

King and Queen of the Roads

Part 8

2008 was a big year for bowling as the Associations governing body were tasked with hosting the European Championships. From a playing and organisational standpoint, they were successful beyond expectation and the big winners graced the stage at Ballincurrig for the October King and Queen festival. The King final of 2008 was an all-Murphy affair as Aidan, now established along with his brother David, in the upper tier of senior bowling, met in the final. They had met in the county senior championship final too with David taking the title, but this time roles were reversed as, thanks to a magnificent cast at 'Geary's', the younger Aidan claimed his first King of the Road title. In the semi-finals, David Murphy, the Gold Medal winner from the summer Euros, defeated Mick Barry Cup qualifier, Nicholas Carey and German champion, Henning Fayen, while Aidan got the better of Michael Toal in a last shot thriller. The battle for the Queen crown in 2008 was intense. Marie Noonan, close runner-up in 2007, returned with a vengeance and delivered a barnstorming performance in inflicting a rare defeat on defending champion and European Gold Medal winner, Kelly Mallon, in a thrilling Friday semi-final. County senior champion, Geraldine Daly was firmly in the mix and won her three-way joust with All-Ireland champion, Dervla Toal who had usurped Kelly Mallon to win the Ulster championship. Simone Davids, Ulster champion was also in this one. Marie Noonan emerged victorious in the Sunday final with five huge opening shots paving the way for a one bowl win over Geraldine. Trevor O'Meara was in battling form too in winning the Jim O'Driscoll Cup with his only fore bowl of a last shot humdinger with Peadar Toal. Michael Murphy and Tommy O'Donoghue combined for a doubles win while Armagh's Thomas Mackle and Martin Toal were also winners. Those 2008 Euros introduced an overseas star from under-

age rankings who would light up the road bowling world for the next decade. A dual gold medallist in the U18 category, Silke Tulk made an immediate impact in adult competitions winning the Dutch champions tour and needed no second bidding to test her skills against the best when the 2009 King and Queen festival came round. Munster champion, Geraldine Daly and qualifying tournament winner, Juliette Murphy were the Dutch star's opponents in a gripping Friday semi-final. Daly looked to have done enough but a monstrous last shot by Tulk snatched the final spot from the Cork challengers. Meanwhile, defending champion, Marie Noonan, overcame All-Ireland winner, Dervla Toal and German champion, Simone Davids to set up a final meeting with Silke Tulk. As Pat McCarthy's report on the event outlines, the Dutch teenager proved unbeatable 'The Queen of the Roads victory for Silke Tulk and the manner in which she delivered was one of the great stories of the weekend. The teenage Dutch star was a hugely impressive performer on the road in the 2008 European Championships, but nobody could have foreseen the mastery she showed in outclassing last year's winner, Marie Noonan, in the competition decider on Sunday evening last. Having blitzed the road with ten magnificent shots, a new record was now in sight and four more of the highest order saw her over the line in an unprecedented fourteen shots. Joy was unrestrained among the orange clad Dutch contingent, in the aftermath of the nineteen-year olds success'. 2009 was significant too from a championship perspective in that it marked the occasion of Michael Toal achieving an unprecedented tenth All-Ireland success. But, and not for the first time, that did not transfer to King of the Roads glory. David Murphy again showed his mastery of the road in claiming his second crown. To Michael Toal's credit, it was a terrific final as he led Murphy for long periods, but the sheer power of the Brinny man over the closing quarter yielded a last shot after both scored the line in sixteen shots. In the Saturday semis

Murphy defeated his brother Aidan and German, Henning Feyen while Toal overcame, Phillip O'Donovan and Dutch champion Bastian Zwieters. Willie O'Donovan won the 2009 Jim O'Driscoll Cup while Kieran Morgan and Thomas Mackle combined to win the McCarthy Insurances trophy. David Murphy and Kelly Mallon lorded it at the King of the Roads during this era. Murphy made it three-in-a row and four in total when winning in style in 2010 and 2011. Covering the road in a record equalling fifteen shots was his forte in 2010 and he needed that quality to see off new All-Ireland champion, Martin Coppinger and Dutchman Ivo Egbers, in the 2010 semi-final. Coppinger's opener cracked off unluckily, but Murphy was unbeatable on the day. The pair would engage in a sustained rivalry that would thrill and enthral bowling followers over the next decade. Almost since its inception, James Buckley, was never far away when King of the Road honours were fought for and he won a cracking three-way semi-final in 2010 defeating Ulster champion, Eddie Carr and German, Ralf Rocker. He had, however, no answer to David Murphy in Sunday's final and the laurels went to Brinny by almost a two-bowl margin. The triumvirate of Kelly Mallon, Silke Tulk and Carmel Ryan would dominate the Queen of the Roads as the second decade of the new century unfolded. All-Ireland champion, Mallon, dethroned Dutch Queen, Tulk, in the 2010 semi-final tussle that also included Catriona O'Rourke while Cork's county champion, Ryan won her penultimate round score with previous winner, Marie Noonan and German Simone Davids. The final was fiercely fought and in near record bowling, Mallon notched her second Queen title by a bowl of odds. Armagh had big success when Martin Toal defeated Gary Daly in the Jim O'Driscoll Cup final, Daly having won the Cork shoot-out on Friday from David Hubbard and Patrick O'Donoghue. Raymond Ryan and Rose Twohig won the Dairypower challenge and Thomas Mackle and Seamus McKee won the McCarthy Insurances trophy. A shock loss to new Ulster supremo, Conor

McGuigan, in the 2011 All-Ireland final at Tassagh did not derail David Murphy's dominance of the King of the Road tournament. His crown tethered at times on a dramatic October weekend, particularly as he made a great escape from a two-bowl deficit in the Saturday semi when the formidable McGuigan was again his opponent and looking every inch a national title holder. Two down at the 'big turn' playing outward had Murphy in all sorts for trouble but, and not for the first time, a scintillating finish overhauled the deficit. Dutchman, Robert Meijir, was in the mix in this one too. Ralf Roker of FKV Germany, became the first non-Irish finalist when he showed excellent mastery in overcoming Gary Daly and Munster runner-up, Christy Mullins, in the second Saturday semi and he hit a blistering start in the final too holding well over a bowl lead on Murphy at the no play lines. As he did on Saturday, David Murphy's finishing prowess brought him from arrears, and he claimed a third successive King title by a bowl of odds margin. It would take something special to break the five-year Murphy stranglehold on the King trophy and it would come spectacularly in 2012. Kelly Mallon remained imperious too in 2011 winning her third queen gong after a thrilling duel with Silke Tulk. Tulk's blistering start gave her commanding odds, but the All-Ireland champion edged a pulsating finish. Kelly delivered too in a hard-fought semi-final with Carmel Ryan, a contest that also included Germany's Feenja Fredericks. Tulk saw off the challenges of four-time winner, Catriona O'Farrell, and Denise Murphy in her semi-final. Brian Wilmot was also a big winner in 2011 taking the Jim O'Driscoll Cup from Thomas Mackle and David Hubbard. Dutch sisters, Joyce and Merlin Leussink won the international U18 competition and there were Armagh doubles victories for the Rafferty brothers, Ethan and Colm and for the Paul O'Reilly/Donal Daly and Shane O'Neill/Paul Grimley combinations.