

No. 121—PADDY McNAMARA of Limerick City

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IN the midst of a period of plenty, Limerick athletes suffered a slack spell around the middle nineties of the last century, the effects of the Parnell "split" were still being felt in the County, the great wave of enthusiasm that followed the founding of the G.A.A. waned considerably, and the sons of Sarsfield's County were strangely absent from winning lists in which they had figured so prominently in earlier years.

Whilst most of the old followers of athletics were lamenting this sad state of affairs and finding it difficult to produce a remedy, a new star was quickly rising in a most unexpected quarter.

Down at the Limerick docks, one of the hardest workers on the ships then frequenting the port was Paddy McNamara, familiarly known to his mates as "Dockty"—a nickname that was soon to ring across the country and sound a clarion call for the Limerick athletic revival that blossomed again to a new maturity a few years later.

Paddy was not the only Limerick dock worker to gain prominence and renown on Irish sporting fields—many followed in the grand footfalls of the great "Dockty" but none gained in the one day the honours that came so thick to McNamara on that memorable August, 15th, 1895.

YEAR OF GREAT REVIVAL

1895 might be termed the year of the great revival in the general field of Irish athletics. Some measure of unity was achieved between the G.A.A. and its rival athletic Association—the I.A.A.A., and a Joint Records Committee was appointed, composed of three representatives from each Association.

The membership and revenue of the G.A.A. were doubled as compared with 1894, tournament and athletic meetings showed a remarkable recovery throughout the country; the G.A.A. extended its activities to Great Britain, and a number of records were broken by Irish athletes at home, in Great Britain and the United States.

The Association organised its first all round athletic championship, the international athletic contests with Scotland were established, Ireland winning the initial event, whilst Irish muscle also helped to bring about the over-

whelming defeat of the great London athletic Club on their visit to New York.

LIMERICK'S LEADING PART

Limerick played a leading part in this big recovery of G.A.A. prestige and influence, through the election of Frank B. Dinneen, of Ballylanders to the Presidency of the Association, at the annual congress held in Thurles on April 7th, 1895.

Like a bolt from the blue was the appearance of Paddy McNamara at the eleventh annual athletic championship meeting of the G.A.A., held in Wexford on August 15th, 1895. Unfavourable weather almost ruined the fixture but the performances in the circumstances were remarkable. In the three leaps, James Wall, of Dungarvan, beat the world record he made three years earlier, and he tied in the standing long jump with the professional performance of J. Darly, at Dudley in 1890.

WONDERFUL ACHIEVEMENT

However, it was the Limerick dockerman who really captured the limelight of the occasion. Paddy McNamara surprised the Irish athletic world by sweeping the decks—winning four national titles the same evening—a wonderful achievement, surely.

The following morning, from all parts of the country the enquiries were pouring in for some particulars concerning the new champion. But his successes were as big a sensation by the Shannon as elsewhere, for his previous athletic appearances were few indeed—the opportunities were just not there for a season or two, with the result that most of his preparations were carried through privately. Consequently, few were in a position to recall anything that would indicate the champion in the making or give a clue to the greatness that revealed itself that memorable evening in Wexford.

ON MERIT ALONE

The four All-Ireland medals Paddy won on that occasion were gained very definitely on merit alone—as his even ten seconds in the 100 yards sprint, and return of 23 2/5 seconds in the furlong denote. The full list of winners at Wexford will be read with interest: 100 yards flat, Paddy McNamara, Limerick, 10 seconds; 220 yards flat, Paddy McNamara,

Limerick, 23 2/5 seconds; half mile flat, J. J. Mullen, Belfast, 4 m. 52 3/5 secs.; 120 yards hurdles, C. Brown, Castlebridge, 19 2/5 secs.; running long jump, Paddy McNamara, Limerick, 20 ft. 9 ins.; standing long jump, James Wall, Dungarvan, 12 ft. 1 1/2 ins.; running hop, step and jump, Paddy McNamara, Limerick, 45 ft. 1 in.; standing hop, step and jump, James Wall, Dungarvan, 33 ft. 5 ins.; three leaps, James Wall, Dungarvan, 35 ft. 8 1/2 ins.; throwing 16 lbs., J. S. Reynolds, Dublin, 127 ft. 7 ins.; slinging 56 lbs., unlimited run and follow, J. Mangan, Kilmuckridge, 34 ft. 2 1/2 ins.; putting 16 lb. shot, J. M. Bergin, Rathrum, 38 ft. 7 ins.; throwing 7 lb. weight, J. Mangan, Kilmuckridge, 71 ft. 8 ins.; three miles walk, J. Reck, Gorey.

HOW HE TRAINED!

When asked what training he had for the championships, Paddy told how he spent the previous week bagging corn "from seven in the morning to seven at night," and said that an athletic admirer who appreciated his worth brought a side car to the Docks on the Saturday evening to get him to the Railway Station in time for the train to Wexford.

The first all round athletic championships under G.A.A. auspices were held in Clonmel on September 9th, 1895, the winner being awarded a silver belt. The competitors included the three Limerickmen—John Flanagan, Denis Carey and Paddy McNamara; other prominent figures participating including Tom Kiely, Denis Horgan, T. E. Wood, of Inniskean, and M. Ryan, of Cashel.

Wood proved the winner, with John Flanagan, who made a world's record in the hammer, a good second. Paddy McNamara only competed in the first two events—the 100 yards and 220 yards flat, being placed second in both; after which he retired.

Subsequently, McNamara was picked as a member of the Irish team for the International contest against Scotland, at Glasgow, in which Ireland triumphed by a solitary point. "Dockty" won the 100 yards flat and hop, step and jump competitions. In the course of the evening four new Scottish records were made—A. E. Mulligan, Roscommon, winning the hurdles in 16 seconds; Horgan putting the 16 lbs. 44 feet 7 1/2 inches; J. M. Ryan rising 6 ft. 1 in. in the high jump, and Tom Kiely covering 22 ft. 2 1/2 ins. in the long jump.

MEETINGS UNDER G.A.A. RULES

In 1894 there were only nine registered athletic meetings held under G.A.A. rules throughout the entire country, in 1895 the number had risen to sixty-six, and fourteen world records had fallen to members of the G.A.A. during the year.

Paddy McNamara won the 220 yards flat championship of Munster at the L.A.A. & B.C. Sports at Limerick Markets Field, held on June 3rd, 1896, and was second in the three hundred yards handicap event at the same meeting. He also filled second place in the long jump, with a fine performance of 21 ft. 7 ins.

LAST VICTORIES ON THE TRACK.

At Clonmel on August 5th, he won two flat events, the 120 yards and the 220 yards. And these appear to have been his last victories on the track. In early 1897 he gained two "thirds" at the L.A.A. & B. C. Sports in the 220 yards flat Munster championship and running long jump events, marking his last recorded appearance at a sports meeting.

Paddy flashed across the athletic scene for a short period—gained well earned renown—then disappeared quietly and unobtrusively from the stage he most certainly adorned during his all too brief appearances.