

# One Fine Morning

“Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter — tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther . . . and one fine morning — So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

- F. Scott Fitzgerald, - The Great Gatsby.

“Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is wound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence; in other words, it is war minus the shooting.”

- George Orwell - The Sporting Spirit.

Among our most fundamental desires is the urge to run, to jump, to throw. At a most basic level, it is a simple assertion of life, a physical expression which defies our stars and challenges the fates to battle. Today, these urges are often forced out of us in childhood. One must walk, not run, in this world of sedation — sitting in school, sitting in college, sitting in work. Our childhood vitality is restricted continually until we achieve a maturity where to run down the street, or to leap for joy is the ultimate loss of decorum. In the “civilised” and “developed” society of today, we must cultivate perversions of physical activity to fill the weary void left by the loss of spontaneous motion. It is among these perversions, albeit the most elemental form, that we find the history of athletics. Athletics is not natural, but it is as close as we can come.

But, like our other primitive desires, the desire to run faster which provided a metaphor of life for F. Scott Fitzgerald has a reverse shadow in the darker worlds of George Orwell. While art and sport remain inextricably linked as aspects of our culture which transcend institutionalised politics and economics, they cannot be apolitical in a wider sense. George Orwell’s 1984 is also the 1984 of the Los Angeles Olympics. Athletics is one sport where race, religion, class or colour cannot matter. Yet the last four Olympic Games have been overshadowed by divisiveness at every level and today, instead of defying the Gods, new money Gods are subjugating athletes. Athletic talent

emerges solely from one's body and mind; it cannot be purchased like a racehorse or a Formula One car. But, if one cannot buy oneself in, one can certainly be bought out. In the recently established "Grand Prix" competition, one could see for the first time athletes actually competing for a figure, and not for themselves and those spectating (who encapsulate their dreams in the competitors they watch). While athletes need to be financed like anyone else, the trend is slowly turning to commercial war. The political war continues, leaving in its wake American, Soviet and British athletes (among others) who have been sacrificed for political gain. A race should be a victory without the war — a victory over oneself, not over others but with others.

In this light, it is appropriate that the history of athletics in Ireland is inextricably linked to a university, which in turn is connected to the history of the Irish state. Indeed, Trinity College Dublin's involvement with Irish athletics mirrors its changing relationship with the Irish nation, in both its positive and negative aspects. In athletics, as with most facets of Trinity life, the English had a hand in its development. Trinity followed the legacy of the British universities where some of the earliest modern athletics meetings were held. In 1850, Exeter College, Oxford held a meeting based on amateur regulations which was followed five years later at St. John's College and Emmanuel, Cambridge. It was two years later on the 28th February 1857 that the awkwardly entitled Dublin University Football Club Foot-Races were inaugurated in College Park. There were only five events initially: 150 yards, 440 yards, 3 miles, high-jump and long-jump. These were, by all accounts, a very loosely organised occasion with distances and times being rather arbitrary. However, they proved such a success that it was decided to hold another exactly one month later under the new abbreviated title of the University Foot-Races. The repertoire of events was increased to twelve. But two athletic meetings in such a short time proved too much for the gentlemen of T.C.D., and from then on the Races became an annual event. John Lawrence in the first issue of the "Handbook of Irish Cricket" in 1867 reflected on some of the problems of those initial races:

"Not at all anticipating that their first meeting would bring together any considerable number of spectators, the committee did not conceive it necessary to rope off any running ground for the competitors: this occasioned very considerable inconvenience; the impetuous desire to see every move induced numbers (very considerable) to run with the runners, occasioning almost interminable confusion, and rendering it perfectly impossible for other spectators (especially those of the fair sex) to see the running. Notwithstanding all these disadvantages, the meeting was a great success."

Among the chairmen of the early Foot-Races committee were Issac Butt, James Digges La Touche, Charles Barrington, J. P. Mahaffy and Bram Stoker.

Following this in 1867, H.J. Hurford founded the Civil Service Club, holding its annual sports at the Leinster Cricket Club in Rathmines. In 1869, at their first annual meeting, it was decided that these events would be reserved for the doubtful category, “gentlemen athletes” — the definition of which is given in John Lawrence “Handbook of Irish Cricket” in 1879 as:

“Any person who does not enter into open competition or who has never competed for either a stake, public money or admission money; nor has ever at any period of his life taught or assisted in the pursuit of athletic exercises as a means of livelihood; nor is a mechanic, artisan or labourer.”

It was this final, virtual afterthought of a clause which kept formal athletics solely the pursuit of the elite. Needless to say, informal athletics continued throughout the country. Just before the Christmas of 1872, the Irish Champion Athletic Club was formed with the intention of co-ordinating Irish athletics more efficiently. Also, though it aimed to open their competition to all amateurs, a ten shilling subscription fee again restricted its potential membership. One member was Michael Cusack, who was to reappear later at the formation of the Gaelic Athletic Association. Cusack argued strongly for the inclusion of traditional Irish jumping and throwing events, and also for the removal of all barriers, which prevented the ordinary man from competing. These were all issues which Cusack would raise again with major effect almost ten years later.

In the same year of 1872, Dublin University Athletic Club was born out of University Foot-Races Committee, and for the next ten years took responsibility for the Races.

On May 19th 1873, the first Intervarsity competition was held in Cork although Trinity did not compete. However, three weeks later, Trinity’s A. C. Courtney broke the world record for the 1000 yards in College Park with a time of 2 minutes, 23.2 seconds. The following year, John Lane of Trinity became the first jumper to go beyond the 23 feet, also in College Park. It was at this time that the College Races were at the height of their social importance, as Field Magazine testified to:

“Looked at from the social point of view, the Dublin University Sports have always been par excellence the outdoor gathering of the season, in Ireland. For them, the highest toilettes have been reserved; to them has come the aristocracy not only of Dublin, but the whole of the Emerald Isle. The multitude of spectators has been a thing to be seen to be believed. The gathering at the Oxford and Cambridge sports may equal it in brilliancy and ra but cannot approach it in numbers.”

A number of the events in the College Races of the period would not be found in an orthodox athletic programme today. These included the long-jump with trapeze, a

Siamese race, a three mile walk, and the cricket ball throw. Recollection of what the Races were like is an entertaining mixture of history and legend. Mr. Lawrence, that avid chronicler of Irish sport, again highlights the problem in his rebuke of the club in 1876:

“...if the Hon. Secretary of the leading club in Ireland does not think the records of his club worth preserving in permanent form, we can only say he stands alone in the athletic world.”

The average attendance was 25,000 with seating for around 3,000. Among the prizes given were a gold pin, a love cup, an inkstand, a picnic basket and a walking stick — all very appropriate in their way. Weather, as always with races, proved a constant problem with incessant rain causing problems particularly in 1873 and 1878. In 1872, the committee decided to use a track measuring one third of a mile. This, however, was a disaster and the old course was reverted to the following year. It was this same modest committee which approached Sir Arthur Guinness to change the date of the Dublin Exhibition (to be opened by the Duke of Edinburgh) so as not to clash with the Races.

Around this time also, it is rumoured that a certain Oscar Wilde was publicly rebuked for ignoring his Races duties! Perhaps it was the same Mr. Wilde who cultivated the social nature of athletic endeavour with records of a different kind being broken; eventually leading to the cancellation of the Races of 1879 and 1880 by the College Board. Such were the “heights” achieved by members of the college under the influence of “some cheap claret, beer and stout” that riots ensued and, as a result, the Races (and indeed the drinking) was reduced to a one-day affair on their resumption in 1881. But after 1881, the Races were no longer public property as a social event and became more of an internal college event. In 1882, the Dublin University Athletic Club was disbanded and became part of the Dublin University Athletic Union — a sporting body for the administration of a number of College sports. (Not unlike today’s Central Athletic Committee).

Throughout this period, glorious though it may have been, athletics was still only the province of “gentlemen athletes”. In 1881, the aforementioned Michael Cusack, one of those instrumental in the foundation of the Gaelic Athletic Association, strongly criticised this elitism in a series of articles in “The Irish Sportsman”. It was in this atmosphere that the Gaelic Athletic Association was founded in 1884 for “the preservation and cultivation of the national past-times”. The G.A.A. felt that both the common Irish people and their traditional sports were ignored by the other “formal” sporting organisations, such as the I.C.A.C. The situation was worsened, as has become standard practice in these matters, by the lack of communication and understanding between the G.A.A. and the official Dublin clubs. In early 1885, the Dublin clubs gathered to consider their

position in relation to the G.A.A. Their major contention was with the avowedly political nature of the G.A.A. which Trinity's cycling representative, Macreeedy (who later wrote the "Road Book of Ireland") condemned in particular, stating that the country should unite to "quash the Gaelic Union". The clubs decided to form a representative body entitled the Irish Amateur Athletic Association, (I.A.A.A.). At their first dinner, a member of the I.A.A.A. refuted the G.A.A.'s accusations using the colourful language of deceit, referring to "bare footed athletes from the rugged hills of Tipperary and the wild plains of Connemara coming to Dublin to win prizes at the College Paces". This seems highly questionable as the Board of the College had refused to hold any open races after the commotion of 1878.

Nevertheless, the I.A.A.A.'s fears here not totally unfounded. Both the G.A.A. and I.A.A.A. had grown from the other's weaknesses and there was reciprocal faults and benefits on both sides. The G.A.A., having criticised elitism, reversed the balance of prejudice by proclaiming that "any athlete competing at meetings held under other laws than those of the Gaelic Athletic Association shall be ineligible to compete at meetings held under the G.A.A." This ban was later lifted. Thus, it was at this early stage that the seeds of division, which were to grow into the problems of today, were sown.

At this time, one hundred years ago, the I.A.A.A. held their inaugural championships. Only affiliated clubs were allowed participate. A very strong Trinity team was present and were reported as having represented Dublin University Athletic Union, Dublin University Boat Club and Dublin University Athletic Club — the official body. For example, Dan Bulger reported as representing D.U.A.C. in the 100 yards and D.U.A.U. in the 440 yards. A similar problem occurs today with athletes being variously reported as representatives of Dublin University, Trinity, D.U.H., D.U.H.A.C. and T.C.D. Nonetheless, despite these confusing titles, the Trinity team which represented the D.U.A.U. (the official college sporting body) was the first team affiliated to the governing athletic body of the day. And so, it was on "one fine morning" in 1885 that Trinity athletes competed as a club team for the first time in a recognised meeting. Since that year, Trinity has continued to produce an official college team each year, with the exception of the two World Wars. Therefore, amid some confusion, 1885 marked the somewhat difficult birth of what was to grow into the Dublin University Harriers and Athletics Club of today. This auspicious occasion unfortunately grew out of an arena of divisiveness which was a microcosm of a more fatal bigotry of ignorance which was soon to develop.

It was not all politics fortunately and, as we shall see, Trinity was now entering one of its most successful periods on the athletic field. However, the social element of the sport was not neglected either. Earlier in 1882 when D.U.A.C. was merged into the general body of D.U.A.U., the remaining club funds were left by the members as a legacy to college for the building of a pavilion. Later in 1885, this legacy became a reality with the opening of the pavilion, thereby establishing a social heritage of equal importance



Figure 3: "Jumping — Jive!" in College Park

to anything on the track. Finally, with the club and pavilion both firmly established in one year, Trinity athletes could look towards one hundred years of activity. Few could have imagined what that future held. Fewer still could have envisaged the War.

The War brought a cessation of athletics and perhaps an end to a carefree, romantic past in which the club, and indeed the college, had its origins. It was, to use an over-used phrase, the end of the beginning. Many of Trinity's potential Olympic competitors had died in the War and the excitement and colour that were the College Races (though possibly now viewed through a tinted lens) were lost when the new college entrants arrived after the War — as they are lost to us today. Now, one looks back on the origins of the club as an elusive dream which is among the stars and out of reach, but that's no matter — tomorrow, we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther . . . and one fine morning.