

ROAD BOWLING

1981 ALL-IRELAND | Contested in Armagh as British Army helicopters hovered overhead

Move to city saw O'Driscoll emerge as one of the greats

THE 1980s brought expansion to the championships with new grades added in both youths and adult sectors and the decade also introduced women's bowling to much acclaim.

The junior category benefited, as Brian Toal attests: 'The most congested bowling division had always been that of the junior grade and it was a necessary development in 1980 when a new 'B' grouping was added to the championship range. That decision had served to promote more open competition in both junior sections with enhanced opportunity for players to gain provincial and national honours.'

The new arrangements did not diminish the now junior A championship and it retained its prestige as the premier competition organised at regional level from which county and All-Ireland distinction could be achieved.

The decade began with a City champion whose roots were firmly in the soil of West Cork. Mick O'Driscoll hailed from Reenascreena and honed his bowling skills at venues such as Reavouler, where he contested a wonderful final with Justin Cremin, and on the Glandore Road, Leap. There, under the aegis of the West Cork Bowling Association, a doubles tournament victory was secured when partnered by his then neighbour Mick O'Sullivan.

A move to the city saw him emerge as one of the greats of junior and intermediate bowl-

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ing, winning All-Irelands in both. Mick's win over the stylish Donie O'Mahony of Enniskeane in the county junior A final of 1981 is still recalled as one that produced one of the most exciting and dramatic of finales in the grade's history.

'Ciarán,' writing about the Ballyshonin contest in The Southern Star of the time, stated: 'It was a pity one of the players had to lose. Both players covered the road in the same number of shots as Séamus Sexton (then senior champion) covered it the previous Sunday, and that in itself truly reflects the high standard of play.'

Suffice to say, Mick was close to two bowls down at Lisladeen cross with four to play but produced an explosive late salvo to snatch a victory by metres: 'O'Driscoll's last throw illuminated the road to give him his finest victory of his career.' O'Driscoll travelled to the Cathedral Road, Armagh, where, as Army helicopters hovered over proceedings, he captured the All-Ireland crown defeating

Malachy McIlvenna by a bowl of odds.

The 1982 season brought the junior A championship back to East Cork when Patsy Coleman, brother of 1967 champion, Christy, won the title from tournament specialist, Pat Sutton, the very capable South West champion.

Played also at Ballyshonin this was too a fiercely competitive decider and had Coleman, a stylish left-hander, in good stead for the All-Ireland the following week. In this one, against Ulster champion, Colm Grimley, a strong start gave Coleman a lead he didn't relinquish. The Championship stayed in East Cork the following year when Paddy O'Leary, in his second final appearance, claimed the county title again at Ballyshonin when getting the better of another fine South West champion, Tim O'Brien, brother of 1978 winner, Noel. Paddy too annexed the All-Ireland, defeating the former Tyrone inter-county mid-fielder Jim McCann at Ballyshonin.

The 1984 junior A championship came to North Cork when Mick Murphy, Donoughmore, took the title in Fermoy after a cracking score with 1965 champion, Willie Dennis of Cobh. Mick, father of Cork football star, Juliet, enjoyed a great regional rivalry with fellow parishioner, Pat Corkery, and several big-money battles unfolded.

Mick won their joust for the 1984 north Cork final at Ballyshonin and followed up with wins from City's Patsy Hogan and North East's Michael Coughlan before facing Dennis in the decider.

It was back to Ballyshonin for the All-Ireland against a worthy Ulster champion Donald Gribben who had defeated 1969 All-Ireland winner Gerald McKee in his campaign. There was no doubting the All-Ireland winner as, in the words of Aidan McVeigh, 'Murphy showed himself a powerful bowler and although Gribben gave a superb performance, victory was beyond him.'

Incidentally, it would be the last All-Ireland series to be played at the famed north Cork venue, Ballyshonin. A fairly rigid system in place since the late 1960s had the Cork se-



Mick O'Driscoll (left), formerly of Reenascreena, who won the 1981 junior A championship representing the City region, pictured with Brendan Roche, who succeeded Flor Crowley as Bol Chumann chairman, and Jerry Desmond, then treasurer.

ries always hosting their turn there but it was time for change and the new regulation saw the finals moved from region to region with a specific club designated to run and organise events for a period of three years. A similar system operates in Armagh much to the mutual satisfaction of all.

The '80s proved a particularly successful decade for the South West's junior A contingent. Their regional championships were contested by a stream of top-class contenders and, after Pat Sutton and Tim O'Brien reached finals in the early years, a trio emerged to claim outright honours in the years 1985-87.

First off was the Ring player Donie Crowley, who came from a bowl and big odds down to rally to a semi-final victory against West Cork champion, Eugie Daly, at Templemartin and then, at Newcestown in the final, defeated City's Stephen Barrett by metres in a dramatic last-shot outcome.

Donie, who had in his armoury a tremendous loft, won the 1985 All-Ireland on the Cathedral Road in the last shot from Gerald McKee. Tom Hayes of Rosscarbery embarked on a thrilling run that brought him all the way in 1986. Strong and determined and backed by a huge following from his home base, Tom won that year's county final in convincing style defeating Robert Shorten at Derrinasafa. The All-Ireland decider was played at Whitechurch and here, Hayes faced

Malachy McIlvenna a highly rated Ulster champion. The Ross man won by two but only after a tightly fought struggle to the three-quarter point.

Kieran O'Gorman from Castleventry came from family with a great bowling tradition and had shown youthful promise when capturing a gold Medal in the U18 event at the 1980 European Championships in Holland.

In 1987, that promise was fulfilled with a barnstorming run to county and All-Ireland junior A honours. O'Gorman defeated City's Donal O'Leary of Waterloo in a terrific county semi-final at Ballinacurra, Upton, and followed with a superb display in the decider at Crossbarry when getting the better of Billy McAuliffe, Glanworth, father of the current junior A champion Billy (Jun). Kieran annexed the All-Ireland crown when defeating Ulster's Jim McCann at Tassagh.

The Gaeltacht division came into being in 1977 and were providing worthy champions for the junior A championship. It was Dan Burke of Inchigeela who was the first to claim county honours for the division when in 1988 he conquered all before him in a magnificent run.

Dan won his county semi-final at Templemartin from the unlucky North Cork champion, Pat Corkery, and then took on East Cork's Willie O'Donovan in the last junior A final at Ballyshonin.

In this, he showed courage



Mick Murphy, Donoughmore, won the 1984 junior A championship.



Dan Burke, Inchigeela, from the Gaeltacht division, won the 1988 junior A championship.



Donie Crowley, Ring, Clonakilty, representing the South West division, won the 1985 junior A championship.

to come from a bowl of odds down to win in a thrilling last shot finish. The Carbery region had just been formed when they were granted the right to host the All-Ireland series for a three-year term 1988-90 and it was here, at Bauravilla, that Dan Burke took All-Ireland honours for 1988, defeating Ulster's Martin Boylan with a magnificent eighteen-shot showing.

Ból Chumann na hÉireann

Ulster championships continue: Last year's dual U16/18 champion Eugene McVeigh won 2020 junior B title at Tieve Tara