

PADDY MARLEY

LEADER OF MEN

BY DICK HOOPER

Clonliffe Harriers captain Paddy Marley was a popular choice as team manager for the Irish team for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. Dick Hooper meets the leader of the Clonliffe Brigade.

It's the same every year. Eamonn Tierney cries "no more". He'll never run another cross-country race. Hates the mud, he does. Has had enough of the jostling, the bumping, changing in ditches, cold water showers on freezing cold days. Give him the road any day. He's a class road runner anyhow. He's in his 30s, a big boy now, he's going to decide his own destiny from now on. Every year he ends up running cross-country, some good, some bad, some very bad but he keeps appearing in the black and gold vest at some vital stage of every cross-country season. The reason - a chap called Paddy Marley.

Paddy Marley, captain of Clonliffe Harriers, Donegal born and bred, former international at 1500m, recently named manager of the Irish Olympic team for the Barcelona Games of 1992. Paddy Marley, athlete, coach, manager, confidant, friend to all at that great club on Dublin's northside called Clonliffe Harriers and to a lot more besides.

It is perhaps one of the more ironic lynchpins that underlies amateur sports such as athletics in this country that the truly successful officials rarely have their talents recognised and capitalised upon in such a fashion that they are allowed to develop and grow. Happily that is not true in the case of Marley. For Paddy Marley is a proven leader of men whose ability has been recognised.

In 1981 Marley was elected captain of Clonliffe - a Clonliffe already spoiled by success since they had first broken through (BLE-wise) and won the National Road Relay of 1975 and the National Cross-Country of 1976. In the period between 1975 and 1980 Clonliffe had been captained by Christy Brady and led superbly. Peter McDermott reigned for one year and then Paddy Marley assumed control. It was an unenviable task - a bit like Kenny Dalglish taking over from Bob Paisley. True, Marley inherited a superbly talented squad of athletes: Jerry Kiernan, Noel Harvey, Eamonn Tierney, Pdraig Keane, Denis Noonan, Gerry Finnegan et al, but having the talent and harnessing the talent are two different and challenging things. There have been many clubs over the years who on paper have looked capable of ending the Clonliffe superiority. Yet for a variety of reasons - wrong moti-



• **Paddy Marley fulfils his ultimate athletic ambition as he races for Ireland against Switzerland at Santry on June 9th, 1969**

ations, disagreements, different goals and directions - they have regularly fallen short. And we are talking middle and long distance running here. Clonliffe's tradition, the country's tradition.

It is in this area of organisation and motivation that Paddy Marley is a winner. He can cajole Eamonn Tierney down to his garden shed each January searching for the vice-grip to fix his spikes; convince Jerry Kiernan training in the San Diego sun that a journey home to run in the European clubs is the correct form of action, talk a 'flu rid-

den Richard Mulligan through a foot of Killenaule mud to 6th place in a national cross-country championship, spring a mad-fit Gerry Brady from nowhere every three years; and direct his *aide de camp* Pdraig Keane to run through a brick wall for him anytime, anywhere - witness the birth of a rather dubious (if hilarious) style of hurdling in the National League steeplechase last August.

The reason is simple. Marley was and still is an athlete himself. He thinks like an athlete. The best part of his day is the miles he logs in St. Anne's Park



• Paddy Marley edges out a strong field in the 1973 George V. Ryan 1500m. Also included in the picture are (left to right) Dermot Byrne, Tony O'Leary, Kevin Humphries and Jerry Kiernan.

every lunchtime with Keane. He was a member of Clonliffe teams that constantly played second fiddle to Donore in the early 70s and he was still in the squad when the big successes started to roll, from Ballinasloe 1976 on. Being part of it and not being long out of it made being captain easier. Injury has been his constant companion in recent years. He was not a remote, aloof figure. These guys he captained were his pals, his running mates - they all wanted the same things.

He knows what makes ambitious athletes tick, what makes them nervous, what makes them do stupid things in training and competition and when they're injured. He's been through it all himself. Would love to have competed in a major games but feels that the level may just have been beyond him. Would dearly love to have broken the four minute mile barrier - now that's his biggest regret. Jokes that that achievement would have allowed him entrance through the front door of Lar O'Byrne's house. At the end of the day though he gave his own career his best shot.

1968 was not a heady time to be an athlete in Donegal. No Patsy McGonagles, no all-weather tracks, just flags around a rarely-mown GAA pitch. Milford, his home village, is hardly a hub of athletic activity. Back in 1968 Cranford A.C. were the kingpins in Ulster. They were backboned by Marley and the McDaid's, Danny and Frankie. It was over a few pints of the black stuff - isn't it always - that Marley, the McDaid's and

Hugo Duggan reached the momentous decision that if they were to improve further they would have to move to Dublin, train in Santry, get the higher level of competition. Brave thinking back in 1968. Braver still was the knowledge that it was not the work that brought them - it was the athletics. Hated leaving his beloved Donegal but he knew he had to do it.

If for Danny McDaid it was a spectacularly right decision so too the effect was good on Marley. In one year he improved his 800m from 1:59 to 1:52. In 1969 he got his coveted international vest against Switzerland, running 3rd in 3:51.2, a personal best. Won the All-

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Army 1500m title. Raced against the great Kip Keino, not once but twice. It was worth it, alright. Smiled ruefully when he recalled his first meeting with Billy Morton on arrival in Dublin. A shy, apologetic Marley asked Morton would it be alright to train on the Santry track. Morton's reply - "what the hell do you think we built the damn thing for?" He learned from the track and the remark.

Last week, when accused of poaching Richard Mulligan into Clonliffe, Marley retorted - "sure he married into Clonliffe".

The job for Barcelona excites him. He wants to do it well. The procedures are simple - his task is to liaise with the athletes, find out what their plans and needs are, organise and ease the way ahead for them. The current impasse between some officials and the leading American-based Irish athletes is a major concern to him. The fact that communications between them and BLE is via an agent is disturbing. Marley wants no hassles, he wants to forget the past, build bridges. Because he is trusted by all the athletes who have had dealings with him, he will succeed. He knows the story, the home-based athletes will talk to the Americans and the truth will out. Nevertheless, communications, relationship-building are the major challenges of the next year or two.

He feels things are on the up. Verbalises the positive. The sponsorships are coming in and gathering momentum. The coaching side of the sport is being orchestrated better. There's a whole new enthusiasm for it - coaching days, seminars, think-ins are being held. People who have a lot to offer are being persuaded to offer it. Good people. Like Brendan O'Shea and Tom Curran.

He's warming to the subject now. A lot was learnt in BLE last year. A new era of getting things done right has begun. The wheat is being separated from the chaff. Only people genuinely interested in athletics need apply. Not people chasing

trips and junkets - that kind of nonsense will have to stop.

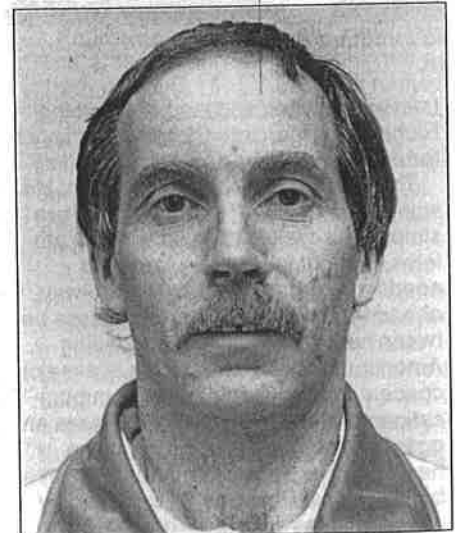
The club scene has deteriorated badly. He apports a lot of the blame to road racing. Athletes are dressed like billboards. Where are the club vests, the team competitions, club against club. Athletes running road races could do

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better concentrating on other events. There are too many factions and associations, he laments. BLE's problems, he proffers, have stemmed from the fact that they have lost control at a time in the growth of the sport when they should have had increased control. Standards have dropped as a result. Even more worrying, he moans, is the drop-off in young athletes.

There's another point - with the popularity of veteran athletics there are not enough people retiring any more - he names the people around the country whose competitive graph will never rise again but whose fresh influx of enthusiasm could stoke the fires of Irish athletics. The lost generation.

All the talk flows from a man who has a



love affair with the sport. His life revolves around it. He hates the politics of it but loves the involvement. Ach, aye. He's a good guy, this Paddy Marley. A superb carpenter by trade. A perfectionist in fact. I can vouch for that - he built the wardrobes my tracksuits hang in. He'll build too the bridges that close the gaps between potential and performance in Barcelona. Ask any Clonliffe man and they'll tell you about the days they wanted to quit and they kept going because they knew they had to; wanted to for Clonliffe and Paddy Marley's sake.

The day I rang Paddy Marley I congratulated him on his selection for team manager for Barcelona. I added that I hoped to be on the plane with him. I meant it. He replied that he hoped I would be. He meant it too - and I don't run for Clonliffe.