

Dr. Pat O'Callaghan

PATRICK JOSEPH O'Callaghan was born in Derygallon, Co. Cork on 28th January, 1906, to Paddy O'Callaghan, a farmer, and his wife Jayne (nee Healy). Pat, the youngest of three boys, began his education at the age of two before progressing to secondary school in Kanturk.

The gifted student later received a scholarship to the Patrician Brothers Academy in Mallow, requiring him to cycle 50km (32 miles) round trip from the family farm.

O'Callaghan, like his older brothers, Sean and Con, also possessed natural physical talents and competed for Banteer GAA in football and hurling.

Academics, however, remained his top priority. At the tender age of 16, O'Callaghan earned admission to the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin.

He would become Ireland's youngest medical graduate ever despite not being old enough to practice medicine. But the pause in his professional career allowed him to pursue another life-changing event: the hammer throw.

The future doctor applied the same relentless drive and determination on playing field as he had in the classroom.

The hard work soon paid off. He rode his bike to meets throughout the region, winning medals while occasionally stopping along the way to milk a cow for quick nourishment.

Although he stood only 1.80 (5'11"), O'Callaghan relied on his explosive power and the nimble feet of a dancer to become Ireland's top thrower and national record-holder.

The Corkman then set out to test his skills against the world's best at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam.

He didn't disappoint.

His winning throw of 51.39m (168'6") became the first gold medal earned by an athlete competing for the Free Irish State. Over the years, previous Irish champions but had been forced to compete for Great Britain.

THE SIGNIFICANCE of O'Callaghan's triumph was simply immeasurable. "I am glad of my victory, not of the victory itself, but for the fact that the world has been shown that Ireland has a flag, that

Ireland has a national anthem, and in fact that we have a nationality," declared O'Callaghan.

Upon returning home, the national hero finally began his medical practice and opened an office in Clonmel, where he remained for the next five decades.

But Dr. Pat wasn't quite ready to hang up his spikes. He eventually earned 22 national titles in disciplines that included the high jump and 56-pound weight throw. Still, O'Callaghan yearned for another chance at Olympic glory – and would travel over 8,000km (5,000 miles) to get it.

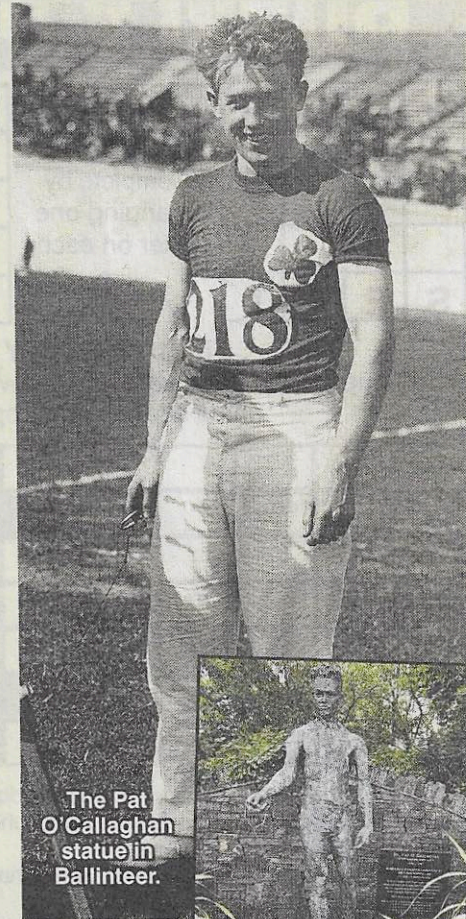
The 1932 Olympic Games in Los Angeles featured plenty of sunshine and glamour at its modern Roman-style Coliseum. Athletes from 37 nations participated in the summer spectacle while hobnobbing with some of Hollywood's biggest stars like Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. and his equally famous actress wife, Mary Pickford.

Christopher Warner tells the story to the Irish Olympic hero who turned down the chance to be 'Tarzan'

But the real drama would star a pair of shamrock-clad Irishmen in search of gold. Shortly after his surprise win in the 400m hurdles, Tipperary's Bob Tisdale was hurriedly summoned to the hammer ring. There, he helped performed surgery with a hacksaw and file on the doc's long spiked shoes, which were ill-suited for the unusually hard surface.

Despite trailing throughout the competition, O'Callaghan unleashed an enormous effort on his final throw to grab victory and raise the Tricolour once again. Unfortunately, it would be his last Olympics.

APOLITICAL SQUABBLE involving Northern Ireland led to a ban of the Irish team at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Nonetheless, the defending champion traveled to the Nazi capital as



a spectator and watched German Karl Hein win the hammer with a toss

well short of O'Callaghan's personal best. Adolf Hitler himself was purportedly obsessed with the hammer throw and had previously dispatched a camera crew to film the Irishman's masterful technique.

Having lived a remarkably full life, Dr. Pat passed away at the age of 85 on 1st December, 1991. An entire nation mourned. Accolades poured in from around the world, and a memorial statue was later raised near the train station in Banteer. Although his story still hasn't received the red carpet treatment yet, film buffs might be interested to learn that MGM boss Louis B. Meyer offered O'Callaghan the role of *Tarzan* back in 1932. The good doctor turned down.

After all, he had patients to see back home in Ireland. The part instead went to another former Olympic champ by the name of Johnny Weismuller. But that, as they say, is another story. ■