



## Pitchford and Tsaptsinos are the champions!

**Author:** Paul Stimpson

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Maria Tsaptsinos claimed her first Women's Singles title and Liam Pitchford his fifth on a dramatic Finals Day at the PG Mutual National Championships at the University of Nottingham.

Both claimed a double on the day as Pitchford & Paul Drinkhall triumphed in the Men's Doubles, while Tsaptsinos & Tin-Tin Ho claimed the Women's Doubles.

All four players went from team-mates to opponents in the singles finals and Tsaptsinos' win over Tin-Tin Ho was the day's surprise result and denied Ho the chance to hold all four titles available to her simultaneously, having taken the Under-21 and both doubles titles earlier in the competition.

Pitchford's 4-0 win over Drinkhall then brought the curtain down on the championships, which were shown live on the BBC Sport website.

Men's Under-21 champion Tom Jarvis was presented with the Swaythling Club International Fair Play Award, awarded for outstanding sportsmanship.

[Click here to visit the event homepage for the full results from the three-day competition.](#)

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## Men's Singles

Liam Pitchford reinforced his position as the best player in the land as he beat Paul Drinkhall in four straight to defend his title and become a five-time winner.

Drinkhall had his chances, particularly in the third and fourth games, but Pitchford was authoritative when it

mattered and took his first match point to win 4-0 (11-6, 11-4, 12-10, 13-11).

Drinkhall actually won the first three points of the match, but Pitchford took the next five and kept a stranglehold on the first two games.

The third was the six-time champion's real opening. He led 4-0 and 7-2, but was forced to take his time-out at 7-6. He kept his nose in front and had a game point at 10-9, stamping in frustration when he went long with an attempted winner. A few seconds later, Pitchford had taken the game 12-10.



Liam Pitchford

The fourth also went to deuce, Pitchford saving game points and then taking his first chance as Drinkhall's return drifted long.

Pitchford was pleased to get his fifth singles title in the bag and to live up to expectations as one of the world's top 20 players.

He said: "It was tough, coming in as heavy favourite but knowing each other's games so well, you can never call it.

"I'm happy I did a professional job and played a solid game. I'm not going to say I played my best table tennis, but now I've found that level where I can play a solid game.

"I knew if he won a set he would get some confidence from that – and when he gets confidence, he can beat anybody in the world. So I knew I would have to win the last two sets and I'm happy to sneak them both."

Drinkhall said: "Getting to the final was good for me. I've been working on doing different things and getting myself in a better place and although my expectation on myself is to get to the final, sometimes it's difficult to put it into the matches.

"Winning the third would have given me a chance, but 3-0 is very difficult against anyone."



Drinkhall's passage to the final was via a 4-3 win over Sam Walker in the archetypal switchback. Three times Walker – who has never beaten Drinkhall – led and three times Drinkhall pegged him back. The contrast in the fifth and sixth was particularly extreme, Walker taking the fifth 11-2 and Drinkhall replying 11-1.

The decider was tight to 3-3, Drinkhall then opening it out to 7-3 either side of a Walker time-out. Walker closed to 8-7 and 9-8 but Drinkhall brought up a match point and took it, Walker's return finding the top of the net. The final score was 4-3 (8-11, 11-7, 7-11, 11-9, 2-11, 11-1, 11-8).

Pitchford made it through to the final with, in the end, a comprehensive 4-0 win over David McBeath.

He started slowly in the first game with McBeath the more consistent in the early exchanges. However, Pitchford found his game at the right time, saving four set points to take it 12-10.

The next two games went by in a flash as the top seed was able to show the difference in class. This continued into the fourth game with Pitchford taking the match 12-10, 11-5, 11-5, 11-6.



Tom Jarvis is presented with the Swaythling Club International silver bat for sportsmanship by Harvey Webb

## Women's Singles

Maria Tsaptsinos stunned defending champion Tin-Tin Ho to win her first Senior singles title and in the process deny her opponent a clean sweep of all four trophies on offer.

Tsaptsinos started quickly, taking the first set 11-5, but doubling her lead in the second set was perhaps more surprising as she came from 7-2 down to do so, saving four game points (7-10 and 10-11) and eventually taking it 13-11.

In the third set, Ho again made a fast start, going into a 9-6 lead. Tsaptsinos still wouldn't budge, taking it to 11-11 before Ho got herself on the board 13-11. And it was 2-2 when she converted a 6-0 lead into an 11-7 win in the

fourth, bagging the crucial point after arguably the rally of the match.

Momentum shift? Not necessarily – Tsaptsinos had saved two game points and was in no mood to take a backward step. She dominated the fifth and claimed it 11-5 as Ho made several errors.

The pattern was set for the sixth and it was again 11-5, Tsaptsinos sinking to her knees in joy at completing a 4-2 (11-5, 13-11, 11-13, 7-11, 11-5, 11-5) triumph.

“I’m ecstatic, happy, all those emotions,” said the champion. “I played well, so that tops it – if you play well and feel good, it makes a difference.

“My mentality was very strong, I had my tactics laid down and fought for every ball. She didn’t play her best and I raised my level quite a bit.”

There was also an element of bitter-sweet feelings for Tsaptsinos in denying her friend a clean sweep of the trophies having won the Under-21s, Women’s Doubles and Mixed Doubles.

Tsaptsinos said: “This was her last chance to win all four (Ho is not eligible for Under-21 next year), which I feel bad about because she deserves it. So I’m gutted for her but very happy for me.”



Maria Tsaptsinos (picture by Alan Man)

Ho said: “Obviously I’m disappointed because it would have been really good to get the clean sweep. Maria played well but I didn’t – I was getting quite frustrated with myself because I knew what to do but wasn’t executing it, and when I had chances I made errors.

“Every title means a lot but obviously the women’s singles is a rewarding one to get, and the one it would have been nice to win again, but congratulations to Maria.”

Tsaptsinos got through to the final the hard way in a cracker of a match against England team-mate Denise Payet, eventually beating her 4-2.

Payet started quickly, with Tsaptsinos looking nervous with lots of unforced errors. Third seed Payet took the first set 11-8 and doubled her advantage 11-6 in the next.

There were signs in that game, in saving three game points, that Tsaptsinos was finding her game and so it proved as she claimed the third 11-6.

The fourth game saw the momentum swing back and forth before Tsaptsinos took it 12-10. There was a contender for point of the tournament with Tsaptsinos defending a ferocious attack from the back of the court, using her left hand to retrieve one shot and eventually winning it with the help of an edge.

If that game felt important, the fifth proved pivotal and 21-year-old Tsaptsinos edged it 16-14 on her fifth set point, having saved three herself. And she went on to close the match in the sixth, sealing a 4-2 (8-11, 6-11, 11-6, 12-10, 16-14, 11-8) triumph.

In the first semi-final, Ho made a fast start against Hannah Hicks – aided by her opponent dropping her bat mid-rally in the match's fifth point. Ho went on to win that first game to six, but Hicks was beginning to find her feet at the end of the game and that continued in the second, which she eventually took 14-12 on her fourth game point, also saving one herself at 10-11.

However, Ho reasserted her authority and was never threatened in the next three as she closed out a 4-1 (11-6, 12-14, 11-5, 11-6, 11-9) victory.

## Men's Doubles

Liam Pitchford & Paul Drinkhall showed their class to win the trophy for a sixth time as a combination, defeating Sam Walker & David McBeath 3-0 (11-8, 11-6, 11-5).

The first set was tight and at 8-8 the second seeds sensed a chance. But the top seeds ruthlessly snuffed that out and moved through the gears in the next two to restore the trophy to their possession after last year's hiatus when Drinkhall won with McBeath as different combinations were tried ahead of the Commonwealth Games.

Drinkhall said: "We played really well. We said to ourselves let's be aggressive and go for it, and that's when we are at our best."

Walker & McBeath had reached the last 16 of the World Championships as a pair, but the reigning Commonwealth Games champions were at times unplayable, and the defeated pair admitted as much afterwards.

McBeath said: "We've been to the last 16 of the World Championships as a pair, but they are the reigning Commonwealth champions for a reason and they are probably one of the best pairs in the world. I don't think we did much wrong – it was difficult."

Walker added: "They played better than us today, but if we had taken the first set it's a different story, because pressure is a big part of it and they wouldn't have been able to play the same way in the second and third."

## Women's Doubles





Action from the final (picture by Alan Man)

Tin-Tin Ho & Maria Tsapsinos turned around a 2-0 deficit against Emily Bolton & Denise Payet to win the title for a fourth time together – and keep Ho's quadruple hopes alive.

Having taken the first game 11-8, the lower-ranked pair added the second, coming from 7-3 down to take it by an identical 11-8 margin.

Ho and Tsapsinos started their comeback by easily taking the third, 11-3, and confirmed they had turned the tide as they won the next two games 11-5.

It was a fourth win as a pair, and a fifth title in a row for Tsapsinos, who won last year with Kelly Sibley.

The beaten pair both felt the pain of a missed chance, but also praised the winners for raising their game when they needed to.

Bolton said: "We played really well to go 2-0 up but they upped their game – credit to them, but we feel we missed a good chance."

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