

LEEVALE AC

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The spectacular success of Leevale AC has been one of the outstanding features of modern sport in Cork county. That success has been determined not only by the power of the athletes but more so by the manner in which the founder clubs organised and popularized athletics amongst the youth. Fr. Mathew AC started simply as a juvenile club supported and financed by the Fr. Mathew Hall. This new club organised training facilities for the many boys in the city who were not attached to established clubs and was strongly supported by the games-master from various schools and members of Montenotte AC who threw in their lot with the new idea.

From the beginning the club was successful for the simple reason that there was a demand for juvenile organisation and the men behind Fr. Mathew AC had the dedication and efficiency to supply it. After about three years as some boys were moving beyond under-age ranks the club made a major decision: for the purpose of senior athletics they decided to seek amalgamation with Hilltown AC but to maintain the independence of Fr. Mathew as an independent juvenile club.

Hilltown AC, originally based in the Carrigaline area, had been founded in 1956 and always paid special attention to its juvenile are. That policy paid rich dividends with the result that the club became one of the most formidable in the county particularly when it moved into Douglas-Ballinlough district. Hilltown accepted the offer of amalgamation made by Fr. Mathew and so Leevale AC was born. Hilltown juveniles however, continued as a separate club and with Fr. Mathew Juvenile AC provided a powerful source of material for the parent Leevale Club. The formation of a ladies section in 1968 added to the strength and attractiveness of the new combination.

In a very short time Leevale became one of the foremost athletic forces in the country. They have won almost every honour which the sport in Ireland could offer: they have assisted at every level of administration and spread their influence to areas where organised athletics was unknown. Today the club stands with a brilliant past; it is determined on a long and greater future.

The early years of the club were full of successes. In the sprints the Walley brothers, Ann and Finbar Jeffords and Conal Courtney were but a few who secured International recognition and National medals. Brendan Mooney was our foremost quarter man in the 'seventies and the middle and long distance events were in the very capable hands of Donie Walsh, Dick Hodgins, Joe O'Flynn and Pat O'Riordan. Seamus Power was the best high hurdler in the country and John Hunter ensured that the longer hurdles event was also well contested. The throws were in the capable hands of Brendan Coughlan and Paddy Moore. The club boasted of several top class jumpers too; in the high there was John FitzGibbon and somewhat later Brendan Cronin and Dave Murray who was a National Champion and International as was Mick O'Flynn, for many years the best triple jumper in the country. Colm Cronin became National record holder in that

event in the late 'seventies and another good exponent of the event was Fintan O'Shea.

With so much talent it was hardly surprising that honours came rapidly and in quick succession to Leevale. The National track and field leagues were won for three years in succession from their inception. Over cross-country Donie Walsh proved himself the National champion several times and on the roads there were few in the country better. The Quinlan, Miskimmon and Oman Cups were all won regularly and National marathon titles fell to Donie Walsh and Dick Hodgins.

Leevale were also the first club from Ireland to compete in the European inter-club contest and were also the first club to win an inter-club International cross-country abroad. Thus the club was very vibrant from its inception.

In the 'eighties Micheal Kiernan showed just how good a sprinter he was through being a National Champion and other high class athletes in these years included Tony O'Leary, Paul and Aidan O'Regan and Ger Horan. All did well at Provincial and National level.

This situation continues to the present day with many top class athletes still in the Leevale colours. The Haddock brothers are still the duo to beat at National level to secure medals and Tim Barry, Mick Murphy and Stephen Fleming are all top class sprinters. Middle and long distance running is in the hands of the very capable Pat Shine, Der O'Donovan, Ray Shanahan Brother John Dooley and Dick Hodgins who ensure that there is quite a pool of talent under their firm grip. Middle and long distance running has always been a highlight and besides the exploits of Marcus O'Sullivan, others to have come to the forefront include Mark Carroll, Dave Healy, Trevor Foolkes, Darren Keenan, Ken Nason, John Murray and Declan O'Callaghan to name but a few of the very talented crop..

Brid Murphy won the National marathon Championship in 1992, thereby carrying on that particular tradition in the club. The women won the National 'B' League last year, this through quite an all-round effort rather than any one individual. Although it should be added that Clair Ingerton scored well and is among the top long jumpers in the country.

In the throws Paddy Moore is as youthful as ever and last year had the distinction of winning National Championship medals in the 'sixties, 'seventies, 'eighties and now of course the 'nineties. Paddy won his first National medal in 1967 and on the 25th Anniversary Championship was still throwing well enough for a bronze. This year (1993) he broke the National over 45 best in the javelin with a return of 57,48 - a distance just off the bronze! At a younger age is Dyan Sheehan who is among a good group of youthful throwers in the Club. The high jump is in the hands of Peter Ruby who is capable at the moment of clearing 2,10 metres and the Hallahan brothers, Michael and Brian are two very talented horizontal jumpers. Michael is an Irish international in the long and has a best of 7,38 metres. Among the hurdlers in the Club are brother and sister, Dave and Aisling Power whose father was a Champion in his time. The future looks very bright.