

No. 112—PAT LIPSETT of Kilfinane

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THE Kilfinane district pre-dated the G.A.A. in its devotion to athletic pursuits, and I have already written in this series about the original venues where famous men appeared in bawneens and knickers at the celebrated "Coarse Fields" outside Kilfinane, to the left of the Corrigeens and to the right of Thomastown Wood, where they contested the three, four and five mile distance, negotiating double ditches, a car passage, a marsh and slob land, and a white-thorn hedge. On Sundays after last Mass the crowds flocked to see such figures as Ned Tobin of Boherconig, Tom Howard of Ballintubber, Mick Duggan of Cush, Will Powell of Ballylanders, the justly celebrated Will Ryan "the runner," as he was universally known, and Mike Condon of Cologue. The jumpers, too, were to the fore at this old gathering place and we recall with particular pride the names of Johnny McDonald of Ballyroe and Ned Connery, both of whom regularly covered thirty feet dead level, backwards and forwards in three standing jumps. The weight men were not missing either, and Con Lyons of Labbamolloga, the "Roaster" Lane, Mike Quin of Ballyfaskin, and Mike Flanagan of the Bog were men foremost in the blacksmith's sledge and the "wheel stock" slung by means of a rope inserted in the axle shaft.

FAMED MEETINGS.

The famed meetings in the "Coarse Fields" commenced fifteen years ahead of the founding of the G.A.A., but it was not until 1875 that anything like track racing in circular fashion took place. The venue shifted to Mrs. Kirby's field, outside Kilfinane, where the celebrated John T. O'Regan of Bosnets-town was soon the star in the open mile with worthy opponents in Tobin, Morrissey, Lillis, Parry and Meade of Bulgaden. A little later, Dr. Tom Walsh of Ballycough, a powerful sprinter, appeared, as did also Schumaker, Townsend, Burgess and Touchstone.

Kilfinane kept alive and well to the front during the late seventies, after which the venue again changed—this time to Tobin's Field, near Mill House, where some of the great meetings of the early G.A.A. days were held. The townland and town of Kilfinane brought forth paragons of speed and dexterity:—

"Och, the boys of Kilfinane,
Brave men and fine women,
Who live adjacent to the swift
Morning Star,
We're not blind, lame or lazy,
To follow brave Harry Tracey,
And meet the hurler, Ned
Casey,
In old Glenanaar."

PAT LIPSETT.

Into the brilliant company of such men as Mick Connery and Dan Shanahan, great jumpers; Mick Slyne, Tom Leahy, Nicholas Devane, Ned Walsh, Will Downs, Jack Fahey, Rodger and Aeneas Fenton, David O'Connell, Maurice Connery, Mike Walsh and Will Ryan, moved another fine figure—the subject of our sketch this week—Pat Lipsett.

An old veteran figure of that era, who years ago recalled for me the glories of that remarkable period around Kilfinane, told of Pat Lipsett's deeds at the earlier meeting under G.A.A. rules, and spoke in feeling terms of some of the other fine athletes who competed with him in those days long since beyond remembrance for many who were even very small boys then.

It is like the litany of athletics to speak again of the men of that long past spell of renown: the brothers Tom, William and John Fitzgerald of Bruff, shoemakers by trade and all-round athletes; John Manning, the 440 man who was a police sergeant; and James J. Manning, a small farmer. The latter was all long distance—one to five miles. Johnny Coll drove the mail car from Newcastle West to Limerick and to train he ran half the dis-

tance behind the car. John McDonnell, Ballinacoma farmer, jumped 31 feet in the three jumps and 23 feet in the long jump.

OTHER GREAT FIGURES.

The old enthusiast spoke of J. J. Condon, a cyclist, "but I do believe he began at the mile flat against Will Cronin, a cooper of Ballyroe, a good 'half' who trained the celebrated Will Ryan of Ballincrana—a great quarter mile man."

Continuing, he recalled Paddy Henn of Glenbrohane; Thady McMahon, the photographer and champion miler who ran second to Johnny McIlvenny, the rivet maker of Belfast, at the All-Ireland cross country championship of 1887 in Dublin; P. M. Nunan, a Cork draper, who specialised in the pole jump and running hop, and only lost narrowly to the great Dan Shanahan at Kilfinane Sports in 1886.

Another Cork draper, Jack O'Connell, who, like Nunan, originally hailed from the Kilfinane district, with Harry Hinchy, shopkeeper, Joe Touchstone, farmer, and John Schumaker, were four noted Walkists, as well as Gerry Coomey of Kilfinane, who opposed Hogan of Pennywell and Mick Hayes of Cannocks in the two miles walk.

Batt Finn of Limerick was the earliest opponent of Pat Lipsett in the 56 lbs., and later came such famed figures as Ned O'Grady, Jim Mitchell and Willie Real of Pallas—all renowned at the 28 lbs. and 56 lbs.—and in which company Lipsett surely held his own.

OUTSTANDING WEIGHTS MEN.

The old star of the days he likes to remember, "when we were boys," told how he saw Doctor Daly, the Dromin man then in Cork, and "Jumbo" Barry, throw against Lipsett, O'Grady and Real in a great contest, consecutive throws, "I think 91 feet odd, but, of course, the years that have passed since with all their eventful happenings in the history of our land has made me forget many of the things that looked so important in those days I speak of so wistfully now."

Continuing, he said: "We must not forget John Flanagan at the hammer and Denis Carey, who brought such honour too on old Kilfinane. Pat Nunan, the 'boy on foot,' was a reindeer in three, five and seven miles, but we must be careful in going deep into the fathoms of athletic greatness around those years for times change and the atmosphere today is not the same as in those carefree years of long ago."

A GREAT HALF MILER.

The reminiscences drew to a conclusion with a remembrance of Jack McNamara, a great half miler, who lost the championship of all Ireland by one foot from Ned Morrissey of Castleisland; James Lyons, high jumper, who covered 5 ft. 9½ ins. and 5 ft. 11 ins. at Kilfinane and Kildorrery, respectively, in 1885; Con Lyons, another good man with the 56 lbs.; J. T. O'Regan, a grand miler, also a draper in Cork. Willie Beaumont was a long distance walkist and competed in all southern meets; Larry Feore, a butcher, was a fast 440 man and ran against Ryan, Sheehy, Frost and Alby Enright at Limerick in 1885. The latter men were good milers; John Kelly was a good harrier, a fine pace, and so was Andy Egan and Dick Smyth.

Most of the deeds of Pat Lipsett unfortunately went unrecorded. He was in his prime just before the G.A.A. swept the country, and the bulk of the deeds of those early days only lived in the traditions of the countryside. Old residents of the Kilfinane area "handed down" the deeds of Pat and many of his colleagues, and it is known that they were great men who excelled in a number of athletic pursuits. Their performances also, under primitive methods, were fit to rank with some of the wonder deeds of after years and were

bracketed with the record breaking work of Real, Flanagan, Ryan and O'Grady.

TWO NOTABLE SUCCESSES.

The founding of the G.A.A. in 1884, threw the spotlight on athletics, and in the report of the Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Club Sports held at the Markets Field, on June 16th, 1885, we find Pat Lipsett recording two notable successes over the renowned J. S. Mitchell of Emly—winning by putting the 16 lbs. weight with a throw of 40 feet 11 inches and making it a "double" with a sling of 139 feet 7 ins. in the 16 lbs. hammer event. On the same occasion we find other Kilfinane names well to the fore—Michael Connery taking the high jump honours and Dan Shanahan winning his favourite running hop, step and jump event, with Michael Connery second.

During 1886, Lipsett was again prominent. At the L.A.A. and B.C. meeting in June he repeated his "double" of the previous season. Putting 16 lb. shot at 40 ft. 5 ins.; throwing 16 lb. hammer (7 feet circle), 138 ft. 7 ins.

He visited Portarlington on 12th August, where he had a great set-to with another famous Limerick man—T. Ryan of Murroe—and divided the laurels—Ryan winning at putting 16 lbs. (38 ft. 4 ins.), with the Kilfinane man second, and Lipsett capturing the honours at throwing the hammer (111 feet 4 ins.), with Murroe filling second place.

At Newmarket-on-Fergus Sports he had his only recorded victory up to that with the 28 lbs. and on September 8th made his last appearance, at Newcastle West, where he recorded another "double"—the 16 lbs. hammer (108 ft. 6 ins.) and putting 28 lbs. 29 ft. 11 ins.).

GREAT FIGURES OF THAT TIME.

The report of that meeting recalls many great figures of the day and with it I conclude this review of Pat Lipsett's career:

"The 100 yards was secured by T. O'Neill, with Willie Fitzgerald, Bruff, a close second. The hop, step and jump was carried off by Dan Shanahan of Kilfinane, with the remarkable figure of 51 feet 1 inch, with Michael Connery second (48 ft. 2 ins.) and D. O'Connell (43 ft.) a third place man. Pat Lipsett, Kilfinane, won the hammer with a throw of 108½ ft. and Tom Lynch, the popular National Teacher at the Limerick Union, won the pole jump at 9 ft. The 220 yards was won by Tom O'Neill, W. Fitzgerald and D. O'Connell tying for second place, and E. Morrissey, Castleisland, scratch man, running third. Slinging the 56 lbs. was won by M. Finn at 22 ft., with Sam Brennan, Limerick, 21 ft. 11 ins., second. The 880 yards had Downey first, John Coll, Limerick, second, and E. Morrissey, third. The long jump was secured by Dan Shanahan, Kilfinane at 20 ft. 4 ins. with Mick Connery, Kilfinane, 19 ft. 8 ins. filling second place. Lipsett won his second "pot" when he took the honours at putting 28 lbs.

THREE MILES WALK.

"The three miles walk was won in fine style by Michael Hickey of Newmarket-on-Fergus, with Lynch and W. O'Grady second and third, respectively. Hickey was scratchman and led the way from the start, winning by ten yards. One mile, open, was won by John Coll, with M. Carroll, Aherlow, a good second. The one mile bicycle brought out J. J. Trehy, a good first, and T. J. Lowrey, second place. Two mile bicycle race had a hearty welcome from a large field of spectators, with T. Connell first, T. J. Lowrey second, and M. Trehy, third, and the big event, three mile cycle, gave T. J. Lowrey first place, J. J. Trehy a close second, and M. Trehy a good third. In this event the cheering for the three Limerick competitors was most enthusiastic."