

BALLYMORE/COBH AC

Phyllis Kidney

On the formation of BLE, three athletic club's existed in the town of Cobh: Ballymore Athletic and Cycling club, Cobh Athletic and Cycling club who were affiliated to BLE and the ICF and Ballymore ACC. who were affiliated to the NACAI.

Two prominent officials who helped in the formation of BLE. were the late Noel Higgin's who was a member of the NACAI National Executive at the time and the late Brendan Hurley whose main achievements were in the formation of BLOE. In the seventies he was one of the prime movers in the development of Divisions Boards in the County.

It was inevitable that the two BLE clubs in Cobh would unite and a historic meeting took place in the Commodore Hotel in Cobh in November 1967. Tom O'Connor, Glenmore, became the first chairman of Ballymore-Cobh ACC. Other officials elected were Noel Higgins, Brendan Hurley, Billy Ramsell, John McCall, Sean Kennedy, Jerome McCormack to name but a few.

The club won many Club, County, Munster and All-Ireland titles in the 'seventies and club stalwart at the time, Len Braham won a number of International 'caps' in the discus. Other people who were prominent in the field events then were Ken Beazley, Pao O'Donovan and his brother Anthony, and Noel Murphy.

The track men in the 'seventies were the most successful in the history of the club and the talent of Thomas (Tossie) O'Brien, Bill Keogh, Jim Burke, Paddy Meehan, Jer Finn, Hugh O'Neill and Jack Allen gained the club All-Ireland club Championship honours at both cross-country and track and Tossie O'Brien won a gold medal at the Catholic Student Games in Lisbon for the 880 yards event.

Cobh's connection with Villanova University also began in 1968 when Ian Hamilton gained a University scholarship and was a member of two Villanova record breaking team (that also included Dubliner Frank Murphy) at 4X1,500 metres and the distance medley relay. Ian failed by a whisker to qualify for the 1968 Munich Olympics and his tussles with army man Junior Cummins will always be remembered, especially at the clubs open sports meetings at the local GAA field.

Frank and Bernard Walley were the best sprinters around and later gained international honours after transferring to Leevale AC.

The late 'seventies saw Billy Ramsell become chairman with Michael Keating secretary, Geraldine Hennessy treasurer and Sean Kennedy PRO with a committee consisting of Time Pierce, Mrs R.Kelleher, Harry Kelleher, Harry O'Rourke, Jerome McCormack, Rose Mulcahy, Mrs J.Evans and Brendan Hurley.

This era saw the emergence of one of the club's hardest working athletes and official Patrick O'Halloran whose stylish long jumping and triple jumping brought many records and titles back to Cobh. His under 16 long jump mark took a long time to break. Kieran Kelleher and Jimmy Hennessy became the club's sprinters of note with John Keating the best middle distance man around at that time. Gerard McLoughlin was also a noted jumper with All-Ireland titles at Schools and BLOE level to his credit.

Gerard, who was tragically killed in a car accident in July 1981, was most unfortunate not to win a Junior International 'cap', because, after being picked for Ireland he played a game of football two days before he was to go away and broke his ankle.

Another young athlete to make his mark then was the club's present legal advisor Frank Kelleher, whose sprinting and jumping ability were highly talented. Des McLoughlin always let him know he was around. John Davidson was the most outstanding Javelin thrower at that time in the country and was to stay to the forefront at all field events for a long time. His excellence at all disciplines - shot, discus, javelin and pole-vault were a joy to watch with much credit for his success due to the coaching of Anthony O'Donovan whose own son Michael was later to emerge as an All-Ireland champion at the long jump.

There was an excellent group of women with Terry Keating, Rose Collins, Deirdre Alcock, Marcella McCarthy, Marie Kelleher, Geraldine Troupe, Ann O'Reilly and Ann O'Donovan always among the medals. Tina O'Donovan was the most complete woman athlete being equally as good at sprinting, hurdling, jumping and throwing and won many awards up to All-Ireland level until a severe ankle injury prevented her from continuing at the sport she loved. The senior men included Tim Greene, Eddie O'Sullivan and James Collins.

Two athletes who have to be mentioned for their titanic struggles with each other are Billy Carter and Sean Walsh who constantly swapped places for gold and silver medals at County, Munster and All-Ireland level.

In 1982 with Phyllis Kidney taking over as Chairman and Pat O'Halloran using all his ingenuity and coaching ability to keep the club going Ballymore-Cobh AC was entering a difficult time which was to become most rewarding.

Over the years the club had their difficulties with club houses. The first one, which the old Cobh club floated down the river from Verolme Cork Dockyard and erected at the Holy Ground was later brought to the College Field where it served its purpose for many years. Some years ago Phyllis Kidney set up a "Building Fund" committee. With many years of hard work and the help of the Cork County VEC, Phyllis's determination was rewarded in September 1992 when the club's greatest ambassador Sonia O'Sullivan performed the opening of the new solid block club-house on a site adjacent to their training area.

The club committee which includes Phyllis Kidney, Dolores Searls, Ber Hastings, Sheila Cullinane, Catherine Hickey, James Casey, Paul Parker, Sean Kennedy, Dave Daly, Luke Dobbyn, and Vincent Downey made that day one of the most memorable in the club's history with many dignitaries from religious, political and sporting sectors attending the opening. COSPOIR and the Department of Education have to be congratulated on their initiative in grant aiding such a small club.

On the athletic side Phyllis Kidney continues to keep the club to the fore-front of Irish athletics. In each and every one of its twenty five years Ballymore-Cobh AC held one - or more -



At the opening of the new club house in 1992; Dan McCarthy, Chairman of the East Cork Board and Sonia O'Sullivan.

confined juvenile sports and this always produced the good athletes.

The club promoted the Cork-Cobh 15 miles road race - up to a few short years ago when the Navy AC took over - and it was always one of the best promoted races in the country.

Each year the club gives a "Disco" and party to the juveniles and it was at one of these parties that Sonia O'Sullivan, now a legend in Cobh - made her first contact with Ballymore-Cobh AC.

Initially coached by Pat O'Halloran and subsequently by Sean Kennedy, Sonia won every conceivable honour available to her at BLOE, Schools and University level and is far from finished. Sonia gained a scholarship to Villanova University in 1986, thus continuing the clubs association with that University, and has a number of records on the all-time list.

Sonia holds Irish records for 1,000 metres, 1,500, mile, 3,000, and 5,000 and won gold and silver medals at the World University Championships in 1991 for 1,500 and 3,000 metres. The club's first ever senior cross-country team award came in 1991 when James Casey, Paul Parker, Vincent Downey and Dave Daly won the Munster intermediate cross-country Championship. The juveniles who picked up medals at County and Munster level this year include Oliver Searls, Keith McKeown, Liam Kidney, Mark Kidney.

Ballymore-Cobh AC continues to operate as a small club in a sport which has a variety of events, and the present aim is to lay a tartan training area in the near future to cater competently for these more 'technical' events.