Ulster Inter-Counties Championship growing from strength to strength

The fourth year of the reconstituted Ulster Inter Counties Team Tournament took place in Ballymena on the 17th October 2026. To the delight of the event referee Norman McBride, all nine counties were represented at the event with three Counties, namely Antrim, Down and Armagh also entering "B" teams. The 10.30 am live draw put the following teams into four groups of three. The top two teams qualified for the main event to contest "The McBride Shield" first presented in 1971 by T C McBride.

Group D

	Group A		Group B		Group C		Group D
1	Armagh A	1	Donegal	1	Antrim A	1	Tyrone
2	Fermanagh	2	Down A	2	Monaghan	2	Antrim B
	Consolation		Consolation		Consolation		Consolation
3	Down B 3	3	Armagh B	3	Londonderry	3	Cavan

In the quarter finals the four group winners powered their way into the semi-finals with Donegal and Tyrone recording 4-0 victories against Monaghan and Fermanagh respectively. Antrim A defeated a strong Down A team 4-1 with only Down's Gus Agnew recording a win over Antrim A's Steve Hughes. Antrim B proved stiff opposition for Armagh A managing to record two victories: Vladimir Brzak beating Barry Dixon 5-11, 11-5, 14-12, 11-5 and Andrew Davies defeating Joe Colvin 11-7, 11-9, 11-9. But Joe Sheard's win over Antrim B's Mark Millar 11-2, 11-9, 9,11, 15-13 provided Armagh with the all-important fourth win to seal Armagh's place in the semis by a score of 4-2.

Antrim A won the first of the semi finals 4-1 over Armagh with some notable performances especially Christopher Allsop's excellent 4 game win against Tom Calvert. Joe Sheard was the only Armagh player to trouble the scoreboard with a five game win over Alex Lo 11-5, 2-11, 6-11, 11-9, 14-12. The second semi final was a real cliffhanger with defending champions Tyrone edging past Donegal 4-3. Starring for Tyrone was VJ Malayo who won the deciding match against Yuri Pavlov 11-9, 14-12, 11-5 to win the fourth and deciding match.

The final was an exciting and tense affair with Tyrone trying to retain their title and Antrim A looking for their first win in four years. The first match say Tyrone's VJ Malayo take a surprise 2-0 game lead over Christopher Allsop winning 11-3, 11-9. A tight third game was won by Allsop 11-9 and he then took the next two games 11-6 and 11-4 to complete a remarkable comeback. Phil Wallace defeated Rodney McKirgan in 4 games 11-9, 11-7, 9-11, 11-2 to put Antrim 2 matches ahead. Des Flanagan won the third match beating Antrim's Steve Hughes in straight sets. Tom Irwin got Tyrone back level winning a ding dong battle with Alex Lo 11-9 in the deciding fifth game, Bjorn Sorenson restored Antrim's lead with a comprehensive 11-8, 13-11, 11- 7 over the combination bat aficionado Mark

McAllister. This meant that Tyrone had to win the last two singles to retain the McBride Shield. Tom Irwin and Des Flanagan recorded a four game win over Antrim duo Alex Lo and Steve Hughes 11-7, 11-7, 8-11, 11-9 and the match was again level at 3-3. The experienced St Annes pairing of Tom Irwin and Rodney McKirgan now faced the formidable Antrim pairing of Christopher Allsop and Phil Wallace in the decider. It proved to be a match worthy of its importance. Tyrone took the first game 11-7 but Antrim bounced back to take the next two games 11- 8 and 11-6. A tight fourth set went Tyrone's way 11-8 to set up a climatic final game. Antrim rushed into an early lead and were ahead 5-1 at the end change . Tyrone gradually reduced the deficit but at 10-7 a powerful hit by Christopher Allsop concluded a wonderful rally to see Antrim become 2026 Inter Counties champions and lift the McBride Shield. Condolences to a very spirited Tyrone team on a stout if ultimately unsuccessful defense of their title.

Quarter Final	Semi Final	Inter Counties Final
Armagh A 4 v 2 Antrim B		
	Antrim A 4 v 1 Armagh A	
Down A 1 v 4 Antrim A		
		Tyrone 3 v 4 Antrim A
Donegal 4 v 0 Monaghan		
	Tyrone 4 v 3 Donegal	
Fermanagh 0 v 4 Tyrone		



The third placed teams played a knockout to establish which of the involved counties would win the Jimmy O'Hara Memorial Shield. In the first semi-final Down B recovered from 3-1 down to take match 4-3 with Down B's doubles pairing of Arnold Morgan and Emily White the Down's heroes, coming from 2 games down to narrowly defeat Londonderry's Louise McCarron and Lee Waring 7 -11, 12-14, 11-8, 13 – 11, 11 – 9 in the deciding match-up.

The second semi-final was also a close affair with five of the matches going to four or five games. Ultimately it was Cavan that emerged victorious by a 5-2 margin.

The Plate final saw a rejuvenated Down B storm into a three match lead. Cavan's John Henry managed to stop the slide with a five game win over the Down B captain John Huyton 7-11, 11-7, 11-7 9-11, 5-11. However Down's Marek Szotkiewicz defeated Cavan's Andrew Mayne 13-11, 11-7,11-4 in the next game to ensure a Down B victory and collect the Jimmy O'Hara Memorial Shield for the first time since presented in 2023.



L-R Arnold Morgan, Marek, Emily White, John Huyton, Andrew McCrorry



Ken Patterson



Joe Colvin



Bjorn Sandstrom



Joe Sheard



Christopher Allsop



Oksana Pavlova



Antrim B L-R Ken Patterson, Mark Millar, Andrew Leckey, Vladimir Brzak, Andy Davies



L-R Fermanagh J Sterling J Hutchinson, D Hutchinson, T Jenson, Slawek