

ROAD BOWLING

BOWLING BROTHERS | PJ and Denis Cooney won junior A championships in 1997 and '98

We continue our review of the junior A championship by looking at the late 1990s and early 2000s

Twohig was the millennium man

THE junior A championship celebrated 40 years on the go with winners from a family who have carved a special niche in the competition's annals. Originally from Kilnamartyra, the Cooney brothers, PJ and Denis, won successive junior A championships for the Gaeltacht division in 1997 and '98.

Close family ties with one of the game's leading lights of the time, Michael Tom Bradley of Macroom, would have been an undoubted influence. PJ, the elder of the family of bowling brothers, enjoyed a great county campaign in '97, displaying style and consistency in a string of victories that brought him to the county final at Ballyclough. Here, he faced the champion of London, Donie O'Driscoll, who was also making waves following wins over highly-rated Cork regional champions.

The final at Ballyclough was a tight one but it was the control Cooney exerted over the closing stages that took him to ultimate victory. The All-Ireland in the grade for that year was held on the Cathedral Road in Armagh – this is where Cooney met his match in the bullet-fast Eddie Carr. They mixed it in splendid bowling before the South Armagh champion blazed home to take the All-Ireland crown.

Both men's careers continued on an upward trajectory. Cooney won intermediate in 2000 and had a productive stint at senior level that included a

county final spot in 2003. Carr, incidentally, won the 2003 senior All-Ireland by defeating Edmund Sexton.

Denis Cooney then blazed a trail for the Gaeltacht in 1998. Accuracy and consistency were his hallmarks and they stood him in good stead as he raced to a county final in Ballyvolane against a fine young champion from the North East division, Damien Murphy. Denis won with aplomb here to bring a second junior A title to the Cooney household. He would not be the last of the Cooney clan to claim county glory.

The 1998 All-Ireland was played at Lyre – the South West club now in the midst of their three-year hosting – and here Denis Cooney atoned for his brother's defeat in Armagh the previous year. Michael Rafferty, the Ulster champion, proved a tough opponent and led by a big margin in the early stages. Cooney came good from the half-way point and took the title by a big fore bowl. 1999 was unique in that it was the East Cork exponent, Willie O'Donovan, carrying the banner of the Mayo region where he was now domiciled, who went all the way to Cork county honours. O'Donovan lost out for the All-Ireland crown when going under to Harry Toal (Jun) on the Cathedral Road.

The millennium junior A champion was a man who continues to garner trophies at the



James O'Driscoll presented the Fr Michael O'Driscoll Cup to Gavin Twohig, 2000 junior A county champion, with, left, Donie O'Mahony, Enniskeane, runner-up, and, right, Brendan Roche, Ból Chumann Chairman.

Twohig became the ninth South West junior A champion to claim the county in the grade

top level. Gavin Twohig from Rossmore has enjoyed a productive bowling career in the upper echelons of the game and it started at the turn of the century when he became the ninth South West junior A champion to claim the county in the grade.

It was a tough campaign. Donie O'Mahony, Enniskeane, 19 years after his dramatic final with Mick O'Driscoll, was still a classy exponent, winning Mid Cork championships and in the peak of form after a superb finish saw off the formidable challenge of Billy Hurley, then West Cork champion, in a terrific semi-final at Fernhill. Twohig, for his part, had to contend with the strong Gaeltacht champion, Tim Kelleher at Derinasafa, a score he won with a bit to spare.

Twohig and O'Mahony met in the decider at Kealkil, who were then the newly appointed All-Ireland hosts. Twohig took the laurels thanks to 'the proverbial miler up to O'Sullivan's bungalow and from there to the graveyard did enough to ensure the winning of the score for him'.

The junior A champions emerging from the north were now a formidable force and this was reflected in their millennium contender, Conor McGuigan, who defeated Twohig in the national final, also at Kealkil, throwing six unbelievable last shots to counter the Ross-



Seamus Ó Tuama, Ból Chumann Chairman, presented the Fr Michael O'Driscoll Cup to 1998 county champion Denis Cooney. On right is championship runner-up Damien Murphy (North East).

more man's big early lead. Both went on to senior level, Twohig winning two national titles in the intermediate grade on his way to the top while McGuigan was an acclaimed senior champion in 2012 after a shock defeat of David Murphy.

The 2001 junior A was fought with great intensity as the grade continued to produce champions of high quality into the new century. Patrick Moynihan of the Gaeltacht was the next to claim the laurels. There were plenty of close calls in the Kilnamartyra man's winning campaign. In the semi-final at Donoughmore he came from a long way back to fire an unbeatable last shot which denied East Cork's Ted O'Farrell. The county final at Bauravilla against 1980 champion Chris O'Donovan was another humdinger. O'Donovan had come through a controversial semi-final with London's Jim O'Driscoll at Lyre to set up the Bauravilla decider with Moynihan. There was huge expectation, evident in the then

near record stake of £16,120, which, in the words of *The Southern Star* report, 'had little or no bearing on the outcome of the score itself, a score contested with true championship fervour by both men and played in that grand sporting manner that scores will be played and continue to be played.'

O'Donovan had control for long periods but came hind bowl for the last shots. The Balineen man put down a big one but Moynihan stood up to the pressure and won the day by metres. He went on to defeat Johnny Kelly to take the All-Ireland crown at Knappagh, Co Armagh.

Noel Gould of the City was top man in 2002, engaging in a stirring campaign that brought him to a county final and a meeting with one of Mid Cork's great ambassadors, Dan Joe Holland of Ovens. It was a score Gould

dominated for long spells until he sensationally lost the lead with a very short second last. He recovered instantly to line a big final effort that his Mid Cork rival missed well. In the national finals Gould came up against Martin Toal, a youthful champion whose star was on the rise following a brace of U18 All-Ireland successes in 1999 and 2000. The Ulster champion fulfilled his promise, proving too good for Gould on All-Ireland day at Knappagh. Bowling's underage sector would deliver more junior A champions as the 21st century progressed.



Patrick Moynihan (Gaeltacht) was the 2001 Junior A All-Ireland winner.

Ból Chumann na hÉireann

Darragh Gribben is Ulster U18 champion for 2020.

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