proud of him. I thank you for this reception.'"

PUBLIC RECEPTION.

Nine days later, on February 17th, 1909, the citizens of Newmarket gave a public reception in the Town Hall for Tom. We must

have a final extract, this time from the "Toronto Morning World":

"The town of Newmarket honoured our own Tom Flanagan last night in a public reception, giving the former manager of Longboat an impressive idea of what the wide awake citizens of that sport loving centre think of him. The hall was packed to the doors, all eager to pay tribute to the man who has put athletics in Ontario on a basis second to no country in the world.

"Representative citizens told in glowing terms of the deeds of the famous Irish Canadian, and to mark the occasion presented him with a handsome diamond studded gold pendant, bearing on one side the raised figure of Tom Longboat in action with the inscription: 'Presented Feb. 17th, 1909, by the townspeople of Newmarket, Ont., to Mr. Thomas Flanagan, a genuine type of the true Canadian sportsman.' On the other side of the medal was engraved: 'As a testimonial of devoted interest in the handling of Tom Longboat, champion marathon runner of the world.' It certainly was a gift to make glad the heart of any man.

"The Newmarket military band played Irish airs, and evergreen harps were festooned everywhere. Hon. E. J. Davis, ex-Commissioner of Crown Lands, was a chairman equal to the occasion, and he dwelt with feeling and force on what Canada owed to Tom Flanagan for the healthy condition of sports in the Dominion, and for his crowning effort in making Tom Longboat defeat the great Alfred Shrub, thus giving Canada the honour of possessing the undisputed champion long-distance runner of the world."

COULD MAKE GOOD ANYWHERE.

The report continued: "It is no wonder a Montreal vaudeville house offered Flanagan 700 dollars per week. After his speech and monologue last evening he certainly showed that he could make good anywhere. His remarks on Longboat were listened to with the greatest interest, and his Irish stories were great. In connection with Longboat he said: 'When we lost, we lost honestly, and when we won, we won honestly.' These concluding words brought forth the greatest applause ever tendered a speaker in these parts. Hon. E. J. Davis rose and called for three cheers for 'Honest Tom Flanagan, a name that will ever stick to him, for no one has proven more worthy of it.'"

On that note, we leave the great Limerick man, sending our good wishes over the waves to one, still happily with us, of whom we have every reason to be proud.

No. 44—Joe Leahy of Cregane.