

**PITCH & PUTT IRELAND**



## **National Strokeplay Finals 2026**

**Senior Gents**

**August 9th**

**Senior Gents Official Venue**

**Tullamore Pitch and Putt**

**Championship Preview by John Manning**

## Gents Senior Preview

Thirteen previous champions including holder **Damien Fleming** (Deerpark) will compete in the 2026 National Gents Strokeplay championship final at Tullamore

The first champion into action will be 2017 winner **Mark Millar** (Killineer) who partners 2017 Leinster Juvenile Matchplay kingpin and 2019 Leinster Juvenile Strokeplay champion **Dylan Hudson** (St. Patrick's).

**Frank O'Donoghue** (Raffeen Creek) is still capable of some outstanding Pitch and Putt. The 1992 and 1998 champion will have 2025 National Intermediate Inter-County winner **Tim Crowe** (Riverdale) for company.

**Frank Dineen** boasts a remarkable National Strokeplay record at Tullamore. Dineen lost a play-off to **William Buckley Junior** (Erry) in the 2003 renewal at the famed Co. Offaly venue while the mercurial St. Anne's player won the title by a shot at the same location in 2008.

In addition to his 2003 National Strokeplay victory, Buckley Junior claimed that season's Leinster Matchplay title at Tullamore. Dineen and Buckley Junior respectively play with a player who tied for second in the 2022 Tullamore Irish Open, **Leonard O'Meara** (Erry) and **Darren Keogh** (Ryston), a 2011 Leinster Inter-County winner at Tullamore.

2023 National Senior Strokeplay champion **Stephen Shoer** (Riverdale) claimed the 2008 All-Ireland Intermediate Strokeplay title at Tullamore with the record low 54-hole aggregate for the championship. Stephen's fellow competitor for the opening 36-holes will be multiple Dublin champion **Chris Gallagher** (Lucan).

Twenty-five years have elapsed since **John Cahill** lifted the Donnelly Cup at Stackallen but the Fermoy ace is still more than a match for the best. Cahill will bring positive Tullamore memories from a 2008 third place finish behind Frank Dineen and a 2014 National Inter-County win over the Arden Road course into his twoball alongside 2023 Leinster Strokeplay champion **Darren Fagan** (Seapoint).

Last of the past champions into the fray during the morning wave will be the 1995 titleholder **Chris Scannell** (Collins) who lines up opposite 2025 Leinster Strokeplay bronze medallist **Karl Murphy** (Old County).

2009 champion **Bryan Delaney** (ESB) claimed his All-Ireland Matchplay success at Tullamore eight years ago and will go into battle flanked by two-time Dublin Matchplay winner, **Philip Sweeney** who now plays out of Fermoy.

**John Walsh** (Collins) chases the National Matchplay/Matchplay double (that he last claimed in 2015) as he sets out with Athgarvan's **Cathal O'Toole**, a 2024 National Intermediate Inter-County victor with Kildare.

**Kieran Earls** (Bruff) chased Stephen Shoer home in that 2008 Intermediate championship at Tullamore before embarking on his all-star adult career that saw the Limerick man lift the Strokeplay trophy at Glenville two years ago. 1994 National Juvenile Strokeplay champion **Brian Webster** (Larkspur Park) has been showing some excellent recent form.

2019 champion **John Ross Crangle** (Loughlinstown) is a perennial contender in the All-Ireland Strokeplay and was super-impressive in the recent Irish Open at Portmarnock. JR is joined by a fellow National Strokeplay runner-up, **Jason O'Regan** (Tralee).

The National Strokeplay record of **Ray Murphy** (St. Anne's) at Tullamore is not great but the record four-time champion did reach the 2018 All-Ireland Matchplay decider at the Co. Offaly venue. Ray's playing partner from 13.54 is Deerpark's **John McGrath**, whom Ray defeated in the 2018 Matchplay semi-finals at Tullamore.

Holder and newly-crowned Munster Strokeplay champion **Damien Fleming** (Deerpark) will have a fair idea of the standard required when he tees-off at 14.12 (seeking to improve on his 2016 third place performance at Tullamore) with two-time Munster Inter-County runner-up **David White** (Hillview).

In addition to the many National Matchplay winners who have also lifted Strokeplay titles, 2023 Matchplay supremo **Stephen O'Reilly** (Hillview) takes his place in the field, in which he will be joined by 2012 National Matchplay silver medallist **Eoin Walsh** (Collins).

**Darren O'Connell** (Tullamore) was runner-up in the last National Strokeplay championship to be played in Tullamore – that was in 2016. **George Beardsley** (MacBride) was a provincial Inter-County winner at Tullamore with Louth in 2004.

**Gary Healy** (Loughlinstown) was a silver medallist at Ring Commons four years ago. That was a feat also achieved by 2022 third-place finisher **James Cleary** (Hillview), in 2006.

There are many other provincial champions on show such as **Jason Cregan** (Tralee), **David Sexton** (Fermoy), **Stephen Murray** (Old County), **Eamon Gibney** (Castletown), **Declan Freeman** (Kilworth), **Ian Dillon** (St. Bridget's), **Dean Grannell** (St. Patrick's), **George McGreal** (Old County), **Keith Redmond** (Lucan), **Alan Hanlon** (Collinstown), **Thomas Hanley** (Bruff), **Shane Redmond** (Old County) and **Phillip Burns** (Brinny).

Sexton and Murray have been recent bronze medallists in the National Strokeplay. Former National Matchplay runner-up Ian Dillon partners 2020 National Intermediate Strokeplay champion **Michael Conway** (Tralee).

Like Brian Webster, 2022 Irish Open champion **Evan Carry** (Castletown) is a former Irish Juvenile Strokeplay champion.

Former National Intermediate Strokeplay champion and 2015 Leinster Strokeplay kingpin **Hubert Kelly** (Loughlinstown) will have an opportunity to witness up close the style that carried **James McLoughlin** (Mellows) to a record-shattering victory at Laytown in the recent Leinster Strokeplay.

**David O'Leary** bids to build on his fourth place finish at St. Anne's twelve months ago as the Douglas man plays in the final group of the day with 2022 National Intermediate Strokeplay winner **Killian O'Gorman** (Listowel).

Gowran's **Patrick Robinson** would love to visit the senior grade podium just as he did in Junior (runner-up in 2013) and in Intermediate (second in 2023) while **Justin McKeon** (Prosperous) seeks to be another National Intermediate Strokeplay champion to go on to capture the senior trophy.

The cut, low round and 36-hole leading score were remarkably similar in the 2003 and 2008 championships at Tullamore. The cut fell each time at 97. 42 was the lowest individual round in both championships and 89 led after 36 holes in 2003 and in 2008.

The cut dipped to 95 by 2016 when 42 remained the low eighteen recorded. Liam O'Donovan fired 86 to lead into the final round.

In a testament to their enduring attributes as competitors of the highest quality eight of the players (including five of the top six finishers) that made the 36-hole cut at Tullamore 23 years ago are set to line-up at Tullamore in 2026.

In addition to 2003 champion, Buckley Junior, runner-up Dineen, fourth placed Frank O'Donoghue, three-time champion John Walsh and his Cork Inter-County colleague John Cahill all made the 2003 top twenty as did Brian Webster, James Cleary and 2024 National Matchplay runner-up **D.J. Lynch** (Tipperary Hills).

2008 champion Dineen obviously made the cut again at Tullamore in 2008 as did John Walsh (who finished third) and John Cahill (fourth). Two-time All-Ireland Matchplay semi-finalist **Paudie O'Sullivan** (Fermoy) came fifth in 2008 while future champions Bryan Delaney and Damien Fleming served notice of their potential by contesting the final eighteen.

John Walsh again survived the 36-hole axe in 2016 to be the only player to make the three Tullamore National Strokeplay cuts – remarkable consistency. In all, 13 of next Sunday's field played the 54 holes at Tullamore ten years ago, including eight of the top ten.

Walsh finished sixth while Fleming was third with Crangle fourth. Millar, Delaney and Buckley Junior also made the 2016 cut as did Erry's Leonard O'Meara.

Others to make it to the final round in 2016 were Keith Redmond, McGrath, Eamon Gibney, Murray and Eoin Walsh.