

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 39)—Michael Hynan of Garryspillane

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

MEET Michael Hynan cycling to Mass any Sunday morning and the impression you get is of a fine, lively man of about sixty, hale and hearty, enjoying the best of health. Then learn that he competed at Ballylanders Sports on 15th August, 1886, just sixty-seven years ago, and was second in two events there—the 440 yards and 880 yards flat, and wonder!

Michael Hynan celebrated his eightieth birthday on May 10th last, and he was just thirteen years of age when he first donned togs at Ballylanders Pattern Day Sports and competed in the two events mentioned, which were confined to boys of under sixteen.

The Garryspillane lad, accordingly, made his athletic debut just two years after the G.A.A. was founded, and he continued in active service until 1907, a period which covered what might well be termed the golden age of Irish athletics.

So we have still happily with us a man who, not alone lived through one of the greatest periods in our athletic history, but actually participated with the big majority of the men who made the athletic welkin ring in memorable days.

FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE.

He can go back the entire span of our modern athletic lore, assured of first hand knowledge from the men who figured in it, for any part not covered by personal experience.

He can tell how, when organised athletics were revived in Ireland, giants and lithe-limbed men flocked to the playing fields and quickly established the name and fame of their country in the realms of athletics. The first remarkable pair to enter the international arena of modern athletics were the Davin brothers, Maurice and Pat, of Carrick-on-Suir. Maurice far outshone all his compères as a weight-thrower, as did Pat as a jumper, runner and hurdle racer. Both won many English championships and medals, and prizes by the hundred, against the cream of American, English and Scottish athletes.

The coming of the G.A.A. tapped rural athletic talent for the first time. From the South rose most of the big figures in the jumps, weights and long distances, whilst the university men came to the fore in the sprints and hurdles.

A WONDERFUL BUNCH OF ATHLETES.

Michael Hynan could tell from first hand experience, of the deeds of a wonderful bunch of athletes of his early days—Mitchell, O'Sullivan, Real, Daly, Purcell, Shanahan, the Leahy's, Pibbs, O'Donovan, Ryan, Power, O'Brien, O'Neill, Conway, O'Mahonys, Mooney, Malone, Kelly, Delaney, Wood, Barry, Fraher, Fahy, Wall, Courtney and Morrissey.

The fine performances of these wonderful men created a nation wide interest in athletics, with Munster leading the van in its devotion to the cause. Despite a pre-occupation with a stern land agitation during this period, athletics quickly gained a firm grip, flourishing as never before, as many world records were set up, particularly in the weights and jumps.

The athletic "Invasion" of America has come under review in the course of these articles, and it is interesting to discover that our subject this week had first hand knowledge of conditions across the Atlantic when he travelled to that continent just sixty years ago and remained for three years.

THE GOLDEN DECADE.

His return in 1896 coincided with the commencement of what has come to be regarded as the golden decade of athletics in this country. Amongst the many new athletes of unusual physical attributes that greeted him on his homecoming, the foremost was Tom F. Kiely, of Carrick-on-Suir, a pupil and neighbour of the Davins and the most versatile of a remarkable group. Majestically built, an inch above six

feet tall, square-shouldered, broad-chested, long-limbed, of an iron frame and constitution, he ran any distance, hurdled well, jumped superbly, and threw all sorts of weights with equal facility. Coming to full maturity, he won honours in plenty at home and abroad, often taking half-a-dozen first prizes at a meeting, and reaching the pinnacle of fame when winning the world's All-Round Athletic Championship at the great St. Louis Exhibition in 1904.

OTHERS MAKING HISTORY AT HOME.

A Mayo man, Martin Sheridan, succeeded Kiely as all-round champion and, benefitting by up-to-date American training, set up new figures, and distinguished himself at succeeding Olympiads—Athens, Paris, St. Louis and London.

Meanwhile Flanagan, the Leahy brothers, Newburn, O'Connor, Hogan and Walsh were making history at home and stretching out world's record figures which stood the test of international attack for many years. Flanagan found his way to America, revolutionised hammer throwing, broke record after record, was the biggest attraction in the athletic world during his time, won the hammer throw at three successive Olympics and carried the world's record from 156 to 185 feet, to be succeeded in this event by two Munster giants in Matt McGrath and Pat Ryan—both also Olympic winners.

P. J. Kelly, J. M. Ryan and Con Leahy were winning Irish and English championships at record heights—Paddy Leahy's 6 foot 4 and three-quarter inches at Millstreet in 1893, stood for many years—and Con, winning the high jump against the world's best at Athens, helped to spread athletic fame of Ireland. Beside him on that occasion was Peter O'Connor, the wonderful long jumper, who won the Hop, Stey and Jump. By strange fate W. J. M. Newburn and O'Connor were competing at the same time and were the world's greatest long jumpers of their period. The big Dublin weight-thrower and jumper advanced the Long Jump record to 24 feet 6 inches and O'Connor finally set the figures at 24 feet 11 and three-quarter inches.

J. J. BRESNIHAN.

Limerick next produced an all round athlete of exceptional promise in J. J. Bresnihan, of Castle-townconyers, whose individual figures rival the great Indian-Irish athlete, Thorpe. The pity of it was, however, that Bresnihan never got the chance of proving his all round talent. Some great Dublin athletes, notably the Murray brothers, Ryder, Morphy, Finnegan and Harris, vied with their Munster rivals led by Mick Hynan, Larry Roche, McNamara, Culhane, the Kirwan brothers and Crowe, whilst Con-nacht sent some useful challengers into the arena in Hynes, Joyce, Daly and Heaney.

We lost many of our finest as the result of the American "Invasion," and later years saw a drain almost as heavy, for many champion athletes found their way to the United States: The Leahys, Flanagans, Ahearnes, Con Walsh, Mick Creed, Paddy Ryan, Matt McGrath, Jim Fahy and P. McDonald.

Dan Ahearne broke Dan Shanahan's long standing hop, step and leap record in the United States; McDonald became supreme with the shot as Ryan did with the hammer, and Fahy surpassed the world's best in the three standing jumps, whilst Walsh set up new figures in the weights.

SPLENDID STYLE.

Returning to Michael Hynan's own career, first let me quote from a review by the late Frank B. Dinneen, in "Sport," under date, 30th August, 1903, in the course of which he said: "Michael Hynan had always a nice style and his taste for athletics brought him in contact with some first class trainers in New York, where he acquired that splendid style of moving, which now charms all who are fortunate enough to see him running. He was in rare form last Sunday, and, of course, his meeting with Daly over the mile was the event of the day. He was late this season in entering the arena, due to the fact that he suffered from a severe attack of pneumonia last November, and, of course, he was right in getting off the effects of it before again coming out. We were delighted to see him in such good form last Sunday, for great men are scarce, and Hynan is one of them."

Hynan won three all-Ireland championship titles, under G.A.A. laws, as under:—

880 Yards Flat, 1902—Time, 2m. 23 2-5 secs. One Mile Flat, 1902—Time, 4m. 33 4-5 secs. 1903—Time, 4m. 37 3-5 secs.

COLOURFUL ATHLETIC CAREER.

The veteran athlete was able to recount much of his doings on the athletic track, the only difficulty he experienced being in recalling the actual dates for some of his performances. And thanks to the kind co-operation of Mr. Jeremiah Tierney, to whom I am deeply grateful, it is possible to fill in the vacant bits and give the main details of a colourful athletic career.

One of his first big successes was achieved at Banteer, where he won both the half and one mile events. A little later, at Mitchelstown, he beat the renowned Con Fibbs, of Glenville, in the half mile.

The following June he went to America, and was second in the "half" at Bayonne on his initial appearance in the land of the Stars and Stripes. He won the same event at the Hibernian Sports, and the following St. Patrick's Day won the one mile indoor from a big entry, in New York. A little later that season he lined out in the 1½ miles indoor, and was second from virtual scratch from a "field" of forty, the winner being Ernest Hitchberg. At Stratton Island he won the long jump at 20 feet, the high jump at 5½ feet, and filled second place in the two miles. These were his main successes "across the herring pond," where his appearances were not too numerous, as conditions there did not suit his health, and he was eventually forced to return home.

ATHLETICALLY "IDLE" FOR A SEASON.

That was in December, and he was athletically "idle" all the following season. In October there was a sports in Galbally and he went there to have a look on. However, he knocked against some of his old pals and they insisted upon his donning togs once more, and without any training whatsoever, he won the "Mile."

That success put him back on the track with a bang, and the closing years of the century saw him win the Half Mile and Mile at Herbertstown, Tipperary and Aherlow; the One and Two Miles at Charleville; the "quarter" and mile at Pallasgreen and the "half" at Nenagh. He was beaten in the half mile at Charleville by half a foot, J. Culhane taking the honours after enjoying a big handicap.

The next season saw him collect prizes galore at far flung venues—

Birr, where he covered the half-mile in 1 minute 59 seconds, Callan, Templemore, Dunshaughlin, Cork, Cavan, Mallow, Newcastle West, Port Laoise, Hospital, Ballylanders, Kilfane, Elton, Bruff, Bruree and Listowel.

To continue in this strain would be like reciting the litany of the great sports gathering of one of the busiest spells ever in the history of Irish Athletics, so I must only pick at random some of the more important outings, as representing his undoubted prowess in company that was definitely first class.

ALL-IRELAND MILE VICTORY.

For instance his 1902 All Ireland Mile victory was achieved at the expense of John Daly of Galway, long regarded as one of the best men ever over this distance in the county.

At Clonmel he won the Half Mile Championship of Munster and the half mile handicap events; at the Licensed Grocers' Spots at Jones' Road, he won the mile from virtual scratch in 4 minutes 24 seconds. After winning the mile at Newcastle West, he lost narrowly in the "half" to Morrissey. At Ballydavid he won the half mile, from scratch, Tim Crowe being second.

In 1900 he won the Cross-Country Championship of Ireland over a six miles course, his time being 36 mins. He has vivid memories of that race, and tells how one person could only go through a certain gap in a stone wall fence at the time, and there was considerable delay in getting through. Hynan kept second all the way. On another occasion he was second in a two miles steeplechase at Dungarvan, after having won the one mile flat event from scratch.

He won the Dunraven Cup at the L.A.A. & B.C. Sports, and often regretted afterwards that he did not compete again, as he could have won that fine trophy outright.

He again competed in the 1904 All-Ireland Cross-Country Championship, once more over the Clonskeagh course, but J. J. Daly, of Galway, won on this occasion, his time being 31 mins. 31 2-5 secs.

RAN FOR IRELAND AGAINST SCOTLAND.

Picked to run for Ireland in the International Mile at Belfast in the annual contest v. Scotland, he was second to the Scotch mile champion, J. McGough, the time of 4 mins. 25 secs. on very bad ground being excellent.

Hynan later travelled to Glasgow Celtic Sports with the intention of having another "go" against McGough. But a well endowed half-mile attracted 70 entrants, and the Garryspillane man could not resist the temptation of participating in it. There were three heats, and 13 qualified for the final, which was won by J. O'Regan. (1 min. 58 secs.), with Hynan second, and John Curran third. The gruelling of that race prevented his participation in the mile, and so ended his hopes of revenging the defeat by the Scotsman.

Michael Hynan was also a first-class Gaelic footballer, and he has vivid memories of some games he participated in, particularly a match with Glenroe against the home side at Glanworth; then an unfinished epic in which he helped Tipperary Rovers against Kilcash, and, maybe the most memorable of all, the day he helped Knocklong to beat the Limerick Commercials in a thrill packed game at Pallas, only to lose the fruits of victory later on an objection.

LIVED THROUGH STIRRING TIMES.

Michael Hynan lived through stirring times in Irish history, and remains now as one of the last glorious links with days of athletic pre-eminence that must always find an honoured place in the pages of Gaelic history. Men like Hynan set the tiny seed that has grown to the mighty Gaelic Athletic Association of to-day, and in saluting Michael Hynan, and wishing him many more long years of happiness and of health, we pay a well-deserved tribute to the renown that was his, and breathe a silent prayer for the many gallant comrades that have gone to where parting is no more.

Slainte, Michael Hynan!
No. 40—Mick Connery of Kilfinane.