

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 24)—JACK O'GRADY
of Ballybricken

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

THIS week I come to deal with the career of a very dear friend and one with whom I was associated, in athletic work, for many years—the late Jack O'Grady, whose death, at the early age of 42 years, took place towards the end of 1923.

Jack was treasurer of the Limerick Athletic Club during my period as secretary of that body, and many an evening we spent together and it was from him that I learned much of the athletic practices of his native county.

A man of powerful physique, well over six feet in height, to those of us who knew him intimately the character of the man was as high and strong as his stature. Genial, even boyish, ever forgetful of his athletic prowess, all his instincts were native, generous and forbearing.

He had high intellectual gifts, and shared the light he had in him, unshared with those around him.

CHARM OF A SUNNY NATURE.

Undoubtedly he won the hearts of all sets and conditions of men by the charm of a bright, genial and sunny nature. If character was inspired and dominated by lofty principles, Jack O'Grady was far exceeded in really great character as well as a great athlete. He was a personality once arresting, attractive and fascinating, whilst his qualities of wit and flashes of humour held you spellbound, and his buoyant and sunny temperament delighted and refreshed you like a sun bath.

There was no more buoyant, spirited or enterprising companion than Jack O'Grady. He was unassuming, but few, I venture to say, would dare to humiliate him.

Athletics, the putting of weights, and sports generally were no exotic cult to him. It was in his blood, and a contest was no mere occasion for fuss than any other natural and pleasant event.

ONLY ONE WEIGHT ELUDDED HIS MASTERY.

Only one weight that is now known from the shoulder should be mastered. With the 10 lb. shot, here he had to take rank behind the great ones of the world stadium. However, the glamour of three world records did not disturb his equanimity or exhaust his power, nor remove his composure. By timorous, he wished he could be roused to Finian's "fury of conflict," and then, indeed, all we have now to record great as it is, would recede into the commonplace before the splendour of new deeds. After all, maybe his philosophy was the better one. Victorics also cannot make up the sum of life; and tranquillity is too rare and precious a possession to be sacrificed in the throes of a pastime. It was enough for him, and us to know that he had kept the athletic fame of the O'Grady clan amongst the foremost in the chronicles of Irish athletics.

EIGHTEEN STONE OF BONE AND Brawn.

Now, let us discover what type of mind and manhood our champion was. Standing some inches over six feet, it was only when one could properly appreciate his inches. His massive proportions dwarfed his stature, for he carried eighteen stone of bone and brawn, and carried it with an ease and grace which increased the deception.

When he won his first G.A.A. championship he was but a youth. The late Frank Dinnane, writing about him in "Sport" on July 31, 1925, said: "I was glad to see O'Grady in great form. His first appearance at a championship meeting was only two years ago, and I said great things about him. Until last Sunday he was disappointed in his progress, though the meetings he had made world record (38 ft. 6 in.) with the 28 lbs. He has developed from an awkward, overgrown boy into a handsome athlete of good strength, and it is rather a pity that he will not train for all-round weight throwing. Some fine day he will throw the 28 lbs. over forty feet. I have great confidence in him."

WOULD RECORDS BY THE DOZEN?

And again in the same publication a fortnight later: "The outstanding feature at the Dungarvan meeting was the weight throwing of J. O'Grady. The weather, or, to be more particular, the ground, as a consequence of the wet weather, was against records, but O'Grady records with the 28 lbs. and 36 lbs. off his shoulder. He won the weight-throwing championship,

J. J. Breanahan being second weight. Tailteann Games, Croke Park, Dublin, 1924—39 ft. 9½ ins., putting 28 lbs. weight. The Cúram (Midland) Garda Sports, Sept. 24th, 1924—30 ft. 4 ins., putting 36 lbs. weight. Cratloe Sports, 20th September, 1920—25 ft. 7 ins., putting 18 lbs. weight, Croke Park, 1928—44 ft. 1 ins.; slinging 56 lbs. over bar, Croke Park, 1928—15 ft.

Irish Championships—Putting 28 lbs., 1913—35 ft. 1 in.; 1914—35 ft. 6 ins.; 1915—35 ft. 10 ins.; 1916—37 ft. 9 ins.; 1917—36 ft. 6 ins.; 1918, 37 ft. 4 ins.

Slinging 56 lbs. (without follow), 1917—25 ft. 2 ins.; 1918—24 ft. 4 ins.; 1924, 23 ft.

Putting 56 lbs. weight, 1917—24 ft.

Slinging 56 lbs. over bar, 1924, 14 ft. 6 ins.

Putting 16 lbs. shot, 1914—38 ft. 10 ins.; 1915—42 ft. 6 ins.; 1924, 43 ft. 2 ins.; 1925—45 ft. 6 ins.

International Triangular Victory—1920 shot, 40 ft. 8 ins.; 1925, 43 ft. 5 ins.

OTHER SUCCESSES.

Other outstanding successes:

Putting 23 lbs., 1913—3 in.; at Monaghan Garda Sports, 1923—39 ft. 10 ins.

Pushing 56 lbs., 26 ft. 11 ins., at Monaghan Garda Sports, 1923—26 ft. 6½ ins., at Castleiney, 1927—25 ft. 4½ ins., at Kilmallock, 1931—

REMARKABLE FEATS.

When O'Grady commenced his attack upon existing records in the heavy weights, he had at least one constant rival, O'Brien of Bulgard, who accompanied him far on the path towards new standards of achievement. We would be sorry to think that they were the last of a great race of mighty men who made the historic territory of Thomond so famous for deeds of strength and endurance. If the cult and vigour infused from his equally renowned relative big Ned O'Grady of the "70's" is entirely lost, where and how can the tradition be revived?

The triumph which the most experienced and discerning of modern athlete experts foretold for O'Grady have been more than accomplished by him. I doubt even if Dinnane conceived that Real's great record in pushing the 56 lbs. from the shoulder would have been raised beyond 23 feet by O'Grady. Yet this O'Grady did.

At Cratloe sports in 1920 he showed that mass 25 ft. 4 ins., thus beating for the second time the Pallasgreen man's 1888 distance of 23 ft. 9½ ins. Not did anyone think that the "awkward looking, overgrown boy" of 1913 would in the sheer zest of abundant vigour attack Ned O'Grady's old records with the unfamiliar three stones (42 lbs.) weight. Yet such feat he accomplished, beating Real's record of 25 ft. 0½ ins. and O'Grady's earlier lift of 27 ft. 10 ins. with a magnificent effort of 30 ft. 4 ins.—his third world's best. This record has been the exclusive monopoly of the East Limerick area—historic ground, redolent of great deeds, every acre of it. Here is its progress of improvement: 1875, 20 ft. 1 in.; Ned O'Grady, Caherconlish; 1878, 27 ft. 10 ins.; Ned O'Grady, Caherconlish; 1888, 28 ft. 0½ ins.; W. Real, Pallaskenry; 1922, 30 ft. 4 ins.; J. O'Grady, Ballybricken.

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCES.

It would be impossible in the space at my disposal to give anything like an exhaustive list of O'Grady's successes during a score of years' active connection with Irish athletics. However, in bare justice, I must record the following outstanding performances of his:

World's Records—Putting 28 lbs.

(weight and ground certified).

Putting 16 lbs. shot, 40 ft. 7 ins.

at Limerick G.A.A. Sports, 1918;

45 ft. 5 ins., at Clonliffe Harriers

Sports, Croke Park, Dublin, 1923;

46 ft. 7 ins., at Tailteann Games,

Olympic Trials, Dublin, 1924, 47 ft.

3 in., at Monaghan Garda Sports,

1924.

Slinging 56 lbs. Over Bar, 15 ft.

3 ins., at Clonliffe Harriers Sports,

Croke Park, Dublin, 1923; 15 ft.

33 ins., at Limerick, 1928; 15 ft.

10 ins., at Newport, 1928—a world's

record, which, however, failed to gain official recognition.

APPRECIATION.

In connection with our report in last week's issue of the An Tostal variety entertainment presented under the auspices of Ardfatrick Guild of Muintir na Tire, the Secretary of the Guild, Mr. Michael O'Donovan, writes to state that the report was not compiled by him, and that the name of Miss Kathleen Leahy, N.T. Ardfatrick, should have been included in the list of names of those who worked hard towards the success of the entertainment.

The members of the Guild regret the omission, caused probably through inadvertence, and wish to record their very sincere appreciation of Miss Leahy's work.

MITCHELSTOWN G.A.A.

The Mitchelstown G.A.A. club (as will be seen from our ad-

columns), are presenting an All-

Night, Night in the Mayflower Ball-

room, Mitchelstown, on Friday,

May 1st, with cellidhe and old time

waltzes. The band attraction will be Austin Stack Cellidhe Band,

Dublin.

THE LATE JACK O'GRADY.

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