

Sporting world pays a moving tribute to Olympian Jim Hogan

Elite athlete is remembered as 'one of nature's gentlemen' who 'spoke his mind'

AINE FITZGERALD

IT was a podium fit for an elite athlete. On the top right hand corner of Athlaca church last Monday morning stood a small wooden table. On top of it, the fruits of hard labour, determination, skill, blood, sweat and tears - two gold medals.

One, 49 years old now, was more timeworn than the other - its ribbon tired looking and pale in colour. Behind the medals stood a black and white photo - within its slim frame, an athlete, in full stride.

To the left, stood an Italian casket finished in deep mahogany. On its lid, the deceased's brown fedora hat.

They came from Coolboy, Athlaca, Knocklong, Bruff and the Kilmallock hinterland to bid farewell to one of their own. Jim Hogan had competed in two Olympic Games - for Ireland in Tokyo in the summer of '64 and for Great Britain in Mexico City in the summer of '68. He had also conquered all of Europe when winning the European marathon in Budapest in 1966.

The Irishman Who Ran For England died peacefully on Saturday, aged 81.

He was born Jim Cregan, in Croom hospital, on May 28 1933 and attended Athlaca national school. He left for England in 1960 for work and he changed his surname to Hogan.

"I heard of the great athlete from Athlaca in County Limerick who was so graceful on foot that he didn't need to wear running spikes when competing on the cinder tracks around the world," the world renowned physical therapist Gerard Hartmann told mourners at Jim's funeral Mass.

"We were told that he was as light as a whippet, poetry in motion and a thoroughbred on the track, cross country and roads."

To honour his great athletic career, Jim's great friend, and legendary British distance runner, David



Olympian is laid to rest: The remains of the late Jim Hogan being carried from the church in Athlaca this Monday. See more pictures page 18

Bedford, brought to the altar, the treasured gold medal Jim won in the European Championships, 1966.

His nephew Karol brought up a world gold medal Jim won in 1983 at the age of 50.

To celebrate a fulfilled life that Jim shared with his dear wife Mary, now deceased, his book *The Irishman who Ran for England* was placed on the wooden table beside two mementos from Jim's other great love in life, horseracing - his binoculars and "daily bible" *The Racing Post*.

Jim and his wife Mary settled in the Knocklong area in 1996. Jim's fond friend, Fr Willie Hennessy, who was the chief celebrant at his funeral Mass said their home, "was a place of welcome".

It was where he heard all about Jim's passion for horses, racing, training and breeding. Among those to

pay their respects at the church was trainer and racing pundit Ted Walsh.

"Often I had to go out to the stables to give my opinion on the newcomers that would arrive - being honest, they all looked the same to me," smiled Fr Hennessy as chuckles went out around the church, "but I couldn't say that to Jim - God only knows what he might say to me," he followed up.

The parish priest of Knocklong was assisted on the altar by Fr Tony Mullins, Athlaca, Canon Willie Fitzmaurice, Croom, Fr Tony Bluett, Ardpatrick, Fr Joe Cussen, Martinstown/Bulgaden and Fr Joe Kennedy, Kilmallock.

Mourners heard how Jim loved a good sing-song and could hold a steady note. "He loved to be called on to sing a song - the trouble was, once

was never enough," smiled Fr Hennessy. "When he returned to sit in his place he would say to someone 'go up and tell them I have been asked to sing again'."

Of all the things he achieved throughout his life, the greatest thing he said he ever did, mourners heard, was marry Mary. "She was not only his wife, but his companion and best friend. He loved her dearly - it was a great loss to Jim when she died."

Jim will be no stranger to God - he was a man of deep faith and would never miss Sunday Mass in Knocklong, kneeling over at the side, saying his prayers.

Gerard Hartmann - who has treated many of the world's elite sport stars - remembered him as "a great loyal friend". He recalled how Jim would hop up on

his treatment table like a teenager. When Gerard asked Jim why he ran at the front with Abebe Bikila in the Tokyo Olympic Marathon and not stay in the chasing group two minutes behind to secure a silver or bronze medal, his response was: "I was going for gold, I wasn't running for a cowardly silver".

He was a pioneer and a man who preferred to step away from the table still feeling "a little peckish".

Among those who couldn't attend the Mass but passed on their sympathies were Olympian Ronnie Delaney. "Once an Olympian, always an Olympian," read Mr Hartmann of Mr Delaney's tribute. Representatives from the Olympic Council of Ireland who were in attendance heard how Jim was one of "nature's

gentlemen who spoke his own mind."

Ronnie Long of Athletics Ireland recalled how Jim was "a valued member of the horse racing community" who travelled to Cheltenham each year until very recently.

Jim's sister, Teresa, paid tribute to all the medical staff who looked after her dear brother in his twilight years.

Jim who was laid to rest in Knocklong cemetery is survived by his brother Mickey Joe Cregan, sisters Mary, Margaret, Elizabeth, Johannah, Teresa, Hanora and Frances, extended family and friends.

Jim ran his race his way until he closed his eyes for the final time in the early hours of Saturday morning in his warm bed at University Hospital Limerick. May he rest in peace.

Limerick athlete inducted into US hall of fame

DONAL O'REGAN

A COUNTY Limerick man has been given the rare honour of being inducted into the famous United States of America Track and Field (USATF) Hall of Fame.

In 1920, Paddy Ryan, from Pallasgreen, won an Olympic gold medal in the hammer by more than 15 feet - the largest margin of victory in any Olympics. It could have been his third or fourth gold medal.

Mr Ryan, who was born in 1883, moved to Boston in 1910. His citizenship had not been confirmed until after the war. The 1916



hurler Ryan O'Dwyer is Mr Ryan's youngest grandchild.

Johanna remembers having lots of questions for her father about his athletic career, and his time living in the United States.

"I was so inspired by his motivation, that in 1961, I emigrated to America. In the evenings, when I came home from national school, I spent a lot of time helping him in his vegetable garden which he methodically tended to.

"In the fall he would dig potatoes all day and when I would come home from school I would spend hours picking up those potatoes for him. Then in the spring I would

He never thought of himself as number one in the world. What he did, he did it well, and that was enough for him," said Johanna.

Mr Ryan was one of five to be inducted for 2014 and joins the likes of Michael Johnson, Carl Lewis and Jesse Owens in the USATF Hall of Fame.

Johanna was presented with a beautiful ring with the USATF insignia. During the induction ceremony, the history of the athlete was shown on video and at the end the family member was called up on stage to accept the award and give an acceptance speech.

A statue to Mr Ryan stands