

## ATHLETIC REVOLUTIONARIES

by Don Anthony

I think it was SCHUMACHER ("*Small is Beautiful*") who said that he was sometimes called a crank. He didn't mind, he said, because a crank was an environmentally friendly, non-violent tool which caused revolutions! One can say something similar about the hammer in athletics. Throwing a hammer was an event in the *Cotswold Olimpicks* which began circa 1612. The hammer was rather like a small blacksmith's hammer featured also on the USSR's hammer and sickle flag; which reminds me of the revolutionary zeal of Armand HAMMER'S father who named his son to perpetuate, in the family both the arm on the flag and the hammer! I'm not joking. A larger hammer was thrown in the traditional Irish and Scottish Games. Fifty years ago I took part in a Scottish Highland Games; held incidentally some 20 miles from central London after the heavy events, the marching, the dancing and the music, we sat down to a fine "Caelidh". After the meal there was rich singing from the Scottish athletes. A cry then rang out - "A song from the English!". We obliged but the only song we all knew was the Scottish "My bonny lies over the ocean!". On this occasion I realised that the 'marriage of muscle and mind - the wedding of sport and art'. COUBERTIN'S dream, was much older than 1894. More recently I discovered in Henry PEACHAM'S "The Compleat Gentleman" (1622 and reprinted by Cornell University Press in 1962) the following :-

*"For throwing and wrestling I hold them exercises not so well becoming nobility but rather soldiers in a camp or a prince's guard. Neither have I read or heard of any prince or general commended for wrestling or throwing save Epaminondas Achmat the last Grand Seignior and Emperor of Turkey who took great delight in throwing the hammer and was so strong that he overthrew his stoutest Janizaries, there being reared in Constantinople for one extraordinary cast which none could come near two great pillars of marble"*

In modern athletics the hammer's inertia is overcome by two swings and three or four revolutions in a small circle, followed by a powerful explosive delivery. My article will thus follow this pattern.

I single out six hammer throwers; five I have met. They exemplify not only the art of throwing but all of them possessed a charisma

which helped to revolutionise my own thinking. The first two represent my preliminary swings, the next three my turns within a circle, the last an explosive cast concerning all-round ability both mental and physical. I never managed four turns in my own career but, if in the course of this article I am inspired to try one, I will include it.

Firstly Dennis CULLUM my own coach. A public school educated ex-Army Officer he devoted himself to voluntary coaching. On a rented field near his home we gathered most weekends for dedicated training. Afterwards it was tea and cakes provided by his elderly mother. He drove us to matches at his own cost. He typified the army of volunteers who keep sport going even at the highest level. I do not believe that the authorities for the sport in England ever rewarded him with just one overseas management role. He rarely forced his opinions upon us. With me there were two exceptions. I knew that in his last months in the army. In Germany, in 1946, he, as a Major, had been advised that he was taking anti-nazism rather too seriously! In 1956 however he announced to me that he had just resigned his commission as a protest against British bullying of Egypt. I know he would have taken the same stance today regarding the middle east. Later in life he decided to end his engineering career and train to be a teacher of physical education. He came up on a one year course to Loughborough College. After a few weeks he had to visit a local secondary school for teaching practice. As a lecturer at Loughborough I was asked to take him to the school and introduce him. I asked for the headmaster on arrival and found him in the star room having coffee. "*This is Mr.Cullum from Loughborough College*", I said. The Headmaster stood to attention and said "*Good morning Sir*". I explained that Mr. Cullum was his student! Such deferential behaviour led to Dennis's departure from the teaching profession and a return to engineering. "*I couldn't work in a profession which displays such pathetic deference*" he said. Dennis took me from 30m to 60m. So that is my first swing.

The second swing concerns a certain George (Jerzy) KORDAS. In my second year as a student at Loughborough we had a match against Nottingham University. KORDAS was a

member of their very ordinary team but he was extraordinary. He won the high hurdles, the shot, the discus, the high jump, and took part in the 4 x 100 relay. We came to the hammer. In England at this time it was, with the steeplechase, one of the joke events. The biggest athletes threw without a turn - "Scottish style". KORDAS entered the circle. Two swings, three turns, a mighty delivery, and out flew the hammer to scatter the unsuspecting jumpers 175 feet away (54m). There was a spontaneous "wow" from 1000 plus students and that "wow" motivated me to take up this fantastic revolutionary event. Peter LOVESEY traced this uprooted Polish athlete to Bydgoszcz but we, sadly, have not managed to find anyone who remembers him there. Not only was it his mastery of technique, but his all-round ability which stayed with me.

Into the first turn. Another would-be all rounder. Harold CONNOLLY, gold medallist in Melbourne in 1956. I trained with him and threw against him. I always wondered what had happened to his short left arm and how he managed to throw so well with such a disability. I never asked him. In 1984 however I took part in a conference in California entitled "Children as Champions". Harold gave the keynote. Many of you knew me as a champion he said but few of you knew me as a child. His spoken cv was astonishing. The last of 11 children - the doctor telling his father he could not promise to save both mother and child - a difficult birth. At birth then Harold suffered "Erbs paralysis" and a permanent shortening of the arm. When he tried for a job as a newspaper boy he hid his arm behind him! At team games he was always just off balance. A big boy but the shot wouldn't work - not the discus. He was a would-be all rounder but a couldn't-be because of the disability. His neighbour was the local university athletics coach. On Fridays he would conduct his clinics. The last group to get coaching were the hammer throwers. Since he always gave Harold a lift home, Harold was eager to speed the session so began to throw the hammers back to the throwers. Amazingly he found he could throw them back further than they could throw them forward! "You'd better join the squad" said the coach. Two years later he was Olympic champion. Harold was headmaster of a secondary school in California before his retirement and now works für Specialolympics. Overcoming a severe physical handicap and reaching the summit of excellence in his event makes Harold special.

My second turn happens in Los Angeles Olympic Stadium 1984. I am sitting behind a gentleman who clearly once had a majestic physique. It turns out that it is Dr. Pat O'CALLAGHAN who won the gold medal for Ireland, in this very stadium, in 1932. His son introduces him to me. We are all watching the hammer event. It concludes and later there is the medal presentation ceremony. Representing the IAAF is some low ranking administrator - perhaps even the Assistant Medical Officer or some such. The anomaly enrages me. Here in the stands is this modest icon of hammer throwing twice an Olympic winner - and not invited to present the medals. The effrontery, the clumsiness, enrages me.

How could they? Not long ago I learnt how. Any organization which has an honourable title like *International Amateur Athletics Federation*, and then changes that acronym to spell *International Association of Athletic Federations* - despite the fact that the great majority of athletes in the world are still amateurs - is capable of any discourtesy. Not only was Pat an outstanding hammer thrower; he reached international class at high jumping - despite a body weight of 100 plus kilos - was a shot putter of eminence - and won several Irish all-round titles. He was also a doctor of medicine.

We turn for the third time and find Tom KIELY perhaps the most astonishing Irish all-rounder of all. Irish patriot but at a time when Ireland was considered, internationally, as part of Britain, he won the Olympic Ten event at St. Louis in 2004. I never met Kiely but I feel I know him well from the writings of David GUINEY. In *Ireland and the Olympic Games* published by the Olympic Council of Ireland he says about KIELY :

*"Between 1892 and 1908 Tom Kiely of Ballymeale strode majestically through the Irish sporting scene, brushing aside all challengers, collecting championships by the score, smashing Irish, Scottish, British, European, and world records on all sides."*

His most memorable Olympic feat was to win the "Olympic Ten" event at St. Louis in 2004. This event comprised the following: 100 yards - One mile - hurdles - 880 yards walk - high jump - long jump - pole vault - 56lb weight for height - shot - and hammer. All events were held on the same day. The event was never held in the Olympic Games again! However I have alerted the *World Association of*

*Olympians*, whose secretary is a decathlon exponent, and the University of Missouri, where physical education is led by a lady pentathlete, to the potential of a 'revival' of the Olympic Ten in 2004. Watch this space.

Moving at high speed we are ready for the final delivery. I present this with the story of George Stuart ROBERTSON who competed in Athens in 1896. I met George in his London flat when he was 92 years of age. He had just completed a journey in Jordan I think - which entailed two days by donkey! His event was hammer but on arrival in Athens he found that this was not on the programme. Instead he threw the discus, putt the shot, and "*had a go at tennis*". Concurrently he wrote fascinating articles for *The Field* and shared rooms with FLACK the Australian marathon runner. His journey was out via Brindisi and back to London via Saloniki, Budapest, and Vienna. He dined with the British Ambassador and at the British School in Athens. However he did win a gold medal - for his Pindaric Ode. The King of Greece made special arrangements for George to present this Ode - much to the chagrin of local poets who had been dissuaded by the organisers. This befitted the 24 year old Oxford University classics Don, who had completed a remarkable degree after leaving his school - Winchester - where de COURCY LAFFAN also studied. LAFFAN became an IOC member in 1897 and was secretary of the *British Olympic Association* from its formation in 1905 until his death - more than 30 years. ROBERTSON, whose grandfather was Scottish, had several spats with the Irish of the time like Jack BOLAND (gold medal at tennis in Athens) about Celtic pride - but these stories can wait. For the moment I want to record -- ROBERTSON'S unique scholarship at Oxford. He paid his way through university by winning the following scholarships: classical at New College 1891 - Canon Hill Junior Greek Testament Prize 1892 - First Class Classical Mods 1893 - Gaisford Greek Verse Prize, Ireland Scholarship, and Craven Scholarship 1894 - Gaisford Greek Prose Prize, Classical Greats 1<sup>st</sup> Class and Winchester Fellowship at New College 1895 - and the Denyerand Johnson Theological Scholarship, the Chancellor's Prize for Latin Essay, and Derby Prize all in 1896. In 1906 he was a judge in the 'Olympic Games' again held in Athens, which he said "were good fun"\* in his

interview with John LOVESEY, London stringer for *Sports Illustrated*, and myself, some forty years ago he had some questionable comments about the 1896 marathon winner - but these need another pertinent moment in time. I prefer the reports he sent back in 1896 and, in particular his personal letter to COUBERTIN in which he wrote:

*" I considered the success of the whole meeting very great indeed [...] and I look forward to the recurrence of the Games [...] [whence] I shall have the additional satisfaction of making Jour acquaintance, of which by same mischance I was deprived in Athens"*

I am very happy to note that Professors Michael VICKERS and Annand D'ANGOUR of Oxford University are happy to plan a dinner in 2004, to honour George ROBERTSON. The latter is prepared to recite the 1896 Ode and even to write another. His recent book which he co-wrote *The art of swimming* marries swimming teaching with the Alexander Method. It enhances skill and sparks off ideas on the art of hammer throwing which have not been fully explored; so revolutions in thought might be spirals - upwards - rather than mere repetitions.

These brief biographies of unusual hammer throwers encapsulate other revolutions which have taken place over the years. For example the throwing surface; this has changed from grass through cinders, to cement. The handle from wood to wire and the head from cubic to spherical. Dennis CULLUM was the cement circle innovator. ROBERTSON claims the invention of a flexible metal handle - after a teacher was nearly decapitated at school when his wooden handle broke! From a 10 metre area to a 2 m circle; from open skies to a metal protective netting; from a 90 degree fan to one of 60 degrees. The 28 lb hammer with its distinctive ball and chain design still continues unchanged I imagine! Prizes have also changed. In 1950 we were pleased to win a standard lamp but preferred an electric razor. It made one a professional if a suit was offered but it was ok to win three metres of harris tweed and have the suit made up privately. Women did not compete in the hammer. However I knew that the writing was on the wall when training with my colleague Peter ALLDAY prior to the 1956 Olympic Games. His wife Suzanne was a shot putt champion - immensely strong. On a beach in Devon I suggested some squat exercises; my wife jumped on my shoulders;

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\* His name appears on the British Olympic Council's list for the Olympic Games in London, 1908.

Peter sat on Suzanne's! Today women give elegance and a new character in throwing their lighter hammer, and the current world Champion is Polish - as is the men's champion. KORDAS would be happy.

I said at the start that I might be moved to try a fourth revolution - and I am moved! My serious training for the 1956 Olympic Games began in Famagusta, North Cyprus, in 1949. Here I also discovered volleyball and determined to establish a national governing body for that international game, back in Britain - which I did. I discovered, too, new ways of looking at sport in society and my higher degree paths in comparative and development studies took foot. After fifty-four years the wheel of life had turned a full revolution and I am back where it all began. Luck and chance played a

major part. However the hammer taught me that in sport, as in life, if you try to stay on where you are, you go down. To stay just where you are you must try to get better. Perhaps the concept of the all-round athlete can also get better. Any restoration at St. Louis next year might include a super all-rounder who displays talent in the arts, in computer literacy, and in humanitarian areas, as well as in sport. COUBERTIN would like that.

To conclude I urge the reader to accept that my chosen examples of charismatic hammer throwers with all-round aspirations - can be found in many other sports as well. There is perhaps much more to the modern athlete, also, than what meets the eye. I do hope so - the alternative would be dreadful.