

THE big bulk of our Limerick athletes who have established the name and fame of Shannonside high in the annals of world athletics mainly hail from the Southern portion of the county. We may be inclined to attribute that to a variety of causes, and many explanations have been offered, as many reasons are advanced for the overlordship of hurling in certain counties.

The brilliance of such figures as the Leahys, Flanagan, Ryans, Walshs, Colls, Connerys, Shanahan, Roche, Real, Blackburne, Carey, Dinneen, Daly, Fahey, O'Brien, Hyman, McCarthy and O'Connell; the opportunities they got through the enterprise of the enthusiasts in their districts who organised big sports meetings and eventually forced the spotlight of publicity on their efforts through sheer dint of perseverance, coupled with the great deeds of the performers, left the men of the West somewhat out of the picture, with some notable exceptions, particularly the Ahernes, Cussens and Bresnihan.

However, if we delve deep enough into the parish records we find evidence in plenty of worth while performers in almost every district. Although the names are only familiar to those who have closely studied the progress of Irish athletics from its earliest days and in its every aspect, a lot can still be recalled by an older generation, the recording of which could mean so much towards completing the picture of Limerick's contribution to the athletic revival movement.

In the course of my travels in order to unearth something concerning our great men of the past, I have discovered much that was in danger of being lost for ever. I am deeply grateful to the many good friends all over the county who helped very materially to get a lot of the information, some of it secured at great personal inconvenience and only after considerable trouble and research.

MANY UNRECORDED DEEDS.

There are still plenty of deeds unrecorded, and it would be a pity were this series to conclude without embracing all the men who shed lustre on the fair name of Limerick in years that cannot come again. In consequence, I would be very happy were any of my readers able to supply me with information that would add to what is already available. By so doing they would render a service to the fair name of Limerick

(No. 60) — GERRY FORAN of Broadford

(By SEAMUS O'CALLAIGH)

and its undoubtedly high standing in the world of athletics, besides doing justice to the deeds of some performed of the past, whose exploits are in danger of being entirely forgotten in a materialistic age when many care all too little for the glories that once were ours.

I am indebted to my good friend, former Young Ireland hurling star, Jim Cleary, for much of the information that permits this tribute to the greatness of Jerry Foran, with which is coupled some reference to the careers of a few others equally famed at the many athletic gatherings that shared so little of the limelight, yet contributed in such generous measure to the overall story of Limerick athletic pre-eminence.

Jerry Foran, who was in his athletic heyday around the middle years of the decade that heralded the turn of the century, was born at Banemore, Broadford, in the early 1870's. He must have been still in his teens when he gained athletic distinction at Ballygran sports with a great win in the one mile event, from no less a personage than the famed George E. Tincler, who was Irish champion in 1892 and '3. Third on that occasion was another grand Limerickman, Jack McCarthy of Bunmons, still happily with us, to tell the tale, and recall the glories of those memorable days.

ACHIEVED GREATNESS IN GREAT COMPANY.

Too few records remain of the meetings at which Foran competed, but a glance even at the scant particulars available, suffices to prove that he achieved greatness in the best of company and during the most splendid of our modern athletic epochs—the 'nineties.

The first meeting I find reported during his era was the Ballygran Sports of November 1st, 1893, at which he won the "mile," J. Walsh being second. At that gathering it is interesting to note that John Kelly won both the 100 and 220 yards, with Larry Roche the runner-up in each. Larry took the honours at slinging the 56 lbs., whilst Dr. Ned Walsh proved suc-

cessful in the running, hop step and jump and tied for first place with J. Blackburne in the pole vault. J. Kelly, who was second in the "Hop, Step," took laurels for Ballygran in the high jump, and Nat Simcox, of Brures, captured the 440 yards prize, with John Kelly filling second place.

At Kilmnane Sports on August 16th, 1893, we again contact the Broadford man when he won his favourite event, the one mile flat, and was third in the 880 yards, which D. Hyland of Glenroe won, with James Birrann of Dromin, filling second place. Other Limerick successes at this meeting will be read with interest: 100 yards flat, William Connery, Kilmnane, and P. Leahy, Cregane, tied for second place. Putting 28 lbs. John Flanagan (scr.), 34' 6" won; Wm. Connery (2 st.), second. Running high jump, Paddy Leahy (6''), 6' 4" won; William Drake (6''), 5' 3" second. 56 lbs. (between legs, with follow), Denis Carey (scr.), 28' 10" second. 16 lbs. hammer, John Flanagan, 146 ft. won; D. Carey, 133' 3", second. 220 yards flat, Wm. Connery (14 yds.), won; D. Carey (8 yds.), second. Running long jump, Leahy (12''), 22' 8" won; L. Roche (scr.), 21' 3", second. Running hop, step and jump, John Flanagan (18''), 49' 3" won; Shanahan (scr.), 49' 2" second. Two mile cycle, J. J. Condon (80 yards), won.

LOST "MILE" TO FAMOUS MICK O'NEILL.

A fortnight later, at Kilmallock, Foran won the half mile but lost the "mile" to the famous Mick O'Neill, of Adare, who was later to become Irish champion in this event. Interesting returns on this occasion include the winning of the 100 yards by Larry Roche, with John Flanagan and J. Highfield tying for second place. Flanagan won the "hurling," with J. Birrann second, and he was also successful at putting the 28 lbs. (from scr.), 32' 4"; and at the running long jump with 19' 8", P. "Dockety," McNamara, of Limerick City, being second at 19' 7". Roche completed his treble by victories at slinging the 56 lbs. (24' 11") and in the three jumps (32' 4"). In the one mile cycle J. J. Condon was the winner, with J. F. Halvey runner-up.

Back at Kilmallock on August 15th, 1896, Jerry Foran won the mile flat, a notable achievement from a distinguished "field." The running long jump on that occasion provided a great tussle between the Leahy brothers, Paddy eventually gaining the verdict from Con by the narrow margin of three inches. The 220 yards that evening was won by P. J. Crotty, of Kilmallock, whilst William O'Shea, of Ballinvana, proved successful in the three jumps with a return of 36 ft. 2 ins.

COMPETED UP TO 1900.

Although the limited records available of the period make no further reference to the Broadford man, it is known that he competed, although with decreasing frequency up to 1900. And, sad to relate, his death took place not many years later at a pathetically early age. He has, however, a sister still living, Mrs. Mary Ann O'Connell, of Broadford, who is now residing on the site of Kilmichee Creamery. Eighty years old Jack McCarthy of Bunmons, who accompanied Jerry Foran to most of his meetings, at which he was also a competitor, had the proud distinction of continuing on the track until he was forty-two years old.

Looking back now, he says that Jerry Foran was the greatest man in the country at the one mile or more, and was only beaten once off the scratch mark by O'Neill of Adare, at a sports in Kilmallock.

Foran's first win, he holds, would be about the year 1890, the venue Ballygran, and the runner-up the renowned Tincler. And Jack remembers the occasion well, because he came in behind Tincler that memorable day.

Foran who also competed in the "half mile," was not one to travel far to a meeting, being generally content with what he won at the local meetings, provided, it was, however, at Banteer, Kilmallock, Kilmnane, Bruff, Ballygran and Dromcollogher, in addition to the many "Patterns," such a feature in his day.

A GREAT PAIR.

Jerry Foran and Jack McCarthy usually took the honours where ever they went—the former generally capturing the mile prize, whilst McCarthy favoured the half distance and took most of his laurels in this event.

One of Jack's longest memories is a pattern dance every Sunday evening at a cross roads near Dromcollogher. They also had a race in the field near by, and this event a half mile, had to be won three Sundays in succession. It was Jack's favourite distance and he won two Sundays running. He thought he had the prize but Foran nipped in to win on the 3rd Sunday. McCarthy had to start all over again, but this time he succeeded.

The Broadford pair figured in a memorable inter-county relay race at Cork on one occasion, in which the number of competitors reached the huge total of 110.

McCarthy tells of another occasion when he wanted money from his father to go to a sports meeting. It was not forthcoming, so he went to a neighbour and bought threequarters of an acre of hay with a scythe the day before the gathering. On the morrow he won the half mile at Banteer. Not a bad performance!

CAPTAIN OF LOCAL G.A.A. TEAMS.

Jack was captain of the local football and hurling teams, and afterwards played in the goal, continuing until he was fifty-five years old. He figured first in the days of the twenty-one sided and later played on the "seventeen" teams.

Another fine athlete of that period still to be met in Dromcollogher is Joe Newman, whose son, Rev. Jeremiah Newman, D.D., was recently appointed Professor at Maynooth College.

Limerick of the early G.A.A. days never lacked jumpers of real merit, and Joe Newman contributed his share to the undoubted fame of Shannonside in this spectacular branch of athletics.

Never competing outside his own district, he, nevertheless, put up some fine performances, particularly in his favourite event—the hop, step and jump. In this he covered 44 ft. 8 ins. at Ashford sports, bringing the figures to 45 ft. 8 ins. a short time later at the Pattern of Russell's Cross. He also figured with success at the Pattern of Gardenfield and at sports meeting at Springfield and Broadford, retaining an unbeaten record at these gatherings.

On one occasion, when he was winning the long jump at Ashford Sports at 22 ft. 2 ins. an objection was lodged because he had no "field dress" (toga), and he was disqualified.

JUMPED OVER A HORSE.

At the Gardenfield Pattern on another occasion, some one said it would be a good feat to vault over a horse, and Joe Newman said it was his aim to do so. He jumped over the horse, which he did, winning the prize, and the admiration of all present.

Joe was the best jumper in his district until the advent of the great J. J. Bresnihan, but the Dromcollogher man had retired then, his withdrawal from the arena being hastened by an injury sustained whilst jumping.

Joe Newman remembers Jerry Foran as the champion mile runner of the middle 'nineties with an unbeaten record in Munster and further afield until he was

falling in later years, when he was beaten once by the former Irish champion, Con Phibbs, at Milford Sports, shortly before he retired.

Foran, he also remembers as a stylish runner who used to sprint on the ball of the foot, and extremely popular with all classes. Shortly after he bade farewell to the arena the local athletes paid him the unique tribute of organizing a sports in his honour at Ashford, to which competitors came from far and near, and a big crowd attended.

PATTERNS HELD EVERY SUNDAY.

The Patterns in those days were held every Sunday at Russell's Cross, and later at Gardenfield, and consisted of dancing on the platform and the sporting events: the half mile race, weight throwing and jumping, with the prizes usually a clock or money.

Joe Newman regards Jack McCarthy as one of the best half millers of his day, and cannot recall any occasion on which he suffered defeat. His great friend and fellow traveller to the nearby meetings, Jerry Foran, was unbeaten in the mile, which was his best event.

The other good athletes of the district, just prior to the Foran-McCarthy period, were Jack O'Brien and Paddy Reidy, of Barren, and there is an record of the report of a great race of theirs over a half mile at Fenagh sports about three or four years ago, which O'Brien won in a welter of excitement.

JACK O'BRIEN OF KELLS.

Jack O'Brien, of Kells, who died quite recently with the best part of ninety years to his credit, was a noted exponent of the hop, step and leap, and had the honour of being runner-up to Willie Real, of Limerick A.A. and E.C. Sports at the Markets Field on June 10th, 1891, when the Fallagren man won the Championship of Ireland at putting the 42 lbs. with a throw of 26 ft. 8 ins. O'Brien was also a great football captain at a period when the big ball game held undoubted sway in the district.

To add to the information concerning Jerry Foran, Denis O'Connell of Broadford explains that the correct family name is Forde, but Jerry was always known as Foran, although he spelled the name as Forde.

Con Phibbs, when Captain of the Cork Harriers selected Foran to run for Cork in an Inter-County event v. Dublin. Foran ran under the name of Lee, and was first man home, which result in a poet penning the lines:—

"Lee could run like a fawn,
He was the greatest of them all;
Lee could run until dawn
And could also wield the caman."

RAN THREE MILES TO OVER-TAKE OAR.

It is recalled that on one occasion Foran missed a drive to Kilmallock for a sports. He however, ran the three miles to Dromcollogher, where he overtook the car, and was rewarded later by being first in the "mile" at Kilmallock.

He ran a cross-country event in England on one occasion, but was beaten by Tincler in a very close finish. The pair met later at Ballygran Sports, as already mentioned, and Foran won. This was his greatest victory, and he was carried shoulder high that day off the field.

In bringing this notice to a conclusion deserved mention must be made of other good figures of that period—Markey Shea, Coolbawn;

Jim Culhane, Newtownshandrum, and William Heffernan Broadford. The latter used make the journey from Broadford to play with the old famed Limerick Commercial of the days of such stalwarts as Alby Gullinan, Jim Riordan, and Con Fitzgerald.

No. 60—Michael O'Brien of Limerick Commercial.