

No. 113—P. M. QUINLAN of Knockaney

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IT may be that because so many Limerick men figured with great distinction as jumpers that this branch of athletics is held in such veneration by Shannonside, and, with weight-throwing, generally proved the rich meat of most of the grand sports meetings that were such a regular feature of the Limerick countryside in the days that we recall with such feelings of pride and admiration, in the athletic history of our nation.

Of all the field events few will deny that the running high jump is the most spectacular. The grace of poise and perfection of balance with which a good jumper tops the lath are really remarkable, and demonstrates beyond question the fact that the high jump calls for a degree of muscular perfection and body control which is unequalled in any other event.

The track events call for their own timing and perfection of training and produce much of the thrills of a meeting, because in these the competitors fight out the issue simultaneously and spectators are in no doubt concerning the merits of the participants as the progress of the event unfolds itself before their eyes.

The field items are, in a way, individual contests and although they may not rouse the spectators to the same degree, attract what many hold to be the superior athlete, in that proficiency at the jumps and weights is a more specialised attribute that can only be brought to a successful outcome by long and careful training and a close study of every aspect.

DAYS OF THE LEAHYS.

The famous Leahy brothers of Cregane put the name of Limerick high up in the annals of high jumping, but we had other great exponents, too, in Micky Creede of Elton; Tim Ahearne of Athea, and J. J. Bourke of Dromcollogher, whilst even before the days of the great Cregane men figures like E. J. Walsh, P. McGrath and the subject of our sketch this week—P. M. Quinlan of Knockaney—had chalked up Irish championship titles to the name and fame of their native Limerick.

It may be well to mention, too, that the running high jump was not a very popular athletic event even as late as a century ago, at which time an athlete capable of topping a five foot lath was considered a great jumper. It was not until the founding of the G.A.A. just seventy years ago that the Irish mind turned really to athletics. Men flocked to the sports-fields then, events long since neglected were revived, and athletic sports organised in almost every parish. With such a resurgence it was only natural that times and distances and heights undreamt of in the past were soon achieved.

FIRST IRISH TITLE UNDER G.A.A. LAWS.

The first Irish title under G.A.A. laws was won at 5 ft. 3 ins. by Limerickman P. McGrath, and despite the impress of the Davins on the earlier Irish scene, this was considered a splendid performance. Figures rapidly improved under the influence of keen competition and improving methods, and the visit of that phenomenal jumper, William Byrd-Page of Philadelphia to the G.A.A. Championships in 1887 resulted in the then record figure of 6 ft. 1 3/4 ins. being set jointly by the American and P. J. Kelly of Clare, in a wonderful jumping set-to, at Tralee, the date August 1st, 1887.

Byrd-Page was a remarkable man—just 5ft. 6ins. in height, he had a unique athletic history. In his very young days he was nearly a cripple. As he grew up little improvement was evident, and eventually he was advised to take up jumping in an effort to develop his muscles. He could hardly hop at the start but gradually mastered his infirmity and climbed inch by inch until he set a world figure at 6ft. 4ins., at Philadelphia, a few months after his great effort with Kelly at Tralee.

QUINLAN'S PERFORMANCES.

The late P. M. Quinlan, a native of Knockaney, lived in later years at Miltown House, Tipperary. A well-known sprinter in his early days and afterwards high jump champion of Ireland, he won innumerable prizes during the seven

years he spent on the athletic fields in an area then packed with great men and great deeds.

Competing for a couple of years before the G.A.A. saw the light of day, most of his performances of that era went unrecorded, and these included much of his doings on the track, where he specialised in the "hundred" and set a high standard in it, able to hold his own with some of the best at that time, including Ballylanders' own F. B. Dinneen, a fellow Knockaney man; J. C. Donworth, with R. Doody of Galbally, J. Fitzgerald of Bruff, and Larry Feore of Kilmallock. He was also a useful man at the "Two-Twenty" and won numerous prizes in Counties Tipperary, Limerick and Cork in these events.

MOST OUTSTANDING TRACK ACHIEVEMENT.

His most outstanding track achievement was recorded at the Island Bridge Sports meeting, Clonmel, where he won the "Hundred" with a dozen yards to spare and beat the then Irish champion, and some of the country's best sprinters in one of his fastest races ever.

"P.M.'s" first meeting under G.A.A. auspices was at home in Knockaney, the date, September 19th, 1885, with Mr. J. F. Crowley as handicapper. He won the "Hundred" that day from a great "field"; Will O'Shea took the "440," with W. Fitzgerald second, and Limerick "swept the deck" in the two mile walk—J. O'Rourke winning, with Jeremiah Coomey second, and P. J. Rea third.

His first recorded success in the running high jump was at Kilmallock Sports on August 15th, 1886, where he finished third to Michael Connery, who rose to the then great height of six feet and a half inch, Quinlan "doing" 5 ft. 9 ins. The great Dan Shanahan was also "coming out" about this time and won his favourite hop, step and jump with a 44 ft. 5 ins. effort.

Two days later, at Tipperary G.A.A. sports, "P. M." won the high jump in easy fashion at 5ft 8ins., Dan Shanahan took the long jump honours at 20ft. 9ins. and Richard Doody finished second in the hurdles.

AT LIMERICK MARKETS FIELD.

His first appearance in 1887 was at the Limerick Amateur Athletic and Bicycle Sports at the Markets Field, where he was second in the high jump at 5ft. 8 1/2 ins. J. Connery of Kilfinane had a double success at this meeting, taking honours in long (21ft. 10 1/2 ins.) and pole (9ft. 6ins.) jumps, whilst M. Connery was second in the hop, step and jump at 45ft. 11ins.

Records are not available of most of the other meetings at which he competed this season but a report of the Emly sports, held on November 6th, give Limerick successes: 100 yards flat, Wm. O'Shea, Ballingaddy, first; J. Connery second. Running long jump, J. Connery, 20ft., first. Putting 42 lbs. (novices), J. McCarthy, 24ft. 10ins., first. One mile flat, J. Fitzgerald, second. Running high jump, Michael Connery, 5ft. 10ins., first; P. M. Quinlan, 5ft. 7ins., second. 220 yards flat, J. C. Donworth, first; J. McCarthy, second; W. O'Shea, third. 440 yards flat, L. Feore, first; J. McCarthy, second. Jig and hornpipe, J. J. Trehy, first.

EXCITING CONTEST.

One of P. M. Quinlan's most exciting struggles in 1888 was at the Limerick G.A.A. Sports, held on September 9th, with F. B. Dinneen the handicapper, and at which he tied for first place in the high jump with Owen O'Neill of Aherlow. Other Limerick successes at that gathering will be read with interest: Putting 56 lbs., W. Real, 23 ft. 3 1/2 ins., won; 100 yards flat, T. O'Brien, won; pole jump, T. J. Lynch, 8 ft. 10 ins., won; putting 42 lbs., W. Real, 27 ft. 3 1/2 ins., won; 220 yards flat, D. Madigan, won; long jump, T. O'Brien, second at 20 ft. 3 1/2 ins., and was also second in the 16 lbs. hammer at 85 ft. 8 ins.; one mile flat, J. Fitzgerald, won; J. N. Ryan (Hospital), second; Putting 14 lbs., W. Real, 51 ft. 8 ins., won; T. O'Brien, 48 ft. 11 1/2 ins., second; putting 28 lbs., W. Real, 35 ft. 0 1/2 ins., won; W. P. Nugent, 30 ft. 11 1/2 ins., second; 440 yards flat, D. Madigan, won; three miles cycle, E. D. Hartigan, second; 880 yards flat, T. McMahon, won; 120 yards hurdles, J. C. Donworth, second.

A week later the Irish athletes and hurlers, fifty strong, that "invaded" America, sailed on the "Wisconsin," the Limerick contingent being: Dr. J. C. Daly, Dromin; William Real, Failas; D. Godfrey of Murroe and a Kilfinane quartette: Dan Shanahan, Jack McCarthy, Michael and Jack Connery.

Quinlan was the only Limerick competitor at the "Freeman's Journal" sports, held in Dublin on September 7th, 1889, to notch a win, the Knockaney man taking the honours in his favourite high jump.

Eight days later he won the same event at the Limerick G.A.A. meeting at the Markets Field, his jump on this occasion being 5 ft. 9 1/2 ins. Willie Real and Dan Shanahan both recorded "doubles" at this gathering, the former at putting the 28 lbs. and 56 lbs; the latter in the long jump and hop, step and jump.

GREAT TRIUMPH FOR LIMERICK ATHLETES.

The All-Ireland G.A.A. Athletic Championship meeting held at Clonturk Park, Dublin, on August 17th 1890, was a great triumph for Limerick athletes. Dr. J. C. Daly of Dromin (who then weighed 21 1/2 stone) won four championships, and broke by 9 inches the Irish record of 34 ft. 1 in. for slinging the 56 lbs. His victories were: Throwing 7 lb. weight, 84 ft. 2 1/2 ins.; pushing 28 lbs., 31 ft. 2 ins.; throwing the 16 lb. hammer (unlimited run and follow), 125 ft. 3 ins.; slinging 56 lbs. (unlimited run and follow), 34 ft. 10 ins.; Dan Shanahan won the running hop, step and jump title with 47 ft. 5 ins., and P. M. Quinlan of Knockaney captured all-Ireland honours in the running high jump with 5 ft. 9 3/4 ins.

This triumph set the seal of quality on a great jumping career but does not, in fact, give full credit to Quinlan, who was capable of much better figures and actually exceeded six feet consistently in training the fortnight previous to his championship appearance, at Clonturk.

It was customary for "P. M." to jump over a horse sixteen hands in height during training, but I think the victory that in after years he held in most esteem was the occasion at Limerick when he beat another Irish champion jumper and Irish and European record holder, at 6 ft. 4 1/2 ins., the late J. M. Ryan of Emly, in a great struggle that roused a packed Markets Field, Quinlan's winning effort on that occasion being 5 ft. 10 ins. and it is interesting to recall that Ryan's 6 ft. 4 1/2 ins. jump remained the European record until Paddy Leahy of Cregane added a quarter of an inch to it at Millstreet in 1898.

WON JUMPING EVENT WITHOUT TOGS.

Many stories are told by old lovers of the jumping art of Quinlan's feats in the arena but space does not allow of their re-telling now. I just mention one, the occasion was Elton Sports, at which Quinlan was present as an on-looker. Requested by the handicapper, the late Frank Dinneen, to give a jump after all the other competitors had failed at 5ft. 5ins., "P.M." advanced to the lathe without undressing, and cleared it at ease, Dinneen remarking: "That puts Quinlan first and the rest nowhere." Anyway, he came home from the gathering to which he did not even bring his togs, with two prizes—a first and a second.

P. M. Quinlan's last public appearance on a sports field was a notable one. It was at Clonmel, the occasion of the 1936 All-Ireland championship meeting under the N.A.C.A. auspices, and P. M. Quinlan, with the great Pat Davin, headed a parade of old champions, the equal of which we certainly could not put on to-day.

The President of the Executive Council, as Mr. de Valera was then titled; the President of the N.A.C.A., Mr. Frank J. O'Dea, and the Mayor of Clonmel reviewed the grand march past. It is sad to think that so many have since passed away from this life — Pat Davin, Tom Kiely, Tom Leahy — the list could go on and on — and with them the pride of Knockaney, P. M. Quinlan, who has left, however, a career and a record that will not be forgotten.