

King & Queen of the Roads

Part 11

Armagh hotshots, Thomas Mackle and Kelly Mallon were bidding for a dual record four in a row when the 2018 King and Queen festival came round for a first ever September hosting. Their championship fortunes contrasted that year with Mackle, who had regained supremacy in Ulster, going down in his bid for a second national title to David Murphy who claimed his third at Grenagh. Kelly Mallon, meanwhile, soared to a fifth consecutive senior crown, her eighth in total, and in doing so surpassed Gretta Cormican's long held record. Mackle cast championship disappointment aside in vanquishing the best that Cork and the continent had to offer as he maintained his unbeaten run with a record-breaking fourth King of the Roads crown. He was put to the pin of his collar in a rip-roaring final where he came up against rising star from Fermoy, Arthur McDonagh. A senior championship runner-up in 2017 and 2018, McDonagh had developed into a match for the best and proved it spades when defeating All-Ireland champion, Murphy, in a gripping Saturday semi-final that also included Dutchman, Mark Muntel. Mackle too was tested when forced to come from a long way back to deny a game Killian Kingston and German champion, Harm Weinstock. The Mackle-McDonagh final was an epic. The Southern Star report sums up a rare encounter 'That Arthur McDonagh's heroics over two days didn't earn him the title seems an injustice but Thomas Mackle, tested like never before, kept his composure and proved himself not only a bowl-player of outstanding ability but also one of great mental toughness'. Mackle took it with his final cast of a sixteen-shot battle. Kelly Mallon had to fight tooth and nail to overcome Germany's Anke Klopper and Kealkil's Claire O'Sullivan to win Friday's Queen semi and it was Silke Tulk who faced her once again in Sunday decider. Tulk overcame the spirited challenges of Cork's Veronica O'Mahony and county

champion, Carmel Ryan and it was the Dutch lady who displaced Mallon winning the Queen crown for the fourth time after another fiercely competitive encounter. Wayne Callanan was a big winner at the 2018 festival taking the Jim O'Driscoll Cup in some style defeating both John O'Rourke and Eamonn Bowen (Jun) in separate scores; Dutch youths, Mirco Brueker and Suzanne Zieverinnk won the youths international and Armagh's Sean Donnelly and Adrian O'Reilly the McCarthy Insurances Cup. Adrian Lappin defeated Michael O'Leary to win the East Cork Oil trophy. To 2019 and finally a return to the winner's podium for the home county. It came in the form of Gary Daly, a senior standard-bearer, of the highest quality when on form, but who had not attained the heights of some of his peers on the bigger stages. Ballincurring 2019 changed all that when, with one of the most impressive final performances in the festival's 35 year history, he overcame All-Ireland champion, Aidan Murphy. Daly's early brilliance and Murphy's wayward second and third left the Fermoy man into a two-bowl lead. The Brinny native staged a stirring fightback, but the new champion showed his mettle matching his rival shot for shot and became the fifteenth winner of the King of the Roads tournament. Murphy ended Mackle's four-year reign in Saturday's semi giving a sublime display in a contest that also included Dutchman William Hobbelink who also had his moments. Daly accounted for Ulster champion, Cathal Toal and German, Ralf Klingenberg in his semi. Kelly Mallon reigned supreme once again defeating her great rival Silke Tulk to take the Queen crown. It was another gripping battle that went to the last shot. It was Kelly's seventh Queen triumph in total. Carbery's Mairead O'Driscoll, the Cormican Cup qualifier winner, threw the first shots of the 2019 festival but a game display could not match her formidable rivals, Mallon and All-Ireland champion, Carmel Ryan-Carey in the first of Friday Queen semi-finals. The Carrigtwohill woman led by a bowl at the half-way point but, once again, Mallon

produced a sensational finish to come through. Tulk, in her semi, outbowled Ulster champion, Derbhla Toal-Mallon and Germany's Anke Klopper. Peadar Toal defeated Michael Bohane in a thrilling Jim O'Driscoll Cup decider, Bohane having vanquished Sean Murphy and John O'Rourke in the Cork final. Irish duo, Wayne Parkes and Hannah Sexton won the Proto-Mark Technologies International Youths play-off. Sean Donnelly for Armagh and Vincent Kiely for Cork were also winners at the 2019 festival it's 35th hosting.

It's been a remarkable journey for the Ballincurrig club. Seamus O'Tuama remains the man at the helm, but it is no one man show. The King and Queen festival is, annually, a monumental organisational effort. A great many have given loyalty and commitment through years of involvement. Moss Twomey, brother of Seamus, has been ever present down through the years at the heart of its qualifying tournaments as has William O'Brien, whose name is on the trophy presented annually for the best shot of the weekend. Fachtna White is the capable chairman who oversees events; Dick McCarthy is President of the organising committee; Mick Hurley is a huge asset in score management; Tadg O'Driscoll, Sam Kingston, Anthony Rohan, Charles Smart, Jim Geary, Leo Hegarty and Pat O'Gorman are among a select band who have given sterling service to the annual hosting. There is hardly a bowling event that does not involve the presence of Gretta Cormican and the King and Queen festival is no exception. The former champion from faraway Lyre commits to the ladies qualifying competition for the cup that bears her name and her photographic skills adorn its historical catalogue. A feature since its inception is the programme produced for the King and Queen festival, a sixty-page booklet filled with interesting content from contributors north and south. Aidan McVeigh has been a mainstay since the beginning. The former Ulster Bol Chumann secretary states 'we were pilgrims going on a crusade, our reward a link that was never broken'. Brian Toal,

Bol Chumann Ard Mhacha's founding secretary is a regular columnist as is the main man Seamus O'Tuama. Christy Santry, Noel Magnier, Catriona O'Farrell, Pat McCarthy, T P O'Mahony, and club Cathaoirleach, Fachtna White, are among an eclectic mix who make regular appearances on the festival programme. For this series we wish to thank Gretta Cormican, Aidan McVeigh and Dominic Morgan. We will leave the final word to the man whose zeal and foresight brought to fruition bowling's premier non-championship event, Dr. Seamus O'Tuama: 'Sport is about many things for many people, but one of its most enduring and special qualities is its capacity to take us out of the mundane reality of our everyday lives. It does this by allowing us to share in the glory of the great moments and it allows us to feel the wind in our hair, the race of youth, unbridled joy and sometimes despair'. For 35 years the King and Queen of the Roads has provided many such moments.