

# Great Limerick Athletes

## (No. 23)—TIM LEAHY of Cregane

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

TIM LEAHY was the greatest of the Leahys — that wonder family of athletes that hailed from Cregane. And the Leahys were the greatest family the athletic world has known. So Tim Leahy was one of the brightest lights in the athletic history of the nations, and, had God spared him to us, there is no question of doubt that records set by him in jumping would have reached figures that might never be surpassed.

That grand judge of an athlete, "Carbery," always maintained that Tim Leahy was big enough to get over seven feet in the running high jump event; and I know that this opinion was shared by the other members of the Leahy family — more particularly by Paddy and Con — two of the grandest figures that ever adorned the world athletic stage. And when we realise that Tim actually cleared a bar in the Markets Field, Limerick, on the occasion of the G.A.A. sports there on August 29th, 1913, at the remarkable height of 6 ft. 5 ins., whilst still in his teens, we can well understand the claim that maturity would add many further inches.

### OPINION OF ALL THE EXPERTS.

That this was also the opinion of all the experts then is amply borne out by the fact that although the Limerick leap equalled the Irish record made by T. J. Carroll, at Kinsale, a few weeks earlier, official recognition was never sought as it was considered that further advances were certain to come.

Circumstances, however, ordained otherwise. Tim secured an important appointment in London, where he soon became associated with the famous Polytechnic Club. Then the Great War intervened to upset matters athletic on the sportsfield of the Saxon, and Tim was denied any great opportunities during the best years of his career.

He was still at the zenith of his power when the much vaunted struggle for the "freedom of small nations" ended, but fate once more stepped in, and during the great flu epidemic of the closing days of 1918 he passed to another world where parting is no more.

### YOUNGEST OF A FAMOUS SIX.

Tim Leahy was the youngest member of the finest family sextette of athletes time has known. From his youngest days he was trying his hand — or, maybe, I should have said, his legs — at jumping, and what youth had better teachers than any one of his famous brothers — Paddy, Con, Joe, Mick and Tom. Pick whichever you will and I could roll off a record in the sports arena that cannot readily be bettered.

In such company Tim grew up "a nice cut of a boy," and he never missed an opportunity for a trial of skill at boys' sports or any like event that offered.

Attending school at Rath Luirc C.B.S. with his brothers, Tom and Mick, it is interesting to recall that they had as a fellow student An Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera. Young de Valera was a class mate of Tom and Mick but Tim was "downstairs" then. But they trudged the same road home together — that road of memories to which I have already referred in these articles.

### BEAUTIFUL SPECIMEN.

A finely built athlete, Tim stripped a beautiful specimen of the typical Celt. He jumped in what has since become known as the wonderful Leahy style. In this regard it might be of interest to mention that Con jumped off the right leg, and was the only athlete of his day to

favour this take-off. Tim's spring was from the left, and it was marvellous to study the roll of his muscles on shapely arms and legs as he strode on tip-toe towards the crossbar. A free moving style, it was a thrill in itself to witness the beautiful "take off," the graceful crossing of the lath, and, then, the perfect landing at the other side. Never a necessity to dig a pit or provide any other aid for him.

In this matter it is well to remember that the vast majority of our Irish jumpers always preferred the hard ground for a landing and, despite the big disadvantage in the "jar" that a fall of over six feet must create, many of them proved by their performances real "natural" jumpers. Compare the Leahy style with the "all fours" landing of the famous American, Osborne, or with the inelegant landing on a specially provided mattress of J. C. Jupp, the well-known English champion.

### FIRST APPEARANCE WITH "THE MEN."

Tim Leahy was a mere stripling when he first appeared "with the men." I think it was at Nenagh, on 24th June, 1906, that he made his debut, being second on that occasion to his brother, Joe, in the high jump, the winner's height being 5ft. 11 ins. and Tim's initial effort 5 ft. 8 ins. He did not appear again until the 15th September, 1907, when he won the high jump at Rath Luirc (5 ft. 8½ ins.) and filled third place in the hurdles, Joe being first and Mick second. The following Sunday he won the pole jump at Dromcollogher at 9 ft. 9 ins., and filled second place in both the high and hop, step and jump. A week later, at Castletown, his winning high jump effort was 5 ft. 10 ins., and he was second at 10 ft. to his brother Mick in the pole event.

1908 saw his performances continue on the ascending scale. At Donoughmore he won the high jump at 6 ft. 0½ ins.; at Tipperary, he rose 6 ft. 1½ ins.; at Mallow, the height was 6 ft., and at Emly, on August 30th, we had his best effort so far in public, 6 ft. 3 ins. During this season he also had victories in the 120 yards hurdles, the pole jump, and the hop, step and jump, in which he returned 44 ft. 8 ins.

He won his first championship spurs at Mallow on 17th September, 1909, when he tied with J. J. Bourke, of Dromcollogher, at 6 ft. 1 in. for the G.A.A. All-Ireland high jump title. Then, like his brother, he set up a sequence, winning in 1911 with 5 ft. 11 ins. (he did not compete in 1910) in 1912 with 5 ft. 5½ ins. on a regular bog, his brother Mick being second. In 1913 with 6 ft. In 1911 he finished third in the 120 yards hurdles championship.

### BRIEF SUMMARY OF HIS PERFORMANCES.

In the space at my disposal it would be impossible to enumerate even a fraction of his performances. However, I will list some as briefly as possible in order to convey to my readers some little idea of his greatness.

On 13th June, 1909, Munster championships at Tipperary, won high jump, 5 ft. 11 ins.; J. J. Bourke being second; position reversed in 120 yards hurdles. On the 27th June, 1909, won long jump at 21 ft. 0½ ins. On 29th June, 1909, at Craughwell, won high jump, 6 ft.

2 ins. On 11th July, 1909, at Clonmel, won high jump, at 6 ft., and pole jump at 10 ft. 6 ins. On the 2nd August, 1909, at London G.A.A., won long jump at 23 ft. On 5th September, 1909, at Rath Luirc, won high and pole jumps and 120 yards hurdles and was second in 16 lbs. shot. On the 12th September, 1909, at Dunmanway, won the pole jump at 10 ft. 6 ins. On 13th September, 1909, at Donoughmore, won pole jump at 10 ft. 6 ins. On 26th May, 1910, at Ballinasloe, won high jump at 6 ft. 2 ins. On 18th September, 1910, at Kanturk, won high jump at 6 ft. 2 ins. On 9th October, 1910, at Dunmanway, won high jump at 6 ft. 2 ins. On 9th October, 1910, at Bruff, won high jump at 6 ft. 3 ins.

At Ballinasloe he also won the pole event and was second to Joe in the hurdles; at Dunmanway he won, in addition to the high jump, the pole jump and hop, step and jump (44 ft. 6 ins.) and the 120 yards hurdles, whilst at Bruff he notched also the pole (10 ft. 6 ins.) and the long (20 ft.) jumps.

6 ft. 2½ ins. at Ballinasloe, and 6 ft. 2 ins. at Rath Luirc, were his best high jump performances in 1911, whilst he was second for the English Championship at 5 ft. 11 ins. to R. Pasemann, Berlin, who won at 6 ft. His greatest hop, step and jump distances that season were 44 ft. 1 in. at Macroom, and 45 ft. 3 ins. at Bandon, whilst he got to a new height of 10 ft. 11 ins. in the pole item (Rath Luirc).

He was second in the 56 lbs. at Ballinasloe on 6th June, 1912, and during that year his good high jumps were 6 ft. 1 in. at Cork and Doneraile; 6 ft. 2½ ins. at Banteer, and 6 ft. 3 ins. at Kanturk. He won the pole jump at Cobh, the height being 10 ft. 8 ins.

### REMARKABLY FINE JUMP.

In 1913, Tim made the remarkably fine jump of 6 ft. 5 ins. at Limerick Markets Field on a sod that was none too favourable. It was at a meeting under the auspices of the Limerick County Board, G.A.A., and the date was August 29th.

During that same year, at a memorable meeting in Kilmallock, at which the late Jack O'Grady set up a weight record that displaced a long standing one of his kinsman, big Ned O'Grady, Tim Leahy won the high jump at 6 ft. 2½ ins., and followed up with pole honours at 10 ft. 9 ins. The following season Tim was in England and was second at 10 ft. 6 ins. in the pole jump at the English Championships, the winner being a Swede, R. Sjoberg. Very few records are available of his performances across the Irish Sea, but we know that he crossed the bar at 6 ft. 3 ins. at a big sports meeting at Stoke-on-Trent.

The above are but a few of his achievements during an all too short career of brilliance, and scarcely does him justice, for I have it on the most reliable of authority that he was fully capable of 6 ft. 6 ins. in the high jump and 11 ft. 6 ins. in the pole vault, and often exceeded these figures — and that before reaching the age of twenty-one.

### REGRETTABLE CARELESSNESS IN KEEPING RECORDS.

It was a real pity that our sports committees and athletic rulers were so careless in the matter of

records during the halcyon days of our athletic renown. We have ample evidence of Irishmen smashing records galore, but very few of these wonder performances gained official recognition. These matters were very badly neglected then, and there was scarcely an effort made to check the accuracy of the measurements or test the condition of the ground — facts that were in most cases responsible for having some of the really genuine records of a grand era denied the honoured place they fully deserve.

Tim's 6 ft. 5 ins. at Limerick was never even claimed as a record, whilst Paddy suffered worse in that his magnificent and fool-proof record at the same venue was never fully vouched, and his grand effort of 50ft. 7 ins. at Mallow in the hop, step and jump met a like fate. It is sad to think that the executives of those days did not even take ordinary care — they just met things as they found them, and left us now without our full reward from the brilliancy of a galaxy of athletic stars such as the world had never witnessed, before or since.

### WHAT A MARVELLOUS ATHLETE!

Just an example of the fine athlete whose memory we recall in this article. He was at the Mardyke, Cork, on one occasion for an athletic meeting — here, as was usual in the Southern City after business on a week evening. The time ran so late that it was growing dusk when the high jump competition opened. The small fry were eliminated one by one, but Tim continued as he had a heavy handicap to overcome. Higher and higher the bar soared as darker and darker grew the evening, until eventually a white handkerchief had to be placed on the lath to enable the jumper see it. But Tim continued unperturbed, and did not finish until he had won the event with a magnificent leap of 6 ft. 3 ins. — a remarkable feat under the conditions. Then it was learned that the Cregane lad had promised to attend an athletic meeting at Ayr in Scotland two days later, and he was forced to rush away on a side car without even changing his togs, and catch the mail train from Cork. He managed it all right and proved equal to the strain, for he also won in Scotland, setting figures that long remained outstanding there.

Now, as this little sketch draws to a conclusion, I feel that I have given but scant justice to one who, had fate decreed otherwise, would surely have become not only the greatest athlete of his day but of all time. To do full justice to the athletic capabilities of the Leahys would require an entire issue. Tim's achievements, taken in conjunction with the performances of his brothers, are incontestable proof of how native and natural the art of jumping is to the Irish athlete, whereas in most other countries performances of equal merit are rare and exotic.

### GREAT MEN ALL.

However, I am proud to be able, even if in faulty fashion, to bring back for a fleeting few minutes some of the athletic glories that once were ours. The Leahys were great men all, and we must not forget them. Let us stir in the new generation the soul and spirit of all that is dearest and noblest in the lives of the past generations, and who bring up again the old scenes and proud memories that raised the hearts and brightened the homes of other days, and best of all for Ireland's future is the grand traditions we can perpetuate around the old time deeds and glamour of our historic athletic fields.

24—Jack O'Grady of Caherconlish.