

# ROAD BOWLING

CHAMPION | Brinny bowler Aidan Murphy won All-Ireland senior titles in 2014 & 2019

## Aidan has travelled the long, hard road to the top

BY GER McCARTHY

REIGNING All-Ireland senior bowling champion Aidan Murphy knows better than most how hard it is to get to the summit of the mountain and then keep your place there.

The journey to the top of the All-Ireland rankings began on the Brinny roads alongside his two brothers while continuing a family heritage.

'I grew up in Brinny bowling along the roads with my brothers Sean and David,' says Aidan, who lives in Dunmanway with his wife Maria and their daughters Emma and Neasa.

'It was always a busy house with my parents, John and Mary, and my sister Bernadette. There is bowling history on both sides of the family. My father, his brothers and our grandfather would have all bowled. The sport was a big part of the parish when we were growing up. There would always have been a bowling community living in and around Brinny.'

'We would have spent a good portion of our childhood throwing shots and bowling scores down the end of the road where we lived. There would have been plenty friends and cousins roped in as well. No matter what age you were, you'd be out watching or even throwing back a shot or two back then.'

Aidan's first year competing at the senior grade was in 2007, a year after winning both the county and intermediate titles. But it was another title, won two years before, that resonates the most with him.

'My U18 All-Ireland win from 2005 is the one that sticks out the most,' he says.

'I had won an U12 county in my first year bowling and reached a couple of finals in the following years. After that, I won a few Mid Corks but it wasn't until I won that U18 All-Ireland that I felt I'd made the breakthrough.'

'What made that special was the fact we travelled up north to the Cathedral Road in Armagh and won the U18 title there. I beat Paul O'Reilly who was also contesting the All-Ireland junior B final that same weekend. It wasn't an easy score by any means.'

'I was – and still am – fortunate that a big gang from home travelled up to support me. There hadn't been too many trips to Armagh before that so it was a big deal at the time. Those are the days that stick with you forever.'

That U18 success was the catalyst for an even better year as Aidan marked his arrival in the adult ranks by claiming both the 2006 county and All-Ireland intermediate trophies.

'Winning is a habit and being successful in an individual sport like bowling meant I just kept going after that U18 All-Ireland success,' he says.

'I had no fear of anything at the time but like that, you need a bit of luck too. I just got on a run and didn't overthink things. It wasn't a big thing to me because I had already been looking further ahead and planning how I would reach the senior grade. That was the goal from day one. It was back to Cathedral Road in Armagh for that 2006 All-Ireland intermediate final where I beat Malachy Laffin. Another memorable day out.'

Aidan's ascent up the bowl-



Aidan Murphy is the reigning All-Ireland senior men's champion.

**'The reality is that it's tough going to get back to the top, let alone stay there'**

ing ranks occurred at a time his older brother David was already making a name for himself both inside and outside the county bounds. It was inevitable that the brothers' paths would cross once the younger sibling reached senior.

'When you are young, you are that bit weaker and it takes a while to build up the necessary strength to start competing at senior level,' Aidan says.

'David would have been senior since 2005. With brothers, you'd always be looking to follow their bowl and get within ten yards or even beyond. Every time. That's where the competitiveness comes from. I looked up to my brothers and tried to learn as much as I could from them.'

'We met in the 2008 county senior final but I hadn't ever thought about facing David up to that point. Being kept apart in the semi-final draw was a good thing because that meant at least one of us might reach the final. It was no big deal when we both got there (final) and David won it that year on the Marsh Road.'

'Then I defeated David in the following year's county final in Templemartin but lost my first senior All-Ireland to Michael



Aidan Murphy has won gold and silver medals at the European Championships.

Toal up in Armagh.'

It would be another five years before Aidan finally achieved his primary goal. Defeating Christy Mullins in the county decider, Aidan went all the way to another All-Ireland final and got the better of Cathal Toal to become 2014 champion.

'Yes, there were a couple of barren years before I became All-Ireland senior champion but that wasn't due to a lack of dedication or anything like that,' he says.

'I'd even suggest it was because, at times, I was trying too hard. My father would always tell me I was too intense and needed to relax more. Bowlers are funny animals because you are your own manager, psychologist, fitness instructor

and we can be stubborn enough when we want to be. Every player goes through a dip in form but coming out of it is another thing.'

He kept plugging away before eventually bouncing back to become 2014 All-Ireland champion. In the interim he would become a European Championship gold medal winner in Pesaro in 2012 as well as a King of the Roads winner in both 2008 and 2013.

'Looking back, maybe losing the 2009 final spurred me on to win the 2014 title,' Aidan says.

'I won the King of the Roads in 2008 and beat David in the final. That was important as before that, maybe I'd become a bit complacent about contesting finals, thinking I'd be

involved every year.

'The reality is that it's tough going to get back to the top, let alone stay there. Some bowlers and bowling supporters can be fickle too. You are only as good as your last score so I appreciated becoming 2014 All-Ireland champion even more.'

'I got on a run in 2013, including winning another King of the Roads, that showed me why bowling is such a game of confidence really. From the end of 2013 to Easter 2014 when I won the Bowl Fada in Armagh, I just kept going until I became senior All-Ireland champion.'

Now he's at the top, again, he wants to stay there, but he knows how tough that will be. Then again, that's just the challenge he wants.