

ROAD BOWLING

MASTER AT WORK | Legendary Mick Barry threw bowls at Ballygurteen

VINCE DULLEA reminisces about road bowling in Ballygurteen during the past four decades

All roads lead to Ballygurteen

THERE'S a strong history and tradition of road bowling around the Ballygurteen/Rossmore area that dates back to the 1940s and '50s when some notable scores were played.

That early era featured some prominent local bowl players such as Sparky Woods, Johnny O'Riordan, Danny William O'Donovan, Miah Keohane, Des O'Mahony, Jerry Holland and John Joe Murphy, now all gone to their eternal rest.

In the 1970s formal tournaments were scarce, but then in the summer months of 1978/79 there were the Ballygurteen Carnival Scores organised by Jerry Holland and Paddy Murray. Taking part were some of the top junior players of the day - Christy Mullins, Sean Crowley, Jerry Dwyer, Dan Connolly, Eugie Daly, Noel O'Brien and Billy Hurley. Those scores brought a new level of excitement and atmosphere to the Ballygurteen road during those fine summer evenings. One semi-final between Crowley and Mullins is particularly memorable, with some fantastic long bowls along the straight and the Ballinacriga man eventually edging the contest on the last throw.

But road bowling wasn't always confined to the bigger players because during the quieter Sundays, especially in winter time and with nothing else to do, a group of local 'social players' would gather to fiercely contest the score north the road from Tots Pub, over to Oakmount Avenue, and back again for the return score. Regulars such as the aforementioned Jerry Holland and Paddy Murray along with Roger O'Donoghue, Sean McCarthy, Paddy Kelly, Mickey Harrington, Jimmy Lar O'Sullivan, the two John Burke's and Willie Jennings, a great character back from England and a brother of Barney's.

Also emerging at that time were a number of promising local young players such as Flor O'Donovan, Pat Joe Connolly, Christy Daly and Finbarr Fitzpatrick, now residing in Rossmore.

It was the O'Connell-Dullea Cup that put the Ballygurteen Road on the map as it featured the top seniors of the day, such as Bill Daly, Declan O'Donovan, Seamus Sexton, Pa Butler, Eamon Bowen, the two O'Driscolls, Mikey Lox and Blondy Jim, Michael and James Buckley, Christy Mullins and the



Pictured after the 1998 O'Connell/Dullea Cup final, from left, Vincent Dullea, James Caverly, Paddy Murray, James Buckley, competition runner-up, Denis Cahalane, Donal O'Riordan, competition winner, Carmel Dullea, Pat O'Sullivan and Jerry Holland.

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great Dermot O'Sullivan from Dunmanway who eventually contested the final.

One of the semi-finals between Billy Daly and Blondy Jim O'Driscoll was a tremendous contest, with a couple of incidents along the way. Halfway through the score a car accidentally reversed onto the road, blocking O'Driscoll's bowl and maybe costing him a bowl of odds. No big complaints either way, except one comment: 'I wouldn't mind but the bloody car wasn't worth 20 pounds!'

They were still level for the last shot, Daly played a good bowl past the line but O'Driscoll's reply just beat the tip, by what Mikey Lox described as, 'by four boots'. Then onto the final between Blondy Jim and Dermot O'Sullivan.

It was a big occasion with a large crowd. Two great opening bowls from O'Driscoll rounded the first corner, while O'Sullivan, caught behind the bend, delivered a huge loft over the corner which was inch-perfect to almost level the score again. The exchanges were close and tense right up to the finish line with O'Sullivan having a formidable last tip to beat, but he maintained his composure to complete the job. It was a fantastic victory for Dermot who, along with his followers, celebrated the occasion late into the evening.

The next big tournament on



Pictured after the 2015 novice final at Ballygurteen were, from left, Vincent Dullea, Ger Connolly, competition runner-up, Bernadette Dullea, Pat Broderick, competition winner, Paddy Murray, Pat Joe Connolly, Charles O'Mahony and Florry O'Donovan.

the Ballygurteen Road was to run off the Red Crowley Cup, which preceded the Jerry Desmond Cup, during the 1997/98 season. Again, all the big senior players involved with some great scores won and lost.

The best score of the lot, by popular consensus, was the semi-final between James Buckley and Pa Butler, two of the all-time greats of the game. It had top-of-the-range exchanges along the entire road, right up to the last throw. Buckley just beat a huge last shot from Butler to reach the final against Donal O'Riordan on St Patrick's Day 1998. There was a massive crowd, stretching halfway to the first corner, with Buckley the money favourite. It was level after four throws each. Buckley was unlucky to have a blocked bowl and O'Riordan took full advantage with a 'Miler' past the Women's Lane to raise the bowl of odds. As much as he

tried, Buckley could not reduce the deficit and Donal O'Riordan was the worthy winner of the Red Crowley Cup.

Over the years a number of novice and junior tournaments were completed, such as Dano Sullivan winning from DJ Flynn and the great Nelius Hurley from Ring emerging victorious over John Joe O'Donovan, Ballinadee, in the junior A final. Other tournaments that spring to mind include Billy Hurley's great display to defeat young Billy McAuliffe in the 2005 junior final, and Pat Broderick defeating Jer Connolly in a subsequent novice final.

The iconic Mick Barry was also at Ballygurteen a few times when he was 'showing road' for John Harrington's tournament scores. On one occasion Mick was throwing a few practise shots before the score and without overexerting himself he went over halfway to the first

corner every time. It was nice for locals to see the master at his craft.

Two county senior finals were played in Ballygurteen over the years, the most recent two years ago when Aidan Murphy took the title from Martin Coppinger on a wet day, not very conducive to good bowling. The '98 senior final at Ballygurteen was well contested between John O'Driscoll and Kieran Gould both from the city. A feature of that score was O'Driscoll's big bowl from Dan Donovan's cottage up to Burke's farmhouse followed by an incredible cast from Gould, going all the way to McCarthy's Cross, which put him in a winning position.

During those years also, a number of other local bowl players, both novice and junior, came on the scene, nearly all of them having played hurling and football with Kilmeeen. Promising players such as Con and

Tim O'Sullivan, the O'Gorman's, Eugene, Kieran and Neil, James Hurley, Gavin Twohig, Danny and Timmy O'Brien and, of course yours truly, Vince Dullea, who Eamon Dunphy might describe as 'a good player, but not a great player'.

To conclude, I would like to thank our committee members past and present and also some other club members such as Gretta Cormican, John Lombard and Sean Kenneally for their help on big score days. Thanks as well to Pat McCarthy and Pat O'Sullivan, Rosscarbery, for their accurate recollection of certain score dates. Like everybody else, we are all waiting for a further improvement in the pandemic so as to resume sporting activities, including the current final of the O'Connell Dullea Cup between Michael Bohane and Gary Daly to be played as soon as possible. Roll on the summer months!