

**MUNSTER OPEN SQUASH CHAMPIONSHIPS 2009**

(Friday, 16<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> Oct.)

- sponsored by **IRISH CAMPER VANS**

**Press Release**

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**Irish Camper Vans**  
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**GASKIN AGONISINGLY CLOSE**

*[Rooney secures 4<sup>th</sup> title in a row in classic final]*

*Old sayings last the test of time because invariably they speak some wise truths.*

There is an old saying that "Sport can be cruel".

Every success and achievement and the joy that accompanies it is mirrored by some failure and non-achievement and feelings of disappointment and doubt. Last Sunday, in the tranquil surroundings of Sundays Well Boating and Tennis club on Corks' Mardyke, 24 year old Carlow man, **Arthur Gaskin** came face-to-face with the cruel side of sport. After an hour and a half of stamina sapping squash, he had engineered a situation that must have sustained him

through many hours of hard training and sacrifice in recent years. Having won the previous rally, Gaskin walked to the front of the court to regain his breath and composure. He collected the ball, returned to the service box and readied himself to serve the next rally. From the gallery, match referee, Lee Healy announced. “10-8, Match ball”

To those who follow Irish Squash closely, Arthur Gaskin's story is an uplifting one. A product of one of the country's most active junior set-ups at Carlow Lawn Tennis Club, he was a talented junior among many good juniors that emerged from that club, although maybe not one that was obviously destined for the professional game. However to achieve success in anything, one must want it badly enough and in March 2005, the young Gaskin decided to commit his future to that of a full-time professional squash player on the English club scene and international PSA circuit. As a minority sport, squash players not at the top table are continually faced with the contradictions of requiring a full-time approach to their training and preparation and earning enough sponsorship and prize-money to finance it. It separates the men from the boys, the good players from the good pros. Gaskin's application and dedication to his sport paid off and he acquitted himself well rising to a ranking comfortably within the world's top 100 players and passing many Irish players to become an automatic selection on the Irish team alongside former world top 10 player, the legendary Derek Ryan, the sublimely talented John Rooney and the Australian born Irish no. 1, Liam Kenny. This has been the case for approximately 2 years and now it's time for some new goals. Earlier this month, Gaskin was named on the Irish team ahead of Ryan for the first time. Now he was one point away from defeating Rooney, not only the winner of this event for the last 3 years but unquestionably viewed as the top native Irish player of the moment in an Irish Grand Prix event.

There is another old saying that “Champions are never beaten”.

**John Rooney** is a sports promoter's dream. Naturally gifted, genuinely interested and selfless in his encouragement and coaching of juniors and lesser players, he more often than not plays with a smile on his face. His appearance however masks the steely resolve and confidence of a winner. The 29 year old has always been a winner since his early junior days at Galway Lawn Tennis Club. Part of a successful squash family (brother Niall is also among the leading Irish senior players and sister Eimear has represented Ireland at junior level in the past), his progress onto the PSA circuit was in many ways inevitable. In recent years, he has flirted with the world top 60 from his base in Nottingham in north-east England.

The “**Irish Camper Vans**” Munster Senior Open Squash Championships is an annual event and this year is the opening tournament on the Irish Grand Prix circuit sponsored by “**Invest Like the Best**”. A search back through the records of recent Mens A finals are something of a barometer on the subtle changes over time in Irish rankings. In 2002 (by Derek Ryan) and again in 2003 (by John Rooney), the 2001 champion, Ulsterman Graeme Stewart was defeated in the final. In 2004, Liam Kenny came to Cork and confirmed his superiority on the Irish rankings with a comprehensive victory over Derek Ryan. In 2005, it was Kenny again, this time accounting for John Rooney. Another subtle change was heralded in 2006 with John Rooney overcoming Derek Ryan in what seemed like a “changing of the guard” moment. In 2007, Rooney again confirmed his superiority over the same opponent and in 2008, it was his younger brother Niall who had to give way at the final hurdle. Those privileged enough to have an un-obstructed view of last Sunday's final on the packed Court 2 gallery must have wondered at many times if they were witnessing another significant power-shift in the Irish rankings.

Rooney was the pre-tournament favourite, however this was his first tournament since a recent bout of flu which had caused him to withdraw from the Irish team that competed at the world team championships in Denmark earlier this month. The possibility of an upset gained further credence when Rooney's somewhat below par performances of the past fortnight were examined. A 2-3 loss to English player, Andy Whipp, having led 2-0 while playing for his club MB Nottingham in the opening round of the English premier league 10 days previously followed by a first-time defeat to Gaskin, his club-mate at Nottingham, in a training game earlier in the week suggested that Rooney may be vulnerable.

Both players, seeded 1 and 2 respectively progressed with relative ease over the weekend to Sunday's decider. The first game set the tone for the match with long gruelling rallies and high intensity work-rate. Rooney appeared to exhibit the greater composure at vital times and scored some crucial volley-drop winners to close out to an 11-6 victory. The 2<sup>nd</sup> game followed a similar pattern with victory going to Rooney by the same margin. Although clearly frustrated at times by his lack of progress and some contested refereeing calls, Gaskin continued to apply the pressure to his opponent, no doubt in the knowledge that the longer the game progressed, the more it suited him. His fortunes appeared to turn as he trailed 6-8 in the third. Rooney's previously impeccable execution of winners appeared to desert him and a succession of rallies ended with Rooney hitting the tin. Gaskin took the 3<sup>rd</sup> game on a score-line of 11-8 and although the match continued to be a tight affair, it seemed as if a watershed moment had been crossed as Gaskin continued his consistent play through the 4<sup>th</sup> forcing his opponent to error at crucial times. The 4<sup>th</sup> game went to Gaskin by 11 points to 9 and as the final game progressed, it was hard to see how Rooney could rescue the situation.

When the referee called "10-8, Match ball" it was not just a match ball. In tennis parlance, Gaskin had 2 championship points. At times like this in sport, when the body is warm, tiredness, adrenaline and luck all play a part, but essentially it is a mental battle. Having been here before cannot be under-estimated. Over the following 4 points, Rooney displayed exceptional bravery and confidence in not only trying, but successfully executing the very shots that had failed him a number of times over the previous 2 games. When the final rally concluded, he had won the 5<sup>th</sup> game on a score-line of 12 points to 10 and his 4<sup>th</sup> straight Munster Open title. The gallery applauded long having witnessed not only a champion display but a brave and unlucky runner-up in the best Mens A final this tournament has seen for many a year.

Rooney now returns to Nottingham to continue his career. He plans to give another year to the professional circuit before returning to Galway. Gaskin's next step is this week's Austrian Open in Vienna where he starts as 4<sup>th</sup> seed.

There is another old saying that "You have to lose one, before you win one".

Five in a row are rare and unique in any sport. Having got a glimpse of what the future may hold, If John Rooney achieves this feat at next year's Munster Senior Open, he may yet have to raise his game to a whole new level!

Elsewhere in the tournament, **Ciara Moloney** from Carlow, now playing with the Fitzwilliam club in Dublin was a comfortable winner of the Ladies A title defeating **Clare Jones** of Highfield by 3 games to love in the final.

A significant result occurred in the 3<sup>rd</sup> place play-off of the Mens A competition that had a high number of 5 game matches on the final day, **Keith Moran** of Sligo who started at no. 4 seeding defeating fellow Connacht man, **Niall Rooney**, the no. 3 seed. The highest ranked Munster player in the draw, **Kevin Knox** from Waterford also had a good tournament, eventually finishing at position 5 having started as 7<sup>th</sup> seed.

In the Mens B, Midleton man Tommy Horgan is not often out-run, but he had to concede to the youthful Michael Conroy from Leinster Cricket club who took that title with a 3 games to 1 final score-line.

The Mens C final brought together a particularly ecumenical pairing. Spaniard, David Buxonat from Barcelona and representing the Westwood club in Dublin losing out 3-1 to Irish Racquetball international player, Patrick Hanley from the Kilworth club in north Cork.

Ballyraggetts Joe Lacey wore his Kilkenny jersey with pride among the Cork natives following his victory over local Sundays Well player, Greg O’Gorman in the Mens D final, while the Mens E title went to Gary O’Mahony of the Celtic club in Waterford who had a 3-0 victory over Colin O’Reilly of Silversprings.

The tournament took place at 3 Cork venues last weekend, Sundays Well Boating and Tennis club, Highfield Rugby club and at Silversprings squash club at the Source Health and Fitness centre in Tivoli with 75 players participating in a 3 full days of competition.

Finals Results in full as follows,

**Men’s A Final**

John Rooney (Galway L.T.C.) bt Arthur Gaskin (Carlow L.T.C.) 3/2  
(11/6, 11/6, 8/11, 9/11, 12/10)

**Men’s 3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

Keith Moran (Sligo L.T.C.) bt Niall Rooney (Galway L.T.C.) 3/2

**Men’s 5<sup>th</sup> Place**

Kevin Knox (Celtic, Waterford) bt Daniel Zilic (Mount Pleasant) 3/2

**Ladies A Final**

Ciara Moloney (Carlow L.T.C.) bt Clare Jones (Highfield) 3/0

**Men’s B Final**

Michael Conroy (Leinster C.C.) bt Tommy Horgan (Midleton) 3/1

**Men's C Final**

Patrick Hanley (Kilworth) bt David Buxonet (Westwood) 3/1

**Men's D Final**

Joe Lacey (Ballyraggett) bt Greg O'Gorman (Sundays Well) 3/2

**Men's E Final**

Gary O'Mahony (Celtic, Waterford) bt Colin O'Reilly (Silversprings) 3/0

**Men's B Plate Final**

Charlie Sturm (Silversprings) bt Aidan Monahan (Sundays Well) 3/1

**Men's C Plate Final**

Pat Keogh (Silversprings) bt Patsy Barrett (St. Finbarrs) 3/1

**Men's D Plate Final**

John Joe Dawson Squib (Sutton) bt Martin Sullivan (Highfield) 3/1

**Men's E Plate Final**

Paul Kelly (Sundays Well) bt John Joyce (Silversprings) 3/0



**Pictured Left**

Prior to the Mens A final,  
Irish Camper Vans Munster Senior  
Open Mens champion, John  
Rooney (right) with runner-up  
Arthur Gaskin (left)