

The Irish man who ran for England



Andrew Carey talks to the county Limerick man forced to run for England in pursuit of a dream

It's a simple title that tells the story as it was, but nothing was simple for former athlete and native Limerick man, Jim Hogan and not much came that easy either.

Born in 1933, Jim Hogan started out his life in Athlaca, County Limerick, very much on the back foot and from the back of the pack.

Unwanted and left for dead as a baby, a neighbour found him and cared for him declaring that, "He may be nearly dead but he will be famous one day," a line that held through to the very moment that Jim Hogan's name rang out through radio transmitters the length and breadth of the country.

Hogan, now in his 77th year, and still running, recalled his years as he paid a visit to the University of Limerick and in particular, the Hartmann collection of sports memorabilia located at Gerard Hartmann's International Sports Injury Clinic at the Arena.

Jim tells the tale of how he joined the realms of athletics later on in life where his running career blossomed and became something of legend as it was littered with a plethora of titles and victories.

Self trained through the roads, fields and lanes of his native county and home, Jim Hogan reached the peak of his athletic career following a move to England in 1960. A move necessary to maintain his employment. This was long before the era of professionalism and as Jim quipped, "We ran in the morning, we ran on our lunch break and then again in the evening. We were working while pursuing our athletics. It certainly wasn't anything like it is today."

It was commonly known that during the late 50s and early 60s, Jim Hogan was one of the best athletes that this country had produced but the bureaucracy of that era reigned and Hogan was ignored and forced to seek his fame elsewhere.

What the powers that be in Irish athletics shunned, the Queen and country embraced and Hogan, already living and working in England, changed his name by deed pole and ran with an English singlet on his back. Jim left his Cregan name in Limerick as he followed his dream across the water.

But his fame was about to grow following

that move and in 1966, in those highly unusual circumstances, running in the European Championships in Budapest, Jim Hogan would take the marathon title and with it a European gold medal. From then, Jim Hogan became the Irish man who ran for England.

That very gold medal won by Jim Hogan was the reason for the UL visit as he made a presentation of it to be added to the Hartmann Collection housed at the famous sports clinic. Hogan's medal now sits with medals from Sonia O'Sullivan, Frank O'Meara, Eamon Coughlan and another most recent addition, the signed running singlet of Olympic 100 metre champion, Jamaican, Usain Bolt.

In the new publication, available in bookstores for 14.99, the extraordinary story of why an Irish man had to declare for England is captured by the native Limerick man

Whatever of his move to England for richer pastures and the pursuit of his running career, his success added to the legend of what became known as the "mad Irishman."

Now, in his later years, Jim has followed his life long love of horses and could have even taken up reigns as a jump jockey, but his passion for running was his drive to take him on one of the most colourful stories of the time.

Enigmatic, charming and outspoken, Hogan's wily and colourful character shines through as his story and presence still captures both the reader and those lucky to meet him.

The Limerick man returned to his home in 1996 and following the passing of his dear wife a short time later, he returned to his love of



Ger Hartman, Jim Hogan & Sonia O'Sullivan pictured in the Sports Museum in UL Arena. Photo by Brian Gavin/Press 22

horses where he breeds and trains a racer of a different sort these days.

On the athletics scene of today, Hogan holds a few thoughts and offers them to those interested.

"Training was different in our time, we worked the full day and trained around our employment and I think that made us what the Africans are like today. We were the best around and I remember holding the fastest time in the world for six miles in Paddington ... and I did that after a full day at work."

On the modern athlete and Ireland's runners, Hogan notes the success of what he calls, "Ireland's greatest athlete."

"Sonia is a triumph. She was, and is, so successful as a runner because she trained with those better than her so that she could become the best she could be and her medal haul that this country can be so proud of is evidence of that."

"As a track runner she was a sight to behold: she was graceful, smooth and balanced and above all she knew how to win. That was the difference and that is what makes her a great."

Asked about regrets or if the clocks were wound back what would he do, the character shines once again as without taking a breath I get my answer delivered with both barrels blazing.

"Would I do it again? You can bet your last bob on it mate. I would do it again and the only thing I would change is that I would have gone to England earlier in my career. As for regrets, I don't have any. I did what I had to do. I was ignored and shunned here by the powers that be of the time and I wanted to run so I went to a country where I could run. So no, I don't have any regrets, a few disappointments along the way but all in all I don't think I did too bad."

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Donn's Lions VX

Lions Second Test - Last chance saloon

South African VX

15. Lee Byrne

14. Tommv Bowe

ONCE again this week, deadlines dictate that we have to run with a "guess" Lions

will be made in the backs.

The backline worked well last week once it got good ball but that was down to one

attempted to win rucks with too few men and also tried to throw to the back of the lineup against the best second rows in the

15. Frans Steyn

14. JP Pietersen