



Life at the 2018 Preston Championships

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9:30 Sunday Morning. It's cold, but no snow or ice and no rain – let Preston Championships begin!

Competitions included the Cadets (U15), Juniors (U18), Singles, Veterans' Singles (over 40), Over-60s' Singles, Handicap Singles and Doubles. Taking part were players from all three divisions. Age of competitors varied from 10 up to, well, a lot lot older.

As with any well run event, the day required the support of event organisers Tony Rigby (who was also competing), Tony Kendal and John Irvine along with the unsung others who helped provide the PA system, collect the money, sort out the draws and ensure everything was set up and ready for play. A big thank you to all the volunteers and helpers – players included – who helped put up and take down equipment and score matches.

Cadets

The winners and runners up of the two groups would progress to the semi-finals. In Group 1 Toby Ellis (Jacobaeus A) qualified in top spot. Noah Chappell-Elgie (Preston Colts) was runner-up. In Group 2 Aakanksha Tripathi topped the group after a winning a hard-fought match 3-2 against youngest competitor in the championships, Bethany Ellis (Preston Colts), who's also the current National U10 girls champion.

The group results meant the first semi-final would be an all-Ellis family affair which older brother Toby (aged 12 and ranked 6 in England in the U13s), won comfortably 3-0. The second semi-final saw Chappell-Elgie continue to impress in his first season playing table tennis, producing a composed display to defeat Tripathi 3-0.

In the final, No 1 seed Toby did what was needed with an efficient display beating Noah, who had gained more valuable experience of competition play, 3-0.

Veterans

Last year's winner John Porter (Jacobaeus A) found himself in a tough group which included Keith Lee (Gryf A), with both players enjoying a similar win rate of 73% in our Premier Division.

The week before, John and Keith had played in a league match with Keith winning a tight battle 3-2. Keith was to repeat his victory again today and topped their group. Keith progressed to the semi-finals where he continued his good form defeating seven times Veteran champion Andy Michnowiec 3-2 in an intriguing and tense battle. In the quarter-finals Michnowiec (URCL), hampered by knee and hip problems, had overcome Brian Oldfield 3-2 in one of the matches of the day.

In the bottom half of the draw, Ian Felton (Astra A) comfortably progressed to the semi-final stages where he defeated a resurgent and determined Mike Armishaw 3-0 to set up a final with Keith Lee.

The Veterans is the one event – minus the over-60s which he is too young to enter – Ian had yet to win at our Championships. This was a record he was determined to put straight but the final against Keith Lee, didn't quite go according to plan.

Keith took the first game but from there on in, Ian raised his game and despite playing solid match play table tennis Keith was unable to maintain the momentum. Ian came back to win the match 3-1 and in doing so won that missing Veterans title.

Juniors



Toby Ellis takes on Oliver Garmston in the final

Next up was the Junior Competition and what a terrific competition it proved to be, providing some of the matches of the Championships. Although under 18, three of the semi-finalists are already playing in our Premier Division, Adam Oldfield (Deepdale B), Oliver Garmston (Kirkham A) and Toby Ellis. The fourth semi-finalist Ogi Kostov (last season's Best Newcomer award winner) continues to make excellent progress in Division 1 with Astra D.

In the first semi-final, Adam played Oliver. Adam started hot with forehand drives and loops coupled with punched backhand blocks denying Oliver time and forcing him back. At 2-0 down, things looked grim for Oliver. But experience of handling pressure in our league and progressing through Preston Cadet and now Junior teams the North West Junior League and elite group training at Garstang stood Oliver in good stead. As his own forehand began to fire, Oliver slowly worked his way back in to the match. 0-2 became 2-2 and in to a decider won by Oliver. It was a match Oliver later described as "one of my best to date".

Not to be outdone, friends and practise partners Ogi Kostov and Toby Ellis provided their own five-set thriller. It was a see-saw match. Toby won the first game 12-10 and the second 14-12. Ogi fought back, winning the third 11-6 and the fourth 11-7.

In to game 5 and Toby built a 9-5 lead before Ogi pegged him back again. At 9-9 Toby, with experience of playing regularly in top level tournaments around the country didn't panic. An accurate serve set up the opportunity for some aggressive play which won him the point and a controlled rally the next – game won 11-9.

Then to the final. Oliver Garmston with power, speed and aggression vs Toby Ellis, control and spin. Both players contributed to a hard-fought, excellent final. Toby won the first and second games. Back came a determined Oliver to take game 3. With instructions to tighten up his serve, Ellis regained control and took game 4 and with it the match.

At age 12 Toby Ellis has, in the space of a month, won our Premier Division Singles title and now our Championship Cadet and Junior titles. All credit to Garmston too, who with hard work and practise has progressed from being the 2015 Preston 2nd Division Singles runner up to a force to be reckoned with in Preston's Premier league in 2018 and the North West Junior league.

Also great to note is that with Bethany Ellis, Noah Chappell-Elgie, Aakanksha and Anupam Tripathi, Brandon Pepper, Luke Suffolk, Joe Johnston and a whole host of new youngsters coming through our coaching system, volunteers Martin Shaw and Danny Johnston soon to be taking their UKCC Level 1 coaching qualification joining our coaching team, the future for table tennis in Preston looks bright.

Singles

Organisers Tony Rigby, Tony Kendal and John Irvine juggled lunch and player availability to get the Blue Riband Singles event started. The early stages consist of groups 3 players. Each group has a top seed based on a players averages and their league ranking. The groups operate on a round-robin system with the winner going through to the knockout stages. This gives everyone a guaranteed minimum of two matches.

Each player in the group is also expected to score a game and those that don't progress through the group stages are encouraged to score matches in the knockout stages allowing them to get close to the action and feel part of the Championships. Without players putting back this type of support our Championships would also grind to a halt.

With the group winners decided, it was on to the knockout stages. Keith Lee, runner-up in the Veterans' final, was pitted against Toby Ellis. Lee controlled the match and proved too strong and accurate for Ellis, winning 3-1. In his quarter-final, Lee played Alex Tyson (Astra A), a solid experienced match player with an all-round game and aggressive forehand.

Andy Michnowiec progressed to the semi-finals by defeating Andrea Harrison (Astra A) who had come through a tough group including Danny Johnston (Deepdale B) and Ronnie Bennett (Kirkham B). Elsewhere, in his quarter-final, John Porter eventually overcame an increasingly confident Ogi Kostov 3-2. Kostov who had a fine championships, had qualified from his group with an excellent win over experienced Paul Robinson (Astra A). The last semi-finalist was Ian Felton, who overcame Astra A team mate Dean Walmsley in his quarter-final.

In the first semi-final, Porter averaging 73% and Felton 85% in our Premier Division, hadn't played each other in the league this season. Porter had beaten Felton at the semi-final stage in our 2017 Premier Division Singles

competition. Felton was determined to make sure the same didn't happen again and from the start Felton got after Porter with aggressive play, bossing the rallies, heavily spinning the ball and hitting winners. A tiring and increasingly frustrated Porter was unable to respond and was brushed aside 3-0.

In the other semi-final, Michnowiec with a worsening injury, struggled to compete with a relentless Keith Lee. Lee took full advantage with a ruthless, clinical display, winning 3-0.



Keith Lee and Ian Felton

In a repeat of the Veterans' final, Lee was to play Felton. Just as in the Vets final, Lee took the first game. Once again Felton came back to take the second. Would history repeat itself? Not this time. Lee took the third 11-5 and the fourth 11-8 and with it his first Preston Championships.

Keith Lee had now defeated on the day John Porter, Alex Tyson, Andy Michnowiec and Toby Ellis. No one could deny he was a worthy winner and Preston Singles Champion for 2018.

Over 60s

Tony Rigby's attempt to win his first over 60s title came to an early end after he found organising and competing too much.

The four players who did make it out of the group stages and in to the first semi-final were Mike Armishaw (Garstang A) and 3 times defending champion Ronnie Bennett (Kirkham B). The other semi-final would be between Brian Oldfield (Deepdale A) and Barry Crook who after an absence of a few years had returned to play in Preston with Kirkham A. Armishaw upset the odds to come through a tough 3-2 encounter with Ronnie Bennett. Oldfield, another man having an excellent Championships, defeated Barry Crook 3-0.

The final between Armishaw and Oldfield provided to be another epic contest. Armishaw playing as well as he's probably played with solid up to the table play mixed with attacking topspin shots bossed the early games as Oldfield struggled to cope with Armishaw's tactics. Games 1 and 2 to Armishaw and a surprise result looked on the cards.

But back came Oldfield who seemed to change his tactics, taking a step back from the table to give him more time whilst also playing with more care and patience. Game 3 to Oldfield. In game 4 Armishaw fought back and served at 9-9 but Oldfield took it to level the match at 2-2.

Armishaw continued relentlessly with his tactics and kept the deciding game close until at 6-7 Oldfield put a run of 3 points together to make the score 6-10 in his favour. Back came Armishaw to 8-10. Then Oldfield served to Armishaw's pocket. Armishaw stepped to his right favouring his backhand and top spinned a reply to Oldfield's backhand corner. This opened up the angle for Oldfield who saw the space and quickly top spinned the ball across the table deep in to Armishaw's exposed backhand corner. Armishaw couldn't get back in time and his attempted return found the net.

So close but still a fine Championships for Armishaw. For Oldfield, after many years of playing in Preston, his first Preston Championships title and well deserved.

Handicap Singles

The Handicap singles is a straight knockout competition, best of 3, played up to 21. Players receive a start based on the division they play in and their season's averages in that division.

Usually in our Handicap competition it's someone with a high points start that makes the final and even wins it. This year that trend was broken. The two semi-finals were Dean Walmsley vs Brian Oldfield and Andrew White (Jacobaeus B) vs Alex Tyson. White, another struggling with injury, had done well to reach the semi-finals but found Tyson too strong and consistent. Tyson won in 2 straight.

Oldfield vs Walmsley was a much tighter affair going the distance. As both players were also involved in the doubles semi-finals their match up had put the championships in danger of not finishing in time. To make matters harder for the organisers if not the watching crowd, Oldfield triumphed after a long see-saw match, winning the decider 21-19. As it turned out there wasn't enough time on the day to play the final between Alex Tyson and Brian Oldfield. This will now be played at a later date when both players are available.

Doubles

Back in the doubles, Ian Felton & Paul Robinson had progressed to take on scratch pairing and surprise semi-finalist Brian Oldfield (having a busy day) & Clive Chisnall (Riverside B) who's probably having his best season in Division 1 for a few years. Felton and Robinson took the first game but with Oldfield playing the captains role, ably supported Chisnall, Oldfield and Chisnall came back to take game 2 only for Felton & Robinson to regain control and win the next two and take the match 3-1. Felton was into his third final of the day, Robinson his first.

In the other semi-final John Porter & Toby Ellis took on defending champions Dean Walmsley & Alex Tyson. In an entertaining match, Porter & Ellis won the first game 11-3. Game 2 to Walmsley and Tyson along with game 3. In the 4th, Porter and Ellis had game points to take the match to a decider but it was Walmsley and Tyson who took an epic 4th game 17-15 and with it a very entertaining match and a place in the final.

At nearly 6pm and after nearly 9hrs of competition there was only time for one more match to play, Tournament Referee Tony Rigby discussed with the players whether to play the Doubles or Handicap final. For logistical reasons the players agreed to play the doubles.

Walmsley & Tyson started off strongly and took the crucial first game 11-8. The second followed quickly 11-4.

Felton & Robinson had a revival in the third but it wasn't enough on the day. Walmsley & Tyson took the third 11-8 and retained their title.

With very few people left, the remaining players and organisers all mucked in to clear the sports hall of the remaining tables and equipment and rubbish left on the floor before leaving for home.

Thanks to Tony Rigby and Andrew White. Special thanks to Tony Kendal and John Irvine for manning the event desk on the day and helping arrange the playing schedule. Finally, thanks to all the players and family members who came down to support our event and to help set up and take down the equipment. Hopefully see you all again in 2019.

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