

PAT "BABE" MCDONALD
OLYMPIC CHAMPION
AND PARAGON
OF THE
IRISH-AMERICAN WHALES

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At the first Olympic Games in Athens, Greece (1896), eight Americans won 11 first places at 100, 400, and 110 meter hurdles; pole vault; shot put; discus; triple jump; high jump; long jump, and two pistol shooting events. All of these Olympic champions were born in the United States in the 1860s and 1870s.

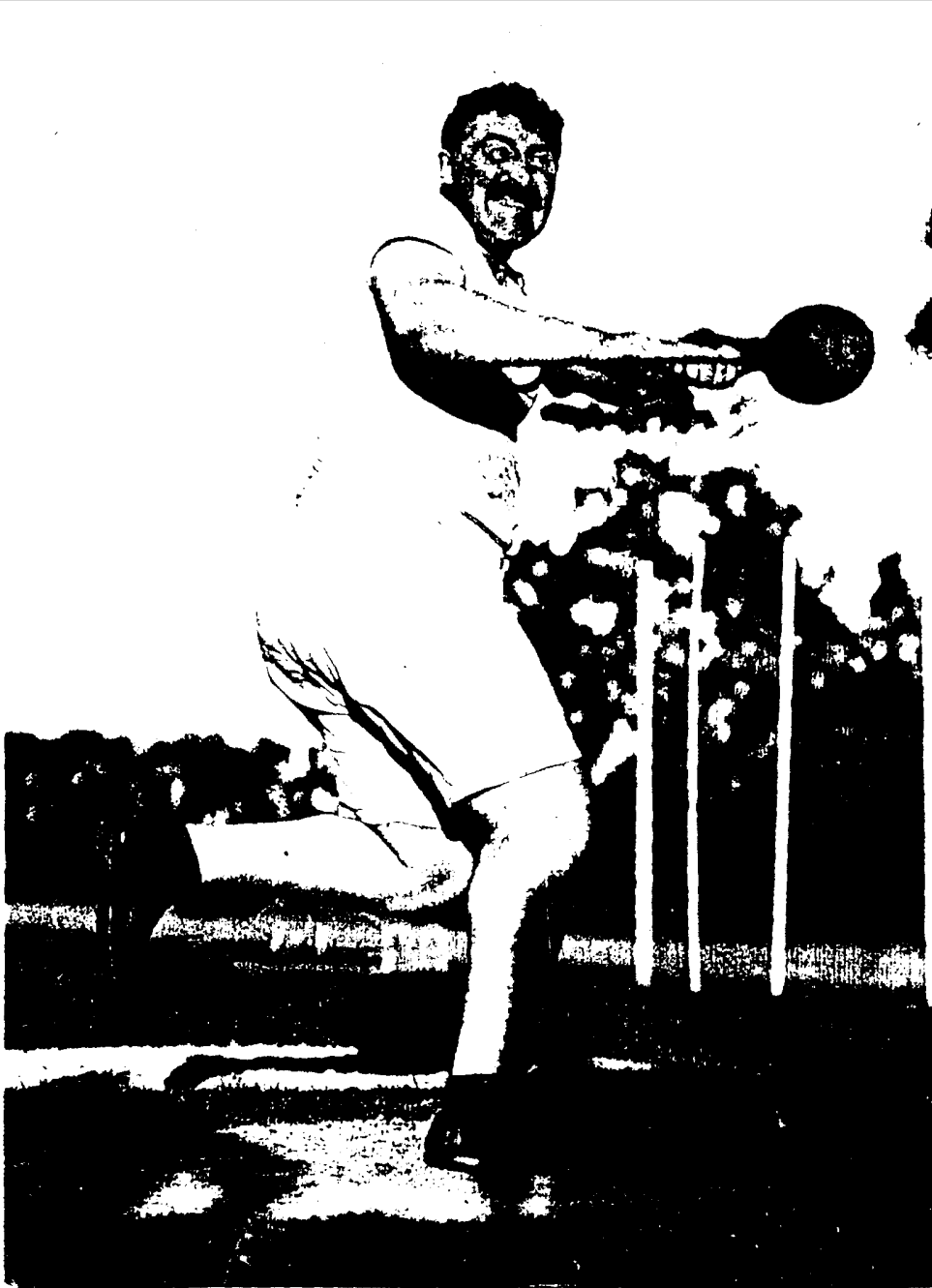
Beginning with the Games of the Second Olympiad in Paris (1900), a remarkable group of American citizens—six of them—dominated the weight-throwing events at these Paris Games, at the St. Louis Olympics of 1904, at the semi-official Olympic Games of 1906 (Athens), at the 1908, 1912, and at the 1920 Games in London, Stockholm, and Antwerp, respectively. All six men were born in Ireland, emigrated to New York City, gained their citizenship, and so dominated the Olympic weight events that they became known as the "Irish-American whales". Collectively, they won 22 gold, silver and bronze medals. All were memorable "characters"; and high on the list was a 300-pound behemoth named Patrick Joseph "Babe" McDonald (1878-1954).

For more than fifty years, Daniel J. Ferris was secretary of the American Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and he knew "Babe" McDonald and his giant Irish-American buddies: James S. Mitchell (1864-1921); John J. Flanagan (1873-1938); Matthew J. McGrath (1878-1941); Martin J. Sheridan (1881-1918); Patrick J. "Paddy" Ryan (1887-1964), and, "bigger than life", the 6'(feet) 5"(inches), 300-pound McDonald.

“They were so big”, remembered tiny Dan Ferris. “Any three of them, combined weighed nearly 900 pounds. They looked like whales. And they could eat”, he chuckled.

Patrick Joseph McDonnell was born in County Clare, Ireland, the son of poor farming parents. He emigrated to

the United States in 1901 where, at Ellis Island, officers misunderstood his given name and called him “McDonald”. He joined the New York City Police Department in 1905, and served with distinction for 41 years. The department was generous in allowing the



“THE IRISH BABE,” PAT MCDONALD, IN DETERMINED ACTION. THE 300-POUND BEHEMOTH WON TWO OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALS, INCLUDING; THE NO-LONGER CONTESTED TWO-HANDED SHOT PUT.

“Babe” opportunities to travel all over Canada, the eastern United States, and to the Olympic Games in Stockholm (1912) and Antwerp (1920). His American teammates, especially his Irish-American “whale” colleagues, won the majority of gold, silver, and bronze. “Babe” won the Stockholm gold medal in the shot put, with a record 50’ 4” toss and a silver medal in the combined left- and right-hand shot put event (87’ 2”). At the Antwerp Games, the 42-year-old McDonald won the gold in the 56-pound weight toss with a record 36’ 11”. Several days earlier, “Babe” (captain of the American team) carried his country’s flag at the Opening Ceremonies. Four years later, in Paris 1924, the non-competing McDonald, this “Prince of Whales”, was selected as honorary member of the team.

McDonald won 16 American championships-his first in 1907 and, at age 54, his last in 1933. He was the most famous “cop” in New York City....a traffic policeman in Times Square. A reporter wrote that he was like a “living statue of Liberty”. He added: “Never in the record of the swirling traffic of autos did any chauffeur ever venture to ignore McDonald’s great bulk. Newsboys pooled their spare pennies to buy him a loving cup.* Captain in the New York Police Force by 1946, the white-haired McDonald retired on April 3 of that year, the uncontested ‘living legend’ of the department and of the United States Olympic team.