

3rd Round of the Ulster Championship - The Oval in Belfast, Sunday 27th January 2019

15 players attended what was the biggest domestic competition on the Irish circuit in many years, hosted at the home of Glentoran FC in Belfast. Three of the highest quality domestic competitors made their debut in the competition; 1984&85 NI and 1985 UK Champion Keith Greene, former NI Junior Champion & 1990 World Cup representative Neal Hermon and former ROI Junior Champion and also 1990 World Cup representative Michael O'Brien. Also making his Ulster Championship debut was German Sven Schilling from Subbuteo Sankt Pauli club in Hamburg a regular traveller on the WASPA circuit.

Group Stage

Debutants Keith Greene and Michael O'Brien joined Lochlin Bradley, Nicky Moore and Derry's Mark McCrossan in Group A. McCrossan topped the group with 4 straight wins but the real battle was for 2nd place and one of the best 3rd place berths. O'Brien and Greene were tied on 4 points as they faced each other in the last session with Moore able to pass the loser if he could beat the winless Bradley. Dubliner O'Brien won the game 1-0 to clinch 2nd and with Bradley recording his first win on the circuit beating Moore 2-1 to overtake him with Keith Greene holding on to 3rd to qualify.

Group B saw the other 2 debutants Sven Schilling and Neal Hermon lock horns with All Ireland Champion Mark Farrell as well as Lawrence Watson and Oisín Mór of Derry City TFC. Tournament favourite Farrell scored 12 goals without reply finishing 3 points clear of Schilling in 2nd. Watson claimed 3rd spot but his negative goal difference ensured he didn't claim a quarter final spot and instead he dropped into the Plate semi-final. Hermon claimed 4th ahead of Mór courtesy of his scoreless draw with Watson.

In an open draw there is always the chance of the clichéd "Group of Death" and so it proved for the third time in three tournaments. Any local semi-final could easily see any of the 5 Group C players figure. Kenny Beggs, Barry Spence, Martin og Bradley, Simon Stewart and Brendan Rodgers went head to head to claim 2 guaranteed places out of the group. With Beggs winning his 4 games it was Stewart who claimed 2nd by way of wins over Rodgers and Bradley and a draw with Spence. With Bradley, Spence and Rodgers all recording victories over each other it was the draw with Simon Stewart that saw Barry Spence claim 3rd and also a place in the next round.

Knock-out Stages

The finalists from the last Ulster Championship Round, McCrossan and Stewart met in tetchy affair which Stewart edged 1-0. O'Brien's trip north ended in a close game with "Sankt Schilling", the German triumphing 2-1. Kenny Beggs played Keith Greene for the first time in 35 years in the third quarterfinal which he took 1-0 and Farrell knocked out Spence courtesy of a 2-0 victory.

In the semi's Farrell beat Beggs 1-0 and Sven eventually fell over the line after a scoreless draw and goalless shot marathon against Stewart. It was a something he relied on again as he held off Farrell in the final to finish the game with a draw after already losing to the Irishman in the group. This time however it was the home player who scored the decisive shot and Farrell claimed his second Ulster Championship win and go top of the table. In the Plate Brendan Rodgers and Martin og Bradley were reunited after their Group C encounter but this time it was Bradley who won the game, 2-1 on shots.