

ROAD BOWLING

LOCAL LEGEND | Humphrey O'Leary was a major figure in West Cork bowling

The six-hour marathon score that saw O'Leary and O'Keefe do battle

IT was the score of the day 65 years ago, a six-hour marathon before an audience of thousands.

The protagonists were the then county champion, Liam O'Keefe from Waterfall, and a leading light from the west in the form of Humphrey O'Leary of Drimoleague.

Ból Chumann's founding father, Flor Crowley, describes the now-legendary contest that unfolded on July 3rd, 1955.

'That Humphrey O'Leary has really 'arrived' in a bowling score was proved beyond all doubt at Drimoleague on last Sunday afternoon, where, in a truly terrific finish, he beat Liam O'Keefe for the huge stake of £400,' Crowley wrote.

'It was a score that was big in every way, the crowd was enormous, running into thousands I should think, the stake was the biggest in years, the score itself was the longest, running up four miles of road and requiring 40 shots or more.

'With regard to this last point, one must say there was not much sense to so long a score. A distance of two and a half miles should be the limit and last Sunday's score imposed hardship on not only on the two bowlers, but on the spectators as well, for it is no easy matter to follow a contest that lasted for over six and a half hours and didn't finish until the blinds of night had begun to fall over the hills.

'It was one of the most gruelling tests I have ever seen on a bowling road. And to the credit of both of them, it must



Liam O'Keefe from Waterfall in action in 1954.

'It was one of the most gruelling tests I have ever seen on a bowling road' – Flor Crowley

be said that they stood up admirably to that test. O'Keefe finished as strongly as he had started and for that I give him a special word of praise. O'Leary was untiring, his endurance seemed inexhaustible, and the farther he went the stronger he got.

'O'Leary started badly but he finished like a lion. His bowling for the first mile was uncertain and unconvincing but I have rarely seen the man who would have beaten him in the last mile or more of the road. Every shot he threw over that last mile was close to record and two of them

covered a distance enclosed by fifteen telegraph poles. His six bowls from a point 200 yards back of Kilmore gate to open the bend above the Mutton bridge were the six longest throws I have ever seen in any one score. There was no fluke about them, they were thrown and played to run.

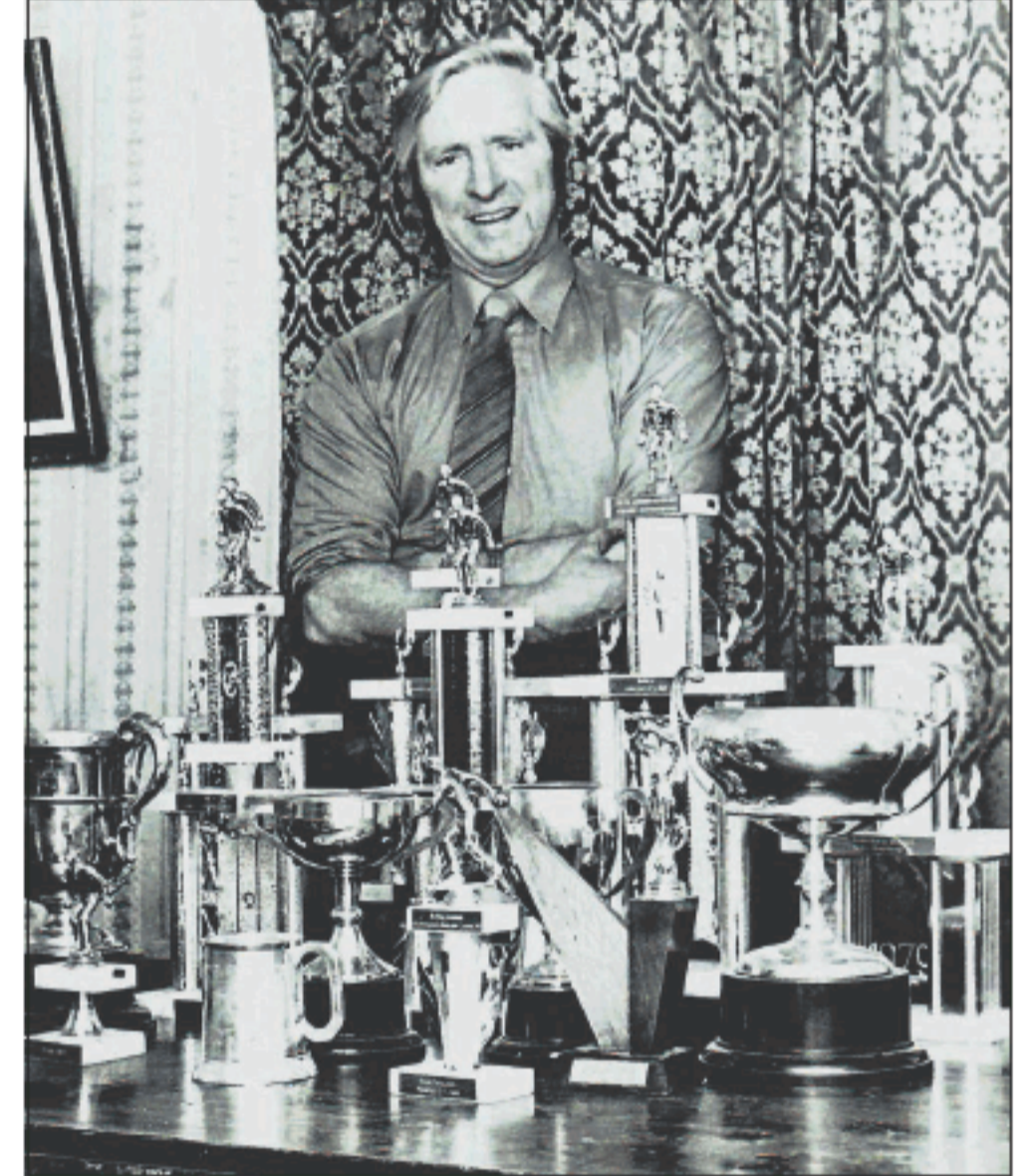
'As for O'Keefe's display last Sunday, it was one of the best scores of his life, he has never been fairer or faster. I can recall only three throws that were ever so slightly off the 'bit' and those three were no more than a foot off-line. His speed was delightful to watch and he never lost it all the way. Even at the end when it was quite apparent that he could not beat O'Leary, he still played straight and fast, and it must be said there are few men who would have stood up so well against so

overwhelming an opponent in so long a score.

'O'Keefe was almost two bowls of odds up in the first seven shots and then O'Leary fought back to draw level at the 'creamery'. But O'Keefe held his lead with some lovely playing beyond 'Cronin's gate' and at Kilmore he still had a nice margin of odds.

At this point O'Leary got really into his stride. He took the fore bowl at 'O'Driscoll's', lost it again at 'the forge', but his marathon throw down to the 'mutton bridge', the longest I have ever seen in a score gave him a bowl of odds. He held his odds up the hill although O'Keefe matched him shot for shot and won a mighty score by a bowl and 50 yards' odds.

'It was a grand score to watch and a pleasant score to follow. With two fine sportsmen



Humphrey O'Leary, from Drimoleague, was a huge figure in West Cork bowling through the 1950s, 60s and 70s.

in opposition and two fine sporting crowds backing them, not a single incident or unruly word marred the evening's sport even though it was an evening of record stakes and heavy gambling. The one side won gracefully, and the other side lost with equal grace and for that both sides must be congratulated.'

Humphrey O'Leary was a major figure in West Cork bowling through the 1950s, 60s and 70s. He played against the game's best, Mick Barry, the

O'Donovan's, Fisher's Cross and Bandon, Mick Murphy, Ballyvolane, among them. He won the county junior veterans championship in 1979. Humphrey went to his reward in May, 2010.

Liam O'Keefe from Waterfall is President of Ból Chumann na hEireann. After a bowling career spanning five decades, he continues his involvement and as well as his role as President of Ból Chumann, he represents the City region as delegate to Executive meetings.

Pad's passion for bowling spanned a lifetime

THE passing of Pad O'Donovan, Dunmanway, was mourned by bowling followers throughout the county.

Pad's involvement with bowling spanned a lifetime. It is an interest nurtured through many generations of the O'Donovan family, one which continues to the present time. His son, Christy, carries the tradition on in his capacity as current chairman of the West Cork region.

For Pad the score of a weekend or a summer's evening was an abiding passion. He was a welcome and engaging pres-

ence on the bowling roads of the county, knowledgeable with an extensive fund of bowling lore.

Pad contested a multitude of scores many on the Inch and Derrinasafa roads where he was always a formidable rival.

His bowling friends from different eras formed a socially distanced guard of honour as his funeral cortege made its way to his final resting place, St Joseph's Cemetery. Condolences are offered to Judy, Christy, Martina, Timothy, Siobhan and extended families.

The South West division lost a great bowling man with the passing of John O'Sullivan, Timoleague. John mixed with the best in an era of top-class junior bowlers. The 1970s and early 80s saw him at the pinnacle of his career, engaging successfully with highly-rated juniors such as Christy Mullins, Justin Cremin, Noel O'Brien and John Carroll.

John is given due recognition in Charlie Madden's 'Lest we Forget, West Cork Bowplayers of Yesteryear'. His fellow

Timoleague colleague acknowledges tournament wins at Newcestown and a magnificent championship run that brought him to a county junior A final spot in 1979. Unfortunately for him that decider at Macroom against City's Joe O'Connor did not go his way. John was, of course, South West champion in '79, scoring a notable win over former All-Ireland winner in the grade, Fachtina O'Donovan. John was laid to rest in St Molaga's Cemetery in late January. Sympathies are extended to his wife, Eilish, sons Ian and

Kevin and families.

Sympathies are extended too to the families of Pat Donegan and Denis Cronin. Pat was a prominent player on the bowling roads of West Cork through the 1960s and 70s, commanding a loyal following from his Enniskeane, Ahiohill homeland. He was victorious in a popular tournament run under the West Cork Bowling Association aegis at Carahvoulter where he defeated John Joe Connolly of Skibbereen in the

final. Sympathies are extended to the Donegan family. Denis Cronin from Grange Hill and Ovens was a very well-known personality on the bowling roads of the county, a man for whom the game was also a lifelong interest. We remember too Mick O'Driscoll of Knockmore, Drinagh on his passing last week. Mick was staunch supporter of bowlers from the Drinagh locality, played himself in his youth and enjoyed the successes achieved by close family connections, Connie Connolly and Ciaran Nyhan.