

SOUTH EAST GALWAY ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY



CAPTAIN DENIS ST GEORGE DALY

The 1900 Paris Olympics was a ground-breaking one. Running from May to October with one thousand competitors in 19 sports, the games were four times larger than the first modern games in Athens four years previous. Women made the breakthrough taking part in the games for the first time, but the headline from a Galway perspective was made by the county's pioneering Olympian Denis St George Daly.

Born on September 5th 1862 at Attymon, the illegitimate son of Denis St. George Daly - 2nd Baron Dunsandle and Clanconal, Daly loved hunting and shooting and excelled at equestrian sports. Crucially, he managed to continue his pursuits when stationed with the British Army (18th Hussars) in India and it was said that his experience of regimental polo later enabled him to fit into any Polo team.

Daly actively played the game in Ireland and England after leaving the army in 1893 and led his side, 'The Freebooters', to the English Champion Cup in 1894 in a match in which he played "*as he had never played before*"¹. As captain of the side it was stated that he had few superiors in his position 'at the back' and that he had arranged a first-rate team - one which retained the trophy the following year.

It is difficult to overstate the popularity of Polo among the elite during the era, and Daly was one of the foremost stars and perhaps the best-loved personality². To put it into perspective, no fewer than eight different Polo tournaments were held in Paris in 1900 as part of the World's Fair. However only the 'Grand Prix Internationale de l'Exposition' was considered the official Olympic event.

In the games themselves, entries were from clubs rather than countries and the winning squad comprised two Irishmen (Daly and John Beresford), two Americans, and an Englishman³. Having defeated an all-French side 10-0 in the quarter final and a French-British side 6-4 in the semi (with Beresford playing), the scene was set for the showdown on June 2nd. The novel final saw two British-American sides face each other, with Daly's Foxhunters (Hurlingham) best-suited to the tough conditions, defeating 'Rugby' 3-1.

Still active in sporting circles into his later life, Daly passed away in England on April 16th 1942, aged 79.

References:

1. *Polo Past and Present* by Thomas F Dale (1905, Country Life, London).
2. *Baily's Magazine of Sports & Pastimes*, Vol. 68 July to Dec 1897 (1897, Vinton & Co, London).
3. *Sports Around the World: History, Culture, and Practice* by John Nauright and Charles Parrish (2012, ABC-CLIO, California).

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