



Waiting in the wings: Entries for the Greyhound trials at the Markets Field in 1968



Ready for the off at the Markets Field in 1955

End of an era arrives for the Markets Field

By LEADER REPORTER

IT is one of the most famous sport institutions in Limerick city and was home to everything from the GAA and cycling to soccer and greyhound racing.

But this Saturday, the Markets Field closes as a greyhound stadium, as the Irish Greyhound Board (IGB) put the finishing touches to the much awaited track on the Dock road which will open in early October.

The Markets Field was first used as a sporting venue in 1886 by the GAA and the Irish Cycling Association, who paid £8 a day for the use of the venue. In the years that followed, it played host to a number of sporting and civic events, including soccer and rugby.

Greyhound Racing was introduced to the venue in 1932, and with upgrades to the facilities over the coming years, it came to be one of Ireland's most respected greyhound racing tracks. Minutes from a standing committee meeting from 28th February 1933 show that the Racing Manager at the time was W.J. Ryan (Geary's Hotel, Limerick), the I.C.C. Official Stewart was Ed Prendergast and Timekeeper was J.P. Frost (Summerhill House, Cratloe).

Limerick FC and new owner Pat O'Sullivan are understood to be in serious negotiations to buy the Markets Field and use it as their soccer headquarters, something soccer supporters in Limerick would widely welcome.

The Markets Field in Limerick has played a vital part in the history of sport in the city. It has been home to athletics, GAA, rugby, soccer, greyhound racing, Garda sports as well as carni-



Alderman Ted Russell, Mayor of Limerick, presents the Irish St Leger Cup to winning owner Miss Roche from Mallow at the Markets Field on July 3, 1954



Some of the huge crowds who flocked to the Markets field for the St Leger final in 1955

vals, circuses and wrestling contests. Sport was first played in the Markets Field in 1886 when the Irish Cycling Association and the Gaelic Athletic Association paid £8 a day to organise athletic events over the course of three consecutive Sundays.

Well-known athletes participated and attracted large crowds. In the following decade the Markets Field established itself as an important venue and, in 1896, the Limerick county senior hurling championship final was played there between Caherline and Ballingarry. In 1928 however, the GAA opened the Gaelic Grounds on the Ennis Road and had ceased to play any matches in the Markets Field by 1932.

Rugby enjoyed the longest relationship with the Markets Field which extended from 1886 until Garryowen sold out their

rights and moved to Dooradoyle in 1957.

International matches were played at the venue including Munster against the All Blacks in 1906 which was won convincingly by the visitors.

When rugby and Gaelic games had departed from the Markets Field greyhound racing and soccer made their homes there. The first greyhound race to be staged in Ireland was held in Celtic Park in Belfast in 1927.

The sport arrived south of the border in Shelbourne Park, Dublin later that year. Three decades later Bord na gCon was established as a semi-state body in the Republic of Ireland. It made its home in Limerick where greyhound racing had first come to the Markets Field in 1932. The track staged the Irish Derby in 1939 and the Irish Oaks in 1944.

Many Limerick soccer

fans also consider the Markets Field to be their spiritual home. Limerick AFC was founded in 1934 and (through several guises) made the Markets Field its home until 1984 when it left in move that was unpopular with supporters.

The Markets Field is owned by Bord na gCon.

The Irish St. Leger, is one of the most prestigious classic events in the greyhound calendar, and has taken place in Limerick since 1944.

The Sean Dunphy owned Bar Blackstone became the final ever winner of the Classic in the Markets Field, winning in June 2009.

The first Irish St. Leger will take place in December 2010 in the new Limerick Greyhound Stadium, which opens in October.

The final ever night of greyhound racing takes place in the Markets Field on Saturday July 17th 2010.



Patrons of the Markets Field track pictured in 1955