



The world hammer record set by Pallasgreen's Paddy Ryan in 1913 was unbeaten for 25 years

Limerick has had huge impact on Olympics

■ Half of early Irish medals were won by athletes from within 30-mile radius of Croom

I ALWAYS look forward to the Olympic Games which takes place every four years, and are currently on in Rio, in Brazil.

The earliest memories come from listening to the progress of the Irish participants on national radio. The Games were held over three weeks, and the weekly and Sunday papers were also scanned for news and photos.

We got to know the different events, and the times, distances, and record holders. I remember listening to the commentary when Jim McCourt from Belfast won his bronze boxing medal in Tokyo in 1964.

The television coverage when it arrived advanced our knowledge still further as we could see the action unfolding before our eyes. It was mighty and far more exciting than going to the garden bog or meadow.

The outside work suffered for those three weeks or so, but we soon caught up on the work due to the long dry and sunny summer weather, unlike at present.

The athletics has been a special attraction from a young age, when we tried out the events during our school days, with makeshift high and long jumps. We treasure those great memories of sport, from our carefree, youthful stress-free days.

When international athletics began to organise on a world basis from the 1880s onward the giant athletes of Ireland dominated the world in many events.

For fifty years to the mid-1930s they were a major force, with Limerick athletes very prominent. In those early days the Irish competitors lined out under the flags of different countries, including America and Britain.

JJ Keane, from Anglesborough, was a founding member of the Olympic Council of Ireland in 1920. He led the Irish delegation who secured Ireland's entry to the Olympic Games as a separate nation in Antwerp in Belgium, where the 1920 games were held.

Baron de Couberton was then the president of the International Olympic Committee, and he invited JJ onto their committee in 1922.

He held this position until 1952 when he was replaced by Lord Killalan, who in time went on to be-



Then & Now

with Tom Aherne

come president of the International Olympic Committee.

The Committee presented JJ with an Olympic medal in recognition for his fine work on their behalf at their congress in Berlin, in the 1930s. This medal is currently on display in the Croke Park Museum, as part of the Olympic Games Section.

Ireland was given formal recognition as an independent nation in the Olympic Movement at the IOC session in Paris in 1924. It was at the Paris Games, in that year that Ireland made its first appearance in an Olympic Games as an independent nation. To date 30 medals have been won by Ireland which pales in comparison to the glory early years, when the Irish won medals for other countries.

Limerick has a proud history participating in the Olympic Games, especially in those early years. Limerick-born athletes have won 10 medals at the Olympics, five gold, four silver and one bronze, from the years 1900 to 1920.

A gold and a silver medal was also won by Con Leahy at the 1906 special intercalated Games held in Athens. William Russell Lane-Joynt, the Limerick marksman won a silver medal in team running deer shooting at the London Olympics in 1908.

The medals were won by five athletes, whose names will always be associated with the county's glory days in athletics at the start of the century. They were John Flanagan, Paddy Leahy, Con Leahy, Paddy Ryan, and Tim Ahearne.

In conversation with Ronnie Long, Limerick AC and the Limerick Live 95 athletics correspondent in 2010 he said that if you put a compass on Croom and drew a 30-mile radius around it, you would find half the Olympic medals ever won by Irish athletes. It was an amazing statistic to have

at that time, and it showed the incredible tradition there was for athletics.

Ronnie who was born in England and grew up in Ballingarry, Killaloe and Mungret, has given a life time to promoting athletics in Limerick and beyond.

Ronnie was also a good racing cyclist and, as a member of the Limerick team that rode Rás Tailteann in 1955, he led a breakaway group through Limerick city.

He was a strong advocate for the founding of Board Lúthchleas na hÉireann (BLE) in 1967 as the national governing body for athletics; he served on its board for 19 years and was PRO for the then national association for 12 years.

Ronnie was Irish team manager for the Olympics in Montreal in 1976 and again for the World Indoor Championships in Indianapolis in 1987 when Marcus O'Sullivan and Frank O'Mara won double gold (1,500m and 3,000m respectively), and Paul Donovan silver (3,000m).

Ronnie was elected president of BLE in 1994, and was awarded a national award for Voluntary Lifetime of Service to Irish Sport in 2012. He continues to keep us all up to date on radio at present.

Waterford author Kevin McCarthy whose excellent book Gold, Silver, and Green, The Irish Olympic Journey 1896-1924 which was published in 2010 includes some very interesting facts about Limerick involvement.

Over the course of the first six modern Olympic Games, the entire nation of Germany won 11 medals and Limerick won 13. These were the days before independence and none of John Flanagan, Kilmallock, Paddy Ryan, Pallasgreen, Con and Pat Leahy, Cregane, or Timothy Ahearne, Athea, actually won medals for Ireland.

Most, the author said, were won by Limerick men representing the United States. But there was no

doubt about where the Olympians were bred.

Limerick, the author continued was central to one of the most successful athletics clubs in history, the Irish-American Athletic Club in Queens.

Three-time Olympic hammer champion John Flanagan a native of Kilbreedy, Kilmallock, and a New York cop was a member of this prestigious club whose athletes won 55 Olympic medals over two decades in the early 20th century.

And it wasn't just the athletes, the club officials would have had deep connections with Limerick. Mike Murphy, who trained the US Olympic team for the 1908 Games was from Limerick. And PJ Conway, who was president of the Irish-American Athletic Club, was a Limerick man as well.

Pallasgreen's Paddy Ryan was another extraordinary member of this club. The world hammer record he set in 1913 was unbeaten for 25 years, longer than Bob Beamon's. Legends like Jesse Owens and Sergey Bubka are among only five athletes who have set more long lasting world records. In 2014 Paddy was inducted into the famous United States of America Track and Field Hall of Fame. Ryan O'Dwyer the Dublin hurler who scored three goals against Limerick in 2011 is a grandson of Paddy Ryan's.

Other interesting facts from the book included the following: The most consecutive medals in the same event, three was won by Martin Sheridan from Bohola in Mayo, and John Flanagan.

The most consecutive Olympic records - three - was set by John Flanagan. The longest standing World record 25 years was held by Paddy Ryan. The first brothers to win Olympic athletic medals were Pat, and Con Leahy.

The first product endorsements credited to John Flanagan, for designing and endorsing a new hammer. The first hammer coaching manual published by Paddy Ryan. Limerick was the county with the largest number of Olympic coaches and administrators. In next week's column we will take a look at Limerick's Olympic medal winners.

Listowelmo the foul sco victory in r

John B. Keane

OUT IN THE OPEN

LAST Saturday night Listowel's Gaelic footballers surprised their supporters when they held neighbouring Finuge to a draw.

Granted that Finuge were short some of their better players, they still had enough big guns to bring them through. It was no more than an average game of football, however, and one that will not be remembered for any length of time.

The intelligent reader will naturally ask at this juncture why write about the game if it was not memorable? A fair question and one I will answer by saying that there was more to the outcome of this game than meets the eye.

As I left the pitch after the game I was approached by a former Finuge footballer, who in his heyday, was as good as the best and who is no mean judge of football all the time.

"Listen here to me," he said, "ye would never have drawn that game tonight only for having a secret weapon."

I must confess that I was nonplussed by this suggestion, for there had been no weapon that I could see. I asked him what he meant.

"Only for the smell," he said, Finuge would have won the match by nine or ten points.

So here then was what he was driving at. The smell from the new factory had affected the game of the Finuge men. The Finuge supporter maintained that his team never played worse, and this was due to the fact that they were overpowered by the smell and not by the close marking of the Listowel backs.

"It's alright for the Listowel people," my complainant went on, "they are immune to it."

It is different for visitors and the way I see it is that no team will have a chance against Listowel as the wind is from the right quarter.

There is always truth in the old sayings and one that comes to mind is it's an ill wind that doesn't blow some good. Does this mean that Listowel will be unbeatable as far as football is concerned from now on? We shall have to wait and see. There is a danger that outside teams will refuse to play. The result of forthcoming games will be awaited with more than passing interest.

Other aspects of reaction to the smell were somewhat varied. While townspeople generally find the smell overpowering other interested parties ask innocently "what smell?"

One farmer renowned for his sense of humour and who lives hard by the town put it very nicely one night

last week in a public house. "You ways have a smell towel," he said, "unbuild a public toilet."

Ballybunion

Ballybunion was busy as it was for the weekend. At one o'clock on August Monday on the way to Ballybunion it was estimated there were over a thousand "Hairies," as they are commonly called, in the lifts.

They were not very successful and late in the roads to Cork and were still fairly well-lated with exhausted hikers. How they spent the morning is a mystery.

It is rumoured that many of them were to be seen on the roads for days afterwards. It is difficult to know some who had no money, no food, and no shelter, and many of them will know some who were to be seen to that.

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Cute Corkman

THE FOLLOWING was bold by a Corkman the weekend. It was against himself and he was the ones that enjoy best.

Some years ago a known digger in DUBLIN resided four stone. One came from other from Limerick finally our friend from Cork.

The four were in Park together and on the occasion of the provincial finals they went to faraway drinking porter home and, speaking, having time.

One night in house they were death and they ranged back and forth whether or not life afterwards was what would and so forth and finally the one that whichever died first presented with three remaining