

BORN and reared in a great athletic district, Thomas Sheedy attributes the first awakenings of his interest in athletics to the stay of the famous Indian marathon runner, Tom Longboat, in Kilmallock, where he was in training for some months for one of his big engagements.

Young Longboat came of a marvellous race of people—the ancient and exclusive Onondagas, the most aristocratic and “blue blooded” tribe in all North America, a tribe that has had a history that would be envied by any white nation.

The Onondagas gave to the world two men of deathless renown—Tom Longboat and Hiawatha. Perhaps, some of my readers will be amazed to know Hiawatha really lived and was a maker of history long before Columbus set foot in America. Facts, however, are stubborn things and one of them is that some lineal descendants of Hiawatha reside hardly a stone's throw from the log-house on the Grand River Indian Reserve in Ontario, where Tom Longboat was born.

Born fifty-four years ago, Young Sheedy was a mere boy when Longboat visited his native district, but he says “Longboat set us all mad,” meaning it, of course, in the athletic sense.

CLAIM WELL LAID.

However, Tom Sheedy had not to wait for Tom Longboat for his athletic flair. Related to the famous Leahy brothers, and to another pair of good jumpers in Father John Daly, and his brother Bill, he had an uncle, “Big Jack” Sheedy, who was a well-known hurler with the “Stakers,” with the result that his claim was well laid to a place in the athletic limelight.

At any rate, Tom Sheedy began to appear at athletic meetings from a very tender age, and competed in boys' races before he was ten years old. At fifteen he was “out with the men” and participated at flapper meetings all over the South. These gatherings were very popular then every Sunday during the season finding such a meeting within easy reach.

Competition was keen, too, and it required good performances to take home the prizes. This will be understood when I say that figures on record for these suggest a 22ft. 7in. standard for the long jump, around 5ft. 9in. in the high, anything from 43ft. 6in. to 45ft. in the hop, step and jump, with excellent times, too, in the 100, 220 and the 300 yards.

FIRST APPEARANCE UNDER THE RULES.

Tom Sheedy's first appearance at a meeting “under the rules” was at the Limerick County Board G.A.A. sports, held at the Markets Field on August 15th, 1918. In order to properly appreciate the period, and the men that flourished through it, it might be no harm to have a glance through the full returns from that gathering:—

Boys' race, 220 yds. (under 16)—M. Ahern, 1; J. McMahon, Kilmurry, 2.

100 yds. open handicap—Thomas Sheedy, Flemingstown (8 yds.), 1; D. Fogarty, Kilfeacle (2 yds.), 2. Also competed: W. Shanahan, Ballinure; G. O'Dwyer, Cahir; D. O'Dwyer, Grange; C. Ryan, Hollyford; J. J. Walsh, Kilfinane.

220 yds. open handicap—Jim Keays, Dromkeen (8 yds.), 1; D. O'Dwyer, Grange (14 yds.), 2; M. J. Hennessy, Cork (10 yds.), 3. Also competed: G. Hennessy, Cork; D. Fogarty, Kilfeacle; J. J. Walsh, Kilfinane; D. O'Brien, Galbally; G. O'Dwyer, Cahir; E. P. Keane, Kilfinane.

440 yards open handicap—J. Keays, Dromkeen (10 yards), 1; C. Ryan, Hollyford (7 yards), 2; M. J. Hennessy, Cork (14 yards), 3. Also competed—P. J. O'Kelly, Kilfinane, D. Fogarty, Kilfeacle; D. O'Dwyer, Grange; G. Hennessy, Cork.

120 yards hurdles—P. J. Kinnane, Upperchurch (over 10 yards), 1; W. Shanahan, Ballinure, scr., 2. Also competed—J. J. Walsh, Kilfinane; Tom Sheedy, Flemingstown; R.

Cotter, Knocklong; C. Ryan, Hollyford.

880 yards open handicap—J. J. Ryan, Dromline (scr.), 1; C. Ryan, Hollyford (50 yds.), 2. Also competed—J. J. Maher, Rusheen; P. J. Kinnane, Upperchurch; E. P. Keane, Kilfinane; M. J. Hickey, Brittas; M. Hennessy, Cork.

One mile flat, open—J. J. Ryan, Dromline (scr.), 1; J. J. Maher, Rusheen (35 yards), 2; E. P. Keane, Kilfinane (95 yds.), also competed.

Running high jump, open—Tom Sheedy, Flemingstown (8 ins.), 6 ft. 2 ins., 1; W. Shanahan, Ballinure (2 ins.), 6ft. 1in., 2. Also competed—R. Cotter, Knocklong; J. Shortt, Thurles; C. Enright, Clonlara; J. Bourke, Croom.

Putting 28 lbs.—J. O'Grady, Caherconlish (scr.), 36ft. 3ins., 1; M. Ryan, Thurles (3ft. 6ins.), 35ft. 11ins., 2.

16 lbs. shot—J. O'Grady, Caherconlish, 40ft. 1in., 1; M. Ryan, Thurles, 39ft. 10in., 2.

One mile cycle, open—C. H. Davis, Limerick (70 yards), 1; J. J. Quinlan, Kilfinane (80 yards), 2. Also competed—E. Keating, Ballydavid; T. Quinlan, Kilfinane; J. Kinahan, Birr; A. W. Moorehead, Limerick; M. J. Kelly, Limerick.

Three miles cycle championship of Munster—C. H. Davis, Limerick, 1; J. J. Quinlan, Kilfinane, 2; M. J. Kelly, Limerick, 3. Also competed—A. W. Moorehead, Limerick; E. Keating, Ballydavid.

Five miles cycle (open)—T. Quinlan, Kilfinane (400 yds.), 1; J. Kinahan, Birr (400 yds.), 2; M. J. Kelly, Limerick (375 yds.), 3. Also competed: A. W. Moorehead and C. H. Davis. The latter had to retire owing to an injury to his machine.

WON OVER 200 PRIZES.

When it is stated that Tom Sheedy won over two hundred prizes on the athletic field it will be realised how impossible it would be to touch on anything like the number of events. We will have to be satisfied with a quick look at some of the more outstanding performances.

Tom Sheedy was in his heyday during the hectic days when the struggle for national liberty was at its height, and it is on record that he played no mean part himself in that glorious fight. He saw occasional service with the Flying Column when big moves were afoot, and his sister's home, near Bruff, was the headquarters of the East Limerick Brigade for a long time.

Athletics naturally had to take a back place with great national issues at stake, and the years of civil strife that followed the departure of the British likewise left the playing fields and running tracks empty.

At school in Mount Mellersay, Tom Sheedy had won the under fourteen high and long jump titles at 4ft. 8ins. and 17ft. 4ins., respectively, besides figuring on hurling and football fields with the school teams.

IN COUNTY SENIOR FOOTBALL

Later, he lined out with the Kilmallock team that won 1916 County Senior Football honours, on a replay from Abbeyfeale, 1-2 to 0-4, and one of his longest memories is of the triumphal return from Rathkeale that evening of 30th September, 1917, his remembrance being coloured by the fact that he was accompanied on the journey by that great Gael and athletic enthusiast, Faddy Mehigan (“Carbery”), then domiciled in Kilmallock.

As already mentioned, he figured at many flapper meetings in his youth, but eventually found these too strenuous, particularly in the sprints, where a good runner had often to burst out from a back mark and fight his way through a big field.

A regular competitor at meetings in the Southern cities of Limerick and Cork, he travelled to the Metropolis for one of the early All-Ireland Championship meetings following the formation of the N.A.C.A., but was unlucky to pull a

thigh muscle in his first long jump essay, and was forced to retire.

He also visited venues like Galway, Tipperary and Kinsale, in addition to all the home centres, and tells of an occasion at Kinsale when he was handicapped so drastically in the long jump, as it turned out, he would have had to break the world's record to win the first prize.

GREAT DAY AT KILMALLOCK.

He had a great day at Kilmallock on one occasion, setting a field record for the 16 lbs. shot that still holds, besides capturing the top honours in both the high and long jumps. At Croom, another day, he won three splendid prizes for the jumping events—high, long and hop step, from Sergt. Keyes, a fine achievement.

He met many fine athletes in the course of the years—the best of them he reckons Jajce and Beausang of Cork; Nolan of the Curragh; Ned McMahon and Bill Britton.

One of his sweetest victories was in the Drapers “Hundred” at the Mardyke, Cork, where he was giving Beausang five yards from virtual scratch, and also had Nolan to overcome. He got a valuable gold medal for that victory, a suitable companion for the gold watch won at Limerick Post Office Sports on the 10th June, 1923, when he beat the famed Joe Thompson in the century—the latter reckoned a ten second man in the event, a time rarely clocked by others then.

Tom Sheedy's best long jump in competition was 23 ft. 2 ins. at Limerick, but he later covered 23 ft. 6 ins. in an exhibition effort. His best performance for height reached 5 ft. 9 ins. at Croom, but he was temperamental and the slightest thing upset him. We know that he often did 6 ft. 1 in. at home in his clothes, and even as late as 1929 he jumped 5 ft. 11 ins. on the paving stones of his own yard for a challenge.

At Bruff Ballcourt he often played a game of handball with the great jumper, Mick Creede, who gave him many a tip as regards the high jump, and; though then well on in years actually jumped 5ft. 6ins. on one occasion in his own back garden, wearing a pair of canvas shoes.

DURING THE “TROUBLE.”

During the “Trouble” Tom organised sports meetings in aid of the movement” and handicapped a flapper sports at Currankeagh to raise funds for the defence of the Knocklong prisoners. He acted as starter for Davy O'Connell at meetings in Elton and Milford, the Ardpatrick man having framed the handicaps.

He cycled to most of his meetings, often covering the twenty-three miles to Limerick, returning generally with a few prizes to add to the difficulties of the homeward “spin.”

His most trying trip was to a Cork Drapers' meeting at the time when Mallow Bridge was “down.” Delayed there most of the day waiting for a conveyance to Cork, he had nothing to eat from morning and barely managed to reach the Rebel City as the sports were about to commence. Stripping on the jarvey car that drove him to the Mardyke, he had a gala evening afterwards, winning in spectacular fashion against fancied opposition.

HIS WORK WAS HIS TRAINING

When I asked him how he trained he confessed that he never did any, but maintained that the harder he worked on Saturday the better he was on Sunday. He often competed at a meeting after spending all the previous night at a “country hop” and had to toe the line as usual the following day.

His profession was dairy farming and, as he put it: “You were always kept at it, and all night, too, if you cared.”

An odd run in the meadow was his only preparation for even the most important event, and that only if any one could be got to