



John Joseph Flanagan won three gold medals for the USA in the hammer throw, silencing the boos of the London crowd in 1908

# First Olympians made great mark on sport

■ Limerick's first medals came at Paris Games of 1900 courtesy of Flanagan and Leahy

THE RIO Olympic Games has thrown up a lot of controversy with an Irish boxer failing a drug test, questionable judging and the ticket scandal and arrests.

All of the above has left Ireland in a poor light, with their reputation tarnished after high expectations, coming into the games, for medals, Irish records, and personal best performances.

It has been a disappointing games for our boxers, who exited early after a number of strange judging decisions.

The silver medals won by Gary and Paul O'Donovan in rowing and Annalise Murphy in sailing have been the highlight for us. It gave the country a great lift, which was continued by Thomas Barr, who was just edged out of a medal in the 400m hurdles final.

The great achievements of Limerick athletes, in winning Olympic medals from 1900 to 1924 mentioned in last week's column, is near forgotten about at present.

Limerick's first Olympic medals were won by John Flanagan, and Paddy Leahy on July 16-17, at the Paris Games in 1900.

John Joseph Flanagan was born beneath the shadow of the Moorestown Mountains in Kiltbreedy on January 28, 1868.

He was an Irish-American athlete, and the first Olympic hammer throw champion in 1900. He was not alone a great Limerick athlete but one of the greatest stars that ever graced the world stage.

He was an all-rounder who brought the hammer (16 pounds) record from 140 feet 11 inches, to 184 feet 4 inches. He threw the 56 pound weight from 35 feet ten inches, to 38 feet 8 inches - surely a remarkable achievement.

A powerfully built man, standing 5 feet 10 inches, tall and weighing 220 pounds, Flanagan demonstrated versatility early in athletic events in his native Ireland. The coordination of movement and dynamic energy which he brought to the throwing of the hammer, and the slinging of the half hundred was amazing.

He won competitions in the long and triple jumps, shot put, and



## Then & Now

with Tom Aherne

hammer throw, taking the English hammer championship in 1896 before emigrating to the United States a year later.

At that time he already held the world record for the hammer throw. Flanagan in 1897 became the first man to throw a hammer more than 150 feet and in 1899 the first to throw it beyond 160 feet.

He competed for both the New York Athletic Club, and the Irish American Athletic Club.

He was part of a group of Irish-American athletes known as the Irish Whales. In 1903 he became a policeman in New York City and his first posting was something of a blessing.

He worked in the Bureau of Licences, where he had a lot of time on his hands, which was mostly used for training at the Irish American Athletic Club in Queens. He was one of the early masters of the three-turn technique.

At the 1900 Olympic Games in Paris, Flanagan threw the hammer 49.73 m (163 feet 1 inch) to win the first Olympic hammer throw competition, an event that the Irish-American throwers would dominate for two decades.

Flanagan also was the first to throw the hammer beyond 170 feet (in 1901) and beyond 180 feet (in 1909). With a throw of 51.23 m (168 feet 1 inch), he won a gold medal in the hammer throw at the 1904 Olympics in St. Louis, where he also won a silver medal in the 56-pound weight throw and finished fourth in the discus.

When he won a third gold medal for the hammer throw (51.92m (170 feet 4 inches) at the 1908 Games in London, the crowd booed him for his Irish heritage.

An element in the crowd appeared to dislike the idea of an Ir-

ishman, competing for the USA at the Olympic Games, and made their feelings clear, vocally, by booing the Limerick man. Flanagan defied their disapproval to take the laurels with a throw of almost 52 metres.

On July 24, 1909, Flanagan set his last world record in the hammer, with a throw of 56.18 meters. He quit the police force in 1910, after his public office squad was abolished and he was transferred to the West 68th Street Station, and forced to walk a beat along Central Park West, giving him no time to compete.

Flanagan returned to Ireland in 1911 and a few years later took over the family farm on the death of his father in February 24 1912.

He won his final international event competing against Scotland in 1911, plus the Irish hammer championship in 1911 and 1912. He later coached Patrick O'Callaghan, the Irish hammer thrower who won Olympic gold medals, in 1928 and 1932, the Irish Free State's first gold medal winner.

In all Flanagan, in addition to his three Olympic golds, also won a Silver medal in the 56lb Weight throwing event at St. Louis, in 1904.

Over the course of his career he set 17 world records, won nine US Championships, and also won the American shot-put title five times. He died, aged 70 on June 4 1938 in his native Limerick, and a statue was erected beside Martinstown Church in 2001.

Patrick Joseph Leahy was born on May 20 1877 in Cregane, Charleville on the border between Limerick and Cork. Their home off the main road was just a stone's throw from the rebel county and the family were often claimed as

from Cork. He was one of seven brothers all of whom were sportsmen, and their sister was just as good.

Paddy who was a born jumper stood at 5 foot 9 inches, and weighed 12 stone whilst in training and he first appeared as a competitor in 1895.

He was universally acknowledged the most stylish jumper that ever crossed a lath. Beautifully built, he ran like all the Leahy's, straight at his leap, rose almost perpendicularly, picked his knees to his chin, in a most natural fashion, swung around on top with no apparent effort and landed facing his take off as lightly as a thistle down.

At nineteen meetings in 1998 he had 43 firsts in competition against Ireland's greatest athletes.

Paddy won the British high jump in Dublin in 1898 with a record jump of 6 ft. 4in. (1.93m). He also competed internationally in the long jump and the triple jump.

In the 1900 Olympic Games, in Paris competing for Great Britain, and Ireland Leahy took part in three jump disciplines.

He won the silver medal, in the high jump 1.78m, behind Irving Baxter, of the United States, and the bronze medal in the long jump 6.71m, behind Alvin Kraenzlein, and Myer Prinstein.

He finished in fourth place in the hop, step and jump behind Prinstein, James Connolly, and Lewis Sheldon.

In 1909 Paddy and Con Leahy emigrated to the United States.

At the Irish Games in Chicago in May 1915 when Paddy was 40 years of age, he jumped 5 foot and a half inch in the standing high jump, 11 foot 10 inches in the standing long jump and 35 feet 9 inches in the three standing jumps (hop step and jump) an unparalleled achievement for his age.

Paddy won the following Irish Championships: six high jump titles, two long jump titles, 1 triple jump title, plus 16 other placings. Paddy died in America on December 29 1927, aged 50.

We will continue our Olympic story next week.

# Townie on bog foreshadowing of affluence

## John B. Keenan

### OUT IN THE OPEN

AS I LOOK back over the years and try to recall the most significant event of our time one incident comes to mind which shows more clearly than any other the changes that have taken place in rural Ireland since the wearisome and depressing thirties.

Innishbeg Bog is probably one of the smallest bogs in the southwest of Ireland but, if this is so, it is true to say that its turf is blacker and more lasting than any other type of turf.

The turf from Dirha Bog is more pleasant and the turf from Lyre Bog more weighty but none have the consistency of the Innishbeg product.

I remember well that it was the month of June, in the year of Our Lord nineteen forty two, when the first Townie made his appearance in Innishbeg.

Nineteen forty two was the year of the battle of Midway and the Coral Sea. It was also the year of the Battle of Stalingrad and El Alamein. In the same year the Germans completely overran all of France but in Innishbeg it was the year of the first Townie.

He came cycling up the bog road dressed in a sports coat, flannel pants, collar and tie and low shoes. When the rays of the sun struck his head his hair glistened and we knew from this that he was well dosed with hair oil.

At the time there were three of us re-futting two sleans of turf for a neighbour. There was myself, Patcheen McCarthy and Stafford Cripps. His real name, of course, was not Stafford Cripps but he looked so much like the famous English statesman that he was nicknamed for him.

I was from the town too, of course, but under no circumstances could I be called a Townie, since I was reared in Lyrcrompane and had the accent, manners and disposition of the natives of that happy place.

Who is it?  
AS THE cyclist approached, we were at our wits' ends to identify him.

"What manner of man is this," said Patcheen McCarthy, "who comes in the noon of the day in Sunday clothes and low shoes?"

"He has to be an insurance agent," said Stafford Cripps, but when it transpired that none of the three of us were insured we were forced to guess again.

"Aha," said Patcheen, "he's some new sort of inspector to do with futting and re-futting."

We dismissed this as being ludicrous and as the cyclist drew nearer we could see that he was a man of

thirty or so. When a few yards from our dismounted and where was the bag which had been weeks previous Mosheen Doran.

We showed him and he went away. This was the Townie commissioned Doran to cut his firing.

He was no weaver to fut turf and as he wore on he left a few stoolins in his waist his head screwed up cause when it came for the four o'clock straightened his taking a parcel from rier of his cycle, a us. We had a fire of a gallon of spring on the boil on top.

"Is there 'ere said he, "that I could drop of that boiling."

We told him he come so he gave a of sugar and t mixed it with. When the brew drawn we proceed

Cripps was and on the man's To weaver sports going to t was fly the face

our bread and cold bacon.

The Townie parcel and pro sandwiches. On consisted of tom other egg and on Stafford Cripps cheen McCarthy tomatoes before did they mistook small apples. The onion puzzled the neither said a w meal was over.

"I beg your pardon said Stafford C we had smoked, you tell us what eating?"

The Townie ex "Why," asked McCarthy, "do y tomatoes up in Wouldn't they l get at if you put of the bread an also see what eating. How wou what might sl sandwich when would be turned

The Townie swer to this so h and resumed his

Suddenly Staf went on his tw crossed himself

"The end of can't be too far he, "when you s like that. Wh