

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 12)—TADY McMAHON of Limerick City

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

TADY McMAHON, a Limerick City man, began his athletic career in the late 'eighties and continued it on into the 'nineties.

He won four Irish Championships—the 880 yards flat, under I.A.A.A., in 1891, in the remarkably good time of 2 mins. 04.5 secs., and the one mile flat the same year, his time for this being 4 mins. 38.1 secs. He retained the one mile title in 1892, but took 4 mins. 42.2.5 secs. to cover the stretch; and in 1896 was again Champion of Ireland in the "880," this time under G.A.A. laws, and "clocking" 2 mins. 2 secs.

His jump to the forefront of distance running was meteoric. He had a beautiful style, natural and without an effort, and his successes for the number of years he remained on the track were numerous. His turn of speed was such that he won many sprints, and as a harrier he was first man home in several cross-country events.

Withall, it is doubtful whether any prominent runner ever took so little care in preparation and training as Tady, and then, when he should be at the height of his athletic career he emigrated to America, and does not appear to have figured further in the active arena.

GREAT TRADITION.

Tady was one of the best, and I am glad to say that his sons followed in noble footfalls and maintained the great tradition set by a fine father.

Ned, whom I knew well during his years in Limerick, later went to the Metropolis, where I last saw him about a dozen years ago as he left the pitch at Croke Park, after having refereed a Leinster senior hurling championship tie between, if I remember aright, Westmeath and Wexford.

Before leaving Shannonside Ned had made a name in athletic fields, particularly over the middle distances, and won a Munster 600 yards flat championship. He also figured in the cross country arena, and rarely missed a Sunday morning run with the old Limerick Athletic Club.

I had the pleasure of being associated with that grand Club for some years, and often times stripped off in the then disused Boardroom of the old Limerick Workhouse, and hit off with a grand bunch for a six miles run that followed the fields away by Delmege's, across the railway line to skirt the Clare hills, and then, via "The Bleach" to Meelick, where the banks of the stream provided a level stretch almost to Lansdowne Bridge.

Turning homewards, the party kept close to the roadway until crossing the lands where the Limerick Gaelic Grounds are now situated and then turned a course that led to the famous old field behind the workhouse, where the lower portion of Lansdowne Park now stands. A final circle of that piece of ground and the race was over.

Back to the "Union" then for a wash under the cold tap, or, as some preferred it, a dash into the pond near the roadside, where portion of Shelbourne Park now stands.

I have wandered off my course a bit, so let us get back to Tady McMahon, and another son of his—Tim, who was also a splendid athlete, and won the Army "100" at Cork, a score or so years ago.

IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCES.

Now, let us have a quick run through the performances of Tady, outside his "All-Ireland" successes. We will take them year by year:—

1888—won 880 yards at Limerick G.A.A. sports, 1889—won 880 and one mile flat events at Limerick G.A.A. sports; second in "880" at Clonmel; second in the 440 and 880 yards flat, at L.A.A. and B.C. sports; third in "440" at Queen's College (Cork) sports, 1890—won 880 at Queen's College; won 440 yards (52.2.5th secs.), 880 yards, open and confined at L.A.A. and B.C. sports, and won 880 yards (2m. 3.1.5th secs.), and one mile (4m. 43.1s.), at Limerick G.A.A. sports, 1891—won 880 yards flat, open and confined, and the one mile flat championship of Munster, at L.A.A. and B.C. sports, 1892—tied with M. B. Morrissey, of Tipperary, for first place in the "880" at the L.A.A. and B.C. meeting; third in the Limerick Harriers three miles Club handicap (from scratch), 1893—first in the six miles cross country test at Cobh, against the Cork side; fifth man home in the Junior Cross Country Championship of Ireland at Clonskeagh; won one mile flat championship of Munster (4m. 44.3.5th s.), at the L.A. and B.C. sports; second in 100 yards and third in "440" at Adare, 1894—retained the one mile championship of Munster, at L.A.A. and B.C. gathering, and won the 100 yards (from scratch), at Limerick R.I.C. sports, 1895—won the "880" and second in "440" at Nenagh sports.

LATE P. J. REA'S ACCOUNT.

Now, readers, I must hand you over to my friend, the late P. J. Rea, for that intimate account of a colleague, in days that used to be, of the career of Tady McMahon.

"It was late in the summer of 1884, a few months prior to the founding of the G.A.A., when young Tady McMahon left his alma mater in Sexton Street and was shown a skylight on the top of Guy's photographic studio, the inside of which isolated elevation was assigned to him therein to develop sensitive plates as a chartered apprentice.

"He found time in his afternoons for developing his muscles, for he was clean at heart—all good athletes are—and in addition to an odd practice with Kincora Club at the rear of the New Barracks, Tady would spin round the field with Jos. Guina, Ned Slattery, Jack Guinane, Frank O'Shea, and the old rugby "tackler," Peter O'Shea, of the eighties.

"By sure and slow degrees Tady found out he had stamina, speed and wind—the three fundamentals for a runner—and, with the kind-

ness of the master of the weigh-house of the markets, Dan Fitzgerald, got in the backway at sunset to have a few laps at his very own discretion. Johnny Coll, the veteran mail carrier for the Post Office to Foynes, saw him a few times, and like the good old soul he was, joined up with McMahon and gave him all the encouragement possible for anything from the 'quarter' to the mile distance.

COMPETED AT MARKETS FIELD.

"Tady had no time to test his progress or prowess, for he was always at the studio, so he reserved his celerity until the next meeting at the markets and competed against several good and popular county runners for the closed and open mile. He won the former and came a good second to Conneffe in the latter, and this brought forward for the first time Tady McMahon 'white and blue' for Limerick City.

"It is a pity he could not attend the suburban 'meets,' for he was now conscious of his ability, but to keep himself in harness he joined the Limerick Harriers of the period, and with that popular old pack went for an evening's run over the course at Castlepark.

This kept him in good form for another season, when he tried conclusions with Regan, Fitzgerald and a few minor competitors, and Tady disposed of all comers in a gallop. "There was now nothing of importance left for him but the championship of Ballsbridge, and Tady stripped against a fieldful, including that fine miler, R. J. Moore of Trinity. The event was fifth on the card, and the men lined up from scratch. Tady was in rare fettle, and the Shaw Cup was worthy of his colours for good old Garryowen. "Val." Dunbar held the pistol, and giving the usual caution then went the signal for stern emotion, Kennedy, a fine 'strider,' leading the pace, and closely followed by Moore, McMahon, Ryan and Cleary. Two laps negotiated, Ryan advanced on the outside, leaving Moore a 'get away' in the centre, Tady watching his chance for the straight. A good-sized rug would now cover the bunch until the 220 mark from home, and then at arm's length Moore and McMahon went down the straight at a speed seldom seen even at championships. McMahon was declared champion by half a yard. It was a grand race, and the two brave fellows shook hands before a large and appreciative course.

SIX MILES EVENTS.

"The champion did nothing after that event worth relating until his big six miles at Clonskeagh, when he met the Belfast rivet-maker, Johnny McIlvenny. Belfast brought a fine team—all trained men—and Dublin sent Harrington, Bective, Elysian and Dunmore teams to meet them. That famed old 'quarter' man, Jack Lavelle, was

in the pack, and Limerick City brought McMahon, Jos. Guina, Johnny Coll, Dick Smith, Stan McAdam, Willie Woodhouse, Blakeney Gubbins, E. Finucane, Alby Enright, Mick Roche, Andy Egan, Bert Comyns and Charley Lord. In a few words, the race fell to McIlvenny, with Tady McMahon a bully second, and Jos. Guina third. It was a well contested race, the respective teams being evenly balanced.

"There was now the 'Angler's Rest' for a brief period until Tady put his pack again on the slobland and faced all South Cork with Cobh for a six mile run over the old racecourse, and it is now well known that Cobh brought men—old milers—from all over Cork to meet Limerick. At two o'clock the teams set out over a rough country—stubbles, barbed wire fences, an old railway track, and three broad tributaries of the old harbour, but the Limerick men were nothing daunted.

"Coll, as usual, made the pace, supported closely by Guina, with Tady Mc. acting 'whipper-in' for his old city gang, and when he saw how matters stood he left the team in the hands of Woodhouse, and followed up the Cobh captain like a redshank—jumping side by side with him up to the final old gateway; and now for Limerick, Coll forged ahead, pulling up his team, and making an opening for Guina and McMahon, which on the straight run home to the Infirmary gate gave Limerick the race in a canter—McMahon, 1st; Guina, 2nd; Coll, 3rd; and then a sprinkling of Cork alternately, leaving the entire pack for home honours. The victory was fully due to McMahon's strategy in guiding the destiny of the race.

FINAL ITEMS IN RACING CAREER.

"The three final items in dear old Tady's racing career were Ballinacurra Course, when a Dolphin's Barn Harrier secured the event, McMahon a good second; three miles hurdles at the Markets Field, when he gave a terrific handicap, giving Woodhouse 1st; Rea, 2nd, and poor Tady, 3rd; and, finally, a friendly race between all home teams, which brought to a happy close as clean and as brilliant a career as the most astute critic could look for. He was always a sport in every sense of the word, and as genial a soul as ever put on a running shoe. May God be fond of him as warmly as he deserved to be—one of nature's loving gentlemen.

"With poor Tady I must associate the honest name of Jos. Guina, his double in every true sense of the word. An ideal athlete if he had only trained, a very tactful runner, and, let me add, Tady's equal in stamina and speed. It often struck me that Jos. didn't let himself go when the spurt required it, but then doctors differ. He was a loyal companion, a lovely miler, and a born harrier. For cross-country purposes Jos. Guina was the man in the gap. Time did not give him a chance, and it affords me infinite pleasure to record this tribute because I knew him. It, therefore, appears only companionable that the events of a good man should not be glossed over unrecorded."

No. 13—John J. Flanagan of Kilbreedy.