

## No. 129—DAN O'DWYER Of Caherguillamore

By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH.

DAN O'DWYER was twelve years old when he lined up at a sports meeting in Holycross, held on August 15th, 1910, and carried off his first prize by winning the youths race.

Dan came of good sporting stock, and athletics came kindly to him, but for the very necessary encouragement in his early youth he can thank a popular and esteemed national teacher—the late Mr. J. P. Connolly, who organised sports meetings, donkey racing and friendly hurling matches for his pupils.

Our subject figured mainly in running and jumping at these school gatherings and also participated in an occasional donkey race. It is of interest to recall that the teacher had a great donkey, which was usually ridden at that time by a youth, by name J. G. O'Dwyer, well known in later years as Major O'Dwyer of the Irish Army Jumping team.

**GREAT SPORTING FIGURES.**

The Grange district boasted many great sporting figures in the first decade of the century, amongst them the late Egan Clancy, Ned Treacy, Mick Bourke, Jack Clancy, W. J. Gleeson, Con Scanlan and Jack Clifford.

I have already mentioned Dan O'Dwyer's success at the Holycross meeting in 1910 and which he repeated the following season at the same venue.

Half a dozen years later we meet him a fully-fledged novice, and Holycross again witnessed his first essay and victory—this time in the 220 yards novice event. Shortly afterwards he attended a similar meeting in Bruff and collected two "seconds," being beaten by M. Moloney, Ballycampion in the "hundred" and by W. J. Daly, Emly, in the "two-twenty."

1918 was a great season for the Caherguillamore lad. He swept the boards at Killeely, winning four events, the 100, 220, 440 and the long jump, and gave an encore performance at Ballinisca, winning the same quartette.

Later that season he won the 100 and 220 at three successive appearances—in Banogue, Newtownshandrum and Ballysheedy; the "100" at Dromin; the 100 and 440 at Darnstown, and the 100 and 300 yards at a second meeting at Killeely.

Dan continued his winning way the following year, and had first prizes in the 100 yards, 220 yards and long jump at no less than four meetings—Elton, Killeely, Knockaney and Ballinisca, besides taking the 100 and 220 at Kilmallock.

**HAD TO TRAIN ON HIS OWN.**

Despite the above successes, Dan always had the grievance that through lack of any stimulating opposition in his own area, or even an athlete with a keen interest in the sport—he was obliged to train on his own. This he did by cantering alone for about an hour in the evenings, varying with long walks on other occasions. His preparation for the long jump was to do a share of jumping across wide trenches and bog holes.

Towards the close of the 1919 season, Dan was satisfied he had nothing else to win in novice ranks—no new laurels to gain, and was contemplating retiring from the track.

It was then an athletic-looking man approached him, spoke about the novice meetings, stressing the fact that he had gained all the renown he could in that particular grade, and suggested he should join G.A.A. ranks, and compete at the bigger meetings.

The man was no other than that flyer of the track—J. J. Keyes, who, when O'Dwyer agreed, entered him for all his favourite events at Caherdavin meeting, held about September 20th, 1919. The result was a triple win for Dan, top prizes being secured for the 100, 220 and 440 yards, in each of which the second man home was none other than that great Limerick City sport—Martin Lawlor.

This gathering rang down the curtain for that particular season. **AT CORK DRAPERS' SPORTS.**

Dan was off bright and early in 1920, and travelled to Cork for the famous Drapers' Sports, at the Mardyke Grounds. That his journey was worth-while can be judged from the fact that he won the 100 and 220—D. J. O'Leary filling second place in the former and P. C. Murphy, of Shandon, being next man in at the finish of the furlong.

His big achievement this season came a short time afterwards, at Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny, where he won the 100, 220, 440 and long jump—a familiar quartette from his novice days.

That was an exciting trip for Dan. In those difficult times, the British Government, whose armed forces occupied the whole country then, ordained that permit from the R.I.C. was to be obtained by all those wishing to travel any distance.

Needless to say, G.A.A. members did not agree with such formalities, and Dan didn't get any permission for the Kilkenny journey. His travelling kit consisted merely of a pair of shoes and running togs, wrapped up in a copy of the "Limerick Leader," with the name "Daniel O'Dwyer" written thereon.

The name was not a very popular one with the powers that be at the time and Dan was as closely watched in Castlecomer that night as if he was Michael Collins. He learned the reason the following day. N. H. O'Dwyer, a prominent member of the Rebel forces, now Consultant Engineer in Dublin, was spending a lot of his time in Kilkenny on I.R.A. work then, and the authorities were keeping a sharp look out. Then the similarity of the name made them doubly careful.

Dan travelled that occasion by train to Ballyragget, bringing his bicycle along also, and cycling the remainder of the journey to Castlecomer.

**NOTED FIGURES.**

Competing that day were such noted figures as J. L. Nolan of Rathcoole, Dublin, the Leinster champion; Bill Shanahan of Thurles, a great man in after years, and Gus O'Dwyer of Cahir. There were thirty-six starters for the "hundred." Dan was closely watching J. L. Nolan and Shanahan in the final and felt he had them beaten when a runner with only one arm—A. J. Nolan of Abbeyleix, made a plucky challenge and gave him the race of his life. J. Sinnott of Wexford was second in the 220 and 440, whilst Bill Shanahan was runner-up in the long jump.

I will let Dan tell in his own words other events of that stirring period:

"At the County Board Sports on August 13th, 1920, in Limerick Markets Field, Jim Keyes won the 'hundred' and I was second. I won the 220 and long jump. Jim Keyes did not compete in the 220 but I ran to his instructions. Two days later, August 15th, I went to Gort where I won the 100 and 220. Charlie Holland, who was second in the former, is now a bishop on the foreign missions field. O'Dowd from Sligo was second in the 220. The late Joe Quinlan of Kilfinane won the three mile cycle race and his brother, Tim, the two mile cycle race that day.

"About September, at Oatfield in Clare, we had a very small meeting as the Black and Tans were very busy and the 'trouble' was getting very hot indeed. I won the 100 yards and the long jump.

**MANY OTHER WINS.**

"In May of the following year, Limerick championships were held in Kilmallock but owing to the times the gathering was a small one. I won the 100, 220, and 440 yards championship of Limerick. Later on, a big meeting was held there. W. Clumson, of Done-  
raile, won the 100, and I was

second. I won the 220 and Jimmy Thompson of Limerick was second. "At O'Callaghan's Mills, Martin Lawlor won the 100 and I was second. I won the 440. I finished that season at Caherdavin, where I won the 100, 220, and 440.

"In 1922 I met with an accident which put me out of training for a good bit. The new Irish Army had a sports meeting in Nenagh in September, and I ran there for the last time. I was leading in the "100" when I fell, and Jimmy Thompson won it. I won the long jump and the 440. I stayed for a week in the barracks with Colonel Liam Fraher and Major J. G. O'Dwyer.

"Handicappers I competed under were Denny Power, Ballywalter, Cork; D. M. O'Connell, Ardpatrick; Colonel Tom McGrath, O'Callaghan's Mills, and Captain Dinny Harkins, of Athy.

"The best runner I ever met was Jim Keyes, and a friendship took root the evening of our first meeting that has survived the years and is, I am glad to say, as warm to-day as ever it was.

"The shoes I wore during my years running under G.A.A. rules were those of the late O. D. Coll, of Bruree, and I returned them to him shortly before his all too early demise.

"I usually travelled to the sports meetings in which I competed by bicycle or train, and often went with that grand old City Gael, M. A. Lawler in his motor car, scarce vehicles that time."

**OF GOOD SPORTING STOCK.**

I said at the opening that Dan came of good sporting stock. His father, the late John D. O'Dwyer, who was a member of Limerick Co. Council, won many prizes in Ireland before he went into exile in America, where he joined the Limerick Guards, hurling team in Philadelphia, and, also, competed at sports meetings in Pastime Park in that City, and won several prizes there. The O'Dwyers could also claim relationship with two great weight-throwers of world renown—Willie Real, of Pallasgreen and John O'Grady, of Ballybricken.