

King & Queen of the Roads

Part 9

The 2012 King and Queen festival had drama on a grand scale. The Southern Star report on the weekend begins 'Seldom if ever in the twenty-eight year history of these great competitions have the titles been decided in such spellbinding fashion. Both finals produced bowling of a high order, but it was the nail-biting nature of the closing stages that made them particularly memorable'. David Murphy, the Gold Medal winner at the Pesaro, Euro games in May, was going for an unprecedented four-in a row and Kelly Mallon, was heading for a hat-trick of Queen titles. It would take something out of the ordinary to break their stranglehold. Martin Copping and Silke Tulk were the ones to deliver. The Bantry native was a powerful force, All-Ireland senior champion for the second time after a thrilling last shot win over Conor McGuigan at Derrinasafa, but King of the Roads success had eluded him thus far. There was a hint of what was to come when he produced a stirring semi-final performance in defeating Aidan Murphy and Dutchman Aarhen Hassink to set up a final clash with the defending champion who was also impressive in disposing of the challenges of Ulster champion, Conor McGuigan and German challenger, Robert Djuren. The final on Sunday was an epic duel. Locked together in eleven each to the 'big turn', Murphy held big law after a searing drive to the 'sycamores' but it wasn't quite over. The report describes the closing shots. 'Not for the first time this year, Copping stared defeat and refused to yield. He pitched a final effort that sped along the centre, cut the left-hand bend and was marked down away in the distance near the end of 'O'Connell's green. Another shot for the record books leaving Murphy with an almost impossible task. He gave it everything, but it stalled seven metres short. Scenes of euphoria followed as the Copping camp enjoyed a champagne celebration'. It wasn't the end of the day's drama.

Immediately after, Silke Tulk and Kelly Mallon produced another contest for the ages. The Dutch champion, almost a shot down early, roared back to take a commanding lead entering the last quarter. Mallon rallied to take the fore bowl facing the line only for Tulk to win it with a sensational last shot. More scenes of jubilation followed as the orange clad visitors celebrated. Mallon had got the better of All-Ireland champion, Catriona O'Farrell and German contender Anke Klopper, while Tulk battled hard to overcome, European Champion, Carmel Ryan and qualifying competition winner, Catriona Murphy. P J Cooney won the Jim O'Driscoll Cup in 2012 and the father and son combination of John and Cian Shorten, the McCarthy Insurances trophy. Ciara Buckley won the junior Queen competition and Armagh men, Niall Smith and Oliver Gribben, won the Smart's Bar prize. The King crown returned to the Murphy household in 2013 when Aidan of the clan captured his second title. The younger of the Brinny brothers, the current All-Ireland senior champion, was also a Gold Medal winner at the previous year's Pesaro championships beating the best tin Europe in the Moors bowling event and had his competitive instincts perfectly honed for the 2013 King and Queen festival. They needed to be, and the roll of the dice went his way as well in a magnificent semi-final battle with All-Ireland champion and defending King, Martin Coppinger. German, Ralf Look was also in this three-way and led early. Murphy took over but Coppinger lined a magnificent shot to the 'big turn' and was in control facing the line. Murphy's last was good, but Coppinger's reply had its measure only to hit a parked vehicle and lay up hind bowl. Edmund Sexton blitzed the road in an impressive semi shoot-out with Ulster's Martin Toal and Dutchman, Jerry Dekker. The Murphy-Sexton final was an engaging set-to too. Sexton recovered from a poor fourth, but Murphy's gritty determination saw off the North Cork man's challenge and big closing quarter brought him his second King crown. Carmel Ryan had a tough battle

keeping the Cork flag flying given the awesome challenge presented by Kelly Mallon and Silke Tulk, but in 2013 she scored her greatest success, fourteen years after her previous win. The Carrigtwohill woman was All-Ireland champion having edged Kelly Mallon for the national title at Whitechurch and was, of course European champion from the previous year. Ryan was superb in her semi-final win over Astrid Henrichs (Germany) and Togher Cross lady, Catriona Murphy, who had won the qualifying tournament. Silke Tulk overcame, Kelly Mallon and Gretta Cormican in the second semi setting up what would be a pulsating decider. 'Both players were at the peak of their powers sharing the lead on numerous occasions. Ryan's two sensational shots from back of the 'green' brought her within sight of the line and were instrumental in a thrilling victory'. 2013 marked the first year of the Mass Engineering Youths International Triple Crown as the under-age champions from the competing nations vied for honours. The Dutch pairing of Joachem Winnink and Manon Zanderick were inaugural winners. Cathal Toal won the Jim O'Driscoll Cup from Killian Kingston who had won the Cork final on Friday from Eamonn Bowen (Sen) and William O'Driscoll. Armagh's Colm Rafferty and Paul Grimley won the McCarthy Insurances trophy from Carbery's county champions, David Shannon and John O'Regan. There was also a Cork doubles victory for Tony O'Flynn and Patrick Butler. It was perhaps, fitting that for the thirtieth King and Queen hosting in 2014, a player whose contribution since the early years was exceptional should return for a shock win. James Buckley was contesting his ninth final when he faced All-Ireland champion and King holder, Aidan Murphy, in the thirtieth anniversary decider. Massively the underdog, he produced an almost faultless display characterised by two brilliant shots from the no-play lines to sight at the end of the long straight giving him a two-bowl lead for the closing quarter. It was enough for a fourth King crown nineteen years after his previous success.

Buckley had secured his spot impressively winning the Mick Barry Cup qualifying tournament, and, on the weekend, saw off the challenges of Bryan O'Reilly Armagh and Matthias Rahmann (Germany) in a hard fought Saturday semi-final. Ulster champion, Cathal Toal was forced to withdraw leaving Aidan Murphy and Hollands Harold Dollerman to contest the second semi during which the Mid Cork man had to overhaul a big early Dutch lead. Silke Tulk was in unbeatable form in the Queen decider in 2014 when avenging her defeat to Carmel Ryan the previous year. County champion, Ryan was bowling well but fourteen shots on the inward route represented an awesome display from the Dutch challenger. In the Queen semis, Ryan defeated Kealkil's qualifier, Claire O'Sullivan and Germany's Anke Kloppper while Tulk mastered All-Ireland champion, Kelly Mallon and Rosscarberty's Emma Fitzpatrick. The thirty-year milestone was marked by a special presentation to King and Queen organiser in chief, Seamus O'Tuama. In making the presentation former Bol Chumann P.R.O. Noel Magnier, spoke of the extraordinary contribution the event had made to the sport of Road Bowling. P J Cooney won the Jim O'Driscoll Cup for the second time in three years and Mairead O'Driscoll with David Devlin won the Youths international triple crown. Armagh scored doubles successes when the combinations of Ruaidhri O'Reilly/Eugene Kiernan and Shane O'Neill/Austin McKeown were successful. It may have been a portent of things to come. We were about to enter period of prolonged Ulster domination as the big prizes at the King and Queen festival took a northbound course.