

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 21)—JIM FAHEY of Galbally

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

SCATTERED among the hilly parts of the South, where the Galtees and the Comeraghs reveal a hundred moods in light and colour, are the remnants of a hardy race. Hill-side men who were champions all, they maintained a grand tradition in the once popular sport of jumping from a mark.

To Jim Fahey, of Galbally, belonged the distinction of being the last of the "old glory" line.

An exponent of an ancient art, possessing all the grace and power of those who preceded him, the Galbally man was approaching his fortieth birthday when he established a new world's record for the three standing jumps, in September, 1923, at Chicago. His distance was 40 ft. 3 ins., and all who had witnessed his performances at his native place twelve months before deemed it characteristic of a man bent on defying Anno Domini.

Sixteen years previously Fahey had won his first Gaelic championship, and in the years which followed was a noted competitor at sports meetings throughout Munster.

The world's record holder in the three standing jumps, James J. Fahey, to give him the name that appeared in the Baptismal Register of his native Galbally, was, perhaps, one of the most paradoxical figures that have ever loomed across the track of Ireland's athletic story. Paradoxical in the sense that he attained athletic eminence without any severe athletic preparation. It was simply as a child friend of his once said that "he jumped far, 'cos he had to jump."

NEVER TRAINED.

I suppose he just had to jump, for he never went into training. He never dieted, he never departed from his ordinary day's routine, but when Sunday came he just ambled away unconcernedly to some meeting where the three standing jumps were on the programme and jumped farther than anyone else. If a fellow athlete continued on, to beat Fahey's jump, well Jim just took another turn and added on a foot or so to his last effort. It was hardly ever the case of his having an "off" day. It was just that at some meetings, some fellow, with a handicap made Jim go a few feet more—and he did, and stopped for that particular day.

Fahey lived with his aunt on a splendid farm just at Galbally, and he was in every sense of the word "his own boss." But he never in any way misused his powers. He lived the clean life of any of his friends around him and had nothing in appearance to distinguish him from hundreds of farmers in

similar circumstances. The only thing peculiar was his diet, and that was peculiar. I know I will hardly be believed when I state that previous to his departure for America he never used butter, practically no meat—just a rasher only, and that crisp and hard; very little milk, not much sugar, and no potatoes. He lived a tea diet and his record, certainly, is an answerable argument against the meat eater.

THE "IRISH KANGAROO."

The "Irish Kangaroo," as Jim was called, born and reared in that valley famed in song and story, the Glen of Aherlow, inherited the athletic traditions of a region that produced some amazing athletes, many of whose performances were never recorded but were "handed down" by "word of mouth."

Each narrator added a little "naigishin" until, eventually, what was originally some performance about the average developed into a miraculous feat. Hence we hear of Canan Maol, who in the native parlance, "fished the say West of Kerry wud a bashkit," and of that famous outlaw, the Breachallach O Buachalla (Speckled O'Buckley) who jumped the Blackwater near Mallow.

Of course, like the Scotchman, some of us may "have our doots" about those performances, but there can be no doubt as to the genuineness of Jim Fahey's jumps, most of which were vouched in every particular.

Jim started in active competition on September 13th, 1897, at Galbally, and got second to Sergt. Joe Chandler, World's record holder standing broad jump, who on that occasion did 38 ft. 10 ins. in the three jumps. The following year he travelled to Cork for the All-Ireland Championships, but Chandler won again, Fahey running him a close second.

For some unaccountable reason the three standing jumps were not included in the Irish Championship programme for the next four years, and very rarely in the open meetings, so that standing jumping became almost a lost art, being kept alive by a few of the most promising athletes simply to keep in shape. J. J. Bresnihan, Paddy

and Con Leahy, J. Barrett and Mick Creedon were among the principal exponents, as Joe Chandler had been transferred and Fahey had practically dropped from sight.

On July 28th, 1907, he re-appeared at Thurles for the Irish Championships, and won both the three jumps and standing hop, step and jump at 35 ft. 2 ins. and 31 ft. 4 ins., respectively. He was lucky in the latter event, as his strongest opponent, P. D. Mehigan ("Carbery") was unfortunate enough to lose his jumping shoes, and was unable to compete, but Mehigan won the standing hop the following year, and so was consoled.

In 1908, Fahey went to Chicago, and won a number of jumps at fairly good distances. The Illinois Athletic Club, recognising his ability, had him join the Club, and under the benefit of good training he rapidly developed into champion. As his performances are not too well known here, I am giving some of the most outstanding.

HIS PERFORMANCES

At Milwaukee, Wis., in 1908—Three jumps, 36 ft. 9 ins.; standing hop, 33 ft.; running hop, step and jump, 46 ft. 8½ ins.

World's Fair Grounds, Chicago, September 17th, 1909—Three jumps, 37 ft.; running hop, 47 ft. 7 ins.; standing hop, 33 ft. 5 ins.

New Orleans, La., 1909 — Three jumps, 38 ft. 11½ ins.

Federal League Park, Chicago, Sept. 1st, 1912—Three jumps, 36 ft. 9 ins.

In 1913, Jim underwent an operation for appendicitis, and returned to Ireland to recuperate. During his stay he attended the Munster Championships at Dungarvan. He just took one try at the three jumps, which he won at 34 ft. 9 ins.

In the following year he returned to America and again starred in competition—

46th Kedzie Park, Chicago, Aug. 23rd, 1914—Three jumps at 38 ft. 7 ins.

August 30th, 1914, North West Field, Chicago—Three jumps at 36 ft. 2 ins., without weights, a world's record which was disallowed.

June 8th, 1919, at Gaelic Park, Chicago—Three jumps, 37 ft. 2 ins.

July 4th, 1920, at Gaelic Park, Chicago—Three jumps at 37 ft. 5 ins.

July 4th, 1921 — Scotch Picnic, Elliott's Park, Ill.—Won the three jumps at 38 ft. 6½ ins., and the running hop at 46 ft. 10 ins.

Schiltz Park, Mil., 1921 — Three jumps, 37 ft. 8½ ins., and running hop at 47 ft.

August 17th, 1922, at Blue Island, Ill.—Three jumps at 37 ft. 10 ins.; three jumps, without weights, at 37 ft. 6 ins., a world's record which was not passed by the A.A.U., and 5 ft. 1½ ins. in the standing high jump, without weights.

ACCEPTED WORLD RECORD.

On September 4th, 1923, at Columet Grove, Chicago, Ill., Jim won the three jumps at 40 ft. 3 ins., and this time the ground was certified and a world's record passed by the A.A.U. August 10th, 1924, at Pilsen Park, Chicago, three jumps at 38 ft. 5 ins. July 4th, 1925, at South Town Park, Chicago, three jumps at 39 ft. 6 ins.; August 2nd, 1925, at Desplaines, Ill., three jumps at 36 feet, without weights, and running hop at 46 ft.

Less than a fortnight after his accepted world's record leap, he was in Buffalo. There he cleared 38 ft. with weights, and 35 ft. 10½ ins. without weights. The latter distance surpassed the accepted outdoor record of Ray Emery by 1½ ins., but was not, for some technical reason, passed by the A.A.U. On the same day he accomplished 47 ft. 1½ ins. in the running hop, step and jump.

Jim Fahey was once suspended for professionalism in the "States" under extraordinary circumstances. Joe Darby, the world's professional champion, was jumping out West, and Fahey, having no foeman worthy of his steel in the amateur arena, conceived the idea of trying conclusions with Joe.

So Jim took a holiday and hiked out West, changed his name and met and licked the hitherto unbeaten Joe. Naturally, the limelight was focussed on the incident, and those Yankee limelights are fierce and glaring, and Jim's little plot was discovered.

He had to stand down for a year, but when the nigger Ben Irish began to sweep the decks at the three standing jumps, the Yanks were not slow in restoring Fahey's amateur status.

A WORLD NAME.

Many good judges maintain that Fahey would have made a world name for himself in other jumping events, if he had not specialised at the three standing jumps. He won various prizes in the States in the running hop, step and jump, having covered between 48 and 49 feet on many occasions, and was not far behind the world's record of Ben Irish in the standing high jump, being credited with 5 ft. 2½ ins. on many occasions. He was also a star performer at the standing hop, step and jump, having never been beaten in this particular event.

May this record of his deeds prove a stimulus to our youth, to emulate his fame, and help us to maintain that athletic prestige for which the Gaels are famous the world over.

I conclude with a brief pen picture of Jim Fahey in action, written by an admirer who rarely missed a meeting at which he competed.

"It is a treat to watch him in competition. Most standing jumpers perform with very apparent effort, but not Jim. No preliminary swinging of the dumb bells—simply a quick spring from the take-off, the upward jerk of the bells, knees almost touching the chin, the great second spring, and then the mighty third, when the bells are discarded without retarding the impetus gained, and the inimitable way in which he shoots out his legs immediately before landing to gain that extra foot that has made him the greatest standing jumper of all time."

No. 22—J. J. Bourke, of Dromcollogher.