

FAMOUS FIGURES IN WORLD OF SPORT

YOUNG FARMERS MEET



Ballybrown Young Farmers' Club held a gymkhana at Clarina on Sunday. Shown here are P. Fitzgerald on "Black Beth" and D. O'Connell on "Rainbow" who won the Club team event. (L.L. photo.)

The "Whales" Of County Limerick

HAMMER THROWERS WHO BEAT THE WORLD

(By DAVID GUINEY)

BACK in the early years of this century some enterprising journalist, having watched some of the gigantic Irish hammer throwers eating themselves up, wrote the world renowned "Whales" and within no time this name had spread all over the world.

Limerick provided the bulk of these weight men, and while I know that the county has produced famous sportsmen in all branches of Irish sport, I think that the hammer throwers of Limerick must be regarded as the finest that Ireland has ever produced.

Having seen Mick Mackey thrill the crowds at Croke Park with his marvellous solo runs, and having watched the flying Stanley De Lacy bring the spectators to their feet with his artistry on the hockey pitch, I know that in putting these hammer throwers on a higher plane I may incur the displeasure of some of my readers, but these men were not only famous within their own country but were acclaimed in all parts of the world, and will be for the rest of time. I remember being in Iceland in 1947, and it was amusing to find that while the athletes there were completely ignorant of Irish life, they were quite conversant with the feats of John Flanagan of Kilmoney, and the one and only Paddy Ryan, of Pallasgreen.

FAMOUS SINCE THE 'NINETIES'

The weight throwers of Limerick have been famous since the 'nineties' when Denis Carey first made his mark on the record books, up to the present day, where John Doherty is still keeping the name of the county to the fore in hammer throwing circles.

It is unfortunate that the careers of these great men dash at times, so I am going to take them all separately.

Denis Carey must be regarded as the father of them all, as this giant of 6' 2", born at Kilmahane, won his first hammer championship in 1892, when he won the Irish championship in Dublin with a wooden handle hammer from a 7' circle. In the following year he retained the championship, and created a new Irish and British record with 130' 3". In that same year he travelled to England and, against the best of opposition, he captured the British crown.

Then came the amazing part of Carey's life, for after blossoming as a hammer thrower, he forsook the heavy event, and took to hurdlings, and won no less than six Irish titles in his new event.

1907 saw Denis return to his first love and he won the hammer championship of that year, and repeated his victory two years later.

John Flanagan returned to Ireland shortly after, and the Kilmahane man commenced to impart the modern improvements to hammer throwing to Denis, and with this help he was good enough to represent Great Britain at the Olympic Games of 1912, at Stockholm. Unfortunately for Carey, the circle at Stockholm was raised a few inches from the ground and Carey, having fouled some of his early throws, had to slow down to avoid disqualification. This meant that he was unable to give of his best, and even Matt McGrath, the eventual winner, stated that with an ordinary circle Carey could have easily placed him second.

OVER TWENTY YEARS IN COMPETITION

The year 1913 saw Carey back again to win the Irish crown, with 155 ft., and later that year saw him reach 161 ft. 5 ins. How was this performance was, one must remember that Carey had now been over 20 years in competition, and had lost the speed and agility of his youth.

And yet, we find his nose cropping up again in 1920, and even later, when he was still capable of beating 150 feet.

Although Denis' Carey is no longer with us, I will always re-

member him acting as judge in the weight events every year, and of the help and advice he imparted to the budding champions. His interest in the hammer never waned, and I can always remember him at the championships in College Park, in 1945, when he began to speak of the famous throwers of the past. When I asked him to name the greatest hammer thrower of all time, in his opinion, he immediately picked his great friend and illustrious county man, the genial John Flanagan.

THE GREATNESS OF JOHN FLANAGAN

Three or four Olympic champions, Flanagan must surely be regarded as one of the greatest hammer throwers of all time, as this wonderful man stood only 5ft. 10 ins. Flanagan made an early exception in the realm of record breaking when he shattered two world records in 1896, setting the new figures of 145 ft. 0 ins from a seven foot circle, and doing 156 ft. in the unlimited run and follow style.

John emigrated to America in the fall of that year, and there he found that Mitchell, from Emily, was the crowned king of American hammer throwers. Flanagan quickly wrested the crown from Mitchell and set new figures for the hammer with nearly 150ft.

Crossing over to Paris in 1900, John became the first Olympic hammer champion of the modern series when he won with a throw of 167ft. 5 ins. On his way back to the States, he took time to set a new English record of 163ft. 4 ins, and also a new Irish record of 160ft. 5 ins, at Kilmallock.

The world had now woken up to the fact that the hairy John was heading towards the 170ft. mark. A figure which some of the greatest authorities at that time had considered unattainable.

Less than a year later, in the September of 1901, Flanagan sent the hammer soaring to a fresh world figure of 171ft. 9 ins, and which was to stand for another three years.

SETTLED DOWN TO SERIOUS TRAINING

Realising that he would have to defend his Olympic title, in St. Louis, in 1904, the Limerick man settled down to serious training, and on the 31st July, he added two feet to his old record, and later that year retained his Olympic title with a throw of 168ft. 1 in, also a new record for the series.

Up to 1907, John reigned supreme in American circles, but the following year saw him bow to the latest Irish recruit to the hammer, Matt McGrath. As both of them were selected for the Olympic Games at London, it looked as though their event was to be one of the highlights of the Games.

And it was. After the three preliminary throws, McGrath was leading with a throw of 167ft 11 ins, and although John was close behind, it looked as though his crown was slipping away. But in his second last throw, the stout-hearted Limerick man, turning with tremendous speed, and exerting every ounce of his powerful body, sent the hammer whirling through the air until it landed out over the 170ft. mark for a new Olympic record.

SET A NEW RECORD

Well you might say that this was a fitting end to the great achievements of John Flanagan, but before the season concluded, he set a new world record of 174ft. 5 ins.

The following year with McGrath pressing him closer and closer at every meeting, John continued to improve his world record, until in June he became the first man ever to pass the 180 mark. A month later he startled the athletic world by adding a further four feet to this performance.

Having brought the world record from 147ft. to 184ft. during

his athletic career, John returned home to his native Limerick in 1913, and although he had decided to retire, he was persuaded to make a comeback in front of his own people, and added to his list by imposing his list of American, British, Canadian, Irish and Olympic titles by taking the Irish championships of 1911 and 1912.

Although his world record was taken over by Matt McGrath, who added over three feet to Flanagan's best, another Limerick man was in the offing who was to regain the title in 1913 with a mighty heave of 189ft. 6 ins, a record which was to stand the test of over twenty years, and which to-day still stands as an American best.

AN AMAZING MAN

Paddy Ryan was truly an amazing man, and I have heard it said he contemplated the Pallasgreen man that had he allowed to systematic training and fitness, the world record to-day would have been standing at over 200 feet.

Although he had won several Irish championships by 1909, his best throw was only 140ft., and when he landed in America few realised on his first appearance that here was the man who was to startle the world within the next few years with his prodigious hammer throwing.

Having first attention to training in the US, Ryan had increased his personal best to 170ft. by 1911, and he was still improving with each meeting, it was clear that Flanagan's successor, Matt McGrath, was in a very shaky possession of the American title.

In 1912 the second Limerick man had crossed the classical 180ft. mark, being the third Irishman to do so within the space of three years. His throw of 182ft. 11 ins, brought him to the American second place in the American championships of that year, he had a doughy opponent but him by two feet when the final result was completed.

INCREDIBLE THROW

1913 was Ryan's greatest year, for in this year he sent the sixteen pound maul to the incredible distance of 189ft. 6 ins, to wipe all previous marks from the books, and a mark which is still unbroken on the American records.

Eight American championships fell to the Pallasgreen man between 1913 and 1921, the only exception being in 1918, when he was in France with the American Expedition Force. His success in these championships are worth recalling. Ryan had maintained an average of over 170 feet for all his victories.

The distances were 1912, 177ft. 3 ins; 1914, 186ft. 3 ins; 1915, 174ft. 2 ins; 1916, 174ft. 8 ins; 1917, 168ft. 7 ins; 1918, 175ft. 5 ins; 1920, 169ft. 4 ins; 1921, 170ft. 7 ins.

Following in Flanagan's footsteps, Paddy Ryan added his name to the Olympic roll of glory by taking the 1916 in 1920 at Antwerp. Although 37 years of age at this time, Ryan was winning a distance of 173 feet in over thirteen feet in front of the second man.

A WORTHY PUPIL

One of Paddy's pupils when he returned home to his native county was John Doherty, who won the N.A.C.A. Hammer title of 1926 with 153ft. 8 ins, and returned to take the title again in 1941, with 155ft. 6 ins. Although over fourteen years have passed, since John took his first title, he was still good enough to represent Ireland in this year's triangular contest in London. I personally had the privilege of seeing John throw a hammer over 175 feet about six years ago, while training, and had he but the temperament of his famous fellow countrymen, I am quite sure that his would have registered far greater distances in open competitions.

Although Limerick has a wonderful history of sport, surely the world wide needs of her Hammer Throwers, must make them stand out, even in the company of the McKeays, the Clonashes, Tor Casey, Stanley de Lacy, John O'Grady, Willie Reid, and all the other household names in the sporting annals of the county.

Little wonder that they are called "Whales" because although they were big men, and doubtless had amazing appetites, their hearts should be a beacon towards the endeavors of our present athletes should be directed, as I believe that it is only in the lessons of these great men that we may one day regain our great name in the world of sport.

DOOR UNDER STAIRS SOME "BOUQUETS"

WHAT SERGEANT FOUND

A sudden death in the locality was blamed for the appearance before Justice C. S. Kenny at Assizes Court on Monday of Elsie Healy, a licensed trader, Pallasgreen, who was charged with a breach of the licensing laws on 23rd July.

Supt. J. J. Conroy, A.D.M., prosecuted, and Mr. M. P. Noonan, (Messrs. Lagan and Co., solrs.) defended.

Sergeant Spillane, Pallasgreen, gave evidence that at 7.55 on the Sunday evening in question he knocked at the door of the premises and was admitted by her. When asked if there was anybody on the premises she replied that there was not, only travellers. Witness inspected the bar, kitchen and here of the premises and found only a number of travellers, but when returning he noticed a door under the stairs which was closed on the outside. When he opened this door he found three men inside, with glasses half full of stout. The licensee, when questioned about the presence of the three men who were not travellers, made no reply, but her husband said they had nothing to say but would admit the offence.

Mr. Noonan - And that is what we are doing here to-day, your Worship. There was a sudden death in the locality that day and these men were discussing it. They asked the licensee for a drink and she yielded and let them in for a drink. The house has a good record and I would ask you to deal leniently with the case.

Supt. Conroy said there was no previous conviction since 1911.

The Justice, fined the licensee 20/- without an endorsement and the three men found on the premises were fined 5/- each.

COUNTY COMMITTEE TRIBUTES

Last Saturday's meeting of the Limerick County Committee Agriculture ended with a tribute to the Chairman, Mr. P. Fitzsimons and to the C.E.O. Mr. M. Gleeson and the Clerk, Mr. J. Shanley and the Chairman, in return, hope that the outgoing members of the Committee would all be re-elected.

Mr. Hayes said that as the meeting was the last one of the outgoing Committee he would like to compliment the Chairman on the way he had conducted the meetings for the past 12 months. He said he would also like to pay tribute to the efficiency of Mr. Gleeson and J. Shanley and for the county which they had shown at times.

Mr. Dore said he would like to be associated with what Mr. Hayes had said. Mr. Fitzsimons had been very fair in the chair, and he was also like to congratulate J. Gleeson and Mr. Shanley on the good work during the year.

Messrs. Donegan and McCurt also associated themselves with the remarks of the previous speaker while Mr. Ryan also agreed with the views expressed, and he asked that all employees of the County Council and its subsidiary bodies be off for two hours on the day of the polling.

Mr. Hayes - I thoroughly agree with that.

All the other members expressed agreement with the suggestion Mr. Ryan concerning the election of the Chairman, and he said he did not think he deserved it, as was said, of him, by the previous speakers. He merely carried the business of the meeting in the way he should, and if they had agreements now and again it were entitled to differ, and only that difference of opinion it would not be there that day.

He said that they had done good work and they did not see any objection of anything that the work the Committee could give them. He hoped that all the members would be back again, and if they were he hoped that the new Committee would be as good as the one that was going out. They may have differences, especially in agriculture, but if they had it was all the good of the rate-payers and the good of the county. He wishes them all very good luck in elections.

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