

# Great Limerick Athletes

## (No. 16)—DR. J. C. DALY of Dromin

(By SEAMUS O CEALLAIGH)

RECENTLY we examined the career of John Flanagan, of Kilmallock, and now we will turn to the performances of an earlier champion, the late Dr. J. C. Daly, of Dromin, one of the first of our great weight throwers, of whom authentic records are available, and who had attained championship status ten years before the G.A.A. was founded.

Daly was a contemporary of the Davins; he saw the uprise of Real and Mitchell with the weights and the triumphs of Shanahan, Purcell and Looney in the jumps. He was a doctor practising in Borrisokane when Tipperary introduced Kiely to add unfading lustre to Ireland's athletic fame, and so belonged to an epoch which must remain imperishable in native athletic chronicles.

Like the Davins, he participated in the development of modern Irish athletics, and though most of his achievements have long since been surpassed under altered circumstances, his merits remain unobscured.

### EARLY DEVELOPMENT.

Born at Dromin, about the middle of the late 'fifties, the future Dr. J. C. Daly was not long out of his teens when he developed into a great weight thrower and jumper. During his youth and early manhood there was little in the nature of formal sports, and no organised athletic control in Ireland. The time was not congenial to athletic pursuits amongst the mass of the people, whose social existence and needs were barely recognised.

Still it proved one of the most prolific of any in great exponents and though the people were denied access to the few arenas where they could prove their worth under satisfactory conditions, there remained to them much more congenial trial grounds of traditional origin, those rural gatherings where native vigour and agility had long proved superior to rivalry and hardship. These became the great national stadia of our race, primitive in many respects, but free from the enervating influences that have since deprived us of much insular virility.

Under such conditions we can only guess the pursuits and performances to which young Daly devoted himself but we know that he soon proved himself a capable and improving contender for local renown.

### OF POWERFUL BUILD.

What the must have been like in physique in those days we can readily conceive from his development in manhood. He was a man of powerful build, and stood fully 6 ft. 6 ins. in height, and when he won four championship titles in one day in 1890, he weighed 21½ stone of active manhood. He was far from the cumbersome mass many might visualise but was in the style of the big men of his

generation, men who lived an active, open-air life, and paid tribute to their bodily fitness by their athletic efficiency.

Conventions may have been uncouth and rules unwritten in those times, but fair play and honest endeavour were maintained by the force of popular judgment. No exotic equipment was known. The "hammer" was little more than one stage beyond the original smithy sledge—a rough-cast iron ball with an ash or cane handle of hurley length. Once 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 the rim of a bottomless grain sieve. The test of his accuracy and ability was to stand inside the sieve and thrice, with his caman, hit the hurling-ball, without leaving his small circle, successively to the roof. A strong man was frequently 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.

### THE "56 LBS."

The "56 lb." was the short conical four-stone weight of the shop or the farm, with a small ring that scarcely admitted three fingers of one hand. The dress of the contestant was the garb in which he worked; his training was his daily toil, healthy habits, and his diet the plain, frugal fare that his own labour produced or earned. Such were the material surroundings and regimens of the earliest of our champions. We must bear all this in mind when examining the achievements of men of Daly's time; and, while we may rejoice that successors were forthcoming who maintained our prestige under changing conditions, we cannot under-rate the vigour and skill of those who were always prepared to test the mettle of an opponent with the implements readiest at hand.

Such men had inherited traditions of athleticism from far back through the centuries. The river a former champion leaped, the boulders that marked the cast of another, the place and festival on which some memorable feat was done, were all remembered and esteemed in their way like deeds of daring done by the natural defenders of the people in their ages of

subjection and injustice.

### HIS FIRST NATIONAL DISTINCTION.

Dr. Daly's first national distinction was gained under the auspices of the Irish Championship Club when he secured the shot title in 1876, in succession to Maurice Davin with a putt of 41 ft. 5 ins., which was the best performance accomplished under that regime and may be taken as the first authentic Irish record with that weight. It is interesting to note that Michael Cusack, founder of the G.A.A., was winner of this event, under the same auspices, five years later.

Unfortunately we have been left in ignorance of Daly's doings for several succeeding years, the most virile stage of his development as an athlete, though it is certain he cannot have been inactive.

### ADVENT OF G.A.A.

With the advent of the G.A.A. in 1885 we get a fuller glimpse of the Dromin giant. He won a championship in that year by pushing the 42 lbs. weight, 27 ft. 6½ inches, which may be taken as the starting point of the native record. He successfully defended his title in 1886 with a putt of 27 ft. 1½ ins., and the following year won with a push of 26 ft. 7 ins. and secured the 56 lbs. sling, with the old style of weight, at a distance of 26 ft. 8 ins. from the side. He had also a victory of 24 ft. 4 ins., with follow, and a record of 33 ft. 11 ins. in the Irish style to his credit.

### PERFORMANCES IN U.S.A.

In July, 1888, he increased his former record with the 56 lbs. from the side to 26 ft. 10½ ins. at an international sports in Ballsbridge. He was in America with the Gaelic Athletic Association teams that year, and with Davin, Real and Mitchell practically dominated the weight throwing department during the tour.

Queckberner, already mentioned in connection with Flanagan's career, held the record for the 56 lbs. from a standing position at 28 ft. 6½ ins., and Daly beat it at Brooklyn with a cast of 26 ft. 10 ins. and later, at Madison Square Gardens in New York, Mitchell equalled that distance, while Daly came second with an inch less.

Daly returned to Borrisokane on the completion of the tour, and does not seem to have exerted himself during 1889. He came to the Gaelic championships at Clontarf Park in 1890, and accom-

plished a brilliant quadruple victory and a new record. He won the following events: throwing 7 lbs. weight, 84 ft. 2½ ins.; throwing the 16 lb. hammer (old style, unlimited run and follow), 125 ft. 3 ins.; pushing 28 lbs., 31 ft. 2 ins., and slinging 56 lbs. (unlimited run and follow), 34 ft. 10 ins. This last performance beat Mitchell's best by seven inches.

### APTITUDE FOR ALL EVENTS.

In his earlier days, he was a typical Irish athlete, with an aptitude for all events. The first record for the running hop, step and jump is credited to him—48 ft. 4 ins., at Cork Queen's College Sports in 1883—which is sufficient to prove he had that combination of qualities we look for in the best type of our athletes. More details of his earlier performances should produce abundant evidence of this.

He was the successful participant in a famous triangular contest with the 56 lbs., Irish style, at Limerick, in 1887. The record was then held by Maurice Davin at 32 ft. 11 ins., set in 1874, and each of the three competitors, Mitchell, O'Brien and Daly, surpassed it; the final result being: Daly, 33 ft. 11 ins.; O'Brien, 33 ft. 9 ins. and Mitchell, 33 ft. 7 ins. Such things occurred in Ireland in those days and rarely, if ever, outside it. Mitchell secured the record in 1888 with a throw of 34 ft. 1 in., which was again beaten by Daly with 34 ft. 10 ins. in the championships of 1890.

Daly retired from active competition soon after winning his four championship titles, which passed into the hands of another fine athlete of this period, J. O'Mahony. The career of the Dromin champion extended over a period of almost a score of years, during which he accomplished many splendid performances, and met men of imperishable renown, with which his own fame will be ever fittingly associated.

### NEVER LOST INTEREST IN ATHLETICS.

His interest in athletics never declined, and he had always a concern in local sports around Borrisokane, where he was ever a "big man" in the eyes and hearts of the people. He lent his assistance to the promotion of schoolboy sports in that town, and the patronage of the towering doctor gave zest to the youthful aspirants, to whom he personified the acme of athletic form and fame.

And now, whether we look upon him as an individual champion or a representative of the time in which he moved, and the men against whom he competed, we cannot fail to be impressed with the grandeur of his epoch, and the natural resources which adorned it. We may not hope to see men of such stature, symmetry, and strength in like abundance again.

No. 17—Dan Shanahan of Kilmallock.