

University Athletics in Ireland 1857–2000

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The history of university athletics in Ireland is a long and distinguished story. While most national athletic associations date their foundation from the last twenty years of the 19th Century and the first twenty years of the 20th Century, university athletics competition started more than thirty years before this time. National competition at university level in Ireland started on the 28th February 1857 when the Football Club (rugby club) at Trinity College Dublin held what they termed the *Dublin University Football Club Foot Races*. The Football Club was founded just three years earlier in 1854. As rugby football in Trinity College Dublin certainly predates the formal establishment of the Football Club, it could also be assumed that running races of all kinds predate the first formal athletics meeting organised by the Football Club in February, 1857. However, this Football Club-sponsored athletics meeting, afterwards to be called *The College Races* is the first organised athletics meeting to be held in Ireland. This meeting is the third oldest athletics meeting in the world, preceded only by meetings organised by the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in London in 1842 and at Exeter College Oxford in 1850.

This first meeting in College Park, Dublin on Saturday 28th February 1857 consisted of a number of events, not all strictly athletic. There were a number of running events in addition to activities called *dropping the football*, *throwing the cricket ball* and finally an activity *where the contestants had to race one another with lighted cigars!* There were of course no sporting events for the ladies but because of the success of this first 'athletics' meeting, the ladies graced the occasion by their presence and dressed in the finest fashions of the day, thereby making the first *College Races* a most fashionable social occasion which over time became one of Dublin's most fashionable annual social events. The first meeting was attended by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and by crowds so much greater than had been expected that a second athletics meeting had to be held four weeks later.

The outstanding success of these first two meetings in February and March 1857 necessitated a change in organisation of these sporting gatherings, henceforth to be officially called *The College Races*. While

the original meetings had been organised and run by the Dublin University Football Club, because of the success and the numbers they attracted, their organisation was now taken over by an 'Athletics Committee' representing wider interests in Trinity College. However, the start of organised athletics competition in Ireland can be demonstrated to have commenced with these athletics meetings held in College Park, Dublin in the early spring of 1857.

The College Races now became an annual event from this time onwards and its organisation became a very demanding activity of itself due to their popularity. In fact the social popularity of this occasion regularly threatened to overburden the sporting aspects. Within ten years of the 1st College Races marquees and seating had to be provided for both athletes and spectators, who on occasion numbered up to 20,000 people and came to see and be seen at this now fashionable annual event. Professor Trevor West, the historian of sport in Trinity College, describes the difficulties of organising *The College Races* at this time. In his definitive and most interesting book *The Bold Collegians* Trevor West writes:

"The difficulty of arranging a major athletic meeting in College Park, which at that time had no pavilion and no spectator accommodation...to cope with athletes and spectators (sometimes numbering 20,000) who flooded in to view the sports was overwhelming. There were problems with distributing tickets (a membership scheme had to be devised), with handicapping the races, with communicating the results (a telegraph board was erected) and with keeping spectators away from the track. There was constant bickering about prizes which were handsome indeed, but the music of a couple of military bands helped to soothe the nerves of exhausted competitors, harassed judges and irritated spectators."

The new-found popularity of organised sports was of course not restricted to track and field athletics. Many other sports developed along similar lines at this time after these sports were organised with their own rules and regulations making widespread competition possible. Such diverse sports as cycling, rugby, hurling, soccer, Gaelic football, cricket, hockey and others all followed this pattern in their development into modern versions of these sporting competitions.

It should be noted that all these significant developments had their modern origins in schools or in the universities. Former students of the universities helped to develop the sports they had participated in during their student days. In this regard the contribution of Henry W.D. Dunlop, a Trinity graduate, illustrates this point in the Irish context. Dunlop was an outstanding athlete while at Trinity, who wished to develop athletics and other sports outside the universities for young men, both graduates and others. He was the founder of the Irish Champion Athletic Club in 1872 and this Club organised the first All Ireland Athletics Championship held in College Park in July 1873. But Henry Dunlop's most lasting sporting achievement is the creation of Landsdowne Road Rugby Ground (now the oldest international rugby ground in the world) in 1872. After Dunlop created the Landsdowne Road venue, he had built a cinder track, a cricket pitch, a croquet green, three football pitches and facilities for archery and lawn tennis, in fact a multi-sports centre with the emphasis being on athletics. The tennis courts were so well regarded that the first Irish Tennis Championships were played at Landsdowne Road before they moved to the Fitzwilliam Lawn Tennis Club some time later. But athletics was the premier sport and on the 5th June, 1875, the world's first international athletics match took place between Ireland and England at Landsdowne Road on the track Henry Dunlop had had constructed four years earlier.

University athletics were still the basis for the sport, both in interest and as the nursery of champion athletes of the future. The success of *The College Races* did not go unnoticed in other universities in Ireland. The Queen's Colleges of Belfast, Cork and Galway, which were all founded in 1845, as well as the newly founded Catholic University (1854) on St. Stephen's Green, Dublin and in particular their students also noted the success of the sporting *College Races* now held annually in College Park. They sought to emulate Trinity's sporting activities by organising their own College sports. By 1873 the students at the Queen's Colleges were eager to take part in 'intervarsity' athletic competitions. Consequently, students at Queen's College Cork invited their fellow students at Queen's College Belfast, Queen's College Galway and Trinity College Dublin to join them in an Intervarsity Athletics Meeting on Saturday 13th May, 1873 on a grass track laid down on the Cork Cricket Club's grounds alongside the River Lee near the Queen's College Cork campus on the Great Western Road. The ground was, and still is, on a stretch of land between the River Lee and the main road west out of Cork called the Mardyke. Interestingly, Landsdowne Road, Dublin was also built on an area between the

railway line and the River Dodder. In both cases these sports grounds were established on waste land that was too wet for any other use than sporting activities.

All the universities invited to come to Cork readily agreed except Trinity College Dublin which did not accept Queen's College Cork's invitation on the grounds that it would interfere with the arrangements for the Irish Champion Athletic Club's All Ireland Championships to be held in College Park. Thus the first Irish University Athletics Championships in 1873 took place without the participation of Trinity College Dublin. This was a most unfortunate decision on the part of the students of Trinity College because the ICAC Championships would not take place until the 5th July and the inaugural Intervarsity Meeting in Cork was planned and took place on the 19th May. It has now been documented that the initiative of the Queen's College Cork students brought into being not only Ireland's first Intervarsity Athletics Meeting but the world's first national intervarsity athletics meeting and championships. Oxford and Cambridge Universities had their first athletics meeting nine years earlier in 1864 but the Oxford meeting was organised as a dual meeting not as a national university meeting and championships and it remains as a dual meeting to the present day. The Queen's College Cork students therefore established the world's first national university track and field championships. To demonstrate its durability the Irish Universities Athletics Championships continue to the present.

In 2001 at the start of the third millennium, the Irish Universities Athletics Championships will be organised, it is felt fittingly, by Trinity College Dublin with universities and third level colleges from all parts of Ireland now taking part. In the 127th year history of Irish university athletics, the former Queen's Colleges have changed their names to University College Cork, The National University of Ireland Galway (formerly University College Galway) and the Queen's University of Belfast. In Dublin the Catholic University became firstly University College Dublin in association with the Royal University of Ireland and subsequently from 1908, University College Dublin in the National University of Ireland. Since 1989 two more universities have been established, namely, the University of Limerick and Dublin City University. Trinity College Dublin in the University of Dublin continues *The College Races*, as it was when it started in 1857.

To illustrate the historic foundation and precedence of university athletics in Ireland from 1857, and at intervarsity level from 1873, it

only needs to be pointed out that the Amateur Athletic Association in England (AAA) dates its foundation from 1880, the Amateur Athletic Union in the United States from 1888, the Canadian Athletic Association from 1884, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) in Ireland, which started as an athletic body, in November 1884 and finally the Irish Amateur Athletic Association in February 1885. As was mentioned earlier the world's inaugural international athletics match took place at Lansdowne Road Dublin in 1876 with a number of university students and former university students on both the Irish and English teams.

However, in spite of the opportunities provided by the early start and the popularity of university athletics, the sport at university level did not benefit from this except perhaps in Trinity and to a lesser extent at Queen's College Cork and Queen's College Belfast. Outside the universities in Ireland organised sport, and athletics in particular, underwent an unprecedented expansion from the 1880's to the early years of the 20th century, in fact up until the start of the First World War in 1914. This expansion was due to the formation of national sporting bodies both in Ireland and abroad. It was also due to the part played by former university sportsmen like Henry Dunlop, assisted by their counterparts in business and the civil services. Here we see the development of athletics outside the universities by the setting up of athletic clubs around the country.

In this context the Civil Service Athletic Club founded in 1867 is Ireland's oldest athletic club and its annual sports was a major event for more than a century. In London three years earlier in 1864, the English Civil Service Athletic Club was founded and held its first annual sports meeting in the grounds of Beaufort House in West London on the 22nd and 23rd April 1864. Like its Irish counterpart the Civil Service Club's annual sports meeting was also a major sporting event. Both Civil Services Clubs held Civil Service Championships and even engaged in International Civil Service Athletic competition. In Britain Charles Herbert, the most important sports official in the world as the first Hon. Secretary of the English Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) was a civil servant in the British Treasury in London. Charles Herbert was to play a major role together with Baron Pierre de Coubertin in re-establishing the Olympic Games and became Britain's first member of the International Olympic Committee in 1894.

While outside the universities in Ireland athletics were developing both technically and in numbers taking part, university athletics, while

developing technically, were not increasing to the same extent as the club numbers were. However, many university graduates after graduation joined outside clubs or even formed clubs on their own. A number of these former university athletes went on to outstanding sporting achievements as club members winning national and international championships and even setting world records in their specialist events. University athletics in Ireland, nevertheless, as annual meetings or as national intervarsity competitions had a rather chequered career in the 19th century. Although the Irish University Championships continued on a somewhat haphazard basis until 1906, Trinity College's *College Races* and Queen's College Cork's annual sports being the exceptions, by 1908 a somewhat semi-permanent structure of university athletic competition had come into being. This situation had been achieved by the establishment of various sporting clubs in the universities, the provision of sporting facilities by the universities themselves and finally a strong commitment after graduation by former university athletes and sportsmen to their *Alma Maters* and their sporting clubs.

Trinity College Dublin always had a distinct advantage here as excellent sporting facilities existed on the College campus. The focus of this sporting activity was and remains College Park. University College Cork purchased its sports grounds that they named *The Mardyke*. Before this Queen's College Cork now University College Cork held its annual sports, which in Cork were as important athletically as Trinity's *College Races* were in Dublin. Queen's College Cork's annual sports took place for many years on the grounds of the Cork Cricket Club also on the Mardyke, a short distance from University College Cork's present grounds.

Queen's University of Belfast, however, along with the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in Dublin and University College Dublin all had to go much further afield from their campuses for their sports grounds. Queen's College Belfast purchased sporting facilities at Cherryfield, Surgeons (RCSI) at Bird Avenue, Clonskeagh and University College Dublin (UCD) first at Sandymount, then Cowper Road, Rathmines, later at Terenure and finally at Belfield from 1935.

However, while university and intervarsity competitions might not have been as regular or as structured as other athletic competitions, nevertheless university athletes both during their time at university and after graduation did have regular structured athletic competition as members of non-university athletic clubs. Similar to their rugby-

playing fellow students and fellow graduates, they took part in athletics by becoming members of non-university clubs on graduation. In this context there was a very strong relationship between athletes and rugby players as most top class athletes were also outstanding rugby players. Many represented their country at both athletics and rugby.

In this regard the Bulger brothers, Daniel, Michael and Lawrence, were outstanding examples. Michael and Larry were rugby internationals with Trinity College Football Club and Lansdowne Rugby Club and also Irish athletic champions and officials, while Daniel played rugby for both Trinity and Lansdowne, was a multiple Irish athletics champion as well as a five-time British (AAA) athletics champion. To add to his athletic prowess he concluded his sporting career in 1892 by winning the AAA long jump championship and the 120 yds hurdles championship at Stamford Bridge London, then as now Chelsea Football Club's home ground. A month later back in Dublin, Daniel Bulger equalled the world's record for the 120 yds hurdles in his final competition at Ballsbridge Show Grounds on 2nd August 1892. Daniel Bulger then retired from active competition and devoted himself to sports administration, becoming Vice-President of the Irish Amateur Athletic Association (IAAA) two years after his competitive days ended.

Larry Bulger continued to sprint competitively winning the Irish 220 yds Championship and going on to play international rugby for Ireland and the Lions touring team in South Africa in 1896, playing in all four tests. The Lions won three of these tests and Larry Bulger set a record for try scoring of twenty tries on this tour. Larry Bulger, after his medical education in Dublin, practised in London with his brother Michael, where both were members of London Irish Rugby Club. Michael had been a founder of the London Irish Club in 1898 and acted as medical officer to the Club for many years. His greatest sporting involvement, however, was at the London Olympic Games of 1908 where he was the Senior Medical Officer for the marathon race from Windsor Castle to the White City in Shepherd's Bush. Together with the other medical officer, Dr Arthur Conan Doyle, they assisted the Italian runner Dorando Pietri at the conclusion of the race, thereby contributing to Pietri's disqualification after crossing the finishing line in first position. The photographs of the finish of the Olympic Marathon in 1908 clearly show Dr Bulger and Dr Conan Doyle giving medical and other assistance to Dorando Pietri. Controversy still continues even today over the part played by the medical officers at the conclusion of this Olympic race in London in 1908.



Dorando Pietri, of Italy, crosses the marathon finishing line on 24 July 1908 at the London Olympic Games. He was assisted the final; 350 metres to the line by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of the Sherlock Holmes stories, who was covering the event as a newspaper reporter, along with Jack Andrew, the clerk of the course, and Michael Bulger, medical assistant to the British Olympic Association.

The Bulgers had started their sporting careers while students at the French College in Blackrock, Co. Dublin. The French College is today Blackrock College, the sporting nursery of many Irish rugby internationals over the years as well as many Irish athletic champions. The Bulgers were not the only schoolboys to be introduced to both athletics and rugby while students at the French College. Edward Walsh and Patrick Kelly were other examples. Walsh was not only an Irish rugby international, but also both the Irish and Canadian high jump and 120 yds hurdles champion in the same year (1885) and Kelly became both the Irish and British (AAA) high jump champion while still at the French College.

Many other university athletes achieved national and even international record-breaking performances while still at university. One example of this was John Gordon Lane of Trinity College who not only set a world's record in the long jump on the 11th June 1874 but also became the first long jumper to exceed 23 feet with an outstanding performance of 23 ft 1½ ins (7.05 m). This world record-breaking performance took place in College Park at *The College Races* in a most competitive atmosphere. At the time of this competition E.J. Davies of Cambridge University was the British long jump champion

(also 1871 and 1872) and world record holder and John Lane, the Irish long jump champion. That day E.J. Davies held the world record at 22 ft 10½ ins (6.97 m) which he had set some weeks before at the Oxford v Cambridge sports meeting in England. In that most memorable long jump competition at *The College Races*, Davies jumped 22 ft 10 ins just one half inch below his world record. However, Davies not only lost his world's record to John Lane but also this long jump competition in College Park. At that time the long jump competitors took off from grass. There was no take off board either and they landed in crude pits so both Lane's and Davies's performances must be seen as outstanding sporting achievements.

Lane's record-breaking long jump was not a somewhat maverick performance for *The College Races*. The year before (1873) A.C. Courtney, also of Trinity College, and at that year's *College Races* broke the world's record for 1000 yds with a time of 2 min 23.6 sec. Outstanding performances were also being achieved at Queen's College Cork and Queen's College Belfast. In fact Charles Wadsworth of Queen's College Belfast, after winning the 16 lbs shot at the first intervarsity championships at the Cork Cricket Ground in May, went on to become the first Irish champion in the shot putt at College Park in July 1873, beating no less a world class thrower than Maurice Davin, the man who eleven years later was to become a founder and the first President of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).

In Cork John C. Daly of Queen's College was establishing throwing records in the hammer, shot, 56 lb weight throw, 120 yds flat and hop, step and jump (today's triple jump). Daly's fellow Cork student W.J.M. Barry was a multi-talented athlete and British (AAA) and Irish champion in the hammer throw and the shot putt. Nevertheless, many university athletes only achieved their full athletic potential after graduation and as members of the athletic clubs that were being established at this time. In this regard they modelled the practice that was occurring in the Irish rugby world.

Organised national inter-university athletics competition involving all of Ireland's university level students did not come into existence until the establishment of the National University of Ireland in 1908. This means that full national intervarsity athletics competition is a 20th century phenomenon, although its roots are in the 19th century. Up to this time, university athletics was an individual university activity

although inter-university athletics competition did take place but only on a few intermittent occasions rather than a regular or annual basis.

Ireland's largest university institution, i.e., University College Dublin, took little interest in sports during its early days, either as the Catholic University (its first Rector being John Henry Newman) or subsequently as University College Dublin, established in 1883, with an association with the Royal University of Ireland (a purely degree granting institution founded in 1879). One of the reasons was a general lack of interest in sports by the College authorities but an equal reason for this official lack of sports interests was that University College Dublin had no area either within or nearby that could be used as sports fields. Both Trinity College and Queen's College Cork had either large playing field areas on their college campuses or very close to them. In addition university sports clubs were in short supply in UCD unlike Trinity College, Queen's College Cork and Queens' College Belfast. Little is known or documented regarding sports development in Queen's College Galway, although sports, and athletics in particular, certainly existed as shown by their participation in the first, and subsequent, intervarsity athletics championships in 1873 in Cork.

University College Dublin did have a number of sports clubs at the end of the 19th century but they were student organised and financed with either no ground facilities or support from the University College authorities. This was the general situation until the coming into existence of the National University of Ireland in late 1908 with University College Dublin as one of its three constituent colleges along with the renamed University College Cork and University College Galway.

University College Dublin, although it had a number of sports clubs that wandered all over Dublin for the use of sports facilities, finally occupied its own sports ground of 19 acres in 1913 on the Templeogue Road at Terenure where UCD sports remained until 1935 when the sports grounds were finally moved to Belfield Estate, Stillorgan, where they are still located. University College Dublin itself followed its sports grounds by transferring some of its faculties to the Belfield campus in 1965. UCD, now like Trinity College, had its sports facilities on the Belfield campus of the University. But track and field participation in intervarsity competitions on a regular basis only started with the new National University of Ireland and the purchase of its sports ground at Terenure (a southern suburb of Dublin and three miles from the city centre) in 1913. While an Athletic Union had

existed for some time in the 1890's it had gone out of existence and it was not until 1909–10 that it came into being again. It was composed of a Football Club, a Hurling Club and a Boxing Club. It is certain that there was a Rugby Club and some kind of an Athletics Club, although while the Rugby Club was affiliated to the Leinster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union in 1910, the date of the foundation of the Athletics Club is April 1921.

In 1910, however, the National University of Ireland intervarsity meeting took place. That was an intervarsity athletics meeting between UCD, UCC and UCG. This meeting was organised by the Athletic Sports Club of UCD, an off-shoot of the UCD Athletic Union Council that controlled athletics in University College Dublin from 1909 until the UCD Athletics Club was established in 1921.

The first official and full intervarsity athletics championships, as distinct from the first intervarsity athletics meeting in 1873, was also and fittingly organised by University College Cork and held at the Mardyke ground in 1912, although Queen's College Cork had organised a university meeting in Cork in 1907. The 1912 Intersvarsity Championship was won by University College Dublin, this being the first of their many intervarsity athletic successes. Again in 1913 UCD won the Intersvarsity Championship with Trinity College Dublin, Queen's College Belfast and University College Cork following in that order. This 1913 Intersvarsity was organised by UCD's Athletic Union Council and held at the RDS grounds in Ballsbridge where Daniel Bulger of Trinity College had equalled the world record for 120 yds hurdles twenty-one years previously.

The 1914 Intersvarsity, the last before the First World War of 1914–1918 was won by Trinity College at their historic ground 'The College Park where organised athletics first made its appearance in Ireland more than half a century earlier. This Intersvarsity Athletics Championship was to bring to an end the first era of organised athletics in Ireland. By the time intervarsity athletics had recommenced in 1920, the country as well as the two controlling bodies, the Irish Amateur Athletics Association (IAAA) and the Athletic Council of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) were about to come to an end. The new era with one national controlling body, the National Athletic and Cycling Association of Ireland (NACAI) came into being in 1922 and ushered in perhaps the most turbulent period in Irish athletic history with consequences still in evidence even into the new millennium in 2001.

During the 1920's UCD Athletic Club and a National University of Ireland athletics team developed into major forces in Irish athletics with national, international and Olympic representatives on their teams. In addition former UCD athletes made their continuing contributions as sports administrators and officials as Trinity College graduates had done in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Sean Lavin, P.C. Moore, Frank O'Dea, P. McLoughlin, Eamon Fitzgerald, Harry Conway, Theo Phelan, M.J. O'Sullivan, Michael Moroney, Tom Wall and Kevin O'Flanagan were all Irish champions, internationals and international champions, with Sean Lavin and Eamon Fitzgerald being Olympic competitors in addition to being national champions. Dr. O'Flanagan subsequently became an Olympic official and served on the International Olympic Committee from 1976 – 1994. He was made an honorary life member of the IOC on his retirement. Both P.C. Moore and Frank O'Dea were to go on to become Presidents of the National Athletic and Cycling Association of Ireland (NACAI). P.C. Moore, the Irish champion and record holder in the 440 yds and international champion at the same distance in 1929, was to become President of the NACAI in 1934, the year in which the Association was suspended from the international competition by the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF).

During this period of the 1920's and 1930's Trinity College athletes were also to the fore at national and international level, with such athletes as D.J. Cussen, R.R. Woods, T.G. Wallis, J.B. Eustace, G.A. Levis, L.H. Braddell, D.H. McNeill, R.E. Coote, R.H. Wallace, N.F. DeVare, G.W. Craigie and L.N. Horan becoming national champions and many of them international representatives as well.

University College Cork and The Queen's University of Belfast also provided their fair share of national champions in the colours of their respective universities, although not as many champions as Trinity College or University College Dublin. The Queen's University of Belfast and University College Cork produced national champions of the calibre of J.A. Price (QUB) in the hurdles and P. O'Brien (UCC) and J.J. O'Sullivan (UCC) in the 880 yds.

At national level, however, university students excelled primarily at the 'explosive' events of sprinting, hurdling and jumping. Their previous success at the throwing and longer distance running events was now taken over nearly entirely by non-university club athletes.

The sole exception was Len Horan of Trinity College who won many Irish titles in the shot putt and also did well in the discus.

During this period of the 1920's and 1930's international university matches were arranged between the Scottish and Irish universities and the Irish universities and an Achilles team (Oxford and Cambridge graduates). Trinity College also competed against Oxford and Cambridge in turn. Irish university athletes also took part in the British Universities Championships and the 1930 World Student Games (then called 'International University Games') in Darmstadt, Germany, all with considerable success. Up to 1934 Irish university athletes and Irish athletes in general were improving at an accelerating rate.

Pat O'Callaghan, formerly of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and University College Cork, won the Olympic Hammer Championship in Amsterdam in 1928 and again in Los Angeles in 1932. Eamon Fitzgerald of University College Dublin was unlucky not to gain a Bronze medal when he placed a close 4th in the Olympic Hop, Step and Jump final in Los Angeles. Finally Bob Tisdell of Cambridge University won the Olympic 400 m hurdles championship, also in Los Angeles in 1932. Irish athletes now looked forward to even greater success at all levels, university included, in the years after 1932. The 1936 Olympic Games were to be held in Berlin, much nearer home than Los Angeles, and due to the Olympic successes, athletics was never more popular with thousands of young people taking part.

A short two years after Los Angeles in November 1934 came the greatest upheaval and tragedy in Irish athletics in the 20th century, namely the suspension of the NACAI from all international athletic competitions. The suspension was confirmed in March 1935. This suspension led in turn to the foundation of the Amateur Athletic Union Eire (AAUE) in 1937 with provisional recognition by the IAAF in May 1937 and full recognition and membership of the IAAF in March 1938. Thus began the division in Irish athletics between the athletes who could compete internationally and those (the majority) who could not. This division in Irish athletics was to be disastrous for the sport with far-reaching consequences that still reverberate right up the present.

To add to this confusion another athletics association was established in Northern Ireland called the Northern Ireland Amateur Athletic Association (NIAAA). This association was not an independent controlling body as were the NACAI and the AAUE. The NIAAA was a regional authority and part of the British Amateur Athletic Board

(BAAB). The BAAB was now the internationally recognised controlling body for all track and field events including road racing and walking in the United Kingdom, i.e., England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, and for all international matches including the Olympic Games and European Championships. The unfortunate outcome for athletics in Ireland, both North and South, was a continual overall decline in standards and performances from this time onwards.

This whole tragic situation resulted from a change in the boundary definition of membership by the IAAF in 1934. In August 1934, the IAAF introduced a new boundary rule as follows:

"The jurisdiction of members of the International Amateur Athletic Federation is limited by the political boundaries of the country or nation they represent."

Under this new rule for membership of the IAAF, the national body had to restrict its athletics control to the boundaries of the state it sought to represent internationally. The *State or Nation* in the case of Ireland was the Irish Free State of 26 counties, not the 32 counties country as it had been formerly.

There was nothing the NACAI could do about this new international rule except to accept it, reject it or seek to have it waived in the case of Ireland as a special case. After debate at the NACAI Congress in Dublin in November 1934 and for confused reasons, the proposal to accept the '*political boundaries*' rule, as it came to be called, was defeated by 27 votes to 24. I use the term "*confused*" because of some of the sentiments expressed during the debate and also because the Garda and Army representatives who had seven votes at the Congress voted against the proposal as did the cyclists. The Universities voted for the motion as did the Dublin County Board and others. Unfortunately reason and practicality failed to prevail and sentiment carried the day. In addition the third alternative of seeking to have the '*political boundaries*' rule waived in the Irish case was never debated or as far as can be established even considered. Pdraig Griffin in his valuable history of these years *The Politics of Irish Athletics* treats the issues fairly, but the damage to Irish athletics North and South can now be seen for the disruption and damage to the sport that the split in Irish athletics produced.

University athletics in practice were little affected for the next few years. But matters were moving at national and international level

that would have their effects by 1937 and then a profound influence both during and after the Second World War of 1939–1945. Up to 1937 athletic clubs, including university clubs, in what was now Eire did not have to take sides. This meant that intervarsity competition still continued, but from 1937 Trinity College, UCD, UCC, UCG, RCSI and QUB had to join one side or the other. However, for the remainder of the 1930's from 1935 intervarsity athletics and international intervarsity athletics continued much as before. In 1936 the Intervarsity Championships were won by Trinity College but neither University College Cork nor University College Galway turned up at the UCD track at Belfield where the Intervarsity took place. In 1937 Trinity College again won the Intervarsity, this time at College Park. Two more Intervarsity Championships, those of 1938 and 1939, the first in Galway hosted by University College Galway and the second, and last before the Second World War, at Belfield hosted by University College Dublin were both won by University College Dublin.

In the Olympic year of 1936, the Games were held in Berlin and great interest was generated in these Games all over the world for a number of reasons, some far removed from sport. Regretfully the NACAI's suspension from international athletics resulted in a situation where no Irish athletes and therefore no Irish university athletes could take part. After Ireland's Olympic athletic successes just four years before in Los Angeles, this was a major set-back for Irish athletes like Bob Tisdell, Eamon Fitzgerald and Pat O'Callaghan and their university successors. This brought matters to a head and a move was now in operation to consider the possibility of accepting the IAAF's '*political boundaries*' rule and returning to membership of the IAAF and international competition.

The establishment of the Amateur Athletic Union (Eire) in 1937 on the one hand exacerbated the situation, but on the other gave athletes whose clubs were members of the new athletics association (AAUE) the opportunity of once again competing internationally. Intervarsity athletics continued but in early 1938 in a effort to maintain inter-university athletic links UCD AC wrote to University College Galway, the university college who were due to host the 1938 Intervarsity Championships, requesting them to call a meeting consisting of The Queen's University of Belfast, Trinity College Dublin, University College Cork and University College Galway to consider the motion:

"That the Irish Universities Athletic Championships (The Intervarsity Meeting) be held purely under the rules

and sponsorship of the Irish Universities Athletic Council, irrespective of the athletic associations to which the participating members belong."

On St. Patrick's Day 1938, Trinity College, University College Dublin and University College Galway met and letters of approval with the motion were received from The Queen's University of Belfast and University College Cork. Informal approaches were suggested and made to both the NACAI and the AAUE regarding this decision of the universities, i.e., a closed meeting, and while the NACAI agreed that the Intervarsity Championships were a matter purely for the universities, the AAUE took the contrary view, thus bringing the athletics 'split' into university athletics as well as national athletics.

The 1938 and 1939 Intervarsity Athletics Championships took place as planned, but Trinity College Dublin and The Queen's University of Belfast did not take part. University College Dublin won the Intervarsity Championships on both occasions. With the onset of the Second World War in September 1939, the Intervarsity Championships were cancelled from 1940 to 1945, although university athletes continued to compete, but now within their own associations, i.e., Trinity College in the AAUE, The Queen's University of Belfast in the NIAAA, and UCD, UCC and UCG in the NACAI. In addition Trinity College and QUB continued to compete against each another. From its inception in 1937, the AAUE and the NIAAA combined under an arrangement called the Irish Amateur Athletics Board (IAAB) to hold Irish Championships, an annual inter-association match and to select joint Irish teams for home internationals both in track and field and later in cross-country running, but the Olympic Games, European Championships and other internationals were excluded.

Between 1940 and 1945 intervarsity athletic competitions were discontinued, although university sports days still continued on a diminished basis. Athletes at university did, however, compete in national championships whether under the auspices of the NACAI, AAUE or NIAAA. Notable university athletes in this period were Kevin O'Flanagan and Tom Wall of UCD and Len Horan of Trinity College. Also during this period Clonliffe Harriers and Donore Harriers held a number of sports meetings that attracted a large attendance due to the fact that many British and some American athletes were stationed in Northern Ireland. To come to a sports meeting in Dublin with good prizes and little shortage of food was a very attractive opportunity. Clonliffe Harriers sports meetings, run by their energetic and far-

seeing Hon. Secretary Billy Morton, were the premier sports meetings of the athletic season. The Clonliffe Harriers meetings were held under AAUE rules. Guinness sports meetings held in the Iveagh Grounds in Dublin were also attractive but without foreign athletes taking part these meetings did not have the glamour of the Clonliffe Harriers, Donore Harriers or Civil Services sports meetings. University athletes took part in all these meetings as they did in the various national championships run by the NACAI, IAAB, AAUE or NIAAA.

The Intervarsity Championships restarted in 1946 but the 'split' in Irish Athletics between the NACAI and the AAUE had deepened and had become more acrimonious. Trinity College now competed against The Queen's University of Belfast and English and Scottish University teams. UCD, UCC and UCG had only themselves to compete against in the university sector.

By the Olympic year of 1948 the relationship between the main athletics bodies had grown even worse. A public dispute between the Olympic Council of Ireland, who took the NACAI's side of the argument, and the AAUE continued right up to the marshalling of all the Olympic teams before the Opening Ceremony of the London Olympics at Wembley Stadium. The Olympic Council of Ireland entered only NACAI athletes whose names were accepted by the Organising Committee in London. The AAUE entered their own athletes through the IAAF who would control all the athletic competitions at the Games. The consequence of this debacle was that the NACAI athletes entered by the Olympic Council of Ireland were not permitted to compete or even march in the Opening Ceremony. The AAUE athletes took part in their respective events but after much acrimonious dispute had to march at the back of the Irish Olympic team at the Opening Ceremony. Finally in the Olympic Council of Ireland's official report of the Games (required by the International Olympic Committee), the Irish athletes and team officials, who took part in the athletic events of the Games with some distinction, were not even mentioned. Those of us who were at the London Olympics as spectators, the present writer being one, found the pettiness displayed not only absurd but distasteful and damaging to this country's international sporting standing and good name.

However, the Olympic Games in London in the summer of 1948 had one immediate positive aspect and athletic benefit, namely that they opened the door to American university athletics through the opportunity provided by American university sports scholarship

schemes. The second outcome was the reorganisation of the Irish Olympic Committee. The long-time officials who had been involved in the London Olympics debacle were encouraged to retire and a new President and Hon. Secretary were elected. The new President was Lord Killanin who was to change the Olympic Council of Ireland and restore Ireland's good name and standing at Olympic level. Lord Killanin was to go on to become President of the International Olympic Committee and to lead the Olympic movement through the revolutionary changes that occurred during his presidency from 1972 to 1980.

At the athletic level, as mentioned above, two Olympic competitors at the London Games were offered athletic scholarships to Villanova University on their performances at the Games, namely, Jim Reardon and Cummin Clancy. Jim Reardon competed with distinction in the Olympic 400 m in gaining a place in the semi-finals of the event and only just missed a place in the Olympic 400 m final. Jim Reardon was the fastest European 400 m runner at the Games and became the first of a long line of Irish athletes, both men and women, who were to go to America on sports scholarships in the years since the 1948 Olympics. Jim Reardon was joined at Villanova University by Cummin Clancy, both of Donore Harriers. Clancy, a discus thrower, won the British (AAA) discus championship two weeks before his participation in the London Olympics. A little over a year later John Joe Barry, perhaps Ireland's greatest middle distance runner up to this time, joined Reardon and Clancy at Villanova.

The movement of Irish athletes to American universities was in time to produce in the mid 50's Ireland's first Olympic champion since the Los Angeles Olympics in 1932, when Ron Delany, also a student at Villanova University, won the Olympic 1,500 m in Melbourne, Australia on 1st December 1956. Eamonn Coghlan followed Delany to Villanova University and became the World 5,000 m Champion at the inaugural IAAF World Track and Field Championships in Helsinki, Finland in 1983. Both Delany and Coghlan had similar careers as highly successful indoor and outdoor runners. Ron Delany had an uninterrupted win record indoors in the 1950's culminating in the World Indoor Record in winning the mile of 1959 in 4:01.4. Eamonn Coghlan did even better thirty years later and in 1983 became the World Indoor Record Holder for the mile with the remarkable time of 3:49.78 sec in February 1983. This record was achieved on all 11 laps of the indoors track.

Two other Irish athletes had outstanding indoor running careers each winning a World Indoor Championship in 1987. These athletes, Marcus O'Sullivan of Villanova University and Frank O'Mara of the University of Arkansas, while successful runners outdoors never achieved the championship success that Delany and Coghlan had achieved outdoors.

Ireland's next World Champion was Sonia O'Sullivan, another Villanova University student, who won the World Student Games (XVI Universiade) 1,500 m Championship in Sheffield, England in 1991 and the World 5,000 m Championship in Göteborg, Sweden in 1995. Sonia O'Sullivan's running success was not restricted to track running. As a cross-country runner she achieved an outstanding double when she won both the World Cross Country Short Course 4,000 m Championship and a day later the World Cross Country Long Course 8,000 m Championship in Marrakech, Morocco in March, 1998. In the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 Sonia O'Sullivan won the Silver medal in the 5,000 m. Finally John Treacy, this time a student at Providence College in Rhode Island, won two World Cross Country Championships in 1978 (Glasgow) and 1979 (Limerick) and concluded a highly successful career by winning the Silver medal in the marathon at the Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1984.

So the successful university athletics tradition continues up to the present except that this time the universities tend to be American rather than Irish, although a marked development in Irish university athletic performance and numbers taking part has occurred in recent years.

Back in Ireland intervarsity and university athletics recommenced in 1946 with the first post-war intervarsity taking place at University College Galway's grounds in Galway. This first competition since before the Second World War was won by University College Dublin, which college was now to enter into a successful intervarsity competitive career of fifty-four championship wins. By comparison Trinity College Dublin with nine wins, Queen's University of Belfast with eight wins, University College Cork with five wins and the new University of Limerick with five wins only illustrates UCD's overwhelming superiority at intervarsity level and also at national level in the NACAI. To be fair to Trinity College and The Queen's University of Belfast, both universities did not take part in intervarsity competition from 1938 until 1962. The absence of Trinity and Queen's gave a clear advantage to UCD to build up its overwhelming record of

success. From 1962 Trinity College, The Queen's University of Belfast and since 1993 the University of Limerick have had fourteen wins thereby cutting back UCD's winning record. Nevertheless UCD has been the dominant university in athletics both at intervarsity and national level in Ireland.

In an effort to heal the 'split' in Irish athletics in 1961 senior members of both Trinity College's Athletics Club, known as Dublin University Harriers and Athletic Club (DUHAC), and their counterparts in University College Dublin tried to heal the divisions between the two biggest associations that had been created in the mid 1930's. Both universities sought to have competition between themselves accepted as a 'closed' fixture, as University College Dublin had suggested unsuccessfully in 1938. Times had changed radically since pre-War days and this time reason prevailed as it failed to do in 1934. Trevor West in his book *The Bold Collegians* mentioned earlier and James Meenan, Professor of Political Economy and National Economics at UCD, in his book *St. Patrick's Blue and Saffron*, both tell the story of the successful outcome. Professor West summarises the story and Professor Meenan tells it in greater detail. West's summary is as follows:

"Athletics coach Cyril White aided by George Dawson, a Fellow in Genetics, who was for many years Chairman of the Captains' Committee of DUCAC at Trinity, worked cautiously behind the scenes to break the mould, while similar efforts were made by P.C. Moore, Judge J.C. Conroy, Fionbarr Callanan and athletics coach Jack Sweeney in UCD."

The result of their efforts was that their proposal was accepted by both the NACAI and the AAUE. In addition the AAUE persuaded the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) to accept this proposed meeting as a 'closed' event. The IAAF accepted this and university athletics recommenced as it had been before the 'split' in university athletics in 1938.

The first of these recommenced meetings was the 'Colours' match between Trinity and UCD held at the historic College Park, Dublin in June 1961. By this time both University Athletics Clubs were predominant in athletics in their respective associations, UCD in the NACAI and Trinity College in the AAUE. After an evening of outstanding athletics competition with a capacity crowd lining Trinity's

College Park, Trinity College won the memorable contest by a decisive margin over their long time opponents University College Dublin. This significant athletics meeting was the athletics breakthrough at university level that had been too long delayed. Shortly afterwards full intervarsity athletics competition was recommenced when The Queen's University of Belfast rejoined the intervarsity athletics family. But greater and unforeseen changes were on the way in the turbulent 1960's.

The first of these changes was the introduction of women's athletics into the Intervarsity Championships. From 1966 women's intervarsity athletics made its appearance with UCD ladies, as they were then called, being prominent in the championships from that time up to the present. Today the UCD women have strong competition from Trinity College, The Queens University of Belfast, The University of Ulster and in the last number of years – 1994 to 2000 – from the University of Limerick.

But women in university athletics goes back well before 1966. Trinity's Maeve Kyle is the first women's athletic champion in both the university and national athletics. She is also Ireland's first women's Olympic competitor in athletics from the Melbourne Olympics of 1956. Maeve Kyle's sporting achievements encompass a number of sports, but she excelled at international hockey and international athletics, both as athlete and activist, all helping to establish women's athletic competition at university, national and local levels. Her contribution over nearly half a century is vast and continues as coach, sports administrator, club member and athletics official right up to the present (2001). A further contribution made by Maeve Kyle is the fact that she has lived in Northern Ireland with her husband Sean, also highly active as an outstanding coach and international athletics official. This has provided an entrée between athletes and officials from the Northern Ireland Amateur Athletic Association (NIAAA) and athletes and officials in the rest of Ireland.

While the new decade of the 1960's opened quietly with the Rome Olympics of 1960, the changes that this decade in particular brought into being were to change not only sport in Ireland but the universities as well. Perhaps the most significant change from a national athletics perspective was the partial healing of the 'split' in 1967 with the establishment of Bórd Lúthchleas na hÉireann, known as BLE (Irish Athletics Board). BLE was formed out of an amalgamation of the NACAI and the AAUE, with the acceptance by the new athletics board

of the IAAF's '*political boundary*' rule. Unfortunately, a breakaway group was formed of members of the old NACAI who would not accept the new arrangements. They continued to call themselves the NACAI. However, in spite of this new 'split', the majority of Irish athletes were now eligible to compete internationally. This situation was to continue up to November 1999 when a new athletics body called '*The Athletic Association of Ireland*' was formed from the NACAI and BLE and the Northern Ireland AAA. This was to conclude finally the reuniting of athletics in the Country of Ireland, a position last achieved before 1934.

The past thirty years, however, have seen the introduction of perhaps the greatest influence sport has had to deal with, namely, the televising on a mass basis of sport, particularly at national and international levels. Television has influenced the popularity of a number of traditional sports in this country to an extraordinary degree, association football and Gaelic football being examples. Other formerly minority sports like snooker have grown from relative obscurity to national obsession. Other traditional sports such as athletics have declined as a consequence of television's intrusion. Television created a new sporting popularity and hierarchy. This popularity has in turn brought into sport unheard of amounts of money which has changed sport from a popular recreation into, in some sports, an important part of the business and leisure industry, a situation far removed from what sports were before the 1960's. With the introduction of professionalism into athletics in the late 1980's, national athletics changed irrevocably and some would say not for the better. Only university athletics remains relatively unchanged and comparable to traditional athletics of the past. So the 1960's, although they did not appear so at the time, brought to an end the second era in Irish Athletics.

The great influx of students into the universities and other third level educational institutions from this time, an increase from less than 20,000 in 1961 to more than 130,000 in 2001, did not halt the relative decline in the standards and popularity of athletics. Athletics both in the universities and elsewhere now had to compete with other sports as never before. In addition to the pressure for places in all third level educational institutions, there has been a very considerable rise in academic standards both for admission and in all courses and degrees. This puts restrictions on the time formerly given by students to taking part in athletics. As students traditionally organised their sports in universities both internally and at intervarsity level, more students

and more institutions meant more time required to continue this traditional practice. The time demands of modern training for competition also cut into the limited time available. All the modern restrictions from a sporting perspective go some way in explaining the relative decline in athletics at university level.

Surprisingly, increased numbers, while not improving national athletic standards and performances to the level expected, have in fact improved vastly the provision of sporting and athletic facilities in the universities and in other third level institutions. The Queen's University of Belfast, University College Cork, University College Galway, University College Dublin and the University of Limerick all have first class modern facilities for athletics on their campuses and Trinity College has access to the finest athletics stadium in the country, the Morton Stadium in Santry, as well as College Park where university athletics all began in 1857. Other third level institutions have athletic facilities of equal standard. Alongside these new facilities is the increase in competition internationally against British, American and European universities, both at home and abroad and the reintroduction of university internationals against Scottish and Welsh Universities. These new developments sustain a high level of interest if not overall standards in university athletics.

One effort to improve overall athletic standards was the introduction of a sports scholarship scheme first by University College Dublin and now by many other Irish universities and third level institutions. While the sports scholarship schemes have raised the standard certainly at individual level, they cannot raise the general standards as it has in the USA, due to the cost of mass participation in sports scholarship schemes. In the United States the sports scholarship athlete is a norm, in Ireland he or she is an exception.

However, a reorganisation of the Intervarsity Championships did apply to all athletes at the universities. By the end of the 1970's the number of university students in Irish universities and even the number of Irish universities had increased dramatically. It was now obvious that the old structures and *modus operandi* of the Intervarsity Committee were increasing year by year. Meetings of the Intervarsity Committee were held to consider these new university developments and their effects on university athletics. The outcome was the formation of the Irish Universities Athletics Association (IUAA) with a radically different perspective and mandate to that of the old Intervarsity Committee. Thus, the Irish Universities Athletics

Association came into being in the UCD Sports Centre at Belfield in October 1990, with Dr Cyril M. White becoming the first President, Professor Michael Hillery of the University of Limerick, the first Vice-President (to become the second President in 1993), Michael Aughey of Dublin City University, the first Honorary Secretary and Eric Brady of University College Dublin, the first Honorary Treasurer. The Executive Committee was composed of members of the other Irish Universities. Since its foundation in 1990 the number of member institutions in the Irish Universities Athletics Association has risen from 12 to 26 in 2001 and the IUAA now represents all major universities and other third level educational institutions in the whole of Ireland.

Thus begins the third era in Irish university athletics and one that is in many ways different, but also in many ways the same as all that preceded it, thereby illustrating the old adage "*the more things change, the more they stay the same*".

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