

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 5)—DR. NED WALSH of Betteville

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

NEXT to Pat Davin and Bob Coll, I would place Ned Walsh the foremost all-round athlete of the 'nineties.

The Walshes of Betteville were athletically endowed for two or three generations, and the three famous brothers—Tom, Michael and Ned—played no small part in helping the great revival of the late 'seventies that paved the way for the G.A.A.

Dr. Tom Walsh, in his student days, was a crack 100 yards man who was credited with level time on more than one occasion.

At the old Queen's in Cork, now a University Constituent College, where he was a student, he compassed the 150 yards in fifteen seconds, a record that has not been approached by a competitor since his time.

Michael Walsh was an "all rounder" of great promise, a good sprinter, and more than useful at the field events.

Michael had two sons — J. J. ("Jemmy") and his brother, Michael ("Buddie"), who won fame and prizes for many years at all the Southern meetings. Jemmy won the hop, step and jump championship of Ireland under G.A.A. laws in 1917, covering 45 ft. 9 ins.

Another member of the Walsh clan, John, who emigrated to Australia at an early age, won the Irish championship under G.A.A. in the 120 yards hurdles, in 1894, his time being 20 1/5 seconds.

And so to the subject of this article—Dr. Ned Walsh, who kept up the family reputation at home in Ireland, and later in the country of his adoption — the land of the leek.

SPECIALISED IN FIELD EVENTS.

Like all his comperes, Dr. Ned specialised in field events and won prizes at weight throwing, pole vaulting, hurdle racing, high and long jumping, and claims the record for the 16 lbs. shot putt at 45 ft. 3 ins., which he made many years ago and which still stands unbeaten.

Four Irish championships were won by him. In the 120 yards hurdles he secured the I.A.A.A. title in 1885, the first time it was ever competed for, his time being 17 3/5 secs. The following season he retained the championship, but with the improved time of 17 secs.. In 1886, also, he captured the G.A.A. championship, and in identically the same time of 17 secs., At the I.A.A.A. meeting in 1885, as well as winning the hurdles, he tied with P. J. Kelly at 5 ft. 9 1/2 ins. for the high jump title.

Ned Walsh left Ireland about the turn of the century to take up the busy life of a practitioner in Wales. I had the pleasure of his friendship, extending over many years, and from his home in Swansea Valley he rendered invaluable co-operation in the production of my "History of the Limerick G.A.A."

"PURELY NATURE'S GIFT."

Dr. Walsh gave me much data concerning the athletic prowess of Limerickmen the world over, and an extract from one of his numerous letters on the subject will be read with interest: "In these statistics which I have endeavoured to compile from memory one must naturally wonder what an array of athletes we can ever boast of at field events and how few reach a prominence at running. I think it has been written by somebody that it is the great distinguishing characteristic of the Celt to do and act spasmodically and his highly strung impulsive temperament must be conducive to the success of a sudden spasmodic effort such as jumping needs. This I cannot accept but would rather attribute their lack of excellence in running to the deficient means and opportunities at their disposal for training. A good runner in order to excel and get of his best needs a trainer — a prescribed dietary and a graduated and well regulated course of training. Most of the athletes I have written of could not afford these luxuries and knew nothing about them. Their athletic ability was purely nature's gift, and I feel certain that if many — aye very many of those of our Limerick athletes were trained and coached to run, many world's records at running as well as at field events would have gone by and be eclipsed by them. But past and gone are all—the very spot where many a time they triumphed is forgot!"

OTHER ATHLETIC MEMORIES.

In another communication Dr. Walsh wrote: "It gives me unbounded pleasure to assist you as I still entertain a great love for our native sports, and a most sincere regard for the memory of those athletes who flourished in my time. In earlier letters I dealt with the majority of the Kilfinane athletes; then there was Larry Feore, of Kilmallock, who was almost invincible in the 'quarter' in his day and won prizes at the sprints all through the South though often very severely handicapped. Will Shea, of Ballingaddy, was a sprinter who won many prizes at Southern meetings but being attracted to the equine field of sport turned more to horses and hunting than to athletics. Still Will had an athletic propensity if he persevered with it. There was one man, Hennessy, who was in his way a prodigy as a long distance

(5 miles) runner. He rode most of the way to Dublin from Kilfinane on a rickety push bike of the bone shaker variety, and when up in the midlands got a lift from some well disposed person who pitied his tired and exhausted appearance. In this way he reached the capital, and next day literally ran away with the five miles championship of Ireland."

I received dozens of letters from Dr. Walsh, dealing with doings in the athletic arena, but never a word about the part he himself played in it. For that I had to go to another dear departed friend, P. J. Rea, who, as a raconteur had no equal. "P. J." and Ned Walsh made their initial entry to athletics on the same day, when they travelled to Churchtown Sports on St. Stephen's Day, and both brought back prizes — five or six apiece, no mean achievement.

WHAT P. J. RAY HAD TO SAY.

Now, this is what P. J. Rea had to say concerning Dr. Walsh—"Edmond Walsh, the popular Doctor Ned, was the youngest member of a family of athletic marvels, a young man who carried the physique, vigour and moral activity, as well as the athletic prowess, from a happy homestead, within a pistol shot of the ancient and holy hill of Ardpatrik to the Black Heath at Edinburgh, and to Swansea in Wales.

"The 'Flying Dutchman,' Ned Walsh, left the parish school in 1879 and 'footed' it to Charleville, where at the seminary under a brilliant old mentor, Charles McCarthy, began his serious studies. It only took him three sessions to matriculate and enter the old Queen's in Cork, and there in addition to reading for medicine he found time to go down to the old quarry, a derelict piece of slobland at the base of the medical school and do a jump, a sprint, and pitch the 14 lb. shot and the 21 lb. weight. He had not turned his nineteenth year when he had walked over and jumped over all Southern Cork, but his great feat was when he met Mick Connery at Churchtown in the long jump and running hop. They were at it all day, until Denny Power, that finest of handicappers, put an end to a record competition—a draw.

AGILE CREDIT TO HIS NATIVE LAND.

"It would be impossible to give even a short concise history of his victories, for there were no programmes issued, and what is still

more surprising, the entries were taken at the posts. Ballacrane, Ballingaddy, Glenville, Glanmire and the annual 'Queen's' gave Walsh his opportunities with pride of place, but his master victories were reserved for Scotland and Wales, whereat he proved an agile credit to his native land. He tried to introduce the 'Three Jumps' and 'Gate Vaulting' at these centres, but they were not popular. Ned Walsh copied the style of Bob Coll for muscle vaulting, at which he was an adept.

"Dr. Walsh, in addition to his own events, found time in the evenings of his early manhood to cultivate the physical ability of such men as Nicholas Dwane, who tightened up Mick Connery to a half inch—6 ft. 0 1/2 in.—at Kilmallock; Aeneas Fenton, who did grandly at the 42 and 56 lbs. at home and in America, and he was certainly responsible for Rodger Fenton, who could shoulder the 56 lbs. to 25 ft. 8 ins. at ease. Pat Lillis, of Mount Russell, an excellent miler, came under his observation and at minor meets proved his worth, for 'Solemon' had a fine stride and method. The 'boneless wonder,' Dwane, would have proved himself a grand high jumper had not his health given way prematurely.

EXPERT AT VAULTING.

"Ned Walsh vaulted all the gates between the cross of Mortalstown and the bridge at Ardpatrik, and his three standing jumps were long intact in Richard Connolly's field, just inside the gate. He tried muscle vaulting over Lowe's gate at Sunville, but could not get a suitable grip owing to spikes. At the close of evening, on the old way home, he would produce the 'Lays and Legends of Thomond,' and read in a clear, tuneful voice 'Drunken Thady' and 'The Fairy Hurling Match,' and for a few—very few, indeed—he would copy out passages for recital. A scholar, an athlete and a medical officer, Dr. Walsh was faithful to his home, his kindred, his country, and his God."

SINCERE LOVER OF HIS NATIVE LAND.

Dr. Walsh was a sincere lover of his native land, and the divisions in the athletic field, as well as those in the political sphere, pained him deeply. I can do no better than conclude with an extract from one of his last letters to me:—"With sincerest wishes for a better, happier, and more prosperous Ireland; with the good resolutions of all the split-up sections of our race and people to 'bury the hatchet' of ill-will, and stand together as Gaels on the common platform of goodwill and affection on behalf of our down-trodden Fatherland, with the good old motto as a symbol—United we stand, divided we fall!"

No. 6—Pat Ryan of Pallasgreen.