

Leevale Seek Limelight

By **BRENDAN
MOONEY**

Famed Shandon steeple, Cork's friendly liar, casts its long shadow across the doorstep while merely the putt of a shot away the River Lee slows to a restful pace having all but reached its destination. Leevale Athletic Club has finally found its roots in the area that gave it its name . . .

THREE times National League champions, Leevale A.C. has produced a host of record breakers and international stars and pioneered Ireland's entry into European inter-club competition. By its own standards the club has gone through lean times of late but the new premises, purchased at a cost of £40,000 coincides with a new spirit within the ranks and a determined drive to decorate the new sideboard.

The new clubhouse is next door to Cork's new multi-storey car park and is situated at the top of Dalton's Avenue, adjacent to Lavitt's Quay — an ideal location right in the heart of Cork City.

It provides the club with every facility — 4,000 square feet of gym, committee rooms, showers and a sauna. Before next September the Club will have spent a further £12,000 in internal reconstruction and the provision of facilities that will include special nets to enable shot putters and discus throwers to practice indoors and also facilities that will cater for the wheelchair athletes attached to Leevale.

To help pay for this project a 10-year membership scheme is offered at a cost of £200. The club hopes at least 60 members will avail of the scheme and the response, even at this stage, has been enthusiastic.

The move from Ballinlough to the city centre has ushered in another new era for Leevale. The club was formed in 1966 when agreement was reached on the amalgamation of city-based Fr. Matthews A.C. and suburban Hilltown A.C. The amalgamation was significant in two respects. It brought together a formidable squad of senior athletes and provided the new club with a top class team of dedicated officials.

The rise to fame was swift and spectacular. By 1969 the club had won Irish youths and junior men's titles and the ladies followed suit by winning the national intermediate title in 1972. The senior men took a grip on the Cork county championship that ran right through to the season just past. They won the Quinlan Cup in Tullamore in 1970 and 1974 and were runners-up in 1968, 1969, 1972 and 1973.

Liverpool

By 1968 they had begun to pursue their fortunes abroad and that year and in 1969 they were runners up in the Waterloo Road Races in Liverpool. In 1970 they succeeded in winning the Liverpool Post and Echo Trophy. It looked just a matter of time before they would take the national senior inter-club cross-country title but this honour has eluded them to this day. They finished second several times — again this year when they were rank outsiders at Kilmacow.

Out of this early swell of enthusiasm exploded a new star who was to epitomise the spirit from which the club blossomed. Donie Walsh quickly made his mark on distance running and was soon to achieve distinction further afield as a key



Front row L. to R.: J. Murphy, B. Hodgins, A. Leahy, D. Walsh, T. O'Leary.
Back Row L. to R.: M. Harte, (Vets), G. Horan (Junior), C. Forde (Schools), D. Murray, M. Walsh.

figure in Junbo Elliot's Wildcat squad at Villanova.

His amazing record in cross-country running began when he finished sixth in the nationals in 1968. He then left for Villanova but returned to win the national title in 1973 and 1974. He was second in 1975, won again in 1976, was third in 1977 and won in 1978. He was fourth in 1979, the year he won a silver medal with the Irish team at the world championships in Limerick and he finished fifth the following year.

He won national 10,000 metres titles in 1970 and 1971, was second in 1972 and won again in 1973, 1974 and 1975. He set an Irish record when he ran 28.52 at the European Championships in Helsinki and the previous year he was fourth in the world university games. He won the national marathon championship title in Athlone in 1972 and represented Ireland in this event at the Olympic Games in Munich that year.

The national track and field leagues got under way in 1973 — a time when Leevale had a host of internationals to draw from — Frank and Bernard Walley and Finbarr Jeffords in the sprints, Dick Hodgins who won the national marathon title in 1975, steeplechaser Pat O'Riordan, triple jump record holder Colm Cronin, long jump champion Mick O'Flynn, national 110m hurdles champin, Seamus Power, Javelin record holder Pat Moore and shot putt champion Brendan Coughlan.

New talent emerged in the form of athletes like high jumpers Brendan Cronin and Dave Murray, who was subsequently to dominate this

event and they won the league title in 1973, 1974 and 1975. As champions, they represented Ireland in the European inter-club championships in Rieti and Wolverhampton.

Athletes achieved remarkable success in a short time and while the club always prided itself in the honour this brought it, it worked against them in some areas for the drift to America drained them of many top performers. Apart from Donie Walsh, several others crossed the Atlantic.

Kieran O'Donovan went out and many others followed suit. Marcus O'Sullivan and John Hunter were on the Villanova team that set the world record for 4 x 800 metres while Ger O'Callaghan went to Nebraska. Noel Shannon went to East Tennessee, Leonard O'Regan to Louisiana, Sean O'Flynn and Niamh Walsh to the University of Richmond and at least two more will travel out next Autumn.

Women internationals also flourished in the club. Fionnuala Morrish, Joy Murphy, Anne Jeffords, Niamh Walsh, Carol Leahy, Anne Leahy and Marie Buckley all represented Ireland at senior level while Tina Hegarty, Patty Delaney and Carol Forde were schools internationals and Deirdre Murphy, an outstanding all round athlete and schools international both in sprints and hurdles is a recent addition to the squad.

Other athletes like Moss Finn, Michael Kiernan and Jim Bowen, who have made their mark in international rugby, were sprint champions with Leevale while G.A.A. stars like

Danny Buckley and young Barry Coffey, also competed and continue to compete in the black and amber. International canoeist, Sheila O'Byrne is also a club member.

Facilities

The Year of the Disabled saw a number of wheelchair athletes avail of the club advice or facilities and this number continues to prosper with international stars like John Twomey, Cathy Dunne-Fitzpatrick, and Kay McShane leading the way. They train with the club and with the new facilities it is hoped that the numbers will increase.

On any one night 110 athletes will assemble at the club premises while upwards of 200 juveniles will take part in the evening training sessions during the summer months. But the club refuses to project the juveniles.

"Our aim is to develop the young athletes not just to be good senior athletes but in such a way that they will be able to enjoy the sport for the rest of their lives." Finbarr O'Brien explains. "It's not the end when an athlete retires. Leevale caters for all aspects of the sport and for all athletes." He points out that a referral system has evolved in the coaching of athletes. When an athlete joins the club, he or she is assessed and referred to the coach most suitable to his needs. The athlete is given an opportunity to try all the events. "The problem arises when a 20 stone man decides he wants to do the marathon," he adds.

At each session nine of 12 coaches will be involved at the different levels and different age groups. The running boom has brought an added but welcome strain on the club and joggers are now an integral part of the club.



More Club Members.

Finally, we leave the last word to founder member and current club chairman Kevin Barry.

"The great strength of Leevale is that it has a group of dedicated officials, many with family commitments who are prepared to give of their time and energy to insure that the present generation of Leevale Athletes will be instructed in the most up-to-date methods of training possible in the event most suited to them. But

more important still that no matter how talented or limited a member's ability is, their own personal goal or achievement is more important to us than anything they can achieve for our club.

Anyone wishing to join the club should come to our club house at Dalton's Avenue, off Cornmarket Street any Tuesday or Thursday night 7.30 p.m. — 9.00 p.m.

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