

LOCAL SPORTS STARS

BY FRANK WATTERS

While many people are, on the face of it, not interested in sport, few can resist being caught up in the excitement, or feel a glow of pride, when a local individual or team achieves something outstanding in their chosen sport. Our sporting heroes come in various forms, but any success with local associations, I suppose, makes us realise that we can be just as good as those from more lofty or glamorous surroundings.

A way back in the early years of the last century, around the time of the First World War there was some very informal interest in boxing locally. Someone had acquired two pairs of boxing gloves and the young fellows of that era would sometimes meet at night in McSherry's forge in Church Street, and take part in impromptu boxing or sparring matches. By far the best boxer in the group was the late Eiver Monaghan. He was, by all accounts, a very skilful and strong boxer. None of the locals was in the same class and Eiver found it hard to get opponents locally.

However, at that time there were many young men hired on local farms and when a new batch arrived, after the hiring fair, it was customary to invite them to the boxing. My father used to tell us how big, raw, uncouth lumps of men from South Armagh would come in, who really fancied themselves as boxers. A bit like lambs to the slaughter, they would be happily matched against Eiver. They could never manage to land a blow, but Eiver would let them dance and flail round for a while before, as my father put it, *'he knocked them in under the anvil.'* When Eiver later emigrated to the United States he took part in a few boxing matches and acted as sparring partner for several 'Golden gloves' contenders.

Greyhound racing

Loughadian

Mrs Mary Morrow, who lived in Aughan Park, had in her house two large solid silver cups which I often admired. Quite a long number of years ago, I was given an old sepia photograph of a greyhound which, I must say was not a particularly impressive looking dog. But as any of you who have had any dealings with greyhounds will know, there's one thing for sure, you can't go by appearances.

The greyhound in question was 'Loughadian', named after the local townland, and it was Loughadian, who won the cups that Mrs Morrow had on her sideboard. Loughadian was a brindled bitch, owned by Mrs Morrow's brother, Joe (Joby) Canavan. Loughadian enjoyed great success in 1928 and 1929, winning many races.



Loughadian

The first of the two cups was the *Nursery Cup* for young greyhounds won at Celtic Park, Belfast in 1929. When asked to name a famous greyhound, most Irish people are likely say, *'Master McGrath'*. And if asked to name another, the more knowledgeable might say, *'Mick the Miller'*. Well in 1929 at Shelbourne Park in Dublin in the final of The Easter Cup, Loughadian rubbed shoulders with that great greyhound. I'd love to be able to say Loughadian won, but in fact she did not, nor, indeed did Mick the Miller. I can't even tell you whether Loughadian finished ahead or behind the great champion, for the news paper result just named the first two with the rest *'also ran'*.

The second cup is *The Breeder's Cup*, a major competition also run at Shelbourne Park, Dublin that Loughadian won later in 1929. When the victorious dog and jubilant party arrived back in Poyntzpass there were great scenes of excitement. Loughadian and the cup paraded through the streets and a tar barrel was set alight in the village-square, the traditional way of celebrating a great event. Sadly Loughadian's career ended abruptly when shortly after winning the Breeders' Cup she was injured while training in a field in Killysavan and, as a result, never raced again. Incidentally Mick the Miller went on to become *'the world's most famous greyhound.'* He won 46 races including the greyhound Derby twice and the St Leger, and later starred in the film *'Wild Boy'* His embalmed remains are preserved in a glass case in the Rothschild Zoological Museum at Tring in Hertfordshire, where it attracts around 60,000 visitors each year.

Horse racing

Little Owl

Many would think that the Aintree Grand National is the prize jumping horse owners or trainers would most covet. That's not strictly true for, while the Grand National is a great spectacle, it is a handicap. That

means that all the horses are not starting on equal terms, for some carry much more weight than others. However, the race that really determines which horse is the true champion steeplechaser, in any given year, is the Cheltenham Gold Cup, where all the top steeplechasers meet on equal terms. Great racing men and women, right up to the late Queen Mother, have striven to breed a horse worthy of running in the race, let alone winning it. Now in 1981 the winner of this, the most prestigious steeplechase of the year, was a horse called 'Little Owl'. *Little Owl* was bred by Mrs Grahamie Ferris in Brannock, at the top of the Chapel Hill and he grazed in those fields till he was three years old.



Grahamie Ferris with "Little Owl"

Mrs Ferris had a brood mare called *Black Spangles*, which she bought from her brother-in-law Harry and sister-in-law Anne, and *Little Owl* was her third foal. The sire was *Cantab*, which was owned by the legendary W.E. Rooney, who rode at Taylorstown and other point-to-points for many, many years. While *Black Spangles's* first two foals turned out to be too small for racing, her third foal was bigger and had much more scope. When the colt was three years old, and unbroken and unnamed, Mrs Ferris and her late husband, Jack, took him to the sales at Fairyhouse. They were not satisfied with the highest bid on the day, so they brought him home again to Brannock and determined to take him to the sales at Doncaster.

Accompanied by Jack's brother, Harry, they travelled to Doncaster, where he was sold for £2,500, to the well-known trainer Peter Easterby, whose stable was at Malton, Yorkshire. Easterby was acting for Mrs Bobby Gundry, an elderly lady, who named the colt '*Little Owl*', why is not known. When Mrs Gundry died in March 1980, her nephews Jim and Robin Wilson inherited *Little Owl*. Jim Wilson, an outstanding amateur jockey, rode *Little Owl* in nearly all his races and in the Gold Cup, which he won in 1981. In doing so Jim Wilson completed a remarkable double for an amateur rider, for he had won the Champion Hurdle on *Sea Pigeon*, the previous day. Prior to his Gold Cup triumph, *Little Owl* had run eight times in the 1980-81 season winning seven races. In the other race a loose horse brought him down, when leading. This was his only defeat in 14 steeplechases prior to Cheltenham. Before the big race

Jim Wilson was supremely confident in *Little Owl's* ability, describing him as "a *Rolls Royce*."



Little Owl clears the final fence at Cheltenham 1981

Following his Gold Cup success Peter Easterby said, "I bought *Little Owl* as an unbroken three-year old and nobody wanted him at the time. He was big and backward but after four months, I knew I had something out of the ordinary and immediately predicted that one day he would win the Gold Cup."

The winner's prize for the Gold Cup was £44,258.75 and altogether, in the season, he won prize money not far short of £100,000. Had the races been run in Ireland the breeder would have received 10% of the prize money, but in this case Mrs Ferris received nothing.

However her achievement was recognised by the Irish Thoroughbred Breeders Association, for Mrs Grahamie Ferris was named '*Leading National Hunt Breeder of 1981*,' at the annual dinner and award ceremony in March 1981. *Little Owl* was voted '*National Hunt Horse of the Year*' and also '*Chaser of the Year*'. (The leading flat race breeder was H.H Aga Khan and the leading 3 year-old colt was *Shergar*.) For *Little Owl*, only seven years old, the future seemed extremely bright. He seemed likely to be a contender for several years to come. John Oaksey described him as "a horse that has everything. Who knows how far *Little Owl*, with luck, may go in the next four years, toward equalling *Arkle's* record of winning at four Cheltenham!" But the 'with luck' part of John Oaksey's statement was prophetic for luck deserted *Little Owl* the following year. After a rest during the summer and an easy win first time out the following season, he was sensationally pulled-up when odds-on favourite in a three horse race at Wincanton in January 1982. It was discovered that he had a breathing problem and, following a botched operation, he never ran again.

Anne Ferris

Until recently, the most successful lady rider in the history of National Hunt and point-to-point racing in Ireland was Anne Ferris of Cloughinney, Jerrettspass. Anne is the daughter of W.E. (Willie) Rooney and she followed in her father's footsteps by riding horses almost before she could walk. She rode in her first point-to-point at Lisnalinchy when she was only 14. She won that race and indeed won her first four races in public. She was N. Ireland champion point-to-point jockey 6 times and All-Ireland champion in 1979. She won the Ulster Grand National on *Mourneview* in 1976, the first lady rider to do so, and won it again on *Bentom Boy* in 1984.



Anne Ferris on Bentom Boy on their way to their historic Irish Grand National win

However, she really won a unique place in the history of steeplechasing, when on *Bentom Boy*, she won the 1984 Irish Grand National at Fairyhouse. *Bentom Boy* was trained by Anne's father, and owned jointly by two Newry-men, Benny Reilly and Tom Dorrian, (after whom the horse was named). Anne was the first lady rider to win this famous race, which is second only in prestige to the Aintree Grand National. (Until 2011, when Nina Carberry won the race on *Organisedconfusion*, Anne was the only lady rider to have won the race). Thereafter, everything was a bonus. She won the Ulster Grand National for a third time on *Androy* in 1986 and the Schweppes Hurdle on *Ayrian* at Leopardstown.

Apart from jump-racing, Anne had many successes on the flat. She won The Rose of Tralee Cup at Tralee but was beaten by a short-head in a photo finish at Ripon in the Ladies' Derby. She also had a successful career as a show-jumper and represented Ireland three times, at Dublin, Belfast and Amsterdam. On one occasion at Dublin Horse Show riding *Millionaire* she beat Pat Smythe who was riding *Tosca*. Anne rode at point-to-points and steeplechases for over 30 years. She sustained her share of injuries but still managed to successfully combine the roles of mother, housewife, jockey, trainer and breeder.

Poyntzpass, the horse

Most people take time out to watch the Grand National and in 1980, 1981 and 1982 Poyntzpass people had more reason than ever to be interested, for one of the runners was a horse called *Poyntzpass*.

Poyntzpass was owned by a successful southern business man called Jim Gleeson whose mother Gertie (nee Byrne) was born in 1899, in the house which is now TPM Credit Union Office in Church Street, Poyntzpass. Her father, John Byrne, was a shoemaker and had his workshop on the ground floor where the Credit Union waiting room is today.

Jim Gleeson owned several horses and one of them he called after his mother's birthplace, Poyntzpass. *Poyntzpass*, half-brother of *Captain Christie*, won in all 16 races in Ireland and England, but not the Grand National. However the horse was an excellent jumper and finished every time. Jim Gleeson sold *Poyntzpass* to a well-known amateur rider Broderick Monro Wilson and he rode *Poyntzpass* several times in the Topham Trophy, also run over the Grand National fences. All in all *Poyntzpass* jumped 150 Grand National fences without mishap.

Gaelic Football

There has been a Gaelic Football Club in Poyntzpass off and on since the 1920's and, while the club won the Armagh Junior championship in 1997, success at club level has been very limited. However, the Poyntzpass area has produced a number of outstanding Gaelic footballers. Sadly most of them opted not to play for their local club.



Jim Pat McSherry

During the 1920's and 1930's one of the local Gaelic stars was **Jim Pat McSherry**. Jim Pat played for several local clubs including Lissummon and Whitecross as well as Poyntzpass. He played centre-forward and was a robust, strong, direct 'go through you' rather than 'go round you' type of player.

He had a tremendously powerful shot and specialised in 'burying the goalkeeper', a tactic which was permitted at the time. His forceful play didn't always endear him to his

opponents and he was at the centre of an odd fracas. Jim Pat was a regular for Armagh and represented Ulster in the Railway Cup inter-provincial series which was then a huge event

During that same era another outstanding local Gaelic footballer was **Paddy Convery**. He was in many ways the opposite of Jim Pat for he was much less physical in his approach to the game. He also played for various local clubs including Lissummon and for Armagh on many occasions and represented Ulster with distinction. Incidentally Lissummon club had at one time six players on the Armagh county team, at that time a record that has recently been equalled by Crossmaglen. Jim Pat's brother, **Tommy John** was also an excellent player of both Gaelic and soccer. He played for the local Gaelic team under his own name and for Glenn in Co. Down under an assumed name. He had the unique distinction of being chosen for both sides when Armagh met Down at junior level played at the Abbey Grounds in Newry. As a staunch Armagh supporter, he chose to play for Armagh.



Joe Lennon with the Sam Maguire Cup 1968

The most successful local sportsman during the 1960's, **Joe Lennon**, was born in Church Street, Poyntzpass, in 1934. However, when he was 11 years-old his family moved to a small farm less than a mile from the village, which took them into Co. Down. This was probably the most significant move of his career, for had Joe's family remained in Poyntzpass, he would have played for Armagh who were at that time, going through one of their periodic slumps. The chances are that had the family stayed in Armagh, he would have won nothing. So the move a half a mile or so to the east was all-important, for Joe, as a result, played his football for Aghaderg in Co. Down and was to become a permanent member of the great Down Gaelic football team of the 1960's.

Joe's record speaks for itself. He won three All-Ireland titles, in 1960, 1961 and in 1968, when he was captain of the team; he won three National Football Leagues, in 1960, 1962 and in 1968 (as captain); with Ulster he won four Railway Cup medals, 1960, 1964, 1966 and 1968 (captain) and seven Ulster Senior Football Championships between 1959 and 1970.

Joe was, and is, after his team-mate Sean O'Neill, the second most successful Gaelic football from Ulster, of all time.

He began his footballing career playing with the locals and remembers playing with Jim Pat and Tommy John McSherry in Magennis's Meadow. Mick Waddell gave him great encouragement and brought him to his first big match, the Ulster football final of 1952 when Antrim played Cavan. When Joe, as captain of Down, became the first Armagh man to receive the Sam Maguire Cup in 1968, one of the first places he brought it to was his native village, and one of his first ports of call was Mick Waddell's shop. The cup was placed in the window.

Joe wrote a very successful book on fitness and techniques for Gaelic Football and is an acknowledged expert on the rules of the game.



Brian Canavan joint-manager of Armagh 2000 Ulster Champions

Between the 1930's, when Jim Pat McSherry's county career ended and 1978 when **Brian Canavan** made his debut against Cavan, no local had represented Armagh in senior Gaelic football. Brian joined the Armagh squad a year after they had won the Ulster championship in 1977. Brian played his club football with Carrickcruppen and played for Armagh for fourteen consecutive seasons, rarely missing a match. He won Ulster Championship medals in 1980 and 1982 losing in the All-Ireland semi-final on both occasions. He reached two National League Finals losing to Down in 1983 and Monaghan in 1985 and represented Ulster in the Railway Cup in 1982.

Throughout the 1980's Brian Canavan was one of the stalwarts of the team, which enjoyed considerable success in the National League, but none in the Championship, as Armagh were beaten in several Ulster finals. Brian captained Armagh in the 1990 season at the end of which he retired from inter-county football. In 1996, following a particularly bleak run by a succession of managers, he became joint-manager of Armagh along with Brian McAlinden. Over the next three years they set about building a team and their efforts were rewarded in 1999 when Armagh won the Ulster Championship for the first time in 17 years. They repeated the performance the following year and were desperately unlucky not to reach the All-Ireland final. In 2001 after the team was beaten in the All-Ireland quarter final by eventual champions, Galway, the joint-managers resigned. The team, which they had put together, was taken over by Joe Kernan and won Armagh's first Senior All-Ireland Championship in 2002. Much of the credit for that success is surely owing to Brian Canavan and Brian McAlinden.

Coincidentally when Brian Canavan retired from playing in 1990, another Poyntzpass man, **John Rafferty**, took his place at corner back. John had enjoyed an exceptionally successful career in University football. Playing for St Mary's College John was a member of a Siegerson Cup winning team and was voted 'Player of the Tournament.' John, who played at club level for Co Antrim club St Gall's, was a totally committed and energetic player with a high level of fitness. He captained Armagh and was rewarded when he was a member of the Ulster Championship winning team of 1999. He retired from inter-county football at the end of 1999 and is currently involved in management.

Athletics

Kevin O'Hare

Even today, there are few facilities in this area for budding athletes, but there were none at all sixty years ago. It is therefore, I suppose, somewhat surprising that the area has produced a number of outstanding athletes. While most of them came from one family - the Monaghan family of Acton - the initial encouragement came from **Kevin O'Hare** from Glenn.

Kevin was interested in sport and won a lasting place in local Gaelic football fame by winning an All-Ireland medal as goalkeeper on the Down team which won the Junior all-Ireland title in 1946.

Around 1940 the annual sports were held in Glenn and by way of a novelty the organisers invited the Ulster shot-put champion, J.B. Burns to give a demonstration. J.B. Burns was at the time was working in McGovern's in Newry. Anyway since he was to be at the sports several locals were encouraged to practise and enter into competition with him although they had no realistic chance. One of those who undertook this



Kevin O'Hare at Croke Park 1946

challenge was Kevin O'Hare. He had no shot to practise with so he used the head of a sledgehammer. When the sports day came Kevin and others did their best but Burns won by a long way. However, he saw that Kevin had talent and an interest and encouraged him to keep at it. Kevin continued to practise using the sledgehead and a circle marked out in the field until he got a proper 16lbs shot specially made for him in Bessbrook Foundry. By 1942 he had progressed far enough to enter competitions and to do this, he needed to be a member of a club so he joined Newry Shamrocks. Throughout the 1940's he competed with considerable success at various sports around the country and it was at sports at Whitecross that he met Frank Monaghan.

Frank Monaghan

Francis 'Big Frank' Monaghan was interested, and Kevin encouraged him to get involved. If you are familiar with the novel 'Geordie', or the film based on it, I imagine that Frank Monaghan's career was something like Geordie's. Geordie McTavish began his shot-putting career by 'putting' a large stone and so did Frank. Anyway, Kevin got him organised with a shot to practise with and gave him some basic coaching. He was naturally big and strong and over time developed into a powerful thrower in events such as the shot, the discus and an event which doesn't appear so much now, throwing a 56lbs weight over a high bar. This latter event was a bit like the high jump or tossing the sheaf, in that the bar was raised and anyone failing to throw the weight over it at a particular height was eliminated. Like Kevin, Frank eventually joined Newry Shamrocks Athletic Club and got involved in competition. At first he competed in local events but soon graduated until he was regularly competing against the best in the country. He won the Ulster title, first in 1946 and several times thereafter and was runner-up for the Irish title that year. In 1947 John Vallely of Armagh introduced him to throwing the discus and this became his favourite and most successful event. He won provincial titles 15 times

and became the Irish discus Champion in 1949. He didn't compete in 1950 because of illness and in his absence his mentor, Kevin O'Hare, won the shot title. Frank regained his discus title in 1951 and retained it in 1952. Indeed, Kevin must have wondered at times why he had encouraged Frank for he was runner-up to him many times over the years.



Frank Monaghan, Ulster Discus champion

Frank told me that at that time he was working for Tommy Agnew in Drumbanagher and while he was preparing for the national championships, Tommy gave him twice as much at dinnertime as any of the other workers. Tommy Agnew was very proud to have a champion working for him. Frank was modest about his successes and there was no fuss about his winning championships. He told me that apart from Kevin O'Hare, his other great supporter was Mickey Waddell and that when he won his first Ulster Championship, Mickey and he celebrated it with a bottle of lemonade out of Carson's shop. He told me that without Mickey Waddell's enthusiastic support he might well have given up.

Early in 1951 a famous Austrian coach of the time, Heirman Stampel, who was coaching in N. Ireland, saw Frank in action. He said that if Frank was prepared to train with him, he, Frank, would make either the British or Irish Olympic teams for the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, Finland. However, as this would have involved Frank giving up his job, it was simply out of the question, for he was an important breadwinner for the family. So Frank's career was confined to the national scene. Frank won titles in the shot and the discus and his Ulster record for the 56lbs over the bar, 15 feet 9 inches, still stands.. It was said that he could throw the 56lbs equally well with either hand.

Frank, along with Kevin O'Hare and another great athlete, Michael Jennings from Saval, eventually formed Glenn Athletic Club. Mickey Jennings excelled in high and long jump and pole vault so they formed a very successful trio. They won numerous Ulster titles and

many all-Ireland Championships in the period from 1945 till 1960. When they had swept the boards at many a sports, people would say, "*You must be a very strong club in Glenn.*" Little did they know that the club had only three members!_



Glen A.C. L-R Mickey Jennings, Frank Monaghan, Kevin O'Hare

Paddy Monaghan

Inspired by Frank Monaghan's very successful involvement in sport and, no doubt, his encouragement, several of his brothers became interested. Seamus won the All-Ireland Youth Shot and discus when he was 17, beating in the process a son of the famous Pat O'Callaghan (who had won two Olympic gold medals for Ireland in the hammer in 1926 and 1930). He also played Gaelic football for Armagh at minor level. Eivor also competed, winning an Ulster title in the pole-vault and Sean also competed briefly. However it was **Patrick** who really was an outstanding athlete. Having accumulated many titles in Ulster, he had his finest hour when, over two days in August 1955 at Belfield, Dublin, he became the first Northern athlete to win the Irish Decathlon title.

The Decathlon consists of ten elements and is a test of the true all-rounder. The events are 100metres, 110m hurdles, 400m, 1500m, high jump, long jump, pole vault, discus, shot and javelin. The events are spread over two days and individual performances are awarded points in each event on an internationally agreed scale. Paddy's strong events were the throwing events, as well as the 100m sprint and high jump. He was given a hero's reception when he returned home. He was a member of St Patrick's Band and the band turned out and he was given a big reception both in Poyntzpass and Acton. He toured the area on the back of a lorry and Jimmy McHale was inspired to write a poem about him:

*"There were boys from the East,
And boys from the West.
Big giants from Cork,
Templemore and the rest
But the joiner from Acton
Proved he was the best.
Great victory for Ulster!
Red hand on his breast!"*



Paddy Monaghan in the long jump and the 300m

Daley Thompson won the Olympic Decathlon twice and could genuinely claim to be the best athlete Britain has ever produced while the ladies' equivalent is the pentathlon, won by Mary Peters at Munich in 1972. Paddy Monaghan was the best all-rounder from our area. Compared with Daley Thompson's performances, Paddy's would be very modest but when one considers that he was competing in the early 1950's, that he had to overcome a complete lack of facilities, train with poor or non-existent equipment after his day's work and never had any real coaching, I have no doubt, that given the opportunities available in the modern era, Paddy Monaghan would have been an outstanding athlete at the very highest level.



The Monaghans, Seamus, Frank and Paddy

Equestrian: Three-day eventing

Our area has produced several outstanding equestrian

three-day-eventers. Three-day-eventing consists of three phases. Day one is dressage, where horse and rider perform a fixed set of moves in an arena - walking, trotting, cantering etc. Day two is a timed ride involving big fixed fences, water etc. and day three is show-jumping. Horses are inspected before each phase to make sure they are fit to continue and if a problem is detected the horse will be withdrawn no matter where it is placed at that point.

Edwin Bryson

While **Edwin Bryson** was, as a schoolboy, a keen athlete and rugby player for his school, he began riding ponies at a very early age. In due course he progressed from hunting to point-to-point racing. He rode at all the local point-to-points winning quite a few races on his own or his father's horses. His first winner was at Taylorstown on a horse called *Forkhill*. However point-to-point racing was never more than an occasional hobby with Edwin and it was only when he took up three-day-eventing, that he really began to seriously apply himself to sport.



Edwin Bryson in action on 'Thunder'

Like all equestrian sports much depends on finding a horse with ability and on the bond that exists between horse and rider and on both horse and rider staying fit. Edwin bought a horse called *'Thunder'* at Banbridge Sales for 140 guineas. With *Thunder* he went on to have many successes in the years that followed. In 1973 the partnership won the Irish three-day International Championship at Punchestown, the premier three-day event in Ireland. The partnership was part of the Irish team that competed at Burghley in the World Championships of 1974. Ireland finished fourth. Altogether Edwin represented Ireland at internationals more than twenty times, in France, Denmark, Holland, England, USA and, of course, in Ireland. In 1976 he was shortlisted for the Irish team, which was due to compete in the Montreal Olympics but unfortunately *Thunder* was injured at Badminton. He was on the Irish team which was due to take part in the Moscow Olympics of 1980 but because of various

problems and boycotts only six countries competed and the Irish equestrian authorities eventually decided not to send a team. Edwin himself suffered many injuries, broken arms, collarbones and a broken wrist. The most serious injury was sustained in 1981 during training at his home, when a horse fell on him breaking his pelvis. He gave up three-day-eventing some time in the late 1980's but still rides regularly and was huntsman with Newry Harriers until 2005. In recent years he has taken up carriage driving with considerable success.

Bill Buller

Bill Buller was born on a farm on the outskirts of Belfast in 1929 and he had vivid memories of the blitz. He began riding the family's farm horses at a very young age. He soon began to ride ponies and had a very successful career showjumping with ponies before the family moved to Scarva in 1946 when he was 17. He was a keen rugby player and played for Ulster Schools before joining Banbridge Rugby Club which was in a very weak state at the time. From ponies he graduated to horses and was competing at various shows from the early fifties. He rode in a few point-to-point races but was too heavy at that time, being well over 13 stones in weight.



Bill Buller on 'Banka'

Bill took an active part in organising hunter-trials locally and throughout Northern Ireland, under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Horse Society. The first Scarva Trials were held in 1961, but it wasn't till 1965 at Punchestown, that Bill rode in his first three-day event. After an unsuccessful debut he progressed very quickly. In 1968 on his first appearance at Badminton and on a young horse, *Orlando*, he jumped clear. Largely on the strength of that ride he was selected to represent Ireland in the 1968 Mexico Olympics but unfortunately *Orlando* got loose on the road one day and was injured, so they couldn't go.

At the end of the 60's he had two good horses, *Banka* and *Rob Roy*. In 1970 he rode *Rob Roy* in the World Championships and again as part of the Irish team at the 1971 European Championships, where the

individual title was won by Princess Anne. In 1972 he was part of the Irish team which finished fourth in the Munich Olympics, narrowly missing a medal. In the Olympics he rode *Banka*, who, very unluckily, picked up a rusty nail on the second day which greatly affected his performance. Nonetheless Bill finished best of the Irish.

He sold *Banka* to the Irish Army Equitation School. The horse was renamed '*Bothar Buidhe*' and went on to have a very successful career. Bill regarded the Olympics as the greatest thrill but also the greatest disappointment of his career, for he was convinced that the Irish team was capable of winning the competition. He continued to compete and had several big wins, including winning at Cork, but became increasingly involved in the administration side of the sport. In October 2002 he was presented with a special award by the Irish Equestrian Federation to mark 50 years of service to the sport.

Apart from Bill, other members of the Buller family have had outstandingly successful careers in equestrian sports. His daughter **Hylda** represented Ireland at Junior, Youth and Senior level, winning '*The Golden Saddle*' as the outstanding young rider of her time. Her brother **Alfie Buller** had also a sparkling career in eventing before a very bad fall ended his career. He won many big competitions and represented Ireland on numerous occasions. Riding '*Sir Knight*' he was part of the Irish team which competed at the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. When well placed, his Olympics ended when the vets turned down *Sir Knight* on the final morning as unfit to continue.

Carriage Driving



Edwin Bryson and groom Lewis Black driving 'Bravo'.

Following serious injury, **Edwin Bryson** gave up three-day eventing and took up the sport of carriage driving. This sport is organised on similar lines to eventing in that there are dressage and cross-country elements and 'cone-driving', which is the equivalent of

the show-jumping phase. Edwin with his horse *Bravo* and groom Lewis Black, won the Irish National Championships in 2001 and retained the title in 2002. In August 2002 the combination represented Ireland in the World Championships in France and finished 6th. The sport of carriage driving had its origins at Lowther in Cumbria in the 1960's. There are many different classes in the sport, ranging from single-horse carriages to pairs and fours and from novice to senior grade. Prince Philip did much to raise the profile of this sport when he took part, in times past, driving a team of four in various competitions.

In 2006, Edwin bought a young horse, a son of *Bravo*. Edwin paired this young horse, which he named *Bravado*, with *Bravo* and acquired a two horse carriage. *Bravado* and *Bravo* have formed a very successful partnership, and in 2008, driving *Bravado* and *Bravo*, Edwin won the prestigious Lowther Championship beating all the top British competitors in the process. He has also competed successfully at the Royal Windsor Horse Show, the Grand Prix of carriage driving.

In 2009, Edwin was selected to represent Ireland at the World Pairs Championships in Budapest, Hungary. A four-day trip across Europe and several days training, ended in extreme disappointment when, on the morning of the first day, before the start of the competition, *Bravo* was found to be lame and Edwin was not allowed to take part.

Edwin won the all-Ireland singles championship at Rathdrum, Co Wicklow in 2011 and has won the Northern Ireland horse-pairs for the last four years. Edwin now gives a lot of his time to helping young drivers and is heartened by the numbers taking up the sport. While some carriage drivers spend huge sums on horses and carriages, Edwin says that the sport is not really very expensive, for a shrewd judge can buy excellent young carriage horses very cheaply, and there is a plentiful supply of good second-hand carriages available for those interested in taking up the sport. In recent times he has reduced the number of overseas trips but competes regularly in local and national competitions.

Badminton: Niall McVeigh

Although Niall McVeigh was born with the physical disability achondroplasia (short-statured), he has established himself as an outstanding badminton player in his class, representing Northern Ireland on numerous occasions in World and European Championships, and has become a role-model for other young people with a disability.

Niall, a past pupil of St Joseph's Primary School, always had a keen interest in sport, particularly badminton and, when he was 13, he joined Loughbrickland Badminton Club. He was competing in the Senior

League when he was 15. In 2006 Niall took the gold medal in the Junior Dwarf European Championships, which were held in Belfast and has gone on since that to win ten four-nations Championships. Other successes include golds at the European Championships (Germany 2010), World Championships (Belfast 2009) and most recently in the 2011 World Championships in Guatemala. He has won badminton tournaments in Germany, France, Sweden, Ireland and Spain and has been ranked World Number 1 in his class for the past four years.



Niall McVeigh

Niall is coached by high-performance coach Leslie Dewart and, in 2009, he was named 'Belfast Telegraph Sports Personality of the Year with a Disability'. Niall, who has been strongly supported by Dame Mary Peters and is a Patron of the Ulster Sports Museum, has received sponsorship from Sport N.I.

Cycling: Noel Teggart

For any sportsman, to be part of a team representing his sport in the Olympic Games is a dream. Northern Ireland is in an odd situation, in that some sports here are organised on an all-Ireland basis, while others operate as either part of United Kingdom sporting bodies or are autonomous bodies based locally. This means that in some sports competitors from Northern Ireland represent Ireland at Olympics, while others would represent the U.K. International rugby, boxing, cycling and equestrian sports are all-Ireland and competitors in these sports represent Ireland; athletes and gymnasts represent the United Kingdom; however, soccer players represent Northern Ireland.

Noel Teggart was born in 1941 and lived for the first few years of his life in the sluice-keeper's cottage at Acton Lake where his father Sam Teggart was employed as sluice-keeper. Acton Interpretative Centre is on the site today. The family then moved to live in Scarva around 1950.



Noel Teggart

As a schoolboy Noel was a keen cyclist and soon became a member of Banbridge Cycling Club, which is one of the foremost cycling clubs in Ireland. He went on to win every major cycle race in Ireland. He won The All-Ireland Road Race Championships twice, at Drogheda in 1967 and at Banbridge in 1972. He won the five-stage Tour of the North, over a distance of around 600 miles, in 1969 and again in 1973. He was part of the N. Ireland team for the 1970 Commonwealth Games but a bad crash caused him to miss out. He represented Ireland at the 1972 Munich Olympics and represented Ireland twice in the 14-day Tour of Britain finishing overall 9th in 1968. Noel died in 1997. The West Down Grand Prix was re-named '*The Noel Teggart Memorial*' in his honour. Incidentally his son Neill represented Northern Ireland in the 1998 Commonwealth Games at Kuala Lumpur.

Rugby

Simon Best

The elder of two Ireland rugby stars, **Simon Best** was born in 1978. He began his career playing mini-rugby at Poyntzpass Primary School and played at schools level for Portadown College. At university in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, he took a more serious interest in the sport, playing for the newly formed Newcastle Club, which was managed by the former England-star Rob Andrew. Simon played for Ireland at all levels, Irish schools, under-19, under-21 and for Ireland 'A'. When offered professional contracts by both Newcastle and Ulster in 1999, he opted for Ulster to be nearer home. He gained Ulster caps playing in the front row as prop-forward and captained the province to become Magners' League Champions.

He won his first full Irish cap when coming on as a replacement against Tonga in June 2003 and went on to win a total of 23 full Irish caps, including World Cup appearances in 2003 and 2007. He captained the Ireland team which toured South America and was set to become an Ireland regular, when a health-scare during the 2007 World Cup cut short a most promising career.



Simon Best

However, it was not before Simon was joined in the front row of the Ireland scrum by his younger brother, Rory. They started together for the first time, at Murrayfield against Scotland and featured together in Ireland teams ten times before Simon's retirement

Rory Best.

Rory Best was born in 1982. His early experiences playing rugby mirrored those of his brother Simon, playing mini-rugby at primary school in Poyntzpass. His first appearance at Ravenhill was as part of a joint 'Poyntzpass Primary Schools' team which competed in the Ulster Primary Schools Mini-rugby finals in 1993. He played schools' rugby at Portadown College before attending university in Newcastle. There he played for Newcastle Falcons before returning home in 2002 to join Belfast Harlequins. He was offered an Ulster contract in 2004 and soon established himself in the team. He made his full Ireland debut as hooker against the All Blacks at Lansdowne Road in November 2005 and has gone on to win, so far, 54 full Irish caps. He was voted Bank of Ireland Player of the Year at the end of the 2009 season.

He has, to date played well over 100 times for Ulster, having taken over the captaincy, from his brother Simon, at the start of the 2007 season. That year he was a member of Ireland's Triple Crown winning team and, in 2009 played in every game in Ireland's historic Grand Slam win, the first in 60 years. Also in 2009, Rory emulated his brother in being accorded the

honour of captaining the Ireland team during a very successful a tour of North America.



Rory Best

During the recent 2011 World Cup finals in New Zealand, Rory played in all of Ireland's games as hooker, scoring a try and being outstanding throughout. He was being widely nominated as one of Ireland's 'Players of the Tournament'. To achieve his success, Rory has had to overcome several very serious injuries and it is hoped that there is much more still to come.

Show-jumping

Killysavan – Prince Hal

From the late 1930's, till the late 1970's the name of **George Bryson** was well-known in equestrian events show-jumping, point-to-point and three-day eventing. George and his brother **Jim**, won numerous races. George won the Members' Race at Taylorstown eleven times, several on the famous 'Black Knight'. He represented Ireland at showjumping in the 40s and had a successful career in eventing. He also played a key-role in the development of young talent and in the organisation of equestrian sports in N.Ireland. In the 1950's one of the household names of equestrian sport was Pat Smythe the leading lady show-jumper. Until the war, showjumping was a male-only sport, regarded as too strenuous and dangerous for women. However, in the post-war years, lady riders were allowed to compete against the men. One of the lady riders, Pat Smythe, not only competed against them, more often than not beat them. She was, and remains, the world's most successful woman showjumper. She owed her great success primarily to two great horses, *Prince Hal* and *Flanagan*.

I can recall as a youngster being at the annual Newry Harriers point-to-point at Taylorstown. The races were

then on a Wednesday, the early closing day in Newry, and there were many special buses from Newry, Armagh, Belfast etc. Local primary schools closed at lunchtime, which meant that we could all go to the races. It was a really big event in the years after the war.



George Bryson leads Sam English on 'Killysavan' at Taylorstown

I remember that the late Sam English was a leading figure at the races. Not only did he announce the runners and riders, he usually rode in at least one race himself. Sam was popular but somewhat eccentric. Those who knew about those things would have said he rode good horses badly and was a poor but brave jockey. He was described as being 'gallant' and I seem to recall him falling off regularly, but always remounting.

I recall seeing him riding a horse named 'Killysavan' that Sam had bred himself. The horse was named after the townland in which Sam's home 'The Fort' was situated. I believe that on that occasion he was, true to form, unseated but remounted and finished down the field. Adults felt it was a pity for they said *Killysavan* was a great horse. *Killysavan* was out of a mare that Sam owned called 'Morna' and the sire was called 'My Prince'. *Morna* had three foals, the third being *Killysavan*. Sam had quite a large dairy herd during the war years. He sent milk by train to Belfast each day and one of *Morna's* daily chores was to pull the milk cart from 'The Fort' to Poyntzpass. Sam eventually sold *Killysavan*. The circumstances are not clear but after racing in England under the name 'Fourtowns' he was sold again and the new owner was the showjumper Pat Smythe. The name *Fourtowns* meant nothing to her so, probably inspired by the sire's name, she renamed the horse 'Prince Hal' after the Shakespearean character of that name. Pat Smythe and *Prince Hal* went on to become one of the greatest partnerships in the history of showjumping.

With *Prince Hal* she won numerous top competitions including the European Individual Championship four times and the Daily Mail Cup at the Royal International Horse Show. They represented Great Britain on numerous occasions at Grand Prix throughout Europe and North America and set a ladies world puissance (high jump) record of 7feet 4 and a half inches which remains to this day. Incidentally, *My Prince*, the sire of *Killysavan/Prince Hal* was the grandfather of the famous *Arkle*, widely regarded as the greatest steeplechaser of all time.

Pat Smythe was the first lady to take part in Olympic showjumping being part of the Great Britain team at Stockholm in 1956, riding her other great horse, *Flanagan*. She won a bronze medal. In 1956 she was awarded the OBE. *Prince Hal* died suddenly in 1957 of a heart condition. Such was his fame and popularity that the BBC broke with tradition and announced the horse's death on the evening news. Pat Smythe wrote many books, including an autobiography '*Leaping Life's Fences*' and died in 1996 aged 67 years.



Dermott Lennon

Dermott Lennon

Dermott Lennon's father, also called Dermott, a brother of Joe, was born in Church Street and as I noted earlier moved to Lisnabrague in 1944. Dermott Snr. lived there until his marriage after which he went to live in Ballynaskeagh.

The Lennon family had little immediate involvement with horses but, as a schoolboy, Dermott Jnr. was given his first lessons in horsemanship by George Bryson who, at that time, owned the Bronte Tavern in Ballynaskeagh, near Dermott's home. When Dermott won the World Championship in September 2002, he became the first Irish rider to do so. It is a fantastic achievement in a most competitive sport.

Tug-of-war

There are many, highly-organised minority sports, which are perceived to lack glamour and rarely get a mention in the sports sections of the national press. One of these is the very ancient sport of Tug-of-War. At one time Tug-of-War featured in the Olympic Games and, while it lost that status, it is still highly organised and has a world-wide following. There are National,

European and World Championships held regularly. Teams in Tug-of-War, as in boxing, compete in different weight grades. Each team consists of eight players whose total weight must not exceed the set weight limit of the class they are competing in. This means that team members must carefully monitor their weights and occasionally leads to a team member having to be 'dropped' and a lighter substitute brought in, or a team member having to undertake drastic dieting, in order for the team to qualify. One local man who has had an illustrious career, in which he has represented both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in Tug-of-War at all levels, is **Phelim Convery**.

Phelim's first experience of tug of war was when he was part of a Taniokye team, which took part in a fun-competition at local sports in 1977. Having enjoyed the experience, he joined a Tug-of-War club in Dundalk and when that club won the Irish National Championship they went on to represent the country at international level. In 1979 he was part of both the Ireland 680Kgs. and 740kgs teams which won gold medals in Capetown, South Africa. He represented Ireland in the European Championships in Jersey 1978 and Switzerland 1980; the World Championships in Jonkoping, Sweden 1979 and England 1981. In 1981 he was part of the Ireland team which toured the United States of America.

In 1984 he joined firstly Ballyhegan club in Co. Armagh and then a new club Ballycrummy. Thereafter he regularly represented Northern Ireland at international level. This included the World Championships in Oshkosh USA (1984), Switzerland (1985), UK Championships in England and World Championships in the Netherlands (1986) and numerous other UK, European and World championships in Wales, Italy, Sweden, Netherlands and Guernsey. His Tug-of-War career ended in 1993 when, having represented Northern Ireland in the World Championships at Minehead in England, and having had to rapidly shed 3kgs to keep his place on the national team, he decided to '*hang up his boots*'.



Some members of 640KG - N. Ireland tug-of-war team and officials who finished 6th in the World Championships, Stans, Switzerland 1985. Phelim Convery - right