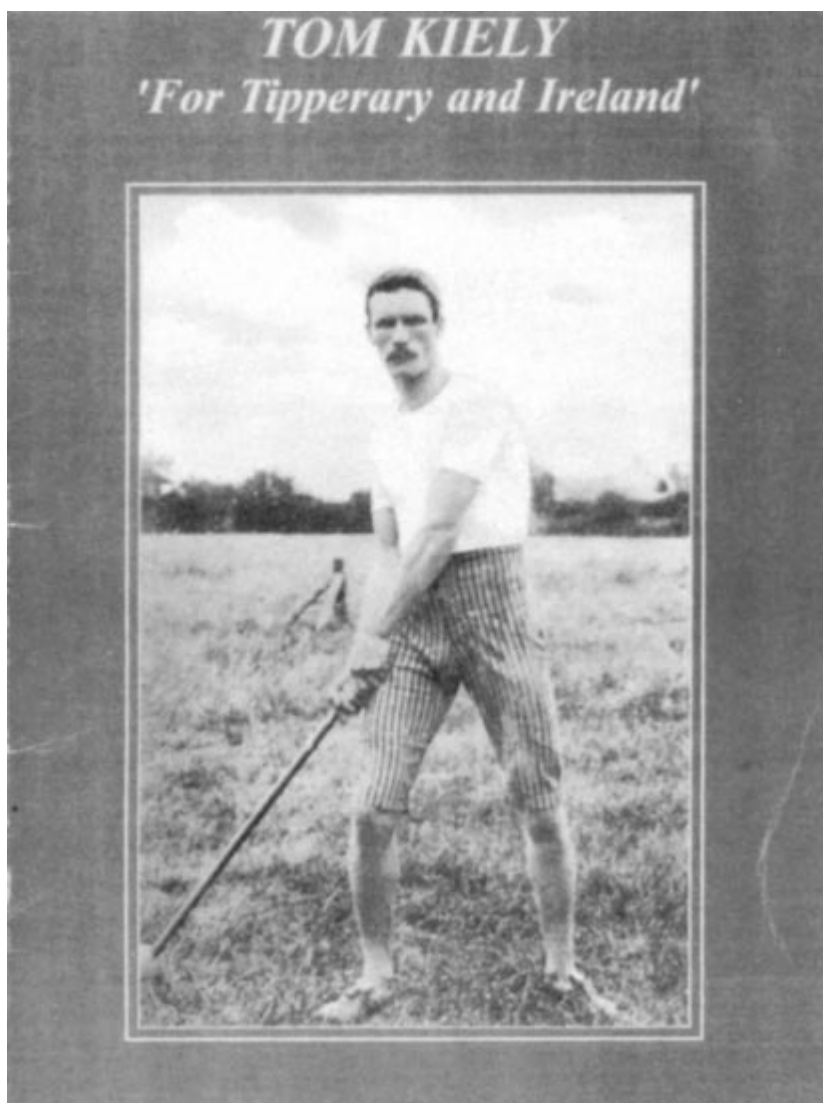


TOM KIELY

OLYMPIC AND WORLD ALL-ROUND CHAMPION



BY SÉAMUS WARE

Thomas Francis Kiely was born in 1869 in Ballyneale near the small town of Carrick-on-Siur, County Tipperary, to a farming family. His neighbours on an adjoining farm were the Davins, where three brothers, Maurice, Tom, and Pat, achieved fame for their sporting successes in the 1870s and 1880s. Maurice as a weight-thrower, boxer, rower, and as an administrator (he was the first president of the Gaelic Athletic Association); Tom and Pat as jumpers - both set world records in the high jump, and Pat was also a champion sprinter, hurdler, and long jumper. Not surprisingly, young Kiely was inspired by their example and was also helped by the Davins in training.

As a teenager, Tom Kiely played Gaelic Football, the rules for which Maurice Davin had helped to draft. He grew into a fine build of a man, being 6 ft. 2 inches (1:88 metres) tall, and weighing between 13 and 14 stone (82.5 - 88 kg). He started to compete in athletics at the age of 19, and as was common at the time, he did not specialize, but excelled as a weight-thrower, jumper, and hurdler. By 1892, Kiely proved his ability by first winning the All-round Championship of Ireland, and a month later he won no less than seven national titles at the GAA Championships, beating among others Dan Shanahan (the world record holder) in the hop, step and jump, with a mark of 49 feet 7 inches (15.02 metres), a distance which was not

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exceeded in Olympic competition until 1924. Over a long career, he won at least seventy (70) Irish and British championships and set world records for the 56 lb. weight and hammer throws - he was the first man to throw the hammer more than 160 feet (48.8 metres). Kiely won the (English) AAA hammer championship for five of the six years 1897 - 1902, losing only in 1900 to the great John Flanagan.

It is not known why Kiely did not compete in either the 1896 or 1900 Olympic Games. The GAA, in which Kiely was prominent, chose not to respond to de Coubertin's invitation to send a team to Athens, and it is probable that Kiely did not want to go to Paris as a member of a British team. By the time of the Third Olympic Games (St. Louis 1904), he was 34 years of age, but was still the dominant all-round athlete in Ireland. He received an invitation to compete in St. Louis from the Irish-American Athletic Club and this invitation was widely reported in Irish newspapers. This came to the notice of the AAA, who offered to pay all his expenses if he competed as a member of the United Kingdom team. As an Irish nationalist, Tom Kiely declined both those offers and said that he would compete "for Tipperary and Ireland". He sold some of the many prizes he had won and with some assistance from his admirers, he raised the fare.

Arriving in St. Louis, he entered for the All-round event, a precursor of the decathlon with ten events held on one day, which happened to be Independence Day in the United States (July 4th, 1904). There were four great Americans competing - Ellery Clark (US all-round champion in 1903), Adam Gunn (champion in 1901 and 1902), John Grieb (runner-up in 1903), and Truxton Hare (Olympic silver medal winner in hammer throw in 1900). The list was completed by two Irishmen, Kiely and John J. Holloway, another Tipperary man who was then resident in the USA. The weather conditions were very bad, the whole competition taking place in a driving rainstorm, with 3 inches (7.5 centimetres) of water on the track in places. Tom Kiely had injured his legs playing Gaelic Football and had not competed in sprints for five years. He finished last in the 100 yards; third in the shot put; fifth in the high jump (won by Holloway); won the 880 yards walk and the hammer; he came third in the pole vault; won the 120-yard hurdles and the 56 lb weight throw; then he was second in the long jump and finished fourth

(and last) in the mile. The final result was: (1) Tom Kiely 6036 points; (2) Adam Gunn 5907 points; (3) Truxton Hare 5813 points; (4) John Holloway 5273 points. Clark and Grieb did not complete the ten events.

For many years, Kiely was not listed as an Olympic champion, because of his poor records at the St. Louis Games and the fact that the All-round Event was listed as a World Championship. On his return home, he was presented with a large illuminated address by the GAA (now in the County Museum, Clonmel, Tipperary), which describes his win as a World Championship. David Guiney in his researches on Irish Olympians, came on Kiely's Olympic medal, then in possession of his daughter, and he was in touch with the late Dr. Ferenc Mezö of Hungary, author of "The Modern Olympic Games". Dr. Mezö had confirmed that the All-round Event was on the Olympic programme in 1904, and in due course the AAU investigated and the IOC accepted that T.F. Kiely should be added to the list of Olympic champions.

Two years later, Kiely returned to America to compete in the World All-Round Championship in Boston. He again beat Ellery Clark, winning five of the ten events, to claim the title. Back in Ireland again, Tom Kiely married but continued to compete in athletics. He won two more GAA championships in 1907. The following year, the great Martin Sheridan (winner of nine

Olympic medals) visited his native Ireland on his way back to the States after the London Olympics. A contest was arranged in Dungarvan between Kiely and Sheridan in five weight-throwing events; each man won two events and in the fifth both fouled their first throws, the contest being declared a draw. Then, at the age of 39, Kiely retired from competition.

After a long and active life, and having raised a family of three sons and five daughters, Thomas F. Kiely died in 1951. An exhibition on his life and career was held in the County Museum, Clonmel (a few miles from his birthplace) in 1997. An informative booklet was produced on that occasion. I have checked that there are still copies available and I am willing to get a copy and forward it to any member of the I.S.O.H. on receipt of cost, being: IR£ 3.00 for the booklet and IR£1.00 for postage.

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