

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 27)—JIM KEYES of Pallasgreen

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

PALLASGREEN and its surrounding countryside and neighbouring villages loom largely in Irish athletic history. Centred in the midst of the "Golden Vein," that grand tract of fertile land stretching from within the borders of Tipperary through Limerick and beyond the frontier of Cork, the Gaels of Pallas have always been found in the limelight of national endeavour.

On the formation of the Gaelic Athletic Association, Pallasgreen was one of the first districts to answer the clarion call of their beloved Archbishop, the illustrious Dr. Croke, when he became the first patron of the great organisation of Irish Athletic manhood. Three teams soon flourished in the joint parishes included in the district of Pallasgreen—New Pallas Football Club, Old Pallas Hurling Club and Knockane Football Club. Here within the confines of this district were powerful combinations composed of sterling Gaels and great athletes. Here Willie Real and Paddy Ryan began their athletic careers which culminated in world's records, and here were fostered many other athletes whose names are recorded in the Gaelic annals of our country.

THE ANCIENT FORM OF HURLING.

Previous to the inception of the G.A.A. hurling was practised in the district, and the hurling of "Abhaile" was reminiscent of the athletic pastimes of early Gaelic Ireland. In this ancient form of our national game there were no goal posts; the opposite fences of a large field were the scoring lines, and, needless to mention, the field was larger than the present regulation pitch.

In still earlier times this took the form of parish contests, when each side endeavoured to take the ball home, or at least carry it as far as they could into their own parish. Undoubtedly these were rather strenuous contests but as there were no fixed number of players aside a big crowd often participated, and were known as "Bhaile" men.

On the establishment of the G.A.A., clubs sprang up everywhere, and in the Pallas neighbourhood there were soon hurling teams in Old Pallas, Kiltely, Corrigeen, Dromkeen, Cappamore, Boher, Murroe, Doon and Bilboa, with football combinations in Old Pallas, Doon, Newtown, Oola, Cullen, Solohead, Lattin, Emly, Knockane, Bilboa, Gurtavalla and Castletown.

GREAT GAELS AND GREAT ATHLETES.

Here within the confines of a small district in the heart of the Golden Vein were powerful combinations composed of great Gaels and great athletes. Willie Real, the champion weight-thrower, and his brother John, were members of the Newtown team. I could enumerate many others. They had ample material for a Gaelic Board of their own, and small wonder that the local tournaments of the time were such a great success. The gatherings at the practice matches were large and enthusiastic, and it was quite usual to see six teams in competition at a centre on the one day. Most of the old band have since passed to their reward. The few who still survive have never forgotten the stirring days of the early years of the G.A.A., and are loyal adherents of the great organisation which they helped so much to establish.

CONGENIAL "ATMOSPHERE."

In such congenial "atmosphere" Jim Keyes first saw the light of day. I have tried to picture for you the tradition that he inherited from grand ancestors. The majority of the athletes I have already covered in this series were mostly weight men or jumpers, including, of course, the hurdles. Which prompts

the question: "Why so few sprinters?" Some authorities hold that it is one of the great distinguishing characteristics of the Celtic race to do and act spasmodically, and his highly-strung, impulsive temperament must be conducive in the Irish athlete to the successes of a sudden spasmodic effort such as jumping needs.

This I am not inclined to fully accept, but would rather attribute their lack of excellence in running to the deficient means and opportunities for training at their disposal. 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. Needless to remark, 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, very many, of those names I have enumerated, were trained by the specialist system so common elsewhere 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."

A CONSISTENT SPRINTER.

Jim Keyes, of Pallasgreen, was one of the most consistent sprinters of his time, and by his performances on the track laid full claim to be ranked with all the great ones of the Irish arena, including such notable Gaelic athletes as our own Frank Dinneen, Denis Cussen, O. D. Coll, J. P. McCarthy, Percy Kirwan, D. J. O'Leary, D. D. Bulger, J. C. Meredith, P. J. Roche, Jerry Beckett, T. J. O'Mahony and D. F. Horgan. What a bevy of brilliant stars.

In handicap events, Jim Keyes appeared to be at his best in the 440 yards flat, but in championship contests he was more successful in the "hundred" and "two-twenty". He annexed the All-Ireland championship (under G.A.A. laws) in the 100 yards flat on three occasions, in 1912, 1918, and 1919, his time in 1912 and 1919 being 10 2/5 seconds, with one-fifth of a second extra pinned on to the 1918 performance. In the 220 yards flat he had two national triumphs, also under G.A.A. laws, and the years were 1912 and 1918. The former season he covered the distance in 23 2/5 seconds, and in the latter year his time was 24 1/5 seconds.

PROMINENT FOR A DECADE.

For a decade of years Jim Keyes was a prominent figure at most of the athletic meetings in Ireland, and he even made a number of incursions, and with success, into the "Black North." In 1912 he was selected as a member of the Irish team against Scotland in the annual international, and travelled to Edinburgh on the 20th July, where he was second in the 220 yards flat to R. Duncan, of Scotland, whose winning time was 23 3/5 seconds.

On the same occasion Duncan dead-heated with S. McCombie in the "hundred," the time being a level ten seconds. Ireland won by 5 1/2 points to 4 1/2. The following year Keyes again turned out for Ireland, in company with another Limerick man, Peter Galbraith, who competed in the long jump. This occasion the venue was Belfast, and the date, July 19th. F. R. S. Shaw won the "hundred,"

setting up an Irish record with 10 seconds, whilst W. R. Sunderland, of Scotland, "booked" the 220, his time being 22 3/5 seconds. But Ireland won this occasion by seven points to four.

England were admitted to the annual competition for the first time in 1914, and won by six points to three for Scotland and 2 for Ireland. Keyes was again with Ireland and came fourth in the 220 yards event, which was won by W. R. Applegarth, of England, in the splendid time of 21 2/5 seconds. Applegarth also won the 100 yards, and for the third successive season the time was ten seconds. This competition took place at Hampden Park, Glasgow, on 11th July, 1914. The internationals ceased this year and were not re-established until 1920.

In addition to the successes enumerated above, Jim Keyes had many other important victories. In the space at my disposal it would be impossible to list them all, but I will endeavour to give in as concise form as possible some of his principal achievements.

1910—Secured the 220 yards flat event at Tipperary Sports and swept the boards at Cappawhite, recording victories in the 100, 200 and 440 yards flat events.

1910—Secured the 200 yards flat first prize at Donohill meeting; won the 100 and 220 at Ennis; brought back first place in the 220 from a visit to the Dublin Trades' Sports; and, at the Limerick Drapers' Sports won the 100 yards flat off the 4 1/2 yards mark.

HIS GREATEST YEAR.

1911—Started his greatest year in record breaking fashion by winning the 100 and 440 flat events and the 120 yards hurdle race, besides securing second place in both the running high jump and 16 lb. shot, at Ballinasloe Athletic Carnival. At Macroom he won the 100 and 220, at the William O'Brien Club meeting on the Cork Mardyke; he was first home in the hurdles, whilst at Mallow he secured first place in the 300 yards flat. Still in Cork County he proved successful at Cobh, collecting first place in the 220 flat and 120 hurdles. In North Kerry, at Listowel, he was first home in the 440, and won the 220 at the Grocers Sports in Dublin. In the Irish Championships, held at Mallow, he filled second place in the 100 and 220 yards, to a fellow Limerickman, J. P. McCarthy, of Kilfinane, who won in the very good times of 10 1/5 and 22 4/5 seconds, respectively. The following year Jim Keyes moved from second to first place, to put the "double" to his credit, as already mentioned. Finishing up the 1911 season, the Pallasgreen man collected the 100 and 440 yards events at Doneraile, won the 440 at Bruff, and was third in a race for the Redmond Cup at Cork.

1912. In addition to his championship successes and his initial appearance in the international arena, Jim Keyes filled first place in the 100 and 220 yards at Cork Drapers' Sports. Won the 220 at the Dublin Drapers' gathering; captured the same event at Ennis, and secured the 220 yards flat and the 120 yards hurdles at the Gaelic League Sports in Dublin.

AT MARKET'S FIELD IN 1918.

Except for appearances with Ireland in the internationals of 1913 and 1914, I can find no trace of any performances of his from 1913 to 1917. In 1918 we again make the

acquaintance of the Pallasgreen sprinter, this time at the Limerick Markets Field, a venue redolent of many deeds in the history of athletics. With handicaps of 4 yards in the 220 and 8 in the 440, he secured these events to put his name again in winning lists. Shortly afterwards we find him back at the same venue—this time for the Irish championships—and a repetition of his 1912 Fermoy successes, putting his name once more to the roll of honour in the 100 and 220.

He retained his title in the short sprint in 1919, again at Limerick, but parted with the 220 crown to Henry Conway, of Mullingar. This year saw the Pallasgreen athlete's final appearance before the Irish public, and in addition to the championship victory he won the 220 yards flat and 120 yards hurdles at another Limerick gathering, and was second in Belfast, from scratch, over 100 yards for the Celtic Cup.

NATURAL ATHLETE.

Jim Keyes was a man of very fine physique—a real Gael and a "natural athlete" in the broadest sense of the word. On the hurling field he was a doughty wielder of the caman and had he devoted more time and attention to the game he was certain to become a brilliant exponent of the national pastime.

No. 28 — Jack McNamara, of Shelbourne.

CORRECTION

A fortnight ago, when dealing with the career of Jim Keyes of Pallasgreen, I mentioned that he was beaten "by a fellow Limerick man, J. P. McCarthy of Kilfinane," in the 100 and 220 yards Flat Championships of Ireland at Mallow in 1911.

This statement was in accordance with the official records as given in Carbery's "Fifty Years of Ireland Athletics" which credits to "J. P. McCarthy, Kilfinane," the following:

Won (under I.A.A. laws) 100 Yards Flat Championship of Ireland, 1911, 10 1/2 secs.; 1915, 10 2-5 secs.

Won (under G.A.A. laws), 220 Yards Flat Championship, 1911, 22 4-5 secs.; 1915, 24 secs.

In bare justice, I must now state that the championships enumerated above were won by Very Rev. Patrick J. Finn, now P.P., Kilmeeedy—a native of Ballinanima, Kilfinane. I understand that the name under which he competed in 1911 was "P. J. Quinn," and, in 1915, he ran as "P. J. McCarthy."

In 1911, Father Finn was a student in St. Munchin's College, Limerick, and later that year left to continue his studies at the Irish College, Paris, where he remained until the outbreak of war in 1914. In November of the latter year he entered Maynooth, and the following season saw his welcome return to Irish athletic fields. In addition to the championship titles he won in 1915, Father Finn had a remarkable success in a memorable race at Kinsale sports for a gold watch, beating Denny O'Leary of Cork, in a great finish.

I hope at a later date to deal more fully with Father Finn's achievements, but wish now to correct an error in the accepted guide book to a great era in Irish athletics.

S. O CEALLAIGH.