



Unbeaten Bennett leads England medal roll-call

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England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland all claimed individual gold medals on the final day of the Butterfly Schools' International Championships in Worcester.

England claimed the lion's share with three – Josh Bennett retaining the Senior Boys' title he also won last year; Raquel Sao Pedro in the Cadet Girls and Naphong Boonyaprapa in the Cadet Boys.

Beth Richards of Wales was the Senior Girls' champion, while Mia O'Rahilly Egan of Ireland took the Intermediate Girls' gold and Dylan Curry of Scotland the corresponding boys' crown.

There were also plenty of minor medals for England, including clinching a clean sweep of the Cadet Boys' event, with Ben Hee taking silver and Ben Piggott and Amirul Hussain bronze.

The players of the weekend, as voted for by the umpires, were England's Thomas Rayner and Wales' Lara Whitton.

There was a special presentation to former ESTTA President John Arnold MBE and his wife Margaret, who have given more than 50 years of service to schools' table tennis. John has overseen the merger between ESTTA and Table Tennis England and is now retiring after this event.



Margaret and John Arnold received a special presentation from Table Tennis England Chairman Sandra Deaton (right) and Schools Committee Chairman Mike Smith (left)

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Full results from the team and individual events can be found by opening the menus below.

Senior Boys

[Team Groups](#)

[Team Knockout](#)

[Individual Groups](#)

[Singles knockout](#)

[Consolation knockout](#)

Senior Girls

[Team Groups](#)

[Team Knockout](#)

[Individual Groups](#)

[Singles knockout](#)

[Consolation knockout](#)

Intermediate Boys

[Team Groups](#)

[Team Knockout](#)

[Individual Groups](#)

[Singles knockout](#)

[Consolation knockout](#)

Intermediate Girls

[Team Groups](#)

[Team Knockout](#)

[Individual Groups](#)

[Singles knockout](#)

[Consolation knockout](#)

Cadet Boys

[Team Groups](#)

[Team Knockout](#)

[Individual Groups](#)

[Singles knockout](#)

[Consolation knockout](#)

Cadet Girls

[Team Groups](#)

[Team Knockout](#)

[Individual Groups](#)

[Singles knockout](#)

[Consolation knockout](#)

Senior Boys



The Senior Boys' podium

Josh Bennett retained the title he won last year and completed an unbeaten competition in both team and individual events for the second year in succession.

He beat his team-mate Gaurav Aravind in the final, triumphing by a 3-0 (11-7, 11-7, 13-11) margin. The semi-final stage saw another marathon clash between Bennett and England colleague Sam Wilson. After a five-setter in the team event yesterday, it was more of the same today, and also the same margin of victory as Bennett took it 3-2 (11-7, 11-9, 8-11, 8-11, 11-6).

In the other semi, Wales' Benedict Watson was defeated by Aravind in three (10, 9, 5), joining Wilson in taking home a bronze medal.

Three of the quarter-finals were decided in four, including a tight win for Wilson over fellow defender Israel Awolaja, avenging a defeat yesterday with a 3-1 (12-10, 11-9, 10-12, 14-12) victory.

Bennett said: "I've been able to play through the age groups in this competition, so it meant a lot for it to be my last one – I really wanted to get double gold.

"It's difficult because you can't have any lapses in concentration and you have to be mentally focused on every match, otherwise it's easy to slip up."

In the groups, Wilson came from 2-0 down against Ireland's Joey Nelson to win 3-2 (10-12, 8-11, 12-10, 11-6, 11-9) and top his pool.

Bennett and Awolaja also won their groups, while Aravind completed the set of English winners by defeating Keir Morton of Scotland and Dylan Grace of Ireland, the latter by 3-2 (4-11, 11-7, 7-11, 16-14, 11-9).

Watson was a group-winner ahead of Murhad Hussain of England, who made sure of a place in the main draw with a 3-2 (10-12, 8-11, 11-6, 12-10, 13-11) victory over Andrew McRae of Scotland.

The consolation final was won by Grace, who beat McRae 3-0 (11-2, 11-4, 11-6).

Senior Girls



Beth Richards

Three nations on the podium, led by Beth Richards of Wales, prevailing in three tight games over Naomi Lau of England (15-13, 12-10, 11-7), who she also beat in the groups.

Winning bronze were Zofia Wawrzyniak of Ireland, who was beaten 3-1 (12-10, 7-11, 11-9, 11-7) by Lau, and Rachael Scott of England, who Richards defeated 3-1 (6-11, 11-4, 11-3, 11-8).

Lau earlier beat Thuy Lin Cashman of Ireland 3-1 (11-4, 8-11, 11-8, 12-10) in the quarters, while Scott came through against Wales' Jamie-Lee Harley (11-4, 11-8, 10-12, 11-9).

Richards, who is 16 and from the Rhondda Valley, said: "I'm very happy and proud. I thought I could get the gold – I played all the matches in the team event and didn't lose a game, so I knew I could win the singles."

The three groups were won by two athletes from Ireland and one from Wales, and there were some close matches which settled the final orders.

Richards edged England's Lau into second with a 3-2 (11-8, 7-11, 7-11, 11-9, 11-9) victory, while Thuy Lin Cashman of Ireland beat Isla Stott of Scotland 3-2 (11-5, 11-7, 6-11, 9-11, 11-4). Stott was also defeated by Scott of England, who finished second.

The other Irish winner was Wawrzyniak, who finished ahead of Harley, sending England's Amy Blagbrough into the consolation singles.

She reached the final of that, but was beaten in four (11-8, 11-6, 4-11, 11-8) by Scotland's Stott.

Intermediate Boys



Dylan Curry

Dylan Curry took gold back north of the border by beating England's Joe Cope 3-0 (15-13, 11-8, 11-8).

The Scotsman was joined among the medals by his compatriot Danny Bajwa, who lost 3-0 (11-7, 11-9, 11-9) to Cope in the semi-finals. The other bronze went to Luc Miller from Jersey, who made Curry fight hard for his 3-0 (16-14, 13-11, 11-8) victory.

Curry earlier ended the hopes of England's Naphat Boonyaprapa in the quarter-finals, winning 3-1 (11-3, 11-8, 8-11, 14-12).

The other two English players went out in the last 16 in five sets – Max Stevens to Joseph Roberts of Wales (9-11, 11-9, 11-6, 4-11, 11-9) and Sam Chesterman to Miller (9-11, 11-6, 11-8, 9-11, 11-4).

The English quartet all won their groups, though Jersey's David Quinn pushed Boonyaprapa, who eventually won 3-2 (11-13, 9-11, 11-3, 11-3, 11-8). Chesterman also needed five to overcome Roberts 3-2 (9-11, 11-7, 11-8, 5-11, 14-12).

Scottish trio Curry, Bajwa and Harvey McDonald topped their groups, McDonald with a 3-2 (11-8, 5-11, 11-5, 12-14, 11-5) victory over Julian Kelly.

The consolation event was won by Zaid Khalid from Scotland, who defeated Ireland's Connor Nugent 3-1 (11-7, 11-5, 3-11, 15-13).

Intermediate Girls



The Intermediate Girls' podium

Mia O'Rahilly Egan recovered from losing the first set 11-2 to England's Katie Holt to come back and take the title 3-1 (2-11, 11-9, 11-8, 11-7). English pair Gemma Kerr and Patricia Ianau won bronzes.

In fact, O'Rahilly Egan was a serial destroyer of English hopes as she defeated the Ianau sisters in successive rounds earlier – Natalia in the quarters 3-1 (9-11, 11-8, 11-4, 11-7) and Patricia in the semis 3-2 (11-9, 3-11, 11-8, 8-11, 11-4).

The Dubliner, aged 15, said: "I'm really happy. I wanted to at least get to the final and it was a tough final but I had a really good head and tried to stay positive the whole time. It's definitely up there with my best achievements."

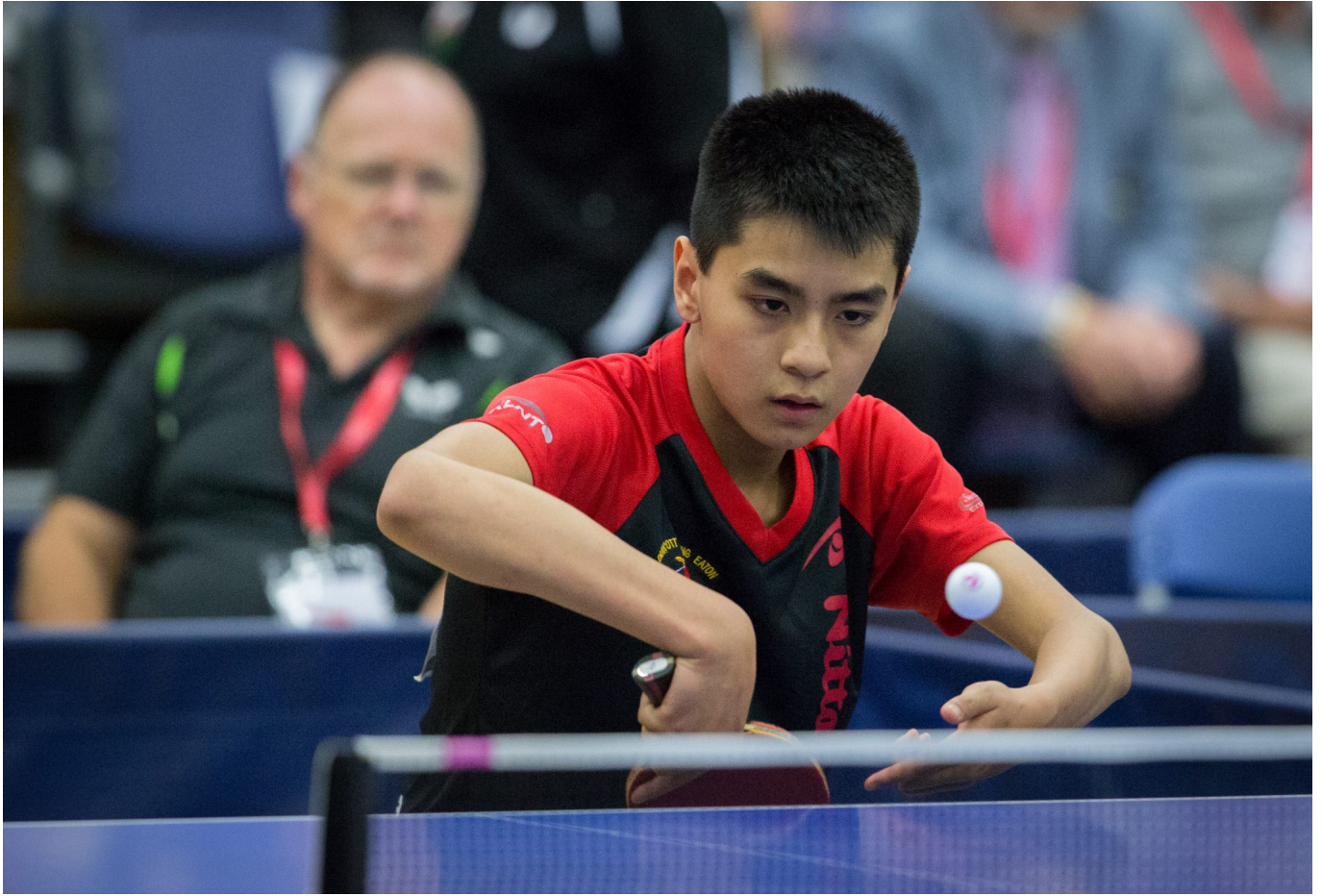
Holt had a big test in the quarters, where she really had to dig in against Faye Leggett of Scotland, eventually triumphing 3-2 (11-7, 11-9, 9-11, 8-11, 14-12) after it seemed the chance had gone.

She then eliminated team-mate Kerr 3-0 (11-9, 11-5, 11-8) in the semi-finals.

England's Alice Dillon went out in the group stage, beaten by Scotland's Leggett – who won the group – and O'Rahilly Egan. The other English players won their groups, as did Morgan Day-Davies of Wales and Thi Ly Cashman of Ireland.

Dillon did win the consolation event, with a 3-0 (11-5, 11-2, 11-8) victory over Libby Owen of Wales in the final.

Cadet Boys



Naphong Boonyaprapa

It was an England lock-out of the podium, led by Naphong Boonyaprapa, who just about got the better of Ben Hee in a lengthy final battle. It was 3-2 (12-14, 11-5, 11-6, 9-11, 12-10) to the Nottingham athlete, who last weekend won the national titles in Under-13 singles and doubles.

The bronze medals went to Amirul Hussain, beaten 5, 9, 8 by Boonyaprapa, and Ben Piggott, who lost 10, 5, 9 to Hee.

Boonyaprapa, 13, said: "On the first two days, you have to play as a team and that requires a lot of chemistry between the players. So playing in the singles final against my team-mate was fun at times but also quite pressurised because we had been supporting each other before and then the mentality changed."

There was a monumental match involving two English players in the quarter-finals as Hussain came from 2-0 down – and 9-5 down in the decider – to beat Thomas Rayner 3-2 (6-11, 8-11, 11-6, 11-7, 13-11).

Hee also beat a team-mate in the quarters, overcoming Ryan Choong 3-0 (13-11, 11-7, 11-3).

All six English boys won their groups with few alarms, while the other two group winners were Louie Evans of Wales and Leon Pierre of Jersey, the latter coming through with a 3-2 (11-7, 11-8, 8-11, 5-11, 11-6) victory over Scotland's Jamie Johnston.

The consolation final was won by Louis Loi of Scotland, who edged a tight three games against Max Roche of Jersey 15-13, 11-8, 11-9.

Cadet Girls



Raquel Sao Pedro

Raquel Sao Pedro had the better of a five-set final against Lara Whitton of Wales, having survived a fightback by her opponent from 2-0 down. It finished 3-2 (11-7, 11-6, 9-11, 5-11, 11-7) in the English girl's favour.

Whitton had earlier defeated English players in the quarter-finals and semi-finals, and was impressive in ending the hopes of Mari Baldwin in the first of those matches, by a scoreline of 3-2 (11-9, 11-9, 6-11, 3-11, 11-8).

The follow-up win in the last four was impressive in a different way as she romped past Sandy Choong 2, 4, 6. The other semi-final was closer as Sao Pedro defeated Grace Clement, preventing an all-Wales final, 3-1 (11-6, 9-11, 11-8, 11-7). Sao Pedro earlier beat team-mate Erin Green 3-0 (5, 6, 11) in the quarters.

Sao Pedro, 13, from Luton, said: "I'm overwhelmed. I started getting nervous when she came back but in the fifth set I kept calm and played how I knew I could."

"There's a lot of good players from all over the UK and they all try their best, so it's a tough competition to win. It's

a great opportunity and I'm proud to get the chance to represent England."

There were no sets dropped by any of the English players in winning their groups. Welsh pair Lara Whitton and Grace Clement also topped their pools, Clement seeing off Prevasja Ragi of Ireland 3-2 (11-9, 3-11, 11-8, 8-11, 11-5).

Kitty Thomas won an Isle of Man clash in the consolation final, beating Lauren Allright 3-0 (11-6, 11-8, 11-4).

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