

15/7/00
KILFINANE

Olympian John's feats to be commemorated

By DEIRDRE McGRATH

A COUNTY Limerick athlete who won three Olympic gold medals is to be commemorated in his native village.

A lifesize bronze statue of Olympian John Flanagan is to be erected in his native Ballinvreena, Kilfinane, by a local committee.

Mr Flanagan won his first Olympic title in Paris in 1900 where he represented the United States; he held onto the title in 1904 when he won the hammer event in St Louis with a new Olympic record of 168 feet and one inch. He went on to break that record at the London Olympics in 1908 with a new record of 170'4.25.

John Flanagan was

described as the biggest attraction in American athletics from 1898 to 1908 when his name headlined every athletics meet from St Louis to Toronto and from San Francisco to New York.

His entrance into the world of weight throwing was a natural one as his father, Mike, broke Irish records in hammer throwing and jumping, and his brother, Tom, broke two world records for throwing the 12lb hammer.

The foundations for Mr Flanagan's later successes were laid in his home place where he was an all round sportsman. He played football and hurling with the Kilfinane team before taking up hammer throwing.

He had already broken the record for the 16lb hammer throw in Ireland before he left for the States at the age of 24.

His physical strength and power was summed

up in his obituary in the Irish Independent in 1938: "John was little taller in than 5' 9", but he made up in symmetry and power what he lacked in height. He was built like the trunk of an oak tree, suggesting power and speed all over, handsome head, black curling hair, chest like a barrel, arms and legs like the pillars of a gate."

John's American uncle, Eugene Kincaid, persuaded his nephew to emigrate and join the New York Athletic Club and the New York police, which gave him the opportunities to bring Irish athletics to international attention.

For his first Olympics win in 1900 he received an honour from the New York Athletic Club which is incorporated under the laws of the State of New York.

On the way to his first Olympic competition Mr Flanagan took part in the

English AAA championships where he won the hammer title.

Not only did he reach dizzying heights as a hammer thrower but he also pioneered the three turns in the circle technique and used ball-bearing swivels and double grip.

During his time in America, John coached at Harvard and Pricetown universities and helped to train many well-known athletes.

He won countless medals and trophies during his outstanding sporting career, which ended in 1911 when John settled down in Kilbreedy East, Kilmallock, and married Mary Lillis from Kilmihill, Clare.

People from Ballinavreena and surrounding areas say they owe it to this sporting giant to mark his international success and keep his memory alive with a

monument to him and so have formed the John Flanagan Memorial Project.

Patsy McGrath, one of the founder members of the project said that the whereabouts of many of Mr Flanagan's medals and trophies were unknown and it was believed that some of them were melted down and made into chalices.

The committee intend to raise around £20,000 for the statue and will start by holding a race-night on October 6.

For further information on the John Flanagan project contact Patsy McGrath on 063-88072 or patsymcgrath21@hotmail.com

At Kil
News •