We left London to visit my grandfather in Nenagh. We were met at the train by a delegation from the Urban Council and I was carried on the shoulders of the immense throng to a coach from which the horses were taken and we were driven through a City-streets with torch lights and bonfires. I shall never forget the hearty greeting! — John J. Hayes, The Marathon Race (New York, 1908).

Our famous countryman, Matt McGrath, has arrived in Nenagh from Stockholm with his honours fresh upon him and is spending a holiday around his old haunts in Carrigatoker and its neighbourhood, where in his boyhood he shot skipe and hurried bares on the moors. He is accompanied by Pat McDonald of Co. Clare who won the shot put with an Olympic record.

— Nenagh News & Tipperary Vindicator, 27 July 1912.

There were many thousands of people waiting at Dun Laoghaire to welcome the team ... the three aeroplanes of the Irish Aero Club dipping and circling over the boats; as the Scotia neared her moorings a railway engine set up a shrill, prolonged peal of welcome, and the people on the pier began to clap and cheer ... among whom were Mr Tisdall's mother and his wife ... The procession moved off ... the main body of athletes, two thousand schoolboys and at least a dozen hotels ... a civic reception at the Mansion House ... proceeded through College Green and Westminster Street, and along O'Connell Street until the Gresham Hotel — at the banquet President de Valera was seated between Dr O'Callaghan and General O'Duffy while Mr W. T. Cosgrave was between Mr Tisdall and the Lord Mayor of Dublin. — Irish Times, 29 Aug. 1932.

This public tribute solicits widespread support
Johnny Hayes rejected the fast, early pace from Windsor Castle, was 11th at half-way, 3rd at 19 miles, 2nd outside Shepherd’s Bush stadium and 100 yards behind Dorando of Italy on the track. But Dorando collapsed and was helped to finish – first, but disqualified.

The official Olympic Report said: ‘The glamour surrounding Dorando’s effort must not be allowed to obscure the courage and intelligence with which Hayes had run a stern chase for so long a course and had nursed sufficient strength to make his final effort’.

JOHN JOSEPH HAYES was born in East 88th Street, New York, on 10 April 1886, the eldest child of Michael Hayes, a native of Silver Street, Nenagh, and Ellen née O’Rourke. Michael was a son of John Hayes, a baker in Silver Street, and Ellen née Flynn.

Johnny Hayes died on 25 August 1965.

Not Only An Olympic Gold Medallist:

➢ His first sport was with neighbours’ boys in impromptu cycling, skating and ‘tag’ competitions; he joined St. Bartholomew’s gym in 1903, took up running in 1904, and by 1905 was captain of their cross-country team and 3rd of 88 runners in the junior Metropolitan Championship.

➢ In 1906 Hayes came 5th in the Boston Marathon and 3rd in 1907. In a 1908 USA Olympic tryout he was 2nd, behind a Morrissey and ahead of a Ryan; three of the seven-man team under trainer Mike Murphy; after 8 am-6pm work they ran Long Island roads three days a week from the Irish-American club grounds at Celtic Park.

➢ His Olympic time of 2hrs 55mins 18.4secs was an inaugural world record for the 26 miles 385 yards which became the standard marathon.

❖ Johnny Hayes was presented by the Greek Olympic Committee with a bronze statue showing the dying Philippiades, the soldier-messenger who collapsed and died after running from Marathon to Athens to bring news of the Athenians’ defeat of the Persians in 490 BC.

❖ The USA team was hosted by President Roosevelt at his country home in Oyster Bay, Long Island. Hayes then twice raced Dorando professionally over 262 laps of Madison Square Garden but lost, toured as a celebrity in vaudeville, and was the subject of an Irving Berlin song.

❖ His career in retail commerce included Bloomingdale’s department stores and food brokerage. He made a second visit ‘home’ to Nenagh, in 1962 with his only child Doris Hale who lives in New Jersey, USA.
Matt McGrath set an Olympic record of 179' 7" which lasted until 1936 and was almost 3' better than Dr Pat O’Callaghan’s winning throw twenty years later. McGrath’s Olympic victory followed his silver medal at the London Olympic games of 1908. Matt McGrath competed for the USA in the 1908, 1912, 1920 (5th) and 1924 Olympic Games (again 2nd when close to 49 years of age). He was sent by public subscription as a spectator in 1928, when his fifth place in the USA trials just failed to make the team of four.

MATTHEW McGrath was born at Curraghmore in the Arra hills near Nenagh on 28 December 1875, son of Timothy and Anne née McGrath.
He died in St. Clare’s Hospital, The Bronx, New York, on 29 January 1941

Not Only An Olympic Gold Medallist
– And Twice A Silver Medallist:

➢ He set new WORLD RECORDS for the 16 lb. hammer throw – 173' 7" at Montreal in 1907 and 187' 4" at New York in 1911; he set a new WORLD RECORD for the 56 lb. throw with follow in 1911 – 40' 6 3/8", still unsurpassed at his death thirty years later.

➢ At Nenagh Sports in 1908 he broke three WORLD RECORDS in non-standard events for 56 lb. throw forward and over a bar and the 16 lb. hammer from a wide circle.

➢ He won 21 USA national titles over a 30-year career and at 56 years of age he came sixth in the USA championships among 70 competitors who included Dr Pat O’Callaghan, the double Olympic champion.

Having left Ireland for the USA in 1897 and worked as a bartender and salesman, he joined the police as patrolman in 1902 with career steps as Sergeant 1917 - Lieutenant 1918 - Deputy Inspector 1930 - Inspector 1936, being Director of Manhattan Traffic Division and still in service at 65 years of age at the date of his death.

➢ He received citations for rescuing a drowning man and arresting an armed killer; lectured to recruits on Better Lifestyles and on Sports Programmes.

➢ The youth who won a half-mile race at Killaloe sports and the 100 yards and long jump at Portroe sports included handball, swimming and golf in later life; he advised: ‘vary your activity, keep in condition at all times’.
Bob Tisdall’s Olympic victory was only his sixth race in that event – following a Greek record, two trials for the Irish team in 56.2 secs and 54.2, the Olympic heat in 54.8, and semi-final in 52.8, which equalled the Olympic record. In the final he ran 51.67 secs, a world record but disallowed under the then rules as he knocked the last hurdle (his eyes were watering). That race also included the 1924, 1928 and 1936 Olympic champions. Within an hour he helped Dr Pat O’Callaghan file down that Corkman’s spikes to repeat his 1928 Olympic hammer victory: ‘Ireland’s Day of Dual Gold’.

Bob went on to take eighth place in the Decathlon.

ROBERT M. N. TISDALL was born in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, on 16 May 1907, son of Meta née Morton of 20 Summerhill, Nenagh, and William Newburgh Tisdall, Co. Cork. From the age of five Bob lived at Summerhill, then at Monsen House and finally at Hazelpoint near Dromineer.

Not Only An Olympic Gold Medallist:

Bob Tisdall uniquely won four events for Cambridge versus Oxford in 1931 – and as President and sole selector left himself out of his best event to enable a colleague get his ‘Blue’.

He held Irish, United Kingdom, Canadian, South African and Greek records. As a schoolboy he was one of a pair deemed the best gymnasts among English schools.

He has farmed in several countries, and now at Nambour, north of Brisbane; has been a teacher, gymnastium proprietor and World War II army officer in South Africa; was President-founder of the Tanganyika AAA and of a yacht club in Queensland; still writes verse and lectures on physical fitness and healthy living.

At 86 years of age: did the first parachute jump from 12,000 feet, played tennis regularly and swam in the pool he himself built at home.

At 59 years of age: missed ‘shooting his age’ over 18 holes of golf in Queensland by an inch; saw the Nenagh Olympic Club; whose Patron he is, win the Women’s National League at Tullamore; spoke warmly of his Lough Derghside youth at that club’s dinner-cabaret in his honour; crewed in the Lough Derg regatta; jogged with his great-grandnephews at Hazelpoint; and received a visit there from his Olympic gold medal successor of 1956, Ron Delany.

At 93 years of age: the oldest Olympian in the world jogged 500 yards of the Olympic Games 2000 torch relay en route from Mount Olympus to Sydney, being greeted at the handover by his wife and family and by the Irish Ambassador who had come there especially for the occasion.