

# Great Limerick Athletes

## (No. 49)—David M. O'Connell of Ardpatrick

(By SEAMUS O'CALLAIGH)

UP in the mountain fastnesses, which stretch in rugged grandeur from South East Limerick to the Valley of the Blackwater, is the district of romantic and historic Ardpatrick.

There, where nature is grandest in majesty and impressive in rugged beauty, Davy O'Connell first saw the light of Irish skies about the closing decade of the past century.

It is a region of historic traditions and memories of men of heroic mould. Legend-haunted with tales of Tir-na-nOge; of Finn and Oisín and other great warriors of the Fianna of Erin; of absorbing traditional lore regarding the days of St. Patrick and primitive Christianity in Ireland; of brave defence against the successive tides of foreign invasion, when our Gaelic ancestors repelled the early invaders; and in later times of many struggles for the cause of Faith and Fatherland made by the gallant Geraldines, who soon forgot the stranger's wiles and became kith and kin with the native Celtic clans.

The hill of Ardpatrick is where the valley of Glenosheen broadens out into the southern plain of Limerick County and where the steep mountain sinks to the level. The venerable church and round tower stand on a high green ridge. An extensive monastery, whose foundation is attributed to St. Patrick's, flourished here. The side of the hill is covered with what appears to be traces of the foundations of numerous buildings, the turf being raised into straight mounds intersecting at right angles.

### SANCTUARY FOR FREEDOM.

In such regions freedom has ever had a sanctuary and freemen are born. Isolation begets self-reliance, and men must breast the craggy heights with ardour and courage. The mountain air demands pure blood and capacious lungs. Weaklings are rare in such environment. The pity is its growing depopulation. The lure of an easier existence unfortunately tempts the sons and daughters of our race from those hills where health, hardiness and simple happiness prevail.

It was amid such rugged but inspiring scenes that Davy O'Connell was born. There, too, he was nurtured to a bodily prowess that made him one of the leading figures on the Limerick athletic stage of his time; a first-class hurler, and later a prominent G.A.A. administrator and one of the best handicappers in the province of Munster.

Looking over the recorded doings of our Limerick athletes, the first mention we find of the Ardpatrick man was at Elton Sports on September 11th, 1904, where he finished second, at 44 ft., in the running hop, step and jump event. Fellow competitors at that meeting included such well-known figures as Pat Ryan of Pallasgreen; Charles McGill, R. J. Casey, M. Hynan, A. F. Kelly and W. Drake; whilst other renowned athletes to the fore at the time were: the Leahys, Con, Joe and Tom (Paddy was handicapper by this); J. J. Condon, Owen Coll, D. J. Herlihy, J. F. McNamara, Con Ryan, Larry Roche (a champion in 1894 and still at the big weights), M. J. Creede, Maurice Dee, J. J. Collins, P. Halvey and J. J. Hurley.

### WON IN TWO JUMPS.

We next meet Davy at Kilfinane, on August 13th, 1905, and on that occasion he won both long jump (21' 6") and the hop, step and jump (46' 6"), beating M. J. Creede in the latter by just one inch.

Twelve months later, the pair were back in Kilfinane, when Creede took long jump laurels from the Ardpatrick man with a jump of 22' 3", Davy filling second place with 22ft. O'Connell, however, won the 100 yards flat on that occasion. But Creede had best, too, in the hop, winning at 44ft., whilst O'Connell's effort was 42' 5", which got him second prize.

Other successes during 1906 included victories in the 100 yards at Bruff and a second Kilfinane meeting; the 220 yards and the long jump (23' 11") at Tipperary; the high jump at Bandon (Con Leahy and W. F. Bennett tying for second place at 6' 1").

At the autumn Kilfinane meeting O'Connell beat Creede in the long jump 21' 6" against 20' 5", to

continue a rivalry that was very pronounced at the period. Davy was second in the high jump at Kilmallock, a meeting made memorable by a great battle in the weights by the two giants—Pat Ryan and J. J. Bresnihan—the latter also putting up the splendid figure of 50' 1" in the hop, step and jump.

Youghal was his first venture in 1907, and he won the long jump at 23' 2". In "High" he tied with W. Buckley (Fermoy) at 6 ft. 1 in. for top place. At Tallow he won the "Hundred," but lost to Creede in the high jump, and, at Kilmallock, won the long jump, the distance, 20 ft. 6½ ins.

At Banteer, on September 8th, he won the 100 yards, a success he repeated at Bruff a fortnight later. In the long jump, at the former venue, he tied, at 22' 6½", with A. Deedy, Banteer, for first place.

### AT THE WEIGHTS.

Bruff, on September 22nd saw him trying his hand at the weights and he was second in both the 28 lbs. and the 56 lbs.

His last meeting of 1907 was Ballyclough, where he shared the high jump with J. McCarthy, Middleton, and J. Kelleher, Kilmartyra, all three finishing level at 5ft. 8ins. O'Connell was second here in the 100 yards.

At the twenty-third annual All-Ireland G.A.A. Athletic Championship meeting, held at Fermoy on June 28th, 1908 "D.M." was second in the long jump to Percy Kirwan, Kilmacthomas, who won at 22ft. 9ins. M. Creodon of Emyly (formerly of Pallasgreen) won the three jumps at 34ft. 3ins., the Ardpatrick man being second at 33ft. 5ins. Big Pat Ryan of Pallas won at raising and striking the hurling ball with a drive of 86yds. 10ins.

Other performances on record by Davy O'Connell during 1908 are: May 31st, at Shanballymore, tied for second in 100 yards flat, second in high jump at 5ft. 11ins.

July 5th, at Banteer, second in 100 yards flat.

July 19th, at Coachford, second to Tom Leahy in the high jump. Leahy won the medal for the best all-round athlete at this meeting.

July 26th, at Kilmallock, won the 100 yards flat and the long jump (22ft. 4ins.).

August 3rd, at Kinsale, second in both the high jump (5ft. 8ins.) and the hope, step and jump (45ft. 10ins.).

August 9th, at Tipperary: won the 440 yards flat and second in 880 yards flat.

August 15th, at Mallow: Won 100 yards flat. Tied at 6 ft. with T. J. Leahy for first place in the high jump.

August 23rd, at Emyly: Won 100 yards flat.

August 30th, at Newcastle West: Won 880 yards flat.

### SUCCESSES IN 1909 AND 1910.

"D.M." had a short but successful season in 1909. His first appearance of the year was at Cobh on August 1st, when he won the high jump (6' 0") and the 120 yards hurdles event from the scratch mark.

At Kanturk, the following Sunday, he won the 100 yards; the long jump (21' 4") and was second in the 56 lbs. (23 ft.).

At Mitchelstown, on August 29th, he won the high jump at 5 ft. 9½ ins., and at Fermoy, a week later, took the honours in the 120 yards hurdles.

At Kilfinane, on September 19th, he was second to D. J. Quinlan in the long jump, and he finished the year seven days later, with second place in the 100 yards, at Tipperary Town.

I can only find reports of five meetings at which he competed during 1910. Results were:

At Kilmallock, July 9th, won long jump, 22 ft. 11½ ins.

At Kilfinane, August 28th, tied for first place with R. Riordan (Cork) in the 100 yards. Won high jump (6' 1") and second in the long jump (21' 6").

At Coachford, September 4th, won three firsts—High jump, 120 yards hurdles and the hop, step and jump.

At Bruff, October 9th, second to Tim Leahy in the high jump. Tim

won with a great jump of 6' 3".

At Dunmanway, October 16th, Tim Leahy, D. M. O'Connell and D. O'Leary (Cork) tied for first place in the high jump. The same trio were in winning hop, step and jump lists—Tim Leahy first at 44' 6", O'Leary second (43' 8") and O'Connell third (43' 6").

With Ardpatrick hurlers going strong in 1911, Davy devoted much of his time to the caman. We find mention of his first athletic outing on July 16th, at Kilmallock, where he won the high jump at 5' 10½", R. J. Casey being second (5' 8"). In the long jump, he won, his return 21' 10".

A fortnight later, at the All-Ireland G.A.A. Athletic Championship meeting, held at Mallow, he was beaten two inches by D. Lane of Castleisland, who won the long jump title with a distance of 20ft. 11ins., and lost by an inch to J. G. Barry of Cork in the three jumps, which Barry won at 33ft 4ins. Incidentally, this title is credited to J. J. Holloway (Dublin) in "Cerberus" Athletic Records Book, but the Press reports of the time give Barry as the winner.

### OTHER PERFORMANCES.

O'Connell's other performances during 1911 were:

August 6th, at Glanworth, won the high jump (5ft. 8ins.), and third in the long jump (21ft.).

August 20th, at Kilfinane, won 100 yards flat and second in high jump to R. J. Casey, reversing the verdict at Kilmallock earlier in the season.

August 27th, at Bandon, won the hop, step and jump at 46ft. 4½ins.

Sept. 3rd, at Bruff, second to P. J. Finn in the long jump and the 220 yards flat.

September 17th, at Dunmanway, won the 100 yards and the hop, step and jump; second in the 120 yards hurdles.

Limerick athletes scored some notable successes at the All-Ireland G.A.A. Championship meeting at Fermoy on July 14th, 1912.

D. M. O'Connell won the long jump title with a distance of 21 ft. 1 inch, M. F. O'Hanlon being second.

James Keays, Pallasgreen, was successful in the 100 yards (10 2-5th secs.) and the 220 yards (23 2-5th secs.); Tim Leahy of Cregane won the high jump (5' 5½"); whilst his brother, Mick, and J. J. Holloway tied for second place; M. O'Brien, Bulgaden, won at putting the 28 lbs. (35 ft. 1 in.); M. Heelan being second with 32 ft. 4 ins.

Con Kiely was second to the winner, J. J. Holloway, in the Three Jumps, his effort being an inch short of the winner's 33 ft. 3 ins. M. O'Brien, in addition to his victory at the 28lbs., had a pair of seconds to his name—in the 120 yards hurdles to D. McCarthy of Castlemagner and in the 56 lbs. to T. Ludgate of Mallow.

I only find trace of "D.M." at two other meetings during 1912—at Bandon on August 3rd, when he won the high jump and the hurdles, and at Doneraile, on Sept. 7th, when he won the 100 yards and the hurdles.

### MEMORABLE MEETING.

His only appearance the following year, and the last record I find of him as an active competitor was in the inter-county contest held at Killarney on 14th August. Special trains from Cork, Limerick, Tralee, Caherciveen and other districts brought a record crowd to this meeting, held on the Muckross Road grounds, and turned out a fixture to be remembered for many years with the happiest of recollections. Teams from Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and Kerry competed, Cork beating Limerick 36 points to 31 in the final tally.

A feature of the meeting was the new record set up by Jack O'Grady, just then coming into the picture, when he displaced Real's long standing figure of 35' 1" at slinging the 28 lbs. O'Grady's effort was 35' 5." Michael O'Brien was second.

Other Limerick successes on that occasion included a dead heat between D. M. O'Connell and P. Bourke of Limerick, for second place in the long jump at 21 ft., J. K. Beazley, of Cork, winning at 21' 2".

P. Bourke won the 120 yards hurdles with M. O'Brien second; C. H. Davis won the half mile cycle with J. J. Quinlan second; M. O'Brien notched up winning figures at slinging 56 lbs. over bar (13' 4"), whilst J. J. Hennessy won the mile flat by half a yard, after an exciting struggle for supremacy with D. Riordan, of Cork.

### PROMINENT HURLER.

I have already mentioned D. M. O'Connell's interest in hurling. He was a prominent wielder of the caman and figured in many important contests. For the Ardpatrick Club he was the leading light, and that combination had their best year in 1911, when they met and defeated Ballingarry at Limerick Markets Field in the final of the County Intermediate Hurling Championship, which was refereed by the late Jim Riordan of the Commercials.

At a subsequent meeting of the County Board, Ballingarry objected to the constitution of the Ardpatrick team, and a re-play was agreed on. This took place at the Markets Field on 23rd July, 1911, and Ballingarry reversed the decision of the previous meeting. Mr. Pat Mangan refereed.

Always interested in the administrative side of G.A.A. affairs, he was a regular attendant at the annual Conventions, and on the 29th November, 1913, was appointed Assistant Secretary of the County Board, succeeding to the Secretaryship when Tom Hayes resigned that position on 24th August, 1914. "D.M." continued as County Secretary until 17th March, 1916, when he retired in favour of the late James Ryan.

I knew Davy O'Connell well during his many years as N.A. and C.A. handicapper, and, although I have dozens of letters that he wrote me on athletic matters, I could never get a word out of him concerning his own career.

### AN APPRECIATION.

His untimely passing in December 1943, was a big blow to Irish athletics, and I will conclude with an extract from an appreciation written by his great friend, Paddy Mehigan, on that occasion:

"I was grieved to learn of the death of one of Ireland's champion athletes of the past generation—David M. O'Connell of Ardpatrick. He had been in bounding health when last I met him at a coursing meeting—a powerful, ruddy man of 60, with the heart and mind of a child. Thoroughgoing sportsman, skilled in all the arts of dog and gun, of greyhounds, and hunters, he sold many thoroughbreds at Cahirmee fair in my time.

"David O'Connell, President of the Greenall Cup Coursing, was widely known through Munster. I met him first at Mitchelstown Sports in 1905; we became keen rivals and fast friends, for we had much in common. We had many excursions together through the highways and byways of the South—on bikes, by train, and on foot. His father, Tim O'Connell, a fine Irish musician, farmed 130 acres of the best of 'Golden Vein' land, just beneath the famous hill. Athletics, hurling, coursing, and hunting were the main sporting topics of that countryside, and David O'Connell took a man's share in them all.

"A sprinter close to eventime, he won 300 prizes in 10 years' all-round competition. He won long jump titles away back in the years. When 13 stone weight I saw him clear 6ft. one day in Banteer—he was a tip-top man over hurdles. He never trained in the modern sense. He saved the hay and schooled his horses; he had much leisure and enjoyed it. A kindly neighbour, he was very popular. He could slip greyhounds well and was a rare judge of a course. Of recent years he enjoyed much favour as an N.A. & C.A. athletic handicapper. He led a life set in the pleasant ways of life—buying and selling cattle at fair and market. He was well read, too, and a grand story-teller. A few heavy wettings were neglected in that careless way so typical of powerful, vigorous men. Double pneumonia claimed him in a few days. He was a simple, honest soul, who harmed none by voice or act. The ranks of those great athletes that made Ireland's name round the Border centuries are thinning rapidly. The light of Heaven to those that are passing from us as the years speed by."

No. 50—J. J. Trehy of Limerick City.