

No. 214—Con Sheehan Of South Liberties

(By SEAMUS O'CEALLAIGH)

IN the very early days of the G.A.A., the South Liberties were one of Limerick's greatest teams, and their games with some of the leading clubs of the time are the highlights in the early story of hurling by the Shannon.

South Liberties contested the first five senior hurling county finals played in Limerick and won three of them in successive years—1888, 1889 and 1890. A most remarkable feature about these wins was that two of them were secured by the only score of an hour's hurling—one point in each case.

Such a low score must be a record for the caman code, more particularly in days when players were twenty-one aside, with point posts at both sides of each goal and extending almost half the end line.

BOTH VICTORIES WON BY SAME PLAYER.

More remarkable still, however, was the fact that the winning score on both occasions was secured by the same "Liberties" player—Con Sheehan, who proved his opportunism by brilliantly taking the only chance of a hard hour's close and exciting hurling, and carrying his team to a pair of unforgettable successes, which any old veteran will resurrect from the bare bones of official records which read:

- 1888—South Liberties, 0-1; Murroe, nil. At Croom, May 15th, 1888.
- 1890—South Liberties, 0-1; Kilfinane, nil. At Rathluirc, July 13th, 1890.

Con also put his name on the scoreboard in the 1889 decider, played at Croom on June 9th, 1889, and in which South Liberties beat Caherline, 1-2 to 0-3.

"Liberties" won some outstanding games in the home arena but ill luck dogged their every footstep when they went outside to do duty for the county.

The G.A.A. was then anything but the well organised body we know to-day and official bungling deprived the "Liberties" of the fruits of their home prowess, when All-Ireland issues were at stake.

A FIELD DAY AGAINST CORK.

The strength of the challenge they could offer the best was well illustrated at the Markets Field on Good Friday, 1888, when the Rebel County title holders, Cork Nationals, were visitors, and were

beaten by a total tally of 11 goals and 14 points. Con Sheehan had a field day on that occasion, and shared with Johnny Connell in notching the majority of the Limerick scores.

The names of the great "Liberties" side who figured in all the early victories were:—

- Jack Malone (captain), John Leonard, John Call, Con Sheehan, Jack Rahilly, Thomas Keane, John Ryan, Michael Fitzgerald, James Ryan, Thomas Neville, Michael McNamara, John Hayes, Michael O'Rourke, Paddy Woods, Jack Connors, John Fitzgerald, Michael Malone, Thomas Toomey, John O'Connell, Thomas Griffin, Michael Kirby, Patrick Ryan, Michael O'Connell.

A number of the "Liberties" lads were forced to emigrate shortly after the third great county success, amongst them the subject of this little sketch.

GOOD RUNNER AND BOXER ALSO.

Con Sheehan joined the British Navy, where his athletic prowess was very much in evidence. He became the half mile and one mile champion runner and the boxing, heavy weight champion of the navy.

When similar contests were organised on the occasion of a visit of the American Fleet, Con again swept the boards, thus becoming the champion of both navies.

A short time afterwards he left the British Service and joined the U.S.A. Navy. In the latter he concentrated on boxing and proved most successful. He fought and won all his contests, his most memorable victory being achieved against a coloured fighter, George Byers, who opposed him fortified with the reputation of having figured in a ten round no decision bout with the famous Jack Johnson. In fact, Con might have achieved world fame as a boxer had not death intervened, pneumonia claiming a victim at an all too early age.

GRANDSONS INHERIT HIS POWERS.

The Sheehan story does not end there, however. Two of Con's grandsons inherited his athletic prowess—the eldest, Con, and the youngest, Pat.

Con holds a sixty yards championship medal, and won Limerick and Munster titles over 100 and

220 yards. He made a record by winning the Tramway Hundred three times, and beat the famous McDonald Bailey in 100 yards at Dublin. He was unlucky to be beaten on a number of occasions for All-Ireland titles, being runner-up by inches in 100, 220 and 300 yards events.

Although he devoted most of his time to athletics, Con found time for other sporting interests, and figured at various times with distinction as a hurler, a swimmer, and as a rugby exponent. He was also 100 and 200 yards army champion, before departing for Canada, where he now resides.

Pat, now running for St. James's Gate Athletic Club, was schoolboy champion in 1949, winning all his races. These ranged from 220 yards to relay, and included the Leinster C.B.S. Championship, the Leinster Schools and Colleges Championship, and then the All-Ireland Championship. This was a splendid achievement, for Pat had spent eleven months in hospital the previous year.

JOINED DONORE HARRIERS.

He then joined Donore Harriers, where he won all his novice championship events, and various team events and open handicaps. In 1952 he was selected for training as a candidate for the Olympics of that year, but misfortune struck, as he contracted pleurisy in May, resulting in another long stay in hospital, this time for 12 months.

His doctor would not allow him run during 1953, or the following year, but in 1955 gave permission for very limited participation.

His first event was in a relay team, which they won. He then ran second in 220 yards championship at Printers' Sports.

In 1956 he won numerous club and graded championships and some open events, and crowned it by competing in a printers' relay team that won that event in Leeds. In this team they had Albert Harding, the N.A.C.A. champion, running. Pat was suspended for this, being then attached to a club affiliated to the A.A.U.

REINSTATED AFTER A SHORT SPELL.

Reinstated after a short spell, he competed at the Civil Service Sports, and was in the Donore sprint relay team which won the 4 x 110 championship in a record time for the native arena. The team on that occasion was P. Hannon, Eamonn Kinsella, Pat Sheehan and Joe Parker.

Last year a move was on foot to have Donore Harriers leave the A.A.U. and turn to the N.A.C.A. It failed, but Pat Sheehan and Joe Parker resigned from the A.A.U. and are now running for the St. James Gate Club. Both have done well in their new colours, winning open events, and in Ballinasloe Relay Championships, St. James's Gate won 4 x 220 yards championship, their time again a native record. The team were: J. J. O'Donnell (a Croom man), Jack Whelan (Hurdles Champion), Joe Parker and Pat Sheehan.

So the years are bridged, from Con Sheehan of 1888 to Pat Sheehan of 1958.