

# Great Limerick Athletes

## (No. 55)—Charlie McGill of Limerick City

(By SEAMUS O'CALLAIGH)

A LIMERICK man who won gold medals in hurling, Gaelic football, Rugby and athletics is our subject for review this week.

In putting the career of Charlie McGill before my readers I am glad to say that this colourful figure of other days is still very keenly interested in local sporting affairs and is one of our most popular personalities.

Charlie competed at sports meetings all over Munster, and often outside the confines of the province, for a decade, and his prizes over that period exceeded the two hundred and fifty mark. The bulk of his athletic trophies were won in the 100 yards flat, the "220" and the "440," but he had an occasional win, too, in the 120 yards hurdles, and a couple of successes in the half mile. In addition, he was in the winning of several relay events.

Big fields were the order all during Charlie's years on the track and, although prizes were really good, the successful athlete definitely earned them. It was a common thing to have several heats in an event, and then there was often a semi-final, besides the final, to run.

### OPENING OF HIS ATHLETIC CAREER.

His career opened at a sports meeting under the auspices of the Boys Brigade, and I think he nearly swept the boards there, showing clean heels to all other competitors in the 100, 220, 440 and 880, a performance he repeated the following season.

He was then approaching the fifteen years mark, and the late Andy Kelly, learning of his capabilities, induced him to travel to Clonmel, where he made his bow to the sports-loving public of the south with a victory in the boys race despite strong opposition.

His first outing, "with the men," was at Ennis Commercial Club Sports, held on July 17th, 1904, when he was third in the "hundred," off the 7½ yards mark, the event being won by J. F. McNamara, with Andy Kelly second.

On August Monday he was at Tipperary, where he took second place in the 100 yards the winner on this occasion being Jerry Hurley of Kilmallock, then in his prime.

### HIS FIRST WIN.

His first win was at Hospital on September 7th, the success coming in the "220," with Andy Kelly second. The position was reversed in the "100," Kelly winning, with McGill second. Four days later, Charlie finished the season with a second in the "hundred" at Elton, the home town of the Creeds and of P. J. O'Sullivan, who has done so much to keep it "on the map" as a centre for Gaelic games all down the years.

He opened 1905 in smashing style, the occasion the annual sports of Nenagh Literary Society, held on June 25th. Second in the "hundred" to T. A. Leahy, he reversed the result in the furlong and caused the upset of the evening by winning the hurdles. Some idea of the surprise that caused may be gauged from the fact that the "books" freely offered sixes and sevens against him for the race.

Between his Nenagh triumph and the final "double" of the season, at Limerick County Board G.A.A. Sports at the Markets Field on September 24th, when he took the "100" and "220," he sandwiched successful appearances at such places as Elton, Ennis, Kilmallock, Scariff (where the old Union Field was the venue), Ogonnelloe, Broadford, Killaloe and Castleconnell. Secretary of the latter meeting was the late W. F. Lee, a life-long worker in the cause of the Gael.

### OTHER SUCCESSES.

McGill's most remarkable meeting during 1906 was at Adare, where he won both the "100" and "220" from very large fields. Run under the patronage of Lord Dunraven, the Adare gatherings were always well supported, offering as they did very attractive prizes.

Another meeting well endowed with prizes was Cobh, or Queens-town as it was then called, and from which Charlie returned with a "pot." His other successes this year were recorded at Nenagh, Bruff, Ennis, Tipperary and the Limerick Commercial Football Club Sports at the Markets Field.

At Cobh he encountered no less a personage than the U.C.C. man, P. J. Roche, who was Irish champion in the 100 yards, and the Commercial Sports saw him successful against another great performer, J. J. Curry, of Waterford, for the second Sunday running, in the "220," which Charlie won.

### WEALTH OF LOCAL ATHLETIC TALENT.

Looking over names of the Limerick winners some of the

1906 meetings, one could not help being struck by the wealth of athletic talent the county boasted then. We had the Leahys—Con, Joe, Tom and Mick; Denis Carey, Jim O'Connor, J. J. Bresnahan, Davy O'Connell, Willie Drake, Mick Heelan, M. J. Creede, Michael Hynan, Paddy Ryan, Ned Caulfield, Jerry Hurley, Martin Lynch, J. J. Bourke, Con Ryan, Ned Halvey, Tim Ahearne, R. J. Matthews, Maurice Dee, D. J. Horgan, Joe Thompson, R. J. Casey and Jim Sparling, all figuring to advantage; with Mick Madigan of Rathkeale coming out on top as the county's best at rising and striking the hurling ball.

McGill appears to have had a quiet spell for the next two seasons, at least as far as recorded meetings are concerned, but nevertheless he had a few notable successes, starting off with a second in the "440" to Jim O'Connor at the L.A.A. and B.C. Sports and proceeding to Birr, Rath Luirc, Dromcollogher and Castlemahon—all the time adding to his collection of sports trophies.

He opened the winning way in 1909 by taking a few prizes at Kinsale, continuing to Clonmel, where he won the "100" and "220." The following day at Ballyporeen, he essayed another double in the same events, but was narrowly beaten by Peter Galbraith in the "100." He won the "220."

Twelve months later Charlie was back in Clonmel, where he again won the "100" and "220," with Peter Galbraith the runner-up in each case. The next day McGill travelled to Waterford, where he accounted for all opposition once more in the "hundred." The trophy for this race was presented by the Waterford "jarvies," and was much coveted by the various sprinters.

### VIVID MEMORIES OF THAT WEEK-END.

Charlie still has vivid memories of that week-end. Remaining overnight in Clonmel, after sweeping the decks at the meeting there, he left the prizes he won in the keeping of the barmaid at the hotel where he stayed, with the request that they be sent to the railway station for him that evening. Returning from Waterford by the night mail, his Clonmel prizes were duly handed over at that station, plus a much appreciated glass of malt, with the compliments of the hotel.

Space does not permit us following him to the many other meetings he visited during the next few seasons, but mention must be made of his success in the open "220" at a sports meeting under the auspices of the old G.S. and W. Railway at Inchicore, when he beat the fancied Neville of Dublin. It is of interest to note that Martin Lawlor, then starting what later proved a great athletic career, also competed on that occasion.

### THE SOUTH WAS HIS HAPPY HUNTING GROUND.

McGill's only other appearance in the metropolis was at Ballsbridge. His happy hunting ground was the South of Ireland, then the home of athletics, and we find him taking prizes from Tralee, Lis-towel, Ballinasloe (the Asylum Grounds), Croom, Kilrush and Templemungret, the latter under the patronage of one of the famous Baggott family of millionaire land owners. Queen's College, Cork, was the scene of some of his best successes in the relay, these being shared by Jim O'Connor, and a soldier then stationed in Limerick, named Oliver.

Outside the gold medals which he won on the playing field with Young Irelands, Commercial and Garryowen, he treasures particularly the grand Connemara marble clock he got as winner of the 100 yards flat at a great R.I.C. meeting held at the Markets Field. This was also his best race, and the most exciting finish of his long career, his victory over a fancied Belfast runner in that final being one of the most popular ever recorded at the Field of the Markets.

### GREAT RACE AT CROOM.

McGill had a great race in Croom with J. J. Cutts, a member of the British Army, who was fresh from a much debated victory in the All-Ireland G.A.A. Championships at Mallow, where he beat the late J. O'Kelly Lynch, afterwards manager of the Munster and Leinster Bank, O'Connell St., and Chairman of the Limerick County Board, N.A. and C.A., for the 100

yards title, a decision that was unsuccessfully challenged later, on the grounds that Cutts had competed in English professional ranks.

Owen Coll and Andy Kelly also figured in that great Croom test which Cutts won, but the outstanding memory of the occasion was the splendid hospitality of the Croom committee, with Denis "Spencer" Lyons and Mr. O'Donnell, solicitor, the leading organisers.

Charlie regards P. J. Roche, Jim O'Connor, Jim Keays, T. J. Kelly, of the Post Office, and J. F. McEniry of Emly as the best men of his time; and he also retains very happy recollections of his associations with Andy Kelly, Paddy McCarthy, a Limerick Post Office lad who later went to Dublin; the Breen twins of Kilrush; Paddy "Docky" McNamara of Limerick City, winner of four All-Ireland titles the one day; and of several others who helped to lighten many a journey.

### TRAIN FACILITIES IN THOSE DAYS.

Travelling to the different venues was a bit of a problem in those now far-off days, but train facilities on Sundays were miles ahead of anything we know now, and Limerick had regular early morning services on every line with connections back in the late evening. This was the usual mode of travel to places served by the railways, and oftentimes other venues arranged to pick up competitors by wagonette at the nearest station.

When these arrangements did not fit in, Charlie and his other athletic friends, generally travelled by "Jacko" McCormack's side car, capable of carrying five, or even six, at a push. This was provided by Jim Cuhane, of Parnell Street, who had a number of jarvey cars then. And just as a matter of interest, the entire charge for a jar-



MR. CHARLIE MCGILL.

vey car for the day, to Hospital or Elton or such like places, was generally ten shillings, and rarely exceeded twelve.

Born and reared in Gerald Griffin St., Charlie, now retired worked forty-seven years in the Railway, in his early days commencing at 6 a.m. and continuing until 5.15 p.m.

Athletics were in his blood from the start, and he would "mouche" from school if there was a sports meeting anywhere within reach. And four years ago he was second in a hundred yards race at the Loco Works Sports in the Crescent College Grounds, a splendid tribute to his fitness after all the years.

### TRAINING SCHEDULE.

His training schedule in his days on the track consisted of two hours at the Markets Field each night with the crowd of youths that used then patronise that great meeting place where hurling, sprinting and rugby were often as not going on there together. Afterwards a bit of a walk and a drink, and then home to bed. He never took supper—just three good meals a day.

When training for Gaelic football, he went with the Commercial to Corkanree, and played many a match there. His big successes with Commercial were won in the 1910 and 1911 championships, beating Glin, 1-1 to 0-1, in the 1910

at the Markets Field; and Abbey-feale, 4-2 to 0-1, in the 1911 decider at Newcastle West.

A hurler with Young Irelands for many seasons, he often collected a penny per man from the crowd in training at the Markets Field in order to buy a sliotar. His hurleys he made himself, after inducing a country friend to bring along a suitable piece of ash, with the "makings" of three or four sticks in it.

Charlie figured in one of the sternest of County finals when he helped Young Ireland beat Castleconnell, 4-2 to 4-1, at the Markets Field, for the 1910 senior hurling title.

### PRESS REPORT.

A press report of that game had this to say: "It is safe to add that Castleconnell were the favourites with the majority of the spectators at the opening. By half-time the match 'was anybody's,' but in the second half Young Ireland proved their sturdiness and staying powers, while for the most part the play of Castleconnell was somewhat disorganised and lacked the sure hitting and passing which placed the team in the final. Taking yesterday's display as a whole the match was a little too fast and furious, and too hard contested to make anything like a really enjoyable game for the spectators. There were, however, points at which individuals in both teams drew forth the wildest applause for play that could not be excelled in brilliancy."

### MOST MEMORABLE HURLING GAME.

Club mates in that great success included Tom Hayes, one of the sweetest of hurlers and a great man on a placed ball; Johnny Creamer, Jack McNamara, Johnny Sweeney, Jack Murphy and Timmy O'Brien.

His most memorable hurling game was a match with Ballingarry, which was played about a mile outside Adare. The Young Irelanders travelled by train to Adare and walked to the venue, where Charlie had as opponent none other than Maurice Hourigan, the renowned Ballingarry runner. Needless to say, they had a tough hour of it. Charlie still talks about the sliotar the "Ger Learys" produced that day, his comment being: "You'd want to be Jack Johnson to drive it."

One of his hardest days was the occasion he played a hurling and football game the one evening at Nenagh in a local tournament. Commercial won the football but Young Irelands were beaten in the hurling.

### IN RUGBY ALSO.

Winner of the Transfield Cup with Lansdowne, Charlie helped Garryowen to victory on five occasions in Munster Cup finals. His last Cup decider was played thirty years ago when Mallow Bridge was down. He remembers the occasion well, as himself and Rory Frawley had their ribs broken.

A wing back in hurling and football, a wing three-quarter in rugby, it was often said that once he got an inch away from an opponent the latter could just whistle after him.

A participant in a Garryowen tour of Wales before the first great World War, under the leadership of Dan Donnelly, then Secretary of the Club, he figured many times for Munster, and in Bateman Cup finals, and played against several Internationals in his time.

One of his most treasured trophies is a Garryowen Silver Jubilee medal. His training for rugby was mainly at the Markets Field, but he recalls occasions when they did "night work" in the Fair Green and got over the problem of failing light by sewing a bit of canvas around the ball and whitewashing it.

### HIS HARDEST RUGBY GAMES.

His hardest series of rugby games were a trio played in Dublin on the morning of an International and the two preceding days—the opposing teams being Dublin University, Bective Rangers and Blackrock.

Charlie skipped Garryowen through great Munster campaigns, and the St. Mary's Band often honoured him by playing outside his house following Munster Cup victories.

An all-rounder in the matter of games, he played soccer in a field on the Roxboro' Road, where the Loco works now stand, and cricket in another field in the same vicinity—since the site of big Oil Company tanks.

Charlie McGill has certainly brought renown to his native city and county, and his many friends will be glad to learn of his well-being. Slainte, Charlie McGill.

No. 56—Mick Heelan, of Caherelly.