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The Irishman Who Ran for England.

Self-trained for many years, Hogan reached the peak of his athletic career after moving to England in 1960. Under the most bizarre of circumstances, Hogan won a gold medal in the marathon of the 1966 European Championships running in an English vest. Why the best Irish long-distance runner of his generation was obliged to declare for England is an extraordinary story. That he was successful under these circumstances only adds to the legend of the Mad Irishman. The enigmatic Hogan, who has also had a lifelong passion for horses, might have chosen a career as a jump jockey but recognised that his sporting potential lay with athletics. Combative, outspoken, colourful and driven to succeed, he battled a cruel bureaucracy in Irish athletics. This is one man's inspiring story of overcoming the odds and realising his dream. Read Less.

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The Irishman Who Ran for England by Jim Hogan.

Turn Back The Clock! Today's Top Runners Talk About Their High School Careers.
Archives Wejo Speaks Rojo Speaks JK Speaks.

Encomium To A Legend: Jim Hogan - A Rare Breed by PJ Browne.

The year 1964 was the most turbulent in the political history of Irish athletics since the 1930s. The International Cross Country Championship was held in Leopardstown Racecourse on 21 March. The race was a low-key affair. Irish television offered a paltry 400 pounds to carry a live telecast which was turned down.

Francisco Aritmendi of Spain, a 25-year-old sports groundsman won the race in front of a medium sized crowd. Athletic fans elsewhere had to make do with a radio commentary. Jim Hogan took 5th for Ireland and the Irish team were 6th out of nine. Great Britain won the team event. It was a race that Hogan might have easily won. He explains: "I had trouble getting over the obstacles, and lost about 5 seconds over each one. Each time I made up ground on the Spaniard only to fall back on the obstacles. Normally I would have run the f***er into the ground."

In the 1966 European Championships, Hogan would win the Gold medal in the marathon in an English vest, the summit of his turbulent athletic career. What follows is a glimpse of Hogan's accomplished career. Mary Hogan, his beloved wife, succumbed to Parkinson's disease before Christmas 2001.

"Only two good things came out of Ireland in the 60s - Arkle and Jim Hogan." This was a popular sentiment that Jim Hogan used to hear around Chiswick, and he smiles as he recalls it. Although a little embarrassed by the hyperbole, Hogan is pleased to be linked with the great chaser. That it embraces the two dominant passions of his life, athletics and horses, is tacitly acknowledged. "I have always loved the horses," he says. "Arkle was marvellous, and I saw him win all his races in England." Hogan is a mere five pounds heavier, 9 stone 7 lbs., that when he was at the peak of his running career. He was light enough to be a jockey, and spent many of his early years riding out for old Joe Hogan, patriarch of the Hogan racing dynasty in County Limerick.

Jim Hogan and his wife, Mary, returned to Ireland in November 1995. "Mary wanted a bit more space, and I was glad to come back," he says quietly. To see him workout in Bruff Sportsfield, one would think that little has changed. He runs barefooted with his distinctive gait moving lightly through the strides. Two to three miles per day is his limit, but characteristically, there's a hint of quality about them.

It was on this field, newly opened in 1956, that Hogan won one of his 5 Munster titles at the 4 mile distance. "I set out the track," says Ronnie Long of BLE. "The weather was roasting hot. That was the day that all the bicycles got punctured." Thanks to some local pranksters, boxes of thumb-tacks were scattered all over the place. After winning his race, Hogan discovered that he had run the entire distance with a tack embedded in the sole of his foot. It would take a lot more than a thumb-tack to impede Hogan's rapid progression to stardom.

Hogan (or Cregan, depending on whom you ask) began his athletic career quietly and furtively in his native Athlacca. "If you were seen running in those days, people thought you were mad," he says. "You'd have to steal out." His parents didn't know about his running until his name appeared in the Limerick Leader after coming 2nd in the Senior County cross-country. "After that I cut a track on our own field with the scythe. My sister had
When he was 28, Hogan went to England. "I should have gone four years earlier," he says, "and I would have made the Rome Olympics. It would have given me experience for Tokyo." He didn't run for about six months having difficulty finding suitable employment. He worked at various jobs until he found the ideal situation with Brentford and Chiswick Local Council. His running needs were accommodated, enabling him to take time off work to travel and compete. It took him about a year to establish his dominance with the Polytechnic Harriers, "and then for about 8 years nobody could get near me." He thrived in the organised training and support of club running.

Success brought acclaim and international recognition: "In 1960 I came back to Ireland and ran as Jim Cregan. I was under the impression that if you ran under the NACA which I did all my life, you wouldn't be allowed to run in England if it was known that you were an NACA runner. So I changed my name to Hogan. A lot of people don't understand it. Cregan was the first name that came to mind, and had no special significance whatsoever." Press clippings indicate that the reverse actually happened, that Cregan changed his name to Hogan. Notwithstanding the mystery surrounding his name, there was no ambiguity when it was time to compete. Jim Hogan was selected to run for Ireland in the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

There was no clear cut favourite in the 1964 marathon, with at least 15 runners in serious contention for the gold medal. Defending champion Abebe Bikila of Ethiopia had undergone an appendectomy only 40 days before the race. The Australian Ron Clarke, running his fourth race in a week, rushed to an early lead, followed by Hogan. "After we started off," Hogan recalls, "Clarke said to me, we'll run as we feel. After 6 miles we found ourselves at the front. I then took the lead and Bikila came up at 9 miles and we drew away from the field. At the halfway, I was 6 metres behind him, and not particularly worried. At 20 miles he had 50 seconds on me, but we were three minutes away from the rest. After 22 miles everything began to unravel; I took no water and my legs stiffened." Hogan was dangerously dehydrated and slowed to a walk before dropping out.

Dave Guiney (now deceased) met Hogan shortly after the race and was shocked by his condition. "I'd always admired his courageous running," says Guiney, "and I remember him saying to me, 'I didn't come here to make up the numbers. I came out here to try to win a medal. I did my best.' That statement typified Hogan's attitude to running and competition. 'Running to win is the only attitude,' he says with conviction. 'If you're looking around at your opposition you'll win f. k all. I cared about no one when I was in form.'

Guiney believes that Hogan's front running may have cost him a medal. It's a valid observation but Hogan does not concur. 'I thought I did quite well against Bikila,' he says, 'and I was, of course, thinking about the win. If Dr. Kevin O'Flanagan had done his job right, I would have medalled. I had pulled out of the 10000 metres with a bad stitch, and I knew nothing about hydration in preparation for long distance. I was cruising at 15 miles. Five minute miles were nothing to me. It was pure dehydration that done me in, and nothing else.'

During his recovery after the race, "not one Irish official came down to me in the medical room. The only assistance that I got was from the New Zealanders. I wasn't disappointed over what happened in the race. I ran quite well as a complete novice." More important for Hogan were the lessons learned. "I vowed that the next time I'd run a marathon," he added, "I would be fully prepared for it."

'I had a fantastic 1965," says Hogan. "Every race I ran in was better than another. I really ran well." He finished second in a three-mile race in Portsmouth in a personal best of 13:19:06. In a 10,000 metre race at the White City, he set a British Record running 28:50 in 80 degrees heat. He made the British cross-country team finishing 5th in the trials, but was disqualified for missing out on some obstacles. By the end of the year, Hogan was convinced that the marathon provided the best chance to medal in the 1966 European Championships.

"So I just trained then for that distance," he explains. "My main run was a 15 mile course in Chiswick, with 3 big hills on it, and I would do that once a fortnight. I never ran more than 15 miles if it was a hard run or a time trial. I thought going further than that would take it out of the legs. I'd sooner run fast at 15 than slow at 22." On Sundays he would run long and easy with his mates. But speedwork was the overriding feature of his training. "This was intensive, quality training," he says. One of his favourite sessions was the 440 with a rest of 110. He would run 30 of these quarters in 64 seconds with a 56 second jog in between. Each run was completed in two minutes or less.

The European Championships 1966.

Ten days before the marathon, Hogan ran the hilly course in 75 minutes. "I knew then if anybody was going to beat me, they would have to be going exceptionally well," he says. He tapered off his training and headed to the British training headquarters, 15 miles outside Budapest. He trained with Alan Simpson, the miler, while in camp, who told him: "You're the fittest man on this team, there's nobody fitter. When you get to 18 miles, you'll just wave them goodbye."

Simpson was as good as his word, and that's how the race went. At the 18 mile mark, Hogan ran about 30 metres behind the field without increasing speed. Says Hogan - "A gap opened, so I said Jesus, now I'll put it in, so I put the boot down and ran the next 5K fifty seconds faster than the previous one. Most of the effort was put in in the first mile of that break, and that was where the race was won. The rest was easy and I never looked back. It just happened like. I won it," he says casually.

1967 was quite a good year for the European champion. He prepared for Mexico and qualified for the 10,000 metres. "I ran the fastest time in my life, six miles in 27:50," he notes. He dropped out in the trials for the marathon. Mexico was a disappointment. "I might have been better off in the marathon because you had to go that bit slower at altitude, whereas the 10000 was run that bit faster, and it was harder to do it," Hogan enjoyed the Mexico Olympic experience and took in a lot of cultural events much to his wife's satisfaction. His running career ended at Mexico. "I ran in 1969, just average running," he says, "and one year later I retired. I kept fit but never raced."

In 1983 he came out of retirement to compete in the Veteran World Championships in South America, and he won two golds in the over 50 division. Somehow it was not the same even though he reached an unbelievable level of fitness. He was doing over 6 miles of interval running and a 6 mile run in 27:30," he notes. He dropped out in the trial for the marathon. Mexico was a disappointment. "I might have been better off in the marathon because you had to go that bit slower at altitude, whereas the 10000 was run that bit faster, and it was harder to do it," Hogan enjoyed the Mexico Olympic experience and took in a lot of cultural events much to his wife's satisfaction. His running career ended at Mexico. "I ran in 1969, just average running," he says, "and one year later I retired. I kept fit but never raced."
inside 41 minutes. Beating runners 10 years younger was amusing but not satisfying. The ten year hiatus from competitive running had refreshed him, but it was to last only for a year. The injuries came in a flurry and though he competed again in Rome two years later, his brief flirtation with the veteran's scene was over.

Any assessment of Hogan's career will have to consider the way he was treated by Irish officials. "I had a terrible time with them," he says. "If you lived in England and ran for Ireland, you were treated as an alien. They only picked me for the Europeans or the Olympics. I was never invited to go to the glamorous meets in France and Italy. When I was selected for England, I ran in several countries, and you have to experience that kind of running if you want to be a successful international runner."

Dave Guiney points out that "he got on the wrong side of the Irish officials quite early on, and the mystery of the name Jim Hogan made them uneasy. He suddenly appeared on the Olympic scene and they couldn't find out his background. He was Jim Cregan before that. He didn't have a job and he was treated badly by officials who basically wouldn't give you the itch then. They looked after him in England." Hogan didn't help his cause either and he spoke his mind when others would have remained silent. He was also a bit of an outsider in England and was heavily influenced by the Australians with whom he trained.

Hogan is quick to point out that he never had any problems with Irish athletes even after he decided to compete for Britain in 1965. All of his clashes were with the officials, and he says, "the athletes were always last on their agenda. I have no regrets about wearing the British vest. I never had an ounce of bother in England," he says, "and athletically I couldn't have done much of it without going there. If you're getting a living in a country you should stand by it. The worst people to work with in England were the Irish."

He speaks highly of the Irish athletes that he competed against. "I ran against Tom O'Riordan several times back in Kerry. I don't think he ever beat me. He was an excellent runner was Tom," O'Riordan remembers Hogan as being highly competitive and driven to win. "He would tear around the country to different sports meets looking for a race, cycling on his bike, or arriving on the back of a lorry with a group of runners. I got on well with him," O'Riordan notes. "He was stubborn, and he had an occasional tendency to swear a lot."

Hogan doesn't bear any grudges. "I carry on. It's in the past and doesn't bother me," he says. He does have some regrets though. "I sometimes wish that the European marathon was at an Olympics as I would have taken a lot of beating that day. Also, if I had a sprint finish, I'd have won a lot more races. If I could run a last lap in 56 or 57 secs I'd have been fantastic."

Hogan views the current athletic scene with some dismay. "There is nothing in Ireland or England for that matter. They've got it too easy now. The Kenyans work and that's why they are successful. That's why Sonia (O'Sullivan) is successful, she trains with people who are way better than her. I have great admiration for the Radcliffe girl. By Jesus but she is some athlete. She is only coming into her own now and I don't see anyone beating her in the marathon if she is right on the day. She'll f***ing destroy them."

These days Hogan's time is taken up looking after a couple of two year old horses, getting them ready for the sales. He is well connected with the racing scene having spent many years travelling with jockey Declan Murphy. He understands the business, and he has an easy way with the animals. He rarely sits still.

His wife Mary has Parkinson's Disease. This is a devastating blow to the couple. They have no children. Mary can already sense that feeling of otherness the diagnosis has brought with it, and is frightened about the future. Hogan's feelings are well concealed and he doesn't like to dwell on it. "You do the best you can and try to get on with it," he says.

It took them about four years to renovate the house together, and Mary sometimes wonders if her husband has fully grasped the implications of her condition. She has difficulty walking but her mind is untouched so far. She dreads becoming a burden on one who is so active.

"Athletics is a great sport to be in if you're good at it," Hogan says as he gently strokes one of the horses in his care. "Look at this boy. Now there's a racehorse. Whether he'll amount to anything remains to be seen. You know I see these fellas running 100 miles a week and never improving. What's the point of doing that. If that kind of running wasn't improving my performance, then I'd go and find something else to do."

"I had my day and it was great," he says. "People tell me I was born 25 years too early and could have made a lot of money. What good is money? I have no time for these people who go around with a chip on their shoulder saying how good they would be nowadays. There's no use in that. It's gone and past." And with that Hogan turned and was gone too, "away in a hack over river and bush."

Former Olympian Jim Hogan passes away.

"The Irishman Who Ran For England" died peacefully on Saturday, aged 81.


The only thing we knew for sure about Jim Hogan was that his name wasn't actually Jim Hogan. He was born Jim Cregan, in Croom hospital in Limerick, on May 28th 1933, and if not one of Ireland's most successful distance runners, he was certainly one of our most enigmatic.

In 1960, when first moving to England to find work, he changed his surname to Hogan; over the next four years he made several international appearances for Ireland, most famously at the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo, where he was the last man left chasing defending marathon champion Abebe Bikila, from Ethiopia. All Hogan had to do was to stay on his feet, keep moving forward, and an Olympic silver medal was his. Then, just after 23 miles, he dropped out, truly dehydrated.

Two years later, at the European Athletics Championships in Budapest, Hogan truly conquered the distance, winning the marathon title in 2:20:04 -
still the only Irish man to win a European championship gold medal. Hogan, however, was actually wearing an English vest, having switched allegiance in 1965 due to his increasing dissatisfaction with the officialdom of Irish athletics.

Hogan also ran the 1968 Olympic marathon, again as part of the British team. This and other issues were the subject of his book, The Irishman Who Ran For England, published in 2008. In the preface, Britain’s legendary distance runner David Bedford writes: “He (Jim) overcame enormous odds and antipathy but he prevailed. I know Jim has no regrets about his career either.”

During that period Hogan also set a world record for 30km on the road, running 1:32:25, and also a European Indoor three-mile record of 13:37.2.

In his later years he returned to Limerick, settling in Knocklong, and after the death of his wife Mary, dedicated much of his life to the horse racing world, breaking and training horses well into his 70s. He died peacefully on Saturday, aged 81, and his funeral mass takes place at noon tomorrow, Monday, at St John The Baptist Church, Athlacca.

Limerick athlete who struck gold as a marathon runner.

Jim Hogan, who has died aged 81, was the only Irish winner of the European marathon title, which he won while wearing a British singlet in 1966. He had previously represented Ireland at the 1964 Olympic Games, while he ran the marathon for Britain at the 1968 games in Mexico.

Reporting on the 1964 Tokyo marathon for The Irish Times, Ronnie Delany wrote that Hogan “dropped out exhausted at the 22 mile stage after a brave but futile effort to match strides with the champion Abebe”.

In 1968 he completed the marathon in Mexico, again won by Abebe Bikila, finishing 26th of over 30 runners.

He was highly regarded by fellow athletes. Olympian Tom O’Riordan remembered him as a “fearless athlete”, though an “awful man to swear”. Former European 800-metres record-holder the late Noel Carroll described him as a “magnificent runner”.

Former 10,000-metres world record holder David Bedford, who attended Hogan’s funeral in Athlacca last Monday, viewed him as a “man after my own heart when it came to training and racing”.

Changed name.

He took up cross-country running in early 1952 and quickly made his mark, becoming Irish five-mile champion that year. A front-runner, he competed barefoot and won a total of 12 Irish championships under the NACA banner.

The NACA was a 32-county body which did not enjoy international recognition. Hence only Irish athletes affiliated to the Amateur Athletic Union, a 26-county body, could compete internationally.

In 1959 Hogan left Ireland to find work in England. It was an easy decision for him to take, as he wrote in his memoir: “There were no jobs and the country was riddled with class distinction.”

On the track.

He joined Polytechnic Harriers, and soon made a name for himself. Selected to represent Ireland at the European championships in Belgrade in 1962, he ran in both the 5,000 and 10,000 metres. However, he was forced to drop out of both races.

He bounced back in the following year to break the Irish three-mile record, as well as the British six-mile record.

In 1964 he was delighted to be selected for the Irish athletics team at the Tokyo Olympics. “It will be the climax of my running career and I feel sure that I can do justice to my selection,” he said.

He competed in both the 10,000 metres and marathon. Forced to drop out of the former race with a “very bad stitch”, he nevertheless acquitted himself well in the marathon. Withdrawing at the 23-mile mark with dehydration, he was taken on a stretcher to the Olympic hospital.

David Guiney reported in the Irish Press: “No one tried harder and more courageously today in his bid to win us an Olympic medal in the marathon.”

However, in 1965 he declared for Great Britain, complaining of the “meanness of Irish officials” after a row over an air fare. Also that year, he broke the British 10,000 metre record at White City, his favourite running track.

Proud moment.

He retired in 1969. He returned to competitive running at the world veteran championships in 1983, winning the 5,000 metres final and finishing third in the cross-country race. But on the whole he had little regard for the veteran scene.

Interested in horses from an early age, he once considered a career as a jump jockey but stuck with athletics. On his return to Ireland in 1995 he settled in Knocklong, Co Limerick, and rode out for a number of trainers. He then became involved in breaking horses for owners and preparing horses for sale. He subsequently bought and sold horses on his own account.

He enjoyed some success as an owner, notably with Marathon Leader, who won the Listowel Castle maiden hurdle in 2009. He is survived by his
brother, Mickey Joe Cregan, and seven sisters, Mary, Margaret, Elizabeth, Johannah, Teresa, Hanora and Frances.

The Irishman Who Ran for England.

Self-trained for many years, Hogan reached the peak of his athletic career after moving to England in 1960. Under the most bizarre of circumstances, Hogan won a gold medal in the marathon of the 1966 European Championships running in an English vest. Why the best Irish long-distance runner of his generation was obliged to declare for England is an extraordinary story. That he was successful under these circumstances only adds to the legend of the Mad Irishman. The enigmatic Hogan, who has also had a lifelong passion for horses, might have chosen a career as a jump jockey but recognised that his sporting potential lay with athletics. Combative, outspoken, colourful and driven to succeed, he battled a cruel bureaucracy in Irish athletics. This is one man's inspiring story of overcoming the odds and realising his dream.