

The Matt Maloney Legend

MY research into marathon running has turned up some interesting information from all parts of the country. Many of our athletes competed in the USA in the early part of the century and while some like Tom Hynes and J. J. Daly from Galway were well known in Ireland, others like Matt Maloney from Co. Clare never competed in Ireland before they emigrated.

I am indebted to Senan Finucane, South Circular Road, Dublin for the following information about his uncle, Matt Maloney, who was one of the leading marathon runners in the USA during the golden era of marathoning when the World was still agog from the dramatic finish in the 1908 Olympic Games in London. The Italian Dorando Pietri entered the stadium

leading the marathon, staggered the wrong way and collapsed. He was aided by helpful supporters who carried him over the line and was consequently disqualified. An Irish-American, Johnny Hayes, took the Gold Medal for America, but Dorando created a sensation and captured the admiration and sympathy of the world. Hayes, in fact, never got proper recognition for his very sensibly run marathon race.

Dorando was at death's door for a few days with his heart a half an inch out of place. He recovered and was presented with a Gold Cup from the British Monarch, Queen Alexandra. This most thrilling event had caught the world's imagination. Dorando and Hayes went to the USA and started challenge race marathons and match races that were to last for three or four years. Many Irish runners took part in these events which were for large money prizes and it was not unusual to see the victor in an indoor marathon race take home \$10,000 for his night's work.

Matt Maloney was born in Coolameen, Co. Clare on the 26th October, 1882 and baptised in his local Catholic church the same day. He took part in local Gaelic football matches but never took part in athletics. At the age of 20 he left for the US and did not take part in his first race till 1907 at the age of 25. I have perused his letters to his mother and even though they are slightly faded after 75 years, we can follow the young Irishman's story. Maloney never mentions anything about prior preparation but on the Celtic 6 Miles Cross Country course he finished 3rd in the National Junior Championships of New York and his club Trinity captured the team prize. This was his first ever race.

Yonkers Marathon

With a few more races under his belt he took to marathon running and here is how he describes the Yonkers Marathon race from Rye to New York City, 1908. "When I arrived at Rye, the starting point, I was accompanied by my attendant, Harry McGrath. Among my friends in the automobile were J. J. Lynch, J. J.



Providence Rhode Island 20 miles match race. Winner: Matt Maloney 1.56.46.

By NOEL HENRY

Corkery, and D. C. Nolan. I made up my mind that I just had to beat Mike Crowley, the star of the Irish American club in New York.

"Matt" said McGrath to me, "I want you to win to day, you can do it". "I am sure . . .", I answered, "I will try by best. Harry, and if I don't land the prize it won't be my fault".

Stray Dog My Mascot

Just then a big brown dog trotted along and I said "Harry, keep him with you until the start, and if he follows me I will win". Naturally it was my desire to win the Evening Journal's big event and when I started off with the bunch my heart went pit-a-pat . . . "that will never do". I said to myself, "I must not get nervous" and I threw off that feeling at once.

I set out on my usual pace, six minutes to the mile. After going a mile I looked around and sure enough, I was being followed by the dog, who, by the way, quit at the seventh mile. Shortly after this stage of the race I took over the lead from Crowley, who had been leading the field till then. I was going fine, not a bit worried and my stride was easy. My attendant in the autocar was right alongside me. There were many good runners behind me, such as Fred Lorz, James Clarke, and John Resinice, but I said to myself forget about everyone else in the race, but remember, you have to beat Crowley!

At about 20 miles, reached in 2 hours 13 minutes, it seemed to me that Crowley who was still on my heels, was not going quite as well as I was. This seemed strange for Crowley had the best of the road. However, it was fair going where I was and I held my own. (this referred to the large crowds packing the road in autocars and impeding some of the runners) . . . I knew in my heart that I had Crowley beaten and so I took my time about things. Gradually I forged ahead and inch by inch I opened up a gap between myself and my most dangerous opponent. We soon struck the City limits, I could hear the people shouting "who is that in the lead"? . . . I could see the thousands of men, women and children and hear them cheering me on. It then came to me to try for the record. I let out a few links (an old

country expression), increased my pace a little, but not too much, for I wanted to have a little left for a sprint. The time for the sprint finally came and I turned on full power. When I came to the finishing point, I had to ask people in an automobile where the actual finishing line was." Mike Crowley was some hundred yards behind in second place. My time was 2 hours 58 mins. (In Matt Maloney's letter he does not mention whether he beat the record, which I presume, meant the course record).

American Marathon

Another letter reported on The American Marathon held on 8th January, 1909 at Madison Square Gardens, New York . . . this was one of the many track (indoor) marathon races which were so popular with the public at the time . . . 32 runners started . . . unfortunately Matt only mentions two other runners in the course of his description of the race. Mellor, a well known American runner, and Maloney's favourite rival, Mike Crowley of the Irish American club of New York . . . "This was one of my best races and made up my mind that I was going to turn professional in a short time . . . in the race I let the others do all the early pace making and it was not until after the seventeenth mile mark that I challenged for the lead. I led for two miles and Crowley again took over and actually led me by ten yards at the 20 mile mark which he reached in 2 hours 7 mins and 11 secs. I forged ahead again and slowly pulled away from the field to beat Crowley by two laps . . ." Matt's letter gives the undernoted times at each mile of the race:

1. Mellor leads at 4.56. 3. Mellor leads at 16.56. 6. Mellor leads at 38.21. 9. Mellor leads at 52.49. 12. Mellor leads at 1.11.00. 15. Crowley at 1.32.15. 16. Crowley leads at 1.39.07. 17. Crowley leads at 1.46.07. 18. Maloney leads at 1.53.20. 19. Maloney leads at 2.00.15. 20. Crowley leads at 2.7.11. 21. Maloney leads at 2.14.35. 22. Maloney leads at 2.21.44. 23. Maloney leads at 2.29.46. 24. Maloney leads at 2.36.51. 25. Maloney leads at 2.44.50. 26. Maloney leads at 2.53.06. 26 miles 385 yards 2.54.45.

Matt Maloney's time for the 25 miles Indoor set a new World Record. The previous best was set by American runner J. Gassman at Williamsburg Long Island, New York on 22nd February 1884. Gassman's time was 2 hours 52.24.

As far as I can ascertain, Maloney's record still stands as races over this distance on the boards i.e.: some 210 laps of 220 yards have long since been discontinued.

The World's Almanac of 1962 in its 77th year of issue shows Matt Maloney's record still standing at that time. I presume it has not been beaten since that date. As a matter of interest, on the same page of the almanac I just happened to notice another Irishman's record . . . a certain Ron Delany set a World record for the indoor mile in New York on the 7th March, 1959 with a time of 4.01.4! A quarter of a century later yet another one of our greats, Eamonn Coghlan, carries on the indoor record breaking tradition, started by the Clare man Maloney, this time breaking 3.50 for the mile.

Shortly after his Madison Square win, Matt Maloney joined the professional ranks and over the next few years is reputed to have made quite a sizeable fortune in the marathon game.

His first professional race was a match race against fellow Irishman, Pat White from Donabate, Co. Dublin. An old uncle of mine had often told me about races he witnessed in North County Dublin venues between White and Tom Hynes, the Galway runner. Again, large crowds attended these races at which large side bets were the great attraction.

The match race between Maloney and White was held at Sixty Ninth Regiment Armoury, New York City and was over 26 miles and 385 yards.

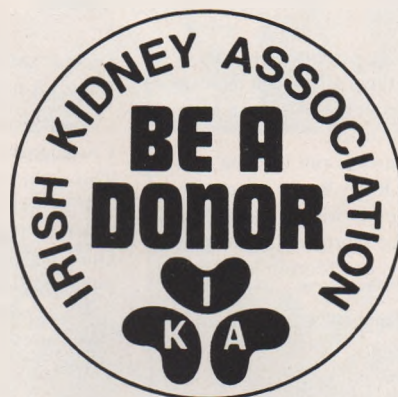
In the early laps Maloney set a fine pace and led his opponent until the three mile mark where White took over and made the pace faster and by 18 miles Pat White led the Clare man by over two laps. At that stage Matt Maloney commenced to reduce White's lead and surprisingly, White disappointed his many supporters by dropping out of the race altogether, leaving Maloney to gain his first victory as a professional in the easiest possible manner . . . this was Maloney's seventh successive win over the full marathon distance.

When reading Matt's correspondence two things struck me: the runners seemed to never have heard the old saying "Pace kills, not distance" as they always seemed to do the first few miles very fast in relation to their finishing times. The other point that I noticed was that marathons were run in very close proximity of each other. Of course with money to be made it was a case of "making hay while the sun shines". The attendance at some of these marathon races was often in the region of 20,000 people at open arenas and photographs shown to me by Senan Finucane show these crowds, mucky tracks, and our heroes in full flight.

A native of Co. Clare

Senan Finucane, a native of Co. Clare, now 67 years young spent his life in the ranks of the Garda. He was Superintendent in Kanturk, Co. Cork for nine years and spent his last five years prior to retirement in Bray, Co. Wicklow. Footballer, Athlete, and swimmer, he is still very fit and active. He and his wife regularly swim in the open sea, all the year round and Senan still takes part in an odd road race.

WOMENS' 10km



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