Roots of Olympians run deep in Limerick

Olympic dream: Limerick men who represented America on world stage

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JOHNNY Hayes was one of only three male American athletes to win the Olympic Marathon, taking gold in 1908 (the other two being Thomas Hicks in 1904 and Frank Shorter in 1972).

He was also the first man to win at the now official standard distance of 26 miles 385 yards. The 1896 and 1904 Olympic marathons had been less than 25 miles long.

Johnny was born in New York on April 10, 1886, to Irish parents. On June 25, 1962, the 76-year-old, flew into Shannon Airport on an Irish Airlines Jet for a two-week sentimental journey with his daughter Doris Hayes, a school teacher.

While in Limerick, he met with veteran oarsman Jack Gleazer at Shannon Rowing Club.

The Leader that day reported that it was "his first visit since his Olympic win in London in 1908 when he visited Cork and Nenagh, and was feted on that occasion... In Cork, he received the greatest reception and was presented with a gold medal by Mr. Augustine Roche M P, at Cork Boat Club".

While at the airport Hayes proudly produced the medal to-

Johnny Hayes photographed by the Leader during his second and last visit to Ireland in 1962

gether with his Olympic medal and told the story of his strange triumph in London on that occasion, 54 years previously.

In an interesting turn of events Hayes was actually second across the finish line. Dorando Pietri, an Italian, had entered the stadium first, by a wide margin, and in his daze, turned the wrong way. Olympic officials physically turned him around and had to help him to his feet three times. As a result of this assistance the Italian was disqualified, and Hayes was pronounced the winner.

The Leader continued to inter-

Johnny Hayes wearing his lucky-number 26 on his team uniform during the 1908 Olympics.

view the five foot four inch tall Hayes who said "that whilst there were bigger champions, the smaller man has the better chance of enduring the tough pace of the marathon... that providing he is properly trained marathon running will not affect his health."

Johnny Hayes returned to the United States of America where he

passed away on August 25, 1965, in New Jersey.

There were many ties between Limerick and the Olympics. Medal winners included John Flanagan, born in Kilbreedy, who represented United States of America in the 1900 Olympics in Paris, taking gold in the hammer throw for these and the following two Olympic games. The

Leahy family from Cregan, near Charleville, had not just one but two Olympic medallists Patrick in 1900 and Con in 1904. In 1908, Tim Ahearne of Athea and William Russell Lane-Joynt of Limerick both placed under the British flag. In 1920, Patrick James Ryan of Old Pallas competed for the United States of America.

Little musicians Feile Luimni winners earn their top honours

Pupils of Scoil Ide, Corbally, who won prizes in the music section of the Feile Luimni in 1990