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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Bill Halpenny Noted As Track, Field Great

By NEIL A. MATHESON

IF I HAD the power to do so I would give my nomination to the Sports Hall of Fame to Bill Halpenny. I'd never have made the Olympic team had it not been for his coaching."

Phil MacDonald, one of the three men inducted Sunday into the P.E.I. Sports Hall of Fame at Summerside, was referring to the man both of us regard as the greatest track and field athlete this Island ever produced.

Bill Halpenny was coach of the Abegweit team back in the early 1920's when Phil MacDonald was the toast of this province in that sport – it was mostly in field events, though he did hold the Maritime record in the high hurdles, as well as in the running broad jump.

PHIL HAD A far-away look in his eye as he thought wistfully, and appreciatively of the many things that Bill Halpenny had told him, and showed him, while he was striving for the goal many Canadian athletes have in mind, but few attain. He made the Olympic team in 1924 as a 400-metre hurdler.

Bill Halpenny was not suggested this year for the Sports Hall of Fame, therefore we, the directors, could not consider his name. But the story Phil told me emphasized tremendously what I have said about him in this column several months ago.

I believe I told you that Halpenny, a Charlottetown man, represented Canada in the pole vault at the Olympic Games in Stockholm in 1912; that his pole did not arrive in time for the Pole Vault and thus he was unable to place. I said also that he later consistently defeated the two Americans who had been first and second, when he competed against them in the United States.

Tremendous Performance

PHIL MacDONALD added to the story immeasurably, though, when he gave me this additional information.

Halpenny's pole did arrive sometime after the official competition. Arrangements were made for him to give an exhibition vault. When the height had reached that which the American winner had cleared, the young Charlottetown man told them to "put it higher". This was done and Bill Halpenny cleared it.

Then the young Charlottetown man was acclaimed on the spot as "the world's greatest pole vaulter".

What is more, the King of Sweden ordered that a special medal be struck in honor of the feat which Bill Halpenny had performed.

I am told that this medal is somewhere in Charlottetown. I haven't a clue where it is. But the story of Halpenny's feat, and the coining of the medal is correct, Phil assures me.

I told Phil that I had never heard the story previously, but later that evening I dimly recalled that a cousin of mine in Rose Valley – I think it was him – had told me the story

many years ago, when I was a wide-eyed youngster and a hero worshipper of athletes, particularly of track and field athletes.

First Football Coach

LATER I GOT interested in football – the man who is now Lieutenant-Governor W.J. MacDonald, was my first coach – and later basketball and other things. But in those early formative years, I leaned toward track and field, which I have never forgotten.

George A. Callbeck, Summerside was the other Islander inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame Sunday night. I hope to do a column on George very soon, for I have often admired him as I saw him in action. The other man, John “Whacky” MacEachern died a few years ago. I had the pleasure, many times of watching Whacky perform. Several times I played on the Abegweit football team with him.

The one thing that stands out in my memory of Whacky on a football field, is his shifty speed in the backfield, and his amazing ability of recovery from a tackle.

Honestly this man would bounce onto his feet and, seemingly, be at top speed in a couple of strides. I have played against and with many great footballers in my day, but never did I see one with this ability so pronounced as the man the Sports Hall of Fame accepted posthumously this week.

My Thanks To Mayor MacKenzie

MY THANKS TO Mayor C. Ross MacKenzie, and his council, for the attractive memento of Summerside they presented to me at the Mayor’s reception in the Council Chambers. I really appreciate your kind thoughtfulness. Mr. Callbeck, Mr. MacDonald and several naval officers whose names I did not catch, also received the same type of memento.

That “Christmas Cactus” business is back in the news. Mrs. Mary Creverie, Souris, tells me she has had a Christmas Cactus bloom in July and August. The plant had not bloomed at Christmas, or Easter.

Mrs. Cheverie tells me that the plant is called “crab plant”.

My friend, B. Frank Tinney writes re the Yankee Gale and encloses a list of names of men lost in the gale and buried in St. Mark’s Cemetery at Rustico. They were buried on October 9, 1851.

Stephen and Samuel Crowell, and David Phillips came from Liverpool, N.S.; Seth MacLaren, Thomas Moody, Charles MacLaren and Freeman Gardner came from Port Morton, Maine.

Henry Fitzgerald and Richard Smith came from Flat Rocks, Maine and Edward Turned from Moore’s Harbor.

On October 23, 1851, James Ryan and David Maxwell, both of Liverpool, N.S. were buried.

All of these men, Mr. Tinney tells me, were buried in the one grave. The spot is ill kept, weed covered and exceedingly difficult to find as the grave is not marked in any way, Frank tells me.

This column will not appear again for the next two weeks. I shall be on vacation and some most interesting and enjoyable activity is immediately in view.

A trip into the Maritimes, and the United States, is a minor part of the proceedings, but I don't expect this time to be gathering column stories.