

PITCH & PUTT IRELAND



National Matchplay Finals 2026

May 30th, 31st & June 1st

**Senior Gent's Official Venue
Rocklodge Pitch and Putt**

Championship Preview by John Manning

Gents Senior Preview

In what must be one of the strongest fields ever assembled for our sport's Blue Riband eleven present or former National Matchplay champions will participate in the 2026 renewal at Rocklodge.

Additionally, a dozen current or previous holders of the National Strokeplay championship will congregate on the famous old Carrigrohane course that is celebrating its 80th anniversary.

Two-time champion **Kieran Earls** is the holder of the Day Cup and the Bruff player's title defence will get underway on the dot of 9.00am on Saturday morning against **Paul Sweeney** (Hillview), 2019 and 2022 Munster Inter-County winner and 2024 Eamonn Birchall trophy winner along with 2025 National Inter-County runner-up.

It won't get any easier for these two as play progresses for the victor will next play former national Matchplay and Strokeplay champion **Bryan Delaney** (ESB) or last year's National Strokeplay fourth place finisher **David O'Leary** (Douglas).

Holder of a record seven Matchplay wins, **Ray Murphy** (St. Anne's) would love to add a Matchplay success at Rocklodge to the Strokeplay crown he garnered at Rocklodge 13 years ago. Murphy must first battle Ryston's **Darren Keogh**, a former Kildare Strokeplay champion and Inter-County high achiever with the Lilywhites.

2017 National Strokeplay champion **Mark Millar's** two National Matchplay victories may date back a quarter of a century but the Killineer man is still capable of scaling the heights. Lucan's **Michael Ahern** won the 2016 Leinster Intermediate Strokeplay and in his Cork residency days was a Munster Juvenile Inter-County winner in 1980.

Collins' **Chris Scannell** was 2010 National Matchplay champion having claimed the Strokeplay in 1995. A beaten finalist in 1998, 2004 and 2011, Scannell made a winning Inter-County debut at Rocklodge in 1984. That won't faze doughty competitor **James Cleary** (Larkspur Park), the 2004 Munster Matchplay champion and a previous silver and bronze medalist in the National Strokeplay championship.

Five-time national individual champion and fifteen-time Munster individual champion **John Walsh** (Collins) has a super record around Rocklodge dating all the way back to his National Strokeplay silver medal there in 1997. 2025 Munster Inter-County winner and 2022 National Intermediate Strokeplay bronze medalist **Dermot Tuohy** (Cill na Móna) will be up against it but will definitely give a good account of himself.

2017 National Matchplay champion and 2019 National Strokeplay victor **John Ross Crangle** (Loughlinstown) is a proven Matchplayer, with four provincial Matchplay victories to his name. Offaly Inter-County stalwart **Anthony Galvin** (Tullamore) reached the 2025 semi-finals.

Darren O'Reilly (Lucan) is another former champion returning to the finals and the 2003 winner will have two-time Munster Matchplay champion **Jason Cregan** (Tralee) as first round opposition.

A pick of many really intriguing first round ties is a repeat of the 2023 All-Ireland final between **Stephen O'Reilly** (Hillview) and 2001 National Strokeplay kingpin **John Cahill** (Fermoy). O'Reilly claimed the title three years ago, but with both men in scintillating early season Scratch Cup form, their latest match-up will be worth travelling far to see.

Ryston's **Sean Harkins** celebrates the 40th anniversary of the first of his three National Matchplay successes by meeting with millennium year quarter-finalist **Andrew Lowe** (Old County) in the first round.

Over 50 years ago, the late great Joe Doyle (Carrigaline) won three National Matchplay championships, two of which were collected at Rocklodge. Deerpark's **Damien Fleming** already owns three titles but after his 2018 triumph at Rocklodge, victory here would see the Kerry native, Cork resident become the second player in history to win the Matchplay twice on the same course.

Fleming is the ante-post favourite for the championship. To justify that, he will first have to deal with the challenge presented by 2015 National Juvenile Inter-County winner, Lucan's **Barry Gorey**.

Frank O'Donoghue's pair of National Strokeplay wins was achieved in the last century but the Raffeen Creek player is still a formidable performer and his encounter with 2012 runner-up **Eoin Walsh** (Collins) will be well worth seeing.

2013 finalist **Sean Goggin** (MacBride) enjoyed his day in the Strokeplay sun at Ring Commons four years ago. Here he faces a man who has represented both Meath and Kerry with distinction in the Inter-County arena, **Chris Gibney** (Listowel).

Three-time National Strokeplay champion and National Matchplay semi-finalist in 2002 and 2003, **Liam O'Donovan** (Bruff) has been an elite player for decades. The most decorated juvenile Pitch and Putt player in history, **Evan Carry** (Castletown) the All-Ireland Under-16 matchplay crown in 2018.

2023 National Strokeplay champion **Stephen Shoer** (Riverdale) would fancy adding an Irish Matchplay to his resumé but has caught a real first round tartar in 2025 and 2026 Leinster Matchplay champ **Stephen Murray** (Old County).

What a match to anticipate to close the morning's play! **Eamon Gibney** (Castletown) is drawn against 2008 National Strokeplay champion **Frank Dineen** (St. Anne's). Gibney is Seeded no. 4 but Dineen won the 2016 Irish Open around Rocklodge and knows the place as well as most.

Past national individual champions apart, so many others travel to Rocklodge with good chances.

In the top quarter, **Mark Hogan** (Tullamore) was last year's National Intermediate Matchplay champion. **Owen Shannon** (Collins) was inspired at Fermoy in the recent Munster Matchplay championship. **Dean Grannell** (St. Patrick's) is a highly-respected player on the circuit and a former Leinster Matchplay winner.

Two other former provincial champions are Bruff's **Tommy Hanley** (Munster Matchplay) and Old County's **George McGreal** (Leinster Strokeplay).

D.J. Lynch (Tipperary Hills) reached the 2024 All-Ireland Matchplay final at Larkspur Park.

Another former finalist, **Ian Dillon** (St. Bridget's) features in the second quarter as do 2023 National Intermediate Strokeplay champion **Sean Clerkin** (Killineer) and Clerkin's Matchplay equivalent **Wayne Allen** (St. Patrick's).

2021 National Intermediate Strokeplay kingpin **Justin McKeon** (Prosperous) will contend from the third quarter where he will be opposed by the likes of two-time National Over-55s Strokeplay bronze medalist **Tadgh Harrington** (Rathfeigh) and 2024 Intermediate Matchplay champion **John Looney** (Collins).

Others with chances in this section are 2019 Leinster Matchplay finalist **Padraic Sarsfield** (MacBride), the 2023 National Mixed Foursomes winner and last year's National Intermediate Matchplay runner-up **Noel Stapleton** (Lakeside).

Other players from the fourth quarter that can't be discounted are Munster Matchplay semi-finalist **Brian Cahill** (Riverdale) and 2002 National Inter-County winner, five-time Leinster Inter-County winner and 2005 National Matchplay semi-finalist **George Beardsley** (MacBride).