

ROAD BOWLING

POPULAR WINNER | Johnny O'Driscoll of Clon was the All-Ireland junior A winner in 2009



Our look at the junior championships focuses on the exciting battles between 2003 and 2011

Home hero Callanan powered to glory in All-Ireland final on the Marsh Road

INTO the modern era, the junior A championships survived a challenge from within. At regional level the multiplicity of grades allocated to adult playing membership numbers seven (three junior and four novice) with another layer, novice E, now also in the offing.

This development has the positive effect of providing competitions for players of lower ranking and was also instrumental in the setting up the very successful All-Ireland junior C and novice championships that cater for peripheral regions and those playing the game abroad.

On the contrary it has also diluted regional junior championships as the spiral in downward grading has meant vastly reduced numbers in the premier regional championships. Currently, upwards of 90 percent of bowling's playing membership operate in the novice grades. Junior A continues to provide champions and finalists of high calibre and there is no doubt that the commencement of inter-regional rounds is an annual summer highpoint.

Brian O'Donovan, Kinsale, gave Mid Cork its fourth outright success when he won in 2003. In opposition in the final at Caheragh was 1981 winner Mick O'Driscoll, then in the

twilight of a career that would span close on six decades. Now representing the South West division, O'Driscoll scored notable wins over a youthful Martin Coppinger, then West Cork champion and 1999 winner, and Willie O'Donovan, whom he beat in a thrilling semi-final at Dunderrow. The Kinsale man, for his part, had high profile wins over Eamonn Connolly and Wayne Callanan.

The county final at Caheragh went very much O'Donovan's way and he annexed All-Ireland honours at famed Ballincurragh when accounting for new Ulster champion Malachy Lappin.

The South West division had the champion in 2004 when represented by Bandonian John Joe Crean. He came with a late surge to deny City's Patrick O'Driscoll at Kilumney in the semi-final while Willie O'Donovan won a great battle from Brendan O'Driscoll at Enniskeane to set up the county decider at Newcestown.

In this one, *The Southern Star* report acknowledges Crean's performance: 'His narrow last-shot victory over the Mayo representative, Willie O'Donovan, was a deserved triumph in his first year in the grade and was a reward for the fine level of consistency he displayed from the outset of the competition



2007 bowling champions at The West Cork Hotel in Skibbereen; from left, Mick Young, Bantry, All-Ireland veteran champion and junior A county runner-up; Jerry O'Driscoll, Ballinspittle, novice veteran county winner; Tim Looney, West Cork Hotel; Bill Daly, Glanmire, All-Ireland senior champion; and Ian Callanan, Ardfield, All-Ireland junior A champion.

when he would not have been touted as a leading contender'.

Malachy Lappin was again the Ulster champion and, this time, took the national title by defeating Crean on the Cathedral Road.

Willie O'Donovan's perseverance paid off and he claimed the junior A county for the second time, when, again representing Mayo but bolstered by a big East Cork following, he eclipsed Gaeltacht's Noel Murphy in the decider at Bweeng. The stand-out bowler of the past decade, Martin Coppinger, in common with many West Cork champions, found the junior A championship a hard one to negotiate and his defeat to Murphy in the semi-final at Caheragh was big shock. Murphy did not produce that form in the final and O'Donovan was a convincing winner. Ulster again thwarted O'Donovan's bid for All-Ireland glory when rising star Brian O'Reilly defeated him in the national final at Doneraile.

The Churchtown South native would go on to win intermediate honours in 2009. Michael Gould, brother of 2002 winner Noel, took the 2006 junior A back to the City after a fine campaign that culminated in victory over Carbery's champion, Tommy Connolly, at Beál na mBláth. Ulster's champions in junior A were now ensuring there was no Munster monopoly. For the third year running

A huge crowd saw Callanan recover from a bowl deficit to win an absorbing struggle in the last shot

the Denis O'Brien Cup went north as 1991 champion Paul Grimley returned to claim his second crown, defeating Gould on the Cathedral Road.

2007 saw a thrilling inter-regional series as South West's Ian Callanan and West Cork's Mick Young stormed through to a Marsh Road showdown. A huge crowd, which resulted in a €28,600 total stake, saw Callanan recover from a bowl deficit to win an absorbing struggle in the last shot. The national series had returned to Carbery for the second time with The Marsh Road new hosts and, on a scorching July Saturday, Ardfield man Callanan claimed the junior A national title after a splendid contest with Harry Toal (jun).

To 2008 and a champion who has a unique place in the annals of bowling. Darren Oliver hails from Ból Chumann na Meirleach, Ard Mhacha, and, as Ulster champion, made his mark winning a splendid All-Ireland junior A shoot-out with Ian Crean at Dunderrow in 1996. Work commitments brought him to Killarney from where he affiliated to the Gaeltacht division and duly won their regional championship

in the grade in 2008. It was the catalyst for a magnificent Cork county run that saw him defeat Carbery's Michael Bohane in the decider at Dunmanway, becoming the only player to win titles in jurisdictions north and south. He lost out though in his bid for a second national crown when going under to Ulster champion Martin Toal.

A very popular county and All-Ireland junior A winner in 2009 was South West champion Johnny O'Driscoll of Clon. In a hard-fought campaign Johnny overcame North East's Aidan Bowen in the county semi at Beál na mBláth and then the formidable City champion, Wayne Callanan, to claim the county cup at Rosscarbery. He excelled too in the All-Ireland decider at Sally's Cross where he came from a bowl down to deny Ulster's Malachy Lappin.

Youth was having its fling in the junior A championships of 2010 and 2011. Killian Kingston of Leamlara in East Cork won the U18 county in 2009 and was slotted straight into East Cork's premier grade while still U18 for the 2010 season. After defeating the formidable PJ Cooney in his regional final, the youthful Kingston, with

solid West Cork ancestry behind him, powered his way to a county final meeting with West Cork champion Brian Wilmot of Bandon. In the decider at Newcestown it was Kingston who prevailed after a magnificent 15th shot to 'O'Brien's corner' proved the decisive throw.

Kingston claimed the All-Ireland on the Tassagh road when accounting for Ulster's Fergal Donnelly in the August finals. Both Cork finalists were on an upward trajectory. The Leamlara youth won intermediate in 2013 before going on to win the senior county in a dramatic finale with Edmund Sexton at Lyre in 2016. Brian Wilmot won intermediate in 2011 and was runner-up to Martin Coppinger in the senior final of 2013 played at Bauravilla.

Arthur McDonagh was also on the rise and won the 2011 county junior A in some style. A powerful exponent who would go on to senior status, McDonagh defeated City's Michael Gould, the 2006 champion, in the final at Kilcorney but caught a tartar in the All-Ireland decider at famed Derrinasafa.

Paul O'Reilly was the unheralded Ulster champion that year and stunned the capacity Derrinasafa crowd with his astute playing and road management. Long awaited titles would come westwards in the following years.

Ból Chumann na hÉireann

Under current guidelines, there will be no return to bowling under level 3 restrictions.