

# ROAD BOWLING

JOHN O'BRIEN | Had a reliable, steady style, complemented by almost unerring accuracy



## Terrific 1989 duel at Derrinasafa

'THE exacting standard of junior bowling in Munster was never more positively underlined than in the 1989 season when the calibre of player and the nature of contest in the closing stages of the championship were each of the highest order.'

Brian Toal's words aptly describe a spectacular series that culminated in an unforgettable final at Derrinasafa. Noel O'Brien, again the South West representative, had defeated City's champion, Simon Buckley, in a cracking semi-final at Ballinacurra, Upton, while Jerry Hegarty, the champion of new region, Carbery, overcame West Cork's John Carroll in terrific duel at Shannonvale ensuring a Derrinasafa showdown that would live long in the memory.

Christy Santry called it in his Southern Star report 'one of the greatest promotional advertisements the game has received in a long number of years.' Hegarty went a bowl up at Nattie's before O'Brien levelled it at Darkwood. In a magnificent closing half, O'Brien went into a big lead but Hegarty almost snatched it with a grandstand finish.

Testimony to their respective standing in the game at the time, O'Brien had won European gold on the road in the 1984 internationals at Garding, while Hegarty would go to win the All-Ireland intermediate championship on two occasions in subsequent years.

It was the only time a three-way junior A All-Ireland was played and here, on the Tassagh Road, Armagh, O'Brien claimed his second national title in the

grade with victory over the redoubtable Ted Hegarty of Lyre, the London champion, and Ulster's Martin Boylan.

On a sadder note, the last days of 1989 marked the passing of Denis O'Brien of The Miles, Clonakilty, brother of Noel's. Denis's memory is perpetuated in a magnificent cup donated for the All-Ireland junior A championship and its first recipient was Dan Kenneally the champion of 1990.

Churchtown South is a noted bowling hotbed in the East Cork division and it was from here that Kenneally embarked on a wonderful campaign that saw him a tough East Cork champion and go on to county victory against '76 champion, Michael Coughlan, at Ballyvolane. The All-Ireland decider at Bauravilla saw another fine performance secure the Denis O'Brien Cup with victory over Ulster's Brian Kiernan.

From Churchtown South to Drishane, the junior A champions' list extended its span in 1991 when Cornie Bohane brought the Fr Michael O'Driscoll Cup to the Carbery division for the first time. The Miles were hosts for a Titanic battle as Bohane squared off against West Cork's highly-rated Humphrey O'Leary, son of Humphrey (senior), one of the greats of the 1940s and '50s.

The Carbery champion had won the All-Ireland intermediate in 1977 and that experience in higher ranks stood to him on the evening as he took the spoils. Christy Santry states that experience may have been the de-



Jerry Hegarty, Skibbereen, 1989 junior A runner-up and later a two-time intermediate champion.

terminating factor: 'Bohane had that advantage over his opponent in that over the years he had consistently proved himself a man for the big occasion, a veteran of numerous big money scores and a man whose tough man image never lost its sheen down through the years.'

The national final did not go his way though: The All-Ireland junior A had almost been the sole preserve of Cork champions since its inception in 1966 with just three titles having gone northwards. That would change in '91 on a dramatic day on the Cathedral Road when Paul Grimley overcame Bohane.

Aidan McVeigh reported: 'The 17-year-long wait was really worthwhile as the Madden man captured the All-Ireland in simply brilliant fashion.' His last bowl 'touched on the rise but straightened out to run over the line amidst a tremendous roar. Grimley had his All-Ireland and, for his dedication to the sport, nobody deserves it more.'

It was back to North Cork for the '92 champion. Denis O'Sullivan hailed from Donoughmore, a powerfully-strong exponent whose determined play saw him win the county title from Gaeltacht's Brendan O'Callaghan in the final played at Ballyclough. It was a hard-fought decider in which O'Callaghan, from the well-known Cuil Aodha bowling family and still competing and winning at junior level, came close to victory only to lose out to O'Sullivan's strong finish.

In the All-Ireland play-off that year at Ballingearry, there was a big surprise as Brian Kinchin kept the Denis O'Brien Cup in Ulster for the second successive

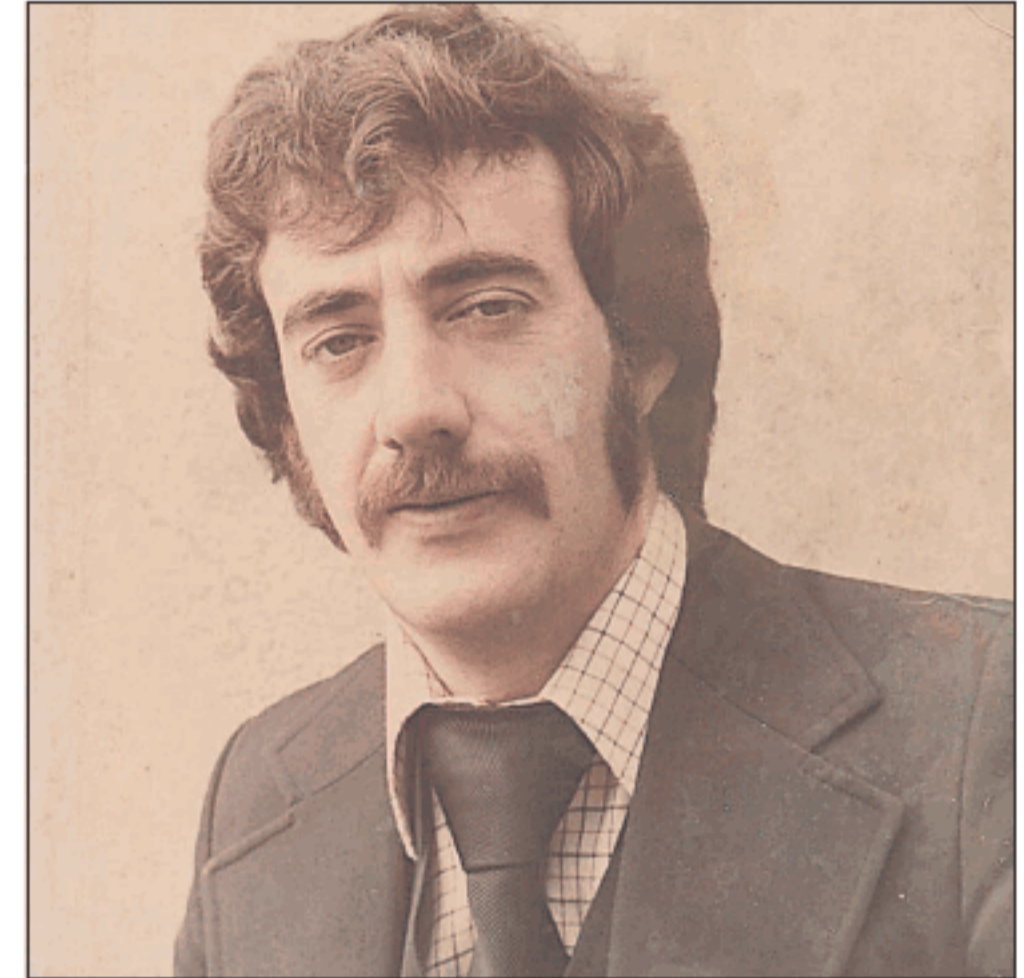
year when inflicting a two-bowl defeat on the Cork champion.

The burgeoning Carbery bowling scene produced another champion in 1993 when John O'Brien of Ballydehob, a man with an ingrained competitive instinct, beat all comers to take outright honours in thrilling fashion. A reliable, steady style, complemented by almost unerring accuracy, saw him overcome stronger opponents as he made it through to the county final at Macroom where he faced a formidable North East champion, Eamonn Connolly.

A fiercely competitive battle ended with victory for the Carbery champion described thus, 'it was an exceptional triumph on one of the most trying occasions that O'Brien has experienced in his bowling career to date.' O'Brien travelled to the Cathedral Road where he proved too good for an out of form Ulster champion, Paddy O'Neill.

The 1994 champion would go on to win at the highest level. It was the year Philip O'Donovan made his breakthrough when bringing the championship back to Churchtown South and the East Cork division. O'Donovan had been junior B champion the previous year and his unbeaten championship run continued with a string of junior A victories that brought him to the county final against North Cork's Michael O'Sullivan at Whitechurch.

Victory here set him up for an All-Ireland tilt with 1991 champion, Paul Grimley, on the Bandon road as the national finals moved to the Mid Cork region. O'Donovan's bowling on the day was first class matching and, at times, beating that of senior contenders



Cornie Bohane. Drishane, the first Carbery region junior A county winner in 1991.



Denis O'Brien, The Miles, Clonakilty, in whose honour the All-Ireland junior A cup is presented annually.



John O'Brien, Ballydehob, All-Ireland junior A champion, of 1993.

Bill Daly and Michael Toal, and he was a comprehensive winner at the score's conclusion.

O'Donovan would go on to win the senior county on two occasions and the All-Ireland in 2005. He won the Moors gold medal at the home internationals in 2008.

Noel O'Brien was going for a record third junior A crown in 1995, but was thwarted in the final by a supremely confident City champion, Jim O'Driscoll of The Glen. O'Driscoll had developed into a top player through the 1990s and that great championship run in '95 culminated in a hard-fought victory against the Miles man at Templemartin.

O'Driscoll faced the doughty Pat Mallon, a former senior champion, for the All-Ireland crown on the Cathedral Road and won in the last shot. Testament to O'Driscoll's prowess in the '90s was his winning of

the intermediate championship three years later.

1996 saw the championship come back to Mid Cork after a 23-year break. Ian Crean of Bandon was the man to break the bogey. The stylish left-hander was massively the underdog in the county decider at Macroom where he faced Anthony Gould the City champion.

Yet it was Crean who took the cup 'with a display of bowling almost without blemish using his ciotóg style effectively and impressively to carve out a thoroughly deserving championship victory.' Darren Oliver was a rising star in Ulster that year and defeated the Cork champion in the national decider after a superb contest at Dunderrow.

Oliver would come southwards on a more permanent basis and gain further honours 12 years later.



**Ból Chumann na hÉireann**

**European championships 2020 not going ahead in May 2021 deferred to May 2022 with new team selections.**

**Check Road Bowls Facebook for video footage – Lyre All-Irelands 2015/16 (Kelly Mallon v Catriona Kidney)**