



Braintree League: Davison is a real six-hit

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Paul Davison joined the exalted ranks of six-time winners when he captured the men's singles trophy with a dazzling display of power hitting at the Braintree Table Tennis League finals night.

In both the semi-final and final Davison set out to dominate every point, following up his own serve with a smash and frequently scoring outright winners when receiving serve with a flick of the wrist or a powerful loop.

He had dropped only one game in his five sets leading up to the finals and he did not drop any more. Lee McHugh in the semi-final came closest when he had him worried in the first game before going down 12-10.

After that it was plain sailing. He never allowed his old foe Peter Hayden to settle in the final. The two of them produced some sharp toe-to-toe rallies but it was invariably Davison who had the speed of thought and weight of shot to bring them to a conclusion.

Hayden, who had been unwell and was uncertain whether he would be able to play, was clearly not at his best but even the best Hayden has always had trouble with Davison on finals night, losing to him in the 2010, 2012 and 2014 finals.

He had been getting closer over those years, losing in four games in 2010, five in 2012 and then at 11-9 in the fifth in 2014. But despite a brief glimpse of Hayden's old form in the third game, that progression never looked likely to reach its logical conclusion this time as Davison swept through 11-7, 11-1, 11-9.

The men's final was a repeat of the veterans' singles final earlier in the evening, which Davison won 11-5, 11-6, 11-7 in similar storming fashion.

And Steve Pennell ensured Hayden went home empty handed by beating him in the final of the over-50s singles 11-8, 11-3, 11-8. It is not the first time Pennell has got the better of Hayden, but not normally by those scores.

Here his solid defence, patient blocking and occasional thump were too much for his opponent.

Hayden's one bright moment of the evening was a men's singles semi-final win over Adam Buxton, who was making his debut on finals night and never really clicked into gear.

The other star of the evening was Kelly Yuenyongpknan, new to the league this year, who won the first ladies' singles final that has been held for seven years – and she came desperately close to bringing home two trophies.

Her ladies' singles victory came over Hannah Pitt, who plays in a division higher and has had some notable victories in the league over recent weeks.

But Pitt did not settle and succumbed to her opponent's greater consistency. Both players were adept at picking up the short ball and both got in some hefty smashes. Pitt started well and won the first game, but Yuenyongpknan gradually wore her down and took the next three.

Yuenyongpknan's near miss came in the division two singles in which she had a match point in the fourth game before missing out in the fifth against Garry Fryatt.

Fryatt started slowly as if overawed in his first finals night appearance and managed only two points in the first game.

But a never-say-die attitude has always been his forte and he dug in and found his rhythm. His steady defence and occasional smash were now beginning to worry his opponent as they matched each other almost point for point over the remaining four games.

Yuenyongpknan took the next game 12-10 and came close to a three-game win before Fryatt held on to win the next 11-9. It was even closer in the fourth as Yuenyongpknan had a match point at deuce. That slipped away and Fryatt held on to take the final game 11-8.

That match was staged simultaneously with the division one singles which featured a similar attack versus defence battle with attack this time winning out.

Lee McHugh's wristy backhand and clever placing left his Rayne teammate Ian Whiteside floundering on more than one occasion. Although Whiteside's formidable long defence ensured his opponent had to work hard, McHugh had enough bite and speed on his shots to win in straight games.

The mixed doubles also made an appearance on finals night for the first time in seven years and this time Hannah Pitt ended up on the winning side.

She joined last year's men's singles winner Brandon Crouchman while Yuenyongpknan teamed up with last year's beaten finalist Andy Holmes.

Initially it was the latter pair who had the edge, able to break up the game with quick hits from unexpected places.

But their opponents gradually settled and Crouchman's classy game began to dominate proceedings as they eased their way to a win in four games.

Crouchman was also on the winning side in the men's doubles with his Liberal A team-mate Simon Webber.

As the top two players in the individual averages, they would have been expected to dominate surprise finalists John Andrews and Keith Martin, but it did not turn out that way.

With a left-hander on both sides of the table, the pattern of play was not always predictable and Andrews and Martin were often able to disturb the rhythm of their opponents with some neat placings.

But the firepower was on the other side of the net as Crouchman and Webber got in some crashing hits, often from way back behind the table.

It was enough, but only just, as the Rayne pair took them to deuce in the first game, won the third and only succumbed at 12-10 in the fourth.

The evening opened with the restricted singles, being played for a new trophy donated and presented on the night by Margaret Woolmer, wife of the league's late chairman and president Len Woolmer.

And it opened with a record when Ken Lewis became the first person to win the event three times, his wins coming in consecutive years.

The 2015 winner Steve Noble did his best to thwart Lewis with an unorthodox mix of spins, but Lewis, a men's singles semi-finalist last year, has unorthodoxies of his own, a dead rubber on one side of the bat that induces his opponent to prod the ball back higher than he had hoped, enabling Lewis to get in a smash on both wings.

Noble improved in each game but it was not enough to stop Lewis.

Results

Men's singles final: Paul Davison beat Peter Hayden 11-7, 11-1, 11-9. Semi-finals: Davison beat Lee McHugh 12-10, 11-7, 11-5; Hayden beat Adam Buxton 11-5, 11-1, 5-11, 11-7.

Ladies' singles: Kelly Yuenyongpknan beat Hannah Pitt 5-11, 11-6, 11-7, 12-10.

Men's doubles: Brandon Crouchman and Simon Webber beat John Andrews and Keith Martin 13-11, 11-5, 10-12, 12-10.

Mixed doubles: Pitt and Crouchman beat Yuenyongpknan and Andy Holmes 4-11, 11-7, 11-3, 11-7.

Veterans' singles: Davison beat Hayden 11-5, 11-6, 11-7.

Over 50s singles: Steve Pennell beat Hayden 11-8, 11-3, 11-8.

Restricted singles: Ken Lewis beat Steve Noble 11-5, 11-8, 14-12.

Division one singles: McHugh beat Ian Whiteside 11-7, 11-9, 12-10.

Division two singles: Garry Fryatt beat Yuenyongpknan 2-11, 10-12, 11-9, 14-12, 11-8.

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