

Great Limerick Athletes

(No. 6)—PADDY RYAN of Pallasgreen

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

IN a copy of the "New York Advocate" sent me some years ago I found some interesting references to Irish giants that made their name as athletes whilst members of the New York Police.

Many famous athletes are mentioned to re-open the flood gates of memory—particularly Paddy Ryan, of Pallasgreen, whom the writer described as the "greatest athlete the world has known."

Let me give a few extracts, by way of introduction, to my talk to you this week on the world's record holder in the 16 lb. hammer event.

Police Inspector Matt McGrath was telling Jim Duffy of how the present generation of Irishmen lack size and strength. "Very few six footers are around any more," said Mighty Matt. "Years ago you'd see Irish giants at the dances and the ball parks but to-day with few exceptions they are of small stature."

Meeting up with Jack Eller, famous hurdler of the old Irish American A.C., we discussed what McGrath had said, which brought up another subject of why the Police Department no longer boasts of first string athletes. They turned out many champions in the old days and only to mention their names brings back memories of Olympic meets and national championships.

"Let's call out their names," said Eller. "Here they are: the two Sheridan—Dick and Martin; John Flanagan, of Kilmallock; Pat McDonald, Matt McGrath, Simon Gillis, Egan, Erickson, Bob McAllister, Jack and Bob Eller, Tim Ryan, Martin Mulderrig, James Kerr, and many others who gave a good account of themselves. If I have left out any others, believe me it's not intentional."

Eller, who was one of the fleetest timber-toppers of his day, says the cops are no longer interested in athletics. "We have a different crop nowadays—fellows who study hard and don't go in for strenuous games. Conditions have changed a lot, and when the annual police games were dropped athletics in the department passed out of the picture."

OUTSTANDING WEIGHT-THROWER OF ALL TIME.

"Listen," said the great hurdler, "the outstanding weight thrower of all time was big Paddy Ryan. The reason I say this is because he never trained properly. Let's say he trained like Freddy Tootill, of Rhode Island State College, he would have set marks with the 35 lb. weight 12 lb. weight, and 'fifty-six' that wouldn't be approached until my grand children had whiskers down to their knees. His record with the 16 lb. hammer had a close call at the Berlin Olympics but, of course, we know Ryan did better than 200 feet. From the circle in Celtic Park out to the goalpost was even better than 200 feet, yet he sent out the leaden missile beyond that mark time and again. He didn't know his strength; he could turn in a three foot circle and his speed and leverage made him the greatest athlete the world has known. I'm glad he is well, and just say in your column that Jack Eller sends his best to the king of the weightmen."

Jack Eller also recalled the days of Sheppard, Kiviat, Bonhag, Archer, Rosenberg, and the other famous athletes who wore the

"Winged Foot"—the emblem of the now almost forgotten Irish American A.C.—and more's the pity. And Lawson Robertson, who ever was the prince of good fellows, "Robbie," as he was universally known, was Uncle Sam's head Olympic coach for many years. When Robbie coached the Irish he proved himself a mentor of rare ability and, incidentally, was a pal of every member of the squad.

Previous to the "Invasion" of the United States by the athletes sent out by the G.A.A. in 1888, American athletics were very largely confined to sprint events, though undoubtedly, in W. Bird Page, the States had produced a grand jumper, who was the first American to clear to six feet in the flight for height. T. Queckberner was a useful man with the weights, but at Boston, where he met the "Invaders," he was eclipsed by the Limerick giant, Dr. J. C. Daly, who created a new record with the 56 lbs. In slinging the 56 lbs. from the circle, Condon held the record, but in this event Mitchell achieved victory and another new record for the Irish. In the hammer, Lembrecht was the American champion, but Mitchell put up a record drive, which he improved to 140 ft. 11 ins. four years later.

In the two events—the 16 lb. hammer and 56 lbs. thrown from the 7 ft. circle—which might be regarded as the extremes of weight-throwing, our countrymen have won a pre-eminence of which any nation should be very proud.

Mitchell started the record making in both, and the figures will be of interest to show how they travelled down to Paddy Ryan's day.

THE HAMMER AND THE "56."

We will take the hammer first. John Flanagan in a series of feats that only surpassed his own previous best carried the figures from Mitchell's 140 ft. 11 ins. to the amazing distance of 172 ft. 11 ins., before Matt McGrath stepped in to gain fame with a throw of 175 ft. 7 ins. Two years later Flanagan regained the record with the magnificent cast of 184 ft. 4 ins.

McGrath, in 1911, improved the distance to 187 ft. 4 ins. and in 1913 Paddy Ryan advanced it to the figure that stood the test of so many years, 189 ft. 6½ ins.

Mitchell's record with the "fifty-six" was 35 ft. 10 ins., Flanagan raised it to 38 ft. 8 ins., McGrath gained world pre-eminence with a distance of 40 ft. 6½ ins., but big Paddy Ryan again surpassed the lot with 42 ft. 10½ ins. at Chicago, in July, 1913.

Asked the origin of the seven foot-circle and hammer length, Maurice Davin said: "It came from the Irish barns. In the old days to test a good hurler they made him stand inside a bottomless grain sieve. The test of his accuracy and ability was to hit the hurling ball, without leaving his small circle, thrice successively to the roof. A strong man was fre-

quently called upon to stand in the same circle and raise a sack of grain over his head without overstepping the boundary. The old Irish circle is best and universal." He added that the handle length originated in the quarries, and, like the caman, was measured hip high.

OF ATHLETIC STOCK.

Paddy Ryan was born at Beena-voy, Pallasgreen, on January 4th, 1886, and his athletic career occupied the first twenty-one years of the present century. He stands 6 ft. 2 ins. in height, and at the summit of his excellence in 1913, weighed about eighteen stone. He sprang from an athletic stock and showed natural tendencies to indulge in feats of strength and skill at a very early age. His first attempts at weight-throwing were made with an ordinary sledge hammer, the throwing of which was then a favourite rural pastime, and an event which aroused considerable interest, as well as healthy rivalry amongst the performers.

Mitchell, Flanagan and McGrath were wonder men, all of them yet at the age of twenty-seven. Ryan's remarkable performances in the two events enumerated above brought him to the summit of world athletic fame and placed him in the position of one deserving of the title "superman."

At sixteen years of age, Paddy Ryan won the Irish hammer title, under G.A.A. rules, with a throw of 136 ft., another of the competitors in the same event being the all-round champion—the great Tom Kiely. Thereafter, each subsequent performance was on an ascending scale. In 1904 he advanced to 143 ft. 1 in., at which figure he won the I.A.A.A. Championship. The following year he won the title under both laws, his best throw being 148 ft. 6 ins. 1906 saw him reaching 150 ft. 2 ins., while he won the 1907 G.A.A. Championship with a slight increase on that measurement. This championship was retained by him in 1908 and 1909, the distance advancing to 154 ft. 5 ins. in the latter year.

SUPERB FEATS.

During these years he also won the Munster championship and had the winning throw at the inter-county contest between Limerick and Cork.

In addition, he won championships with other weights in 1909, namely, the 28 lbs.—34 ft. 1½ ins., and 56 lbs. sling—35 ft. 2 ins., these with the hammer throw the same season totalling three championships.

Then he crossed the Atlantic, and his first noteworthy feat in the United States was a throw of 190 feet, unlimited run and follow, with the hammer, at New York, in 1912. Distinctions crowded upon him during the year when he had become acclimatised and familiar with American environment. His most brilliant feats include that which gives him pre-eminence in the Republic of hammer-throwers—the world's record of 189 ft. 6½ ins.

with the orthodox hammer. This record was made on August 17th, 1913, at Celtic Park, and this historic stadium, now, unfortunately, no more, was also the scene of four other superb feats during the same season. They were—Putting 35 lb. for distance 57 ft. 0¾ ins. (January 1st); 16 lb. hammer, 9ft. circle, 189 ft. 3 ins. (September 1st); putting 42 lb. with follow, 28 ft. 11½ ins. (September 1st); 12 lb. hammer, 213 ft. 9½ ins. (October 19th). In the same year at Bronx, he attained such another distinction when he threw the 35 lb. weight for height, 20 ft. 9 ins. on April 12th. These were all American records.

OTHER EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCES.

In addition, Paddy Ryan furthermore had the following exceptional performances to his credit by the end of 1913—Putting 56 lbs. from shoulder, 25 ft.; Metropolitan Championships with the hammer (185 ft. 7½ ins.) and 56 lbs. (40 ft. 2 ins.) and hammer throws of 189 ft. 3 ins. from 9 ft. and 189 ft. 6 ins. from 7 ft. circles at New York.

Ryan's throw of 213 ft. 9½ ins. with the light hammer beat Flanagan's previous best by over 6 ft., and at Buffalo in 1914 he added 12 feet to his effort with a cast of 225 ft. 9½ ins. In February of that year also he put the 28 lb. 38 ft. 6½ ins., and at Chicago in July he threw the 56 lb. with two hands and no follow the amazing distance of 42 ft. 10½ ins. from 7 ft. circle. The achievement speaks for itself.

He won both the National (183ft. 3½ ins.) and the Metropolitan championships with the hammer in this year, and in the latter his throw measured 186 ft. 2 ins. He won the hammer championship again in 1916 and 1917.

Then we meet him at Paris in 1919, where he won the hammer event with 180 ft. 5 1-10th ins., and later that season he competed in the I.A.A.A. championships at Dublin, winning the hammer at 169 ft. and the 28 lb. putt at 36 ft.

He was back in America again and in training for the Olympic Games at Brussels in 1920. He threw the hammer 171 ft. at the United States "trials" and won in Belgium with 173 ft. 5½ ins. The American National Championships again fell to him in the year of the Olympiad, and for the last time, in 1921, with 170 ft. 7½ ins.

HIS RIGHT TO TITLE OF SUPERMAN.

The foregoing, though not by any means a complete record of Paddy Ryan's career, is sufficient to show that his right to the title of superman is an undisputable one. In this grand athlete from Pallasgreen, where he is resident again this many a year, we have a living exemplar of what Irish manhood is capable of in congenial and native sports; and he brings close to us the persistence of the tradition of vigorous life, which we have endeavoured to interpret through the performances of such votaries. Great as his achievements have been, it is not difficult to conceive that he was capable of more doughty deeds, if called upon.

In saluting one of the grandest figures that ever adorned the world's athletic stage, we recall how all of his deeds redounded to the credit of his race and country which may well be proud indeed when it beholds his life again.

Bail O Dia ort, a Phadraig,
No. 7—Tom Leahy of Cregane.