

St FINBARR'S AC

Reggie Hayes

The club was founded in 1951 as an extension of the Boys Club by Canon Cashman RIP, Dick Day, Mick Barry RIP and Paddy Hennessy becoming affiliated to the then NACA Cork County Athletics' Board. With the formation of BLE in 1967 the club became affiliated to the new athletics organization.

St Finbarr's has been one of the strongest clubs in BLE since its inception and has been involved in every facet from competition through administration and officiating and the general promotion of athletics.

During the period of time since the formation of BLE we have had a number of homes. At the formation of BLE we were based in Kate Kearneys or Musgrave Park - to the uninitiated. We then moved to Carrigmore, the home of Old Christians. After that we moved to the Model Yacht club on the Lough which we rented and then moved to C.B.C. in Landsdown - the top of St. Patricks Hill.

Each time we moved premises we tended to loose quite a number of our juvenile members and so on the 18th of July 1977 a Special General Meeting of the club was held at which it was decided that we would build a club at the Lough and the official opening was held on April 30th 1978 and was opened by the Lord Mayor of Cork Mr Gerald Goldberg. We were the first club in Cork to build our own club house. This we felt was very important for all the members and so the club was naturally very strong as a result.

We were also one of the first clubs to admit female members long before equality of opportunity and we were extremely lucky with the members that we had. Among some of our top ones were Elaine Kelly, Joan Fleming, Mary Doyle, Mary O'Sullivan, Mary Endes, Eleanor English, Ann Coughlan, Doris Manning, Joy Good, Marion Stanton, Mary Dempsey, Rose Crockett, Rose O'Brien, Rita O'Brien, Rita Murphy, Joan and Mary O'Neil, Catherine O'Leary, Betty Herlihy and many many more. Most of these winning county, regional and national titles on the roads and over cross-country and in track and field generally. Some also achieved International success.

On the men's side we were also extremely powerful with many household names the like of John and Denis Buckley, Jack and Flor O'Leary, Fergus O'Donovan, Joe Barry, Noble and Barry Johnson, Ritchie Crowley, Pat O'Connell, Thomas McCarthy, Ricki Burke, Michael and Denis Dooley, Jerry Beckett, Denis Manning, Pat Ryan, Billy Horgan, Noel Shannon, Len Braham, the Crotty brothers, Declan Ahern, John O'Kelly-Lynch, Colm Murphy, Joe Hartnett, Bill Thierfelder, Pat Nugent, Pat Moore, Frank Loneragan, Martin and Pat Lynch, among many many more.

During the period that we were based between the Lough and C.B.C. we developed a massive gathering of top juveniles some sent to us by Brother McGrath such as Owen, Tom and Jim Crotty, Declan Ahern. Then Fred Gilbert brought his two sons Tony and Declan add to that Terry Comiskey. The Ryan twins, Donal and Edward, were also very capable athletes and this was a very exciting time for Cork athletics and the St Finbarr's Athletic

Club itself.

As I mentioned already, as part of our commitment to the development of athletics in Cork we promoted many fixtures both at track and field level and cross country. Some of our major ones were the county senior track and field and also the county junior track and field. Cross country was obviously a difficult one to promote being a city club however we did manage to promote the county senior cross country and also the novice.

We have continued this to this day and still continue to promote many road races. We also originally promoted some street leagues with the intention of initiating new members into the club. At present the club promotes the Nike Cork City Half Marathon which ranks the nearest in prestige to the Ballycotton race and this coming year will also incorporate the national half marathon championship..

In the early 'eighties - during the great jogging boom - the club was again to the fore in promoting this section of the sport under the watchful eye of Bart O'Sullivan and Humphrey Kerins. Many of our present ladies section has come through these ranks.

Also as the club has matured we have also developed a very strong veteran's section and stalwarths such as Eric Crockett, Flor and Jack O'leary, Pat Ryan and many many more have become rejuvenated. The most outstanding has obviously been John Buckley and his crowning achievement has been his medals haul in the World Veteran's Championships last year and how proud we all were to meet him on his return. John of course has accumulated quite an outstanding collection of European and World championship medals in recent years.

As I have already mentioned we have also participated at every facet of the sport and this has also been seen at County Regional and National level. Many of our people first gained excellent grounding at club and committee level before going to board meetings and then further developing into officer material.

The County Board was under the chairmanship of John O'Connell for many years to be followed by Martin Lynch, Reg Hayes and Michael Dooley. Martin later went on to the Regional Council and became secretary and Reg was the first County Board Chairman to serve two terms - covering six years in all - in that position. Other officers at County level include Pat Buckley who was Vice Chairman and at present, Tom Stanton continues the tradition of officership. Pierce McNamara was also an officer at Southern Region level and Bill Nestor served as County Board Starter for many a year and was also County Board Secretary and PRO. Reg Hayes, of course, later went on to become Vice Chairman of the Regional Council and eventually became National President.

However we have no fear for the future of the club with the great tradition that it has behind it, it will continue to develop and you will find that the club can hold its head with pride and we will all be looking forward to the 50th celebrations at the turn of the century.