

Training for the Hammer

BY PAT RYAN.

The balancing of the swings and the timing of the turns is the main secret of hammer throwing, and until a man can do these things fairly well he need never hope to get a really smooth throw or to make a big distance.

It has often been remarked that men who come from a certain section in Ireland have usually led the world in hammer throwing, and it has been hinted that there must be a secret which is passed from one to the other and of which the outside world can gain but little knowledge. There is a secret, of course, but as far as I remember nobody told me. I seemed to acquire it by degrees. Nobody told Flanagan and, as far as I could learn, Flanagan never told McGrath. Yet McGrath has it. It is hard to explain this peculiarity on paper and it is still harder to make a younger hammer thrower understand it.

The main hinge of the secret is to strike a medium between the too fast and the too slow swing of the hammer at the start. Some beginners at the game wind the hammer so fast in the preliminary swings over the head that they bury themselves into the ground, and when they start the first turn they have such force in the hammer that they are nearly carried off their feet and

they either fall down before the third turn is made or else the hammer flies away without the right force being applied at the finish. On the other hand, the too slow preliminary swing is nearly as bad, for the slow movement will not help the thrower to make the first spin and he has, as it were, to drag himself around for the first turn and is naturally all out of position for the next two turns. He has gathered no speed, his feet are in the wrong position, and perhaps his body is bent over from the exertion of trying to lunge himself around so that at the very commencement he is wrong and might as well abandon the try then and there. He will not be able to make the proper kind of a finish, for on the very last heave-off, if a man cannot get the lift of the body and the sweep of the arms, the hammer will not fly into the air and a big throw is impossible. There should be one thing before the man's mind, first, last, and all the time, and that is a vicious, snappy finish, with every ounce of weight working. Keen judges of the game tell me that I appear about half my natural size at the finish of my best throws. That suits me, for I know when I look like that I am getting in all my strength and pulling for every ounce of power in my body.

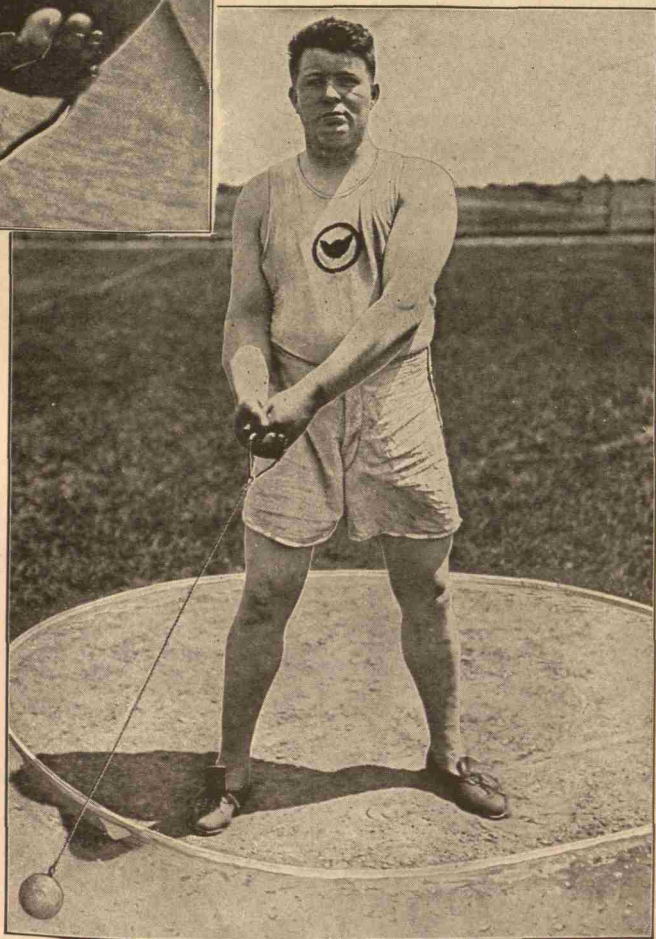
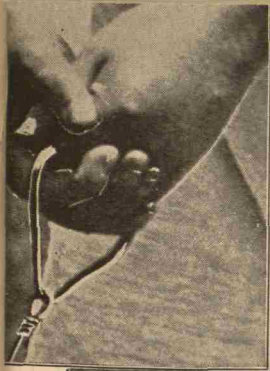
A man about to make a throw should swing the hammer over his head fairly fast, with the shoulders thrown back and the arms held straight out at full length. He should bring the hammer

well in front of him before his feet begin to leave the ground for the first turn. At the same time his body should be turning from the hips upward in the direction of the turn. The knees should be slightly bent, so as to impart a little spring to help to throw the body around. It is best to make the first turn as short as a man possibly can and to almost land the feet right behind the stance of the original position. This will give a lot of room for the next two turns and a little leeway to go forward at the spins, for if the thrower cannot go forward his efforts are almost useless. A vital point is to make the slightest pause as the feet touch the ground after the first turn. This will balance the swing and the athlete can tear into the next two like a wild man.

I once heard a college coach tell one of the most promising of his pupils that he should try and make his body always beat the hammer so that he would be in the right position for a heave-off at the finish. The poor college advisor did not know the first rudiments of the sport and he was, for the sake of a bluff, simply killing off whatever ability the innocent student may have possessed. The collegian did leave the hammer behind him and tore himself all over the circle and was so exhausted that he had little or no strength left when he attempted to get a drive at the finish.

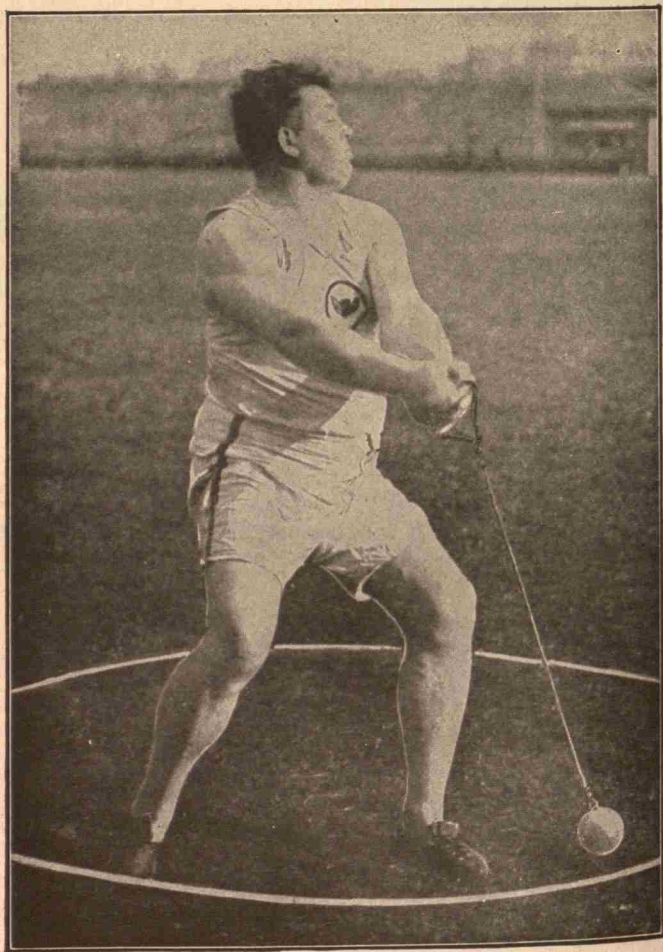
It is something not very well known that hammer throwing is a very tiring exercise, much more

so than the 56-pound weight, shot or discus. Therefore, the beginner should be careful of the amount of exercise he should take. When learning, fifteen throws a day will be found to be enough, and when proficient about half that number will do. If he finds that he is fagged out after a practice he may skip a couple of days to rest the muscles. He should watch out for staleness, which steals unawares on a hammer thrower and is a thing very hard to overcome. A man may eat almost any healthy food, but must avoid the victuals that cause biliousness, or cause any great exertion on the stomach during the progress of digestion. On the day of a competition food should be partaken of sparingly and the athlete should feel that his stomach is completely empty during the contest.



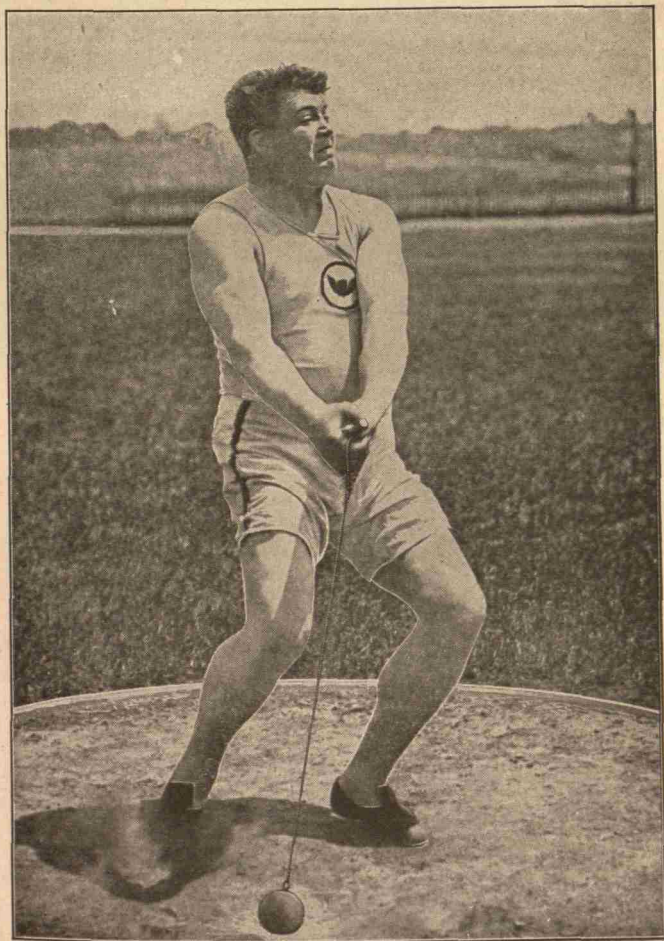
PAT RYAN.

First position in hammer. Showing correct method of holding the hands.

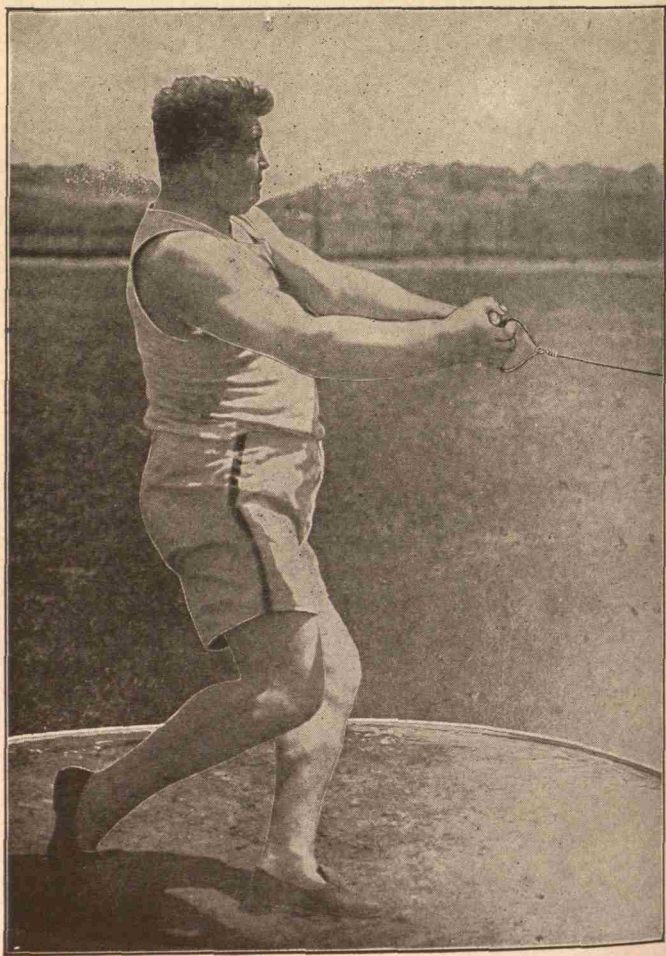


PAT RYAN.

Start of the first turn in the hammer.

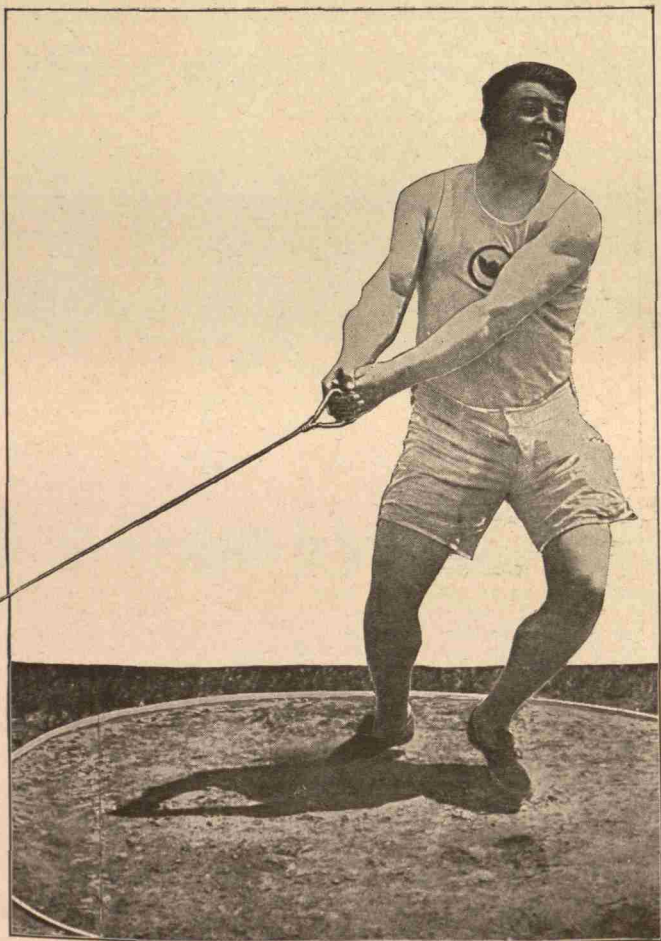


PAT RYAN.
Position of body after first turn.

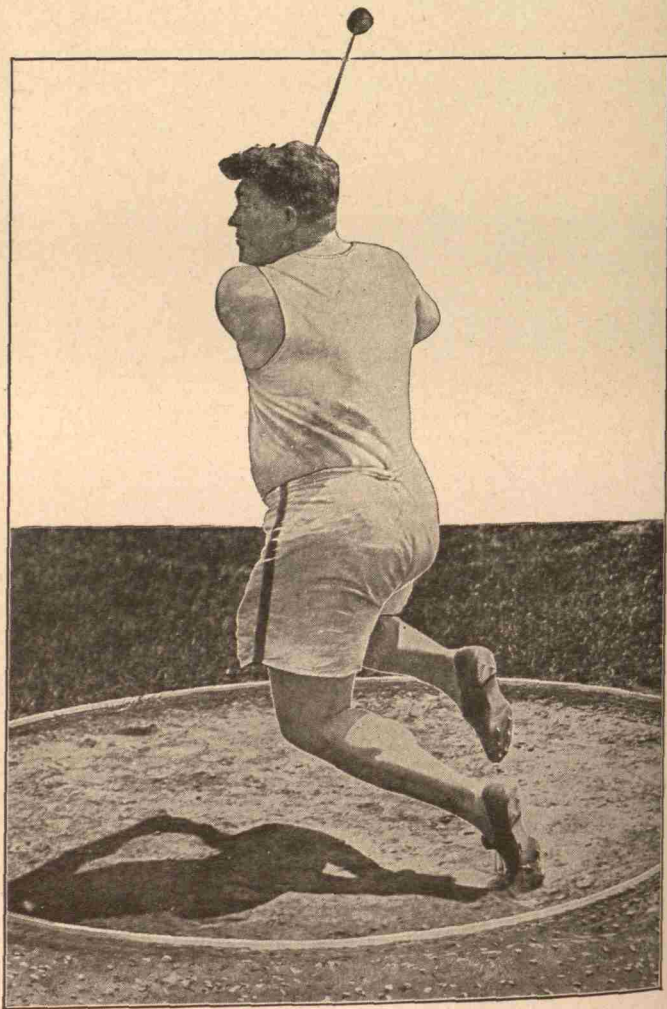


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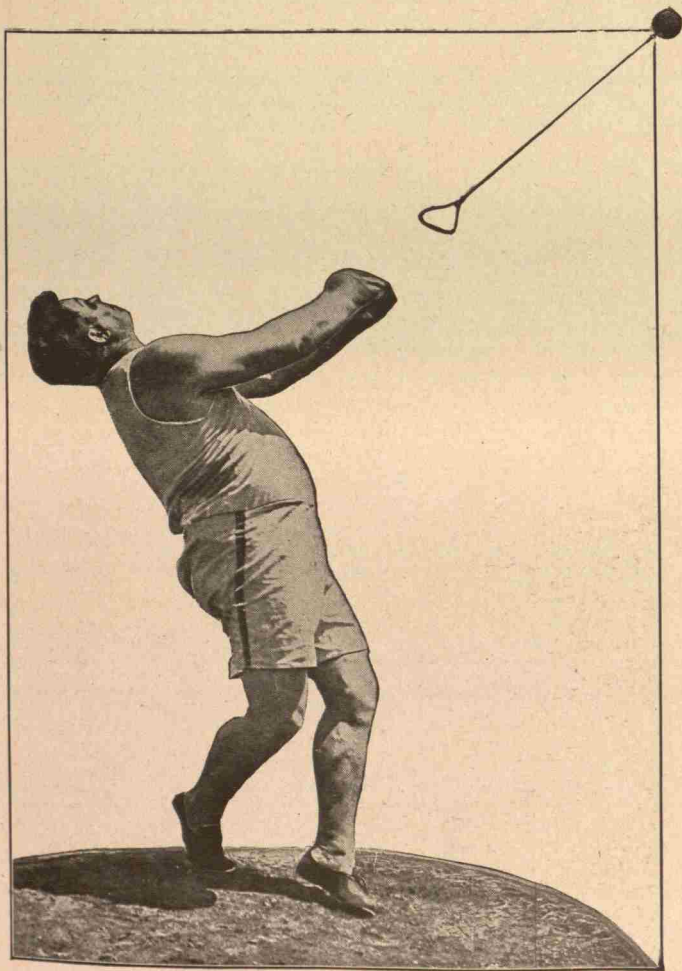
Spinning on his left foot for the second turn of the hammer.



PAT RYAN.
Landing on second turn.



PAT RYAN.
In full swing on last turn.



PAT RYAN.

Delivery of hammer after three turns.



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