



Clacton & District: Panthers' historic double

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Nomads Panthers capped their superlative Clacton & District League season this week by adding the **Handicap Knock-Out Cup** to their Division One title, becoming only the seventh team in League history to achieve the 'Double', and only the second side to accomplish it in the last 30 years.

In an entertaining and high-quality final held at the Brotherhood Hall, Sam Hume, James Denyer and John Hatley – the same trio which lost last year's final to Windsor Condors – defeated the 2015 Cup-winners Brotherhood B 5-2.

It was a third Cup success for Denyer, a second for Hume but a first for skipper Hatley. And there was a measure of revenge for Denyer who clinched the victory for his team by defeating Andy Warner in match seven, beating the opponent who had edged him out of this year's Closed Championship Mens Singles' final.

The Panthers started the match in storming style and raced into an early 3-0 lead.

Denyer and Hatley (-3) proved comfortable 11-8, 11-6, 11-9 winners in the opening doubles against Gracie Edwards and John Owen (+2). They retrieved their handicap early in the first two sets and it was only at 9-all in the third that the Brotherhood pair threatened

Match two promised a mouth-watering encounter between Sam Hume (0) and Andy Warner (0) but a not-fully-fit Warner got off to the worse possible start, losing the opening set 11-2. And, although he levelled in the second, a closely-fought third set of top-class rallies and not a little tension went the way of Hume. Thereafter it was plain sailing for the Panthers' number one, winning 11-2, 6-11, 14-12, 11-2.

Who knows what might have been had Warner been fully fit although it was somewhat ironic that he'd been called in as a replacement in the Brotherhood line-up in place of injured skipper Martin Edwards.

And so Hatley (0) faced Gracie Edwards (0) in a seemingly must-win game for Brotherhood. Hatley made a tentative start and his errors cost him the first set 11-7. But Edwards was unable to maintain consistency and lost the next two until a tightly-fought fourth set saw Hatley edge it 7-11, 11-6, 11-8, 15-13.

At 3-0 to the Panthers, Brotherhood were staring a possible whitewash defeat in the face. But, cometh the hour cometh the man, and that man was Brotherhood's number three player John Owen (+2) who had the daunting task of facing Denyer (-8), a hot favourite to win despite the handicap difference.

Denyer took the initiative immediately but, after winning the first set 11-7, he took his foot off the throttle, not retrieving his handicap until 0-8 down in the second and eventually losing 11-6. The third saw Denyer back in business, getting back the handicap at 7-all but, by this time, Owen was visibly growing in confidence and belief, a confidence and belief which was displayed in spades in the fourth and fifth sets where a combination of Owen aggression and Denyer errors saw the Brotherhood player take a shock 7-11, 11-6, 8-11, 11-4, 11-0 victory to keep his side in the final.

And Brotherhood continued their recovery after the interval, reducing the arrears as Warner and Owen (+2) proved unexpectedly straightforward 11-3, 11-8, 11-8 winners over Denyer and Hatley (-3).

Then followed another eagerly-anticipated tie between Clacton's top male and female Juniors, Hume and Edwards. But Hume (-3) was always in control and won 11-6, 11-7, 11-9 with something to spare to make the score 4-2 to the Panthers.

And so to match seven where the below-par Warner (0) faced his old foe Denyer (0). But, despite Warner being unable to maintain his usual peak form, the pair produced an eye-catching series of rallies before Denyer took a see-saw match 11-4, 9-11, 11-4, 5-11, 11-6 and with it the Cup for the Panthers.

The Panthers now enter the record books alongside six other teams who have completed the League and Cup 'Double' – CYC Nomads (1962, 1963, 1966), CYC Unpredictables (1970, 1973), Nico A (1977, 1978), Windsor A (1980), Great Holland A (1985, 1986) and Brotherhood A (2006).

Final results: (*Nomads Panthers' players named first*): J Denyer/J Hatley (+2) beat G Edwards/J Owen (-3) 11-8, 11-6, 11-9; S Hume (0) beat A Warner (0) 11-2, 6-11, 14-12, 11-2; Hatley (0) beat Edwards (0) 3-11, 11-5, 11-6, 15-13; Denyer (-2) lost to Owen (+8) 11-7, 6-11, 11-8, 4-11, 0-11; Hume/Hatley (-3) lost to Warner/Owen (+2) 3-11, 8-11, 8-11; Hume (-3) beat Edwards (+2) 11-6, 11-7, 11-9; Denyer (0) beat Warner (0) 11-4, 9-11, 11-4, 5-11, 11-6.



Brotherhood B (from left) Andy Warner, Gracie Edwards, John Owen.

* On Saturday 12th May, the League holds its celebrations to mark the 80th Anniversary of its formation. It's hoped as many current and former players will be able to attend. The event is being held at Firs Park, Little Clacton and tickets, at £15 each, are available from League Chairman Peter White on 01255 425292.

* The Windsor Club's Quiz Evening takes place on Saturday 19th May at St James' Hall, 7.30pm for an 8pm start. Bring your own drink and nibbles. Tickets are £3 per person for teams of up to six. For details and to book a table, contact Jenny Higgins on 01255 432397 or 07790 240466.

* The League's Annual General Meeting takes place on Tuesday 5th June at the Brotherhood Hall. The presentation of trophies for the 2017/18 season will take place at the conclusion of the meeting.

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