

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 18) — Michael J. Hayes of Lough Gur

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

I HAVE dealt in these articles with almost every event in the athletic programme, and I am sure that all will agree the evidence is fairly conclusive that Limerick has produced men in every branch capable of taking their stand with the select of the world arena.

Now I come to that ideal pastime, walk racing—so little heard of nowadays, but once a very popular event, and with Michael J. Hayes, of Lough Gur, Limerick could claim a notable place when world honours were being distributed here.

I knew Michael Hayes well. One of the real old stock, his death in October, 1937, snapped another golden link in the chain of the old brigade of our Celtic nobility.

He was a noted walkist in his young days, and in 1884 won the seven miles walk championship of Ireland, defeating such noted performers as O'Driscoll, Irvine and Haughton.

ALWAYS ON THE SCRATCH MARK.

Like many another good athlete, he had stories to tell of all the great figures of the arena, but never a word concerning his own part. However, I eventually persuaded him to tell the story of his active athletic career, and this is what he said:—

"I had my first two-miles walk at the age of fifteen and got second. The next year and following years I won all I competed for in the counties of Cork and Limerick. Being heavily handicapped and always on the scratch mark, in Cork City I gave 150 yards in two miles and immediately afterwards gave 350 yards in four miles and won both.

"I had the advantage of being trained by the best judge of walking in Ireland, with the exception of the late Valentine Dunbar, John McNamara, of Shelbourne. He took the style from C. B. Irvine, of Trinity College, who had won the seven mile championship of Ireland for three years. I met him, with several others, at Lansdowne Road, on 5th July, 1884, and I won the championship, my time for the seven miles being 57 minutes 10 seconds.

HARD LUCK IN COURSE IN ENGLAND.

"I trained then for the seven miles championship of England, held in Southport, on 27th June, 1885. I led for 6½ miles, and coming home a winner got a sudden pain in my side, so violent that I had to stop up, when the second man passed me, and had gone 150 yards in front when the pain left as suddenly as it came. I walked that last quarter mile as I never walked before being beaten by only fifteen yards. If there were another 100 yards to go I would have won, my time being 56 mins. 10 secs. Training in the Markets Field, I used do the distance in 55 minutes 20 secs. The only thing I could attribute the pain to was the sweltering heat, and, contrary to what I expected the track was as hard as a road, with the result that the spikes of my walking shoes were worn down to the soles.

VICTORY IN TORONTO

"My next event was the International Championships, held in

Toronto, where on 25th September, 1885, I had an easy victory over a three miles circuit. There appeared to be some doubt in Dublin whether Irvine or I should represent Ireland, so we met at Ballsbridge to decide it in the presence of many thousands of people. So the choice fell on me, having made a record of 21 mins. 56 secs. for the three miles. Fred Gallagher, the editor of "Sport," organised that first Irish team that beat the G.A.A. "Invasion" of America by a few years. There were nine of us—Barry and Harte winning the weights. I went from New York to Canada to walk one mile, but found when I got there that I had to give the Americans 160 yards. I did not think it fair, and did not walk."

SOME HINTS.

Mr. Hayes had a few hints to give to prospective walkists:

"If you want to revive walking in Ireland you must have trainers—there is no other athletic event that requires more training, for as a rule most walkers break into a run when hard pressed. Then they are disqualified and it leaves an ugly feeling. A perfect walker should keep very erect, swing from the hips, keep the upper part of the body as quite as possible and take the longest possible stride consistent with rapid recovery if he wants to do two miles at the rate of nine miles an hour, or eight miles in the hour without taking one false step."

That is all Michael Hayes ever said about himself and his athletic performances, and as records of the few athletic gatherings held in pre-G.A.A. days are scanty, we are lucky to be able to turn to a grand colleague of Michael Hayes in the golden days of long ago—the late P. J. Rea, for some further details concerning him.

"UNBEATABLE RECORDS."

Mr. Rea was also a noted walker, and this is what he had to say to me concerning Michael Hayes:

"The Lough Gur hero has left behind him unbeatable records, unapproachable style, unforgettable achievements, and an honest advice to all future aspirants who care to don silk in the walking world—'Live systematically and train methodically.'"

"As a mere apprentice, and when most boys are at school, young Mick Hayes was ploughing about the circuit accompanied by a specimen of the 'Kerry Blue,' and getting up speed for his debut at Regan's Field, below Kilfinane, when he polished off, in the two miles open, such fine old 'peds.' as Touchstone, Hinchy, Townshend Schumaker and honest Jerry Coomey. After the third lap he bled from the nose, and yet finished the distance to the loud yells of the large gathering, who appre-

ciated the boy athlete just in the making.

"Curiously enough, he wore no shoes in this event, and it was difficult for the local judges to give an open verdict, yet an objection was over-ruled, and Hayes got the victory unanimously.

OTHER NOTABLE EARLY SUCCESSES.

"He followed this up by beating a noted Cork walkist Jack O'Connell, in the two miles open, and then faced the old cracksman, W. J. Beaumont, whose records at the various meetings were phenomenal.

"He beat Beaumont, Paddy Hogan and the popular Larry Connors, and he came not only into notoriety, but his various performances brought him under the vigilance of that expert official handicapper, Valentine Dunbar, of Dublin.

"To beat Beaumont was to accomplish a task worthy of so young an athlete—for Michael Hayes had not attained his twentieth year, and Beaumont had successfully walked the 100 miles in the Old Rink at Charles Street in the acknowledged time of 13 hours 48 minutes.

"During 1883, 1884 and 1885, Hayes gave heartbreaking odds to real good men, perhaps the most noticeable, and to Hayes the most dangerous rival, Michael Hickey, of Newmarket-on-Fergus.

GLORIOUS OPPORTUNITY.

"The Limerick Amateur Athletic Sports held annually in June gave Hayes his glorious opportunity, and in 1883, the Committee put on a special three miles walk as a preparatory training for Ballsbridge. He won easily, having walloped Hogan the only dangerous opponent at the meeting.

"Having invaded Cork City and County to meet the indomitable J. F. Crowley and Dr. Hennessy, and wiped their prowess off the map, he prepared for big engagements, and at the third meeting in Limerick he outclassed all rivals in the two miles open, at which meeting he was heavily taxed, giving as much as 135 yards to very superior competitors. To give 350 yards in a four miles walk was a gruelling trial on a good man, yet Michael Hayes, at the Cork Cricket Field in 1883, gave it to a real good walkist and won almost on the tape.

"The beginning of 1884 found the unsurpassable athletes in training for championships. It is only fair to give credit to a boon companion athlete like Dan Madigan, for, as a pace and guide, Dan gave Hayes yeoman service. Madigan was an excellent furlong sprinter, and he knew his man.

"JACK MACK" OF SHELBOURNE.

"Michael Hayes, now came

directly in contact with that grand old half miler, Jack McNamara, of Shelbourne. Both men went strictly into private training at the back of the City Home—an ideal field, specially rolled and 'sodded,' and a measured track of 385 yards was speedily commandeered. McNamara took Hayes in hand from the start, and the progress was so apparent that Hayes not only improved his speed but converted his style into a fine art.

"Here I must observe that the latter was taken from Beaumont, whose style was graceful and honest, and after the fashion of Merrill, the American champion walkist. Irvine's Dublin successes for three successive years put Hayes on his mettle, and 'Jack Mack' got at him by pacing him for short distances from three to five hundred yards, and then a short pull up and a rub down. Each evening would see a new method, and the veritable half-miler would insist upon the 'two mile limit' for two or three evenings, and, always on the Friday, poor old Michael would have to face a five mile 'go as you please.'

AT LANSDOWNE.

"Then the championship meeting at Lansdowne in 1884 brought forth all comers, and after a fierce contest Hayes, of Limerick, was declared champion of Ireland. He faced England the following year, and met with such accomplished Walkists as Meek, Murray and Jervis. It was a cinder track and under a sweltering sun he faced the seven miles, the pace being fast from the very start. The Englishmen wore socks, and instead of spikes had buttons on the soles, so that the cinders had no effect. Hayes, after three miles going got blistered, and at the end of the fifth mile both his feet were bleeding. He held on like a leech, and still led at the close of the sixth mile, when a side stitch proved his undoing. He had all his opponents conquered up to a few hundred yards from home, when he had to yield to the inevitable. Eye witnesses gave him the olive branch, for in all justice he was the winner by well over three hundred yards when his misfortune assailed him.

WENT TO AMERICA.

"He then rested on his oars for a time, and after comparative discussion with a few of the old Gaels was persuaded to go to America with a select team, but here, I must say, he had no real opposition. The journey just did him good and he had a regular 'walk over' there.

"He was a grand man, a fine specimen of the Goban Saor. Simple, unassuming, unobtrusive he made friends everywhere, and was beloved by rich and poor alike. He was a kind friend, and always loved to meet an old athlete. They are now all beneath the 'grass track.' He gave the palm to O'Crowley, Hickey, Irvine, Hogan, and lately Paddy Frost, and his advice was 'get a trainer.'

"Walking as a race died with him. Vale, Michael Hayes."

No 19 — Willie Real, of Pallas-green.