

(Rathkeale). P. J. Kelly, O. D. Coll (Bruree), M. Clifford, M. Barry, E. Gibbons (Ballygran), P. J. Leahy (Cregane), L. Roche (Dromin), T. Flynn (goal), J. W. O'Brien (Kilfinane).

At an athletic meeting which followed, Owen made up with J. O'Regan, Paddy and Joe Leahy, a quartette that secured first place in the relay race.

As well as lining out for Limerick in hurling, Owen represented his county in those great athletic years when in inter-county contests Limerick, headed by Larry Roche, threw down the gauntlet to Cork, and the chosen venue was Cobh, the date, 26th July, 1904.

The Leesiders had a great sprint trio in Butler, O'Farrell and Roche and these, with other grand athletes like Con Walsh, Denis Horgan, J. J. Curry, R. Kent, Murray of Blarney, Ludgate, D. Leary, Bobbie Butler and T. P. O'Sullivan, gained the verdict by 62½ points to 54.

**THE LIMERICK MEN IN ACTION THAT DAY.**

Limerick had in action that day well-known figures like Andy Kelly, Joe, Con and Paddy Leahy, Owen Coll, Mick Creede, Paddy Ryan and J. McNamara, but some did not touch their best form and the honours went from them.

This defeat of Limerick gave the impression that the county had gone down in athletics, but the public had a rude awakening when, on August 14th, in the Munster Championships at Dungarvan, Owen, with ease, annexed the "hundred," and other Limerick athletes captured the lion's share of the trophies. Jim Condon made a clean sweep of the cycling, winning the one, three and five mile events. Once Jim missed the train by a minute in Cork, and cycled to Skibbereen—a distance of forty-six miles—to compete at the sports there.

**FINAL EFFORTS ON THE TRACK.**

An old friend has left this record of Owen Coll's final efforts on the track:

"The last time I met Owen was at a sports at Kilkkee. The meeting was being held on the strand, and I was curious to know how it would affect his pace. In the 100 yards, as the pistol went, owing to 'sand slipping,' he stumbled, fell on one knee, quickly righted himself, made up for the bad start, and with what looked like a superhuman effort caught the judge's eye, repeating the success in the 220, and leaving that evening for another meeting, to win two similar events next day. Denis Power, of Ballywalter, the great handicapper, told me once that he was the fastest man he knew to get away at the pistol."

**COLLECTED MORE THAN 100 PRIZES.**

Owen Coll collected more than a hundred prizes in his all too short time on the track, and when I saw him that day in Clonmel, with a galaxy of old champions, from Pat Davin of Carrick-on-Suir, his near kinsman, Tom F. Kiely, and Larry; Peter O'Connor, Creed Meredith, Mick Ryan and the Leahys, down the long years, he still looked every inch the champion. An accident shortly afterwards hastened his end, and he went to an untimely grave deeply mourned by all who had the privilege of his friendship or who had known him on the field of sport.

No. 55—Charlie McGill, of Limerick City.

# Great Limerick Athletes

## (No. 54)—OWEN D. COLL of Bruree

(By SEAMUS O'CALLAIGH)

If my memory serves me rightly it was in 1936 that I attended a memorable All-Ireland Athletic Championship meeting at Clonmel, under N.A.C.A. laws.

The choice of venue was a happy one—the capital town of a great athletic county, in Ireland's pre-eminently athletic province.

The meeting was remarkable, quite apart from the fact that F. G. Moran was credited with even time for the second successive year in winning the hundred, that of the eighteen championships listed fifteen were won by the holders, and that only one champion of the previous year was defeated.

An Taoiseach, Eamonn de Valera, attended the meeting, being met at the Borough Boundary by the Mayor of Clonmel and the President of the N.A. and C.A.—Frank J. O'Dea, and the sports were preceded by a parade of old champions.

Prominent in that great muster of the olden stars of the arena were many Limerickmen, most of whose careers I have already reviewed in the course of these articles. The Shannonside turn-out included Owen D. Coll, whom I later saw in earnest conversation with An Taoiseach.

Owen, who was a schoolmate of An Taoiseach at Bruree, often fielded a team with him to meet the young aspirants of the neighbouring parish.

**THE YOUTHFUL ENTHUSIASM.**

David T. Dwane, in his excellent "Early Life of Eamonn de Valera" tells of An Taoiseach's youthful enthusiasm in the following passage:

"Most people take some interest in games and athletics but in this respect De Valera was an enthusiast. When not engrossed in a book he was found wielding a caman, playing football, or testing his capabilities at the hundred yards mark. There was no middle course and no idle moment. The late Fr. Eugene Sheehy, P.P., took a keen interest in the Bruree hurlers, and accompanied them on many a memorable day to the venue where conclusions were tried with the boys from a neighbouring village or parish. In these encounters the Bruree team nearly always came out victorious, and the return of the wagonettes at night was invariably heralded by cheers from the collected at the cross re replied to by those in Amongst those would be Valera, cheering more loudly than any. Those us days in Bruree.

**JOIN THE HURLERS.**

De, Patrick Coll, a dignified man, standing 6 ft. height, relates how De ten returned home with household messages for e had been sent to the vil- might be that on his way some of the hurlers would met for practice and through enthusiasm for the game he ould join them, placing his mes- sages on the road fence. Oblivious of what was happening around him, he would hurl away for per- haps half an hour or more, only to find that the household messages had meanwhile disappeared. The messages were, of course, taken as practical joke, and after a while ound their way to their proper estination, but not before De lera had been put through the eal of giving an explanation.

Yet a month later he would do the very same again."

**OLD DAYS IN BRUREE.**

Before passing on, I would like to reproduce a passage from a letter received during the week from a Limerick exile, for over fifty years resident in Wales. Recalling old days in Bruree, he wrote:

"Bruree played very little foot- ball. But there is one match I must mention. It was for a set of medals, and the opposing team was Croom. Big hearted, reckless Spencer Lyons decided to keep goal for Croom. By way of adding spice to the occasion, Father Sheehy persuaded Patrick Coll, of Knockmore (De Valera's uncle) to do likewise for Bruree. Needless to say neither was a footballer. But what a sight. Spencer about 6 ft. 6 ins. and P. Coll over 6 ft. 4 ins. No trouble to reach the cross bars. I could not say who won, what odds?"

Mention of Owen D. Coll recalls some stirring events in athletic fields in the early part of the century.

**HONOURED NAME IN ATHLETICS.**

The Coll name was an honoured one in athletics even before the G.A.A. was founded. Bob Coll of Dromin, Chairman of Limerick Co. Council and Assistant Land Commissioner, was the most brilliant of a great family of old-time athletes. Of medium height and powerful build, he could sprint, jump and throw weights with the champions, and was a close rival of the Davins in the early 'eighties.

A nephew of Bob Coll's was the Herculean, versatile footballer, hurler, athlete, Larry Roche of Ballymuddagh, a magnificent specimen of manhood who threw his lot in with Cusack and was closely associated with G.A.A. work in its formative period. Standing 6ft. 2ins. and weighing 14½ stones, Larry Roche was an All-Ireland football medal winner with Commercial's' champion team of 1896. He won many athletic titles in sprints, jumps and weights in the 'eighties and did much organising work, taking teams to London and elsewhere.

**A BEAUTIFULLY MOULDED ATHLETE.**

Owen D. Coll was a beautifully moulded, handsome athlete, something in build like Paddy Leahy. A real speed merchant, who was close to even time over the "hundred," he could run a great furlong and a darling quarter mile, as well as hurt in the best of company. A contemporary of his described him thus to me only a few days ago: "Owen was a great bit of stuff surely, fast as any man I ever saw, and with a light tread that would scarcely break an egg."

Owen grew up in the athletic tradition, and most of the recreation time of himself and his school-mates was spent in running, jump- ing, weight throwing or some form of athletic pastime. Owen's younger brothers were almost as fast on the sprints, and although they never competed, were a great test for him when preparing for championship

events.

**INITIAL SUCCESS.**

The first mention I find of him in actual competition was at the Limerick A.A. and B.C. Sports, held at the Markets Field on June 12th, 1901, when he was second to Andy Kelly, in the 220 yards flat and third in the "hundred." These initial successes were gained in the best of company, for "fields" were large at that great meeting, many noted athletes, including famous Limerick figures like the Leahys—Paddy, Joe and Con—J. J. Condon, W. J. Ryan, Mick Hyman and Con Ryan participating.

At Bruff G.A.A. Sports, a fortnight later, we find him second in the "100," to Andy Kelly. The "Two-Twenty" that day was won by another nephew of Bob Coll's, and first cousin of Larry Roche—Dan Hartigan of Fort.

At three further meetings that season—Kilmallock on July 14th; Tipperary, August 18th and Kilkree, August 27th, Owen took "seconds" in the 100 yards flat, before notching his first win at Banteer, then, as now, a great centre of athletics. Bruff G.A.A. Club held another meeting on September 15th, at which Owen won the "100" from J. J. O'Brien, and was runner-up to O'Brien in the furlong.

**HIS PEAK YEAR.**

1902 was his peak year, and he opened it with a pair of great wins at Bruff on Sts. Peter and Paul's Day, taking the top prizes in the 100 and 220.

His next outing was at Kilmallock on July 20th, where he was first home in the 220 yards flat. An old admirer afterwards recalled this meeting and told how Owen was scratchman in the event. It was the time when bookmakers openly made a "book" at athletic sports, and shouted the odds in colourful fashion. Some of the wiseacres said: "We can't back Owen to-day," but others had different views and decided to take a chance, and sure enough Owen had caught the limit man at the 200 mark, and was easing up on the tape.

On another occasion, at Bruree, he was scratchman, but he had to go all out to just nip the limit man on the tape. He made a particular effort on that occasion as he was very keen on notching a win. He confessed afterwards that it was one of the sweetest of his victories, as it being his native place a win was greatly appreciated in his own home and with the general public.

**STIRRING TUSSLES.**

A very large entry favoured the Limerick G.A.A. Sports at the Markets Field on August 3rd, 1902, and in a great race for the "hundred," Andy Kelly won narrowly, with Owen Coll second and J. J. O'Brien close up third.

The Limerick A.A. and B.C. Jubilee Sports on September 4th attracted a huge crowd to the Markets Field and they were treated to some stirring tussles, including a terrific battle in the 100 yards flat, which J. J. O'Connell won, breasting the tape a few inches ahead of Coll.

The seventeenth G.A.A. All-Ireland Athletic Championship meeting was held at the Markets Field ten days later. Limerick athletes proved very successful, Owen Coll being amongst the grand galaxy that kept the name of Sarsfield's County to the fore. He won the 220 yards flat championship of Ireland and was second in the "100."

The full list of Limerick successes on that occasion will be read with interest: 16 lb. hammer (9 ft. circle), Pat Ryan, Pallasgreen, 136 ft.; slinging 56 lbs. between legs, C. Ryan, Pallasgreen, 24 ft. 0½ in., won, P. Ryan, 21 ft. 0½ in., third; long jump, Con Leahy, Cregane, 22 ft. 2 ins.; high jump, C. Leahy, 5 ft. 11 ins.; won, Joe Leahy, second; running hop, step and jump, C. Leahy, 46 ft. 3 ins.; 220 yards flat, Owen D. Coll, Bruree, won, A. F. Kelly, Limerick City, second; one mile flat, M. Hyman, won, W. Ryan, third; Half mile flat, M. Hyman, won, W. Ryan, second; 16 lb. hammer, unlimited run and follow, Pat Ryan, 151 ft. 7 ins., won, Con Ryan, 126 ft. 5 ins., third; 100 yards flat, A. P. Kelly, second, Owen D. Coll, third; 16 lb. shot, Con Ryan, 34 ft. 8 ins., third; 56 lbs., unlimited run and follow, Con Ryan, 27 ft. 7 ins., second.

I can only find mention of Owen at two meetings during 1903, and he had to be satisfied with second place in the "100" at both Kilmallock, on July 26th, and Portlaoise, on August 20th.

**ON IMPORTANT HURLING TEAM.**

He was a member of the Limerick hurling team that had a sensational win over the London Irish—then All-Ireland senior hurling champions, at Elm Park Grounds, Lea Bridge, London, before five thousand spectators, on Whit Monday, 23rd May, 1904. The final score was 3-4 to 0-3 in Limerick's favour. The full Shannonside seventeen was: Tim Lloyd (capt.), W. Ryan, M. Creamear (Caherline), J. Herbert, M. McCarthy (Castleconnell), M. Danaher (Murree), M. Quinlan (Bruff), W. Sheahan.

