



Meet your qualifiers for the Senior National Championships

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A total of 20 players have secured their spot at the Senior National Championships after topping the table sat this weekend's qualifying tournament.

Almost 100 men and women battled it out over the two-day tournament at the University of Nottingham for their chance to play on the biggest domestic stage with England's elite players next month.

Ethan Walsh, Gabriel Achampong, Louis Price, James Smith, Jack Bennett, Joshua Weatherby, Israel Awolaja, Shaquille Webb Dixon, Graeme Barella and Naphong Boonyaprapa all successfully qualified in the men's category, while Millie Rogove, Gemma Kerr, Megan Jones, Rebecca Savage, Mya Sultan, Erin Green, Emily Haskell, Samadhi Udamulla, Amy Marriott and Anna Green took the top 10 spots for the women. However, as Amy Marriott had already qualified via ranking, Kirsty Maull, who came eleventh, has taken the 10th spot.

Men's Singles



It was National Junior Champion **Ethan Walsh** who took the top spot this weekend, after a closely fought final against Gabriel Achampong that went to five sets.

Speaking after his win he said: "Considering last year I didn't get through via qualification and ended up getting in as a reserve, it's great to have done it myself this year.

"I didn't expect to win it coming into it, but I played really well throughout. More than anything I think it was my consistency I was impressed with.

"I think what was different between this year and last year was that I went into this year more relaxed. Last year I put too much pressure on myself.

"I didn't perform my best at Senior Nationals last year, so I want to really go in this year and play like I did here. If I do, I think I could get some big wins and cause some upsets."

Gabriel Achampong, who took second place, commented: "I'm happy that I made it to the final, but I'm disappointed about my performance in the crucial match. I came here wanting to win, but I've got to try and stay positive.

"I did lose to Ethan last time I played him, so I don't have a good track record against him.

"I'm looking forward to playing at the Senior Nationals because it's a chance to play against the top players."

Louis Price, who came third, said: "It was really good to come in the top three. My aim was to qualify so I'm happy. It's been a good weekend overall for me.

"The highlight for me was beating James Smith in my final match. I have never beaten him before.

"It will be the first time I have played Senior Nationals and it is going to be tough, but it is going to be a good experience. I'd love to play a match against Pitchford just to see how I do against him."

James Smith, who came fourth, said: "I thought I could get into the top 10 but I didn't expect to come fourth so I'm very happy with that.

"I'm looking forward to playing Nationals. It's great to be able to play against the best players in the country. I'm just going to do the best I can do and have fun."

Jack Bennett, who came fifth, said: "I'm feeling good – it's a job done really. I came here to qualify for Senior Nationals and I've done that. I didn't expect to be playing here this weekend, but I missed out on a ranking place because I'm 22, so it was a bit of a struggle. It is always a highlight to play at Nationals. It was great to win bronze in the men's doubles last year with my brother Josh.

Joshua Weatherby, who came sixth, said: "I think I have played quite well this weekend. Beating the seed in my group, Jack Bennett, was the main highlight for me.

"It feels really good to have qualified for the Senior Nationals and it's great to play in the senior tournament against the professionals. I'd love to play against Liam Pitchford because he is the best player in England."

Israel Awolaja, who came seventh, said: "I came with the aim of qualifying and I did so, so I'm happy. I'm excited to play in the Nationals again because it is always good experience being able to play against some of the best players in the country.

"I'd love to get to play a match against Sam Walker because I feel like it would be a really good match for me to play."

Shaquille Webb Dixon, who took eighth place, said: "I feel really good. I didn't perform in last year's qualifier and so didn't get in, but I'm really pleased I managed to get in this year.

"I feel I played really well. The venue is really nice as well and that helps.

"The highlight for me was my match against Graeme Barella. I played really well and so did he, so it was a really positive match. I'd love to get to play against Paul Drinkhall in the main event. It would be a great experience for me because of his standard of play.

Graeme Barella, who took ninth place, said: "I'm absolutely thrilled to be returning to Nationals this year. It is the biggest tournament of the year for me so I'm over the moon.

"I felt I played poorly on Saturday, but I managed to step it up today. I just love playing the Nationals because of the prestige of it."

Naphong Boonyaprapa, Cadet Doubles Champion, who took the final spot said: "Every match I played I had to try for every point because there is not a bad player here.

"It is a lot more mentally tiring than physically tiring.

"I've never been in the Senior Nationals before, but it will be a good experience to see the top players in England and I'm happy that I will get the chance to play against more experienced players so I can improve in my match play."

Women's Singles



In the women's event it was **Millie Rogove** who took the top spot after a 3-0 win over Gemma Kerr.

Speaking after her win, she said: "I'm very happy that I have qualified for the main event. I didn't play that well on Saturday but I'm happy with how I played today.

"It was definitely difficult today, but I tried to keep a clear head and it was much better.

"I had to be 100% on it today, but I did everything I needed to do and I was proud of how I played.

"I'm excited to be at Senior Nationals and my goal is to make it through the group stage and into the main draw."

Gemma Kerr, who took second place, said: "I feel great. It will be my first time at Senior Nationals and it will be good experience, especially as it's my last year as a junior

"I had a really tough first game today, but I felt like I was playing well in my other games.

"When I go to Nationals next month, I want to get out of my group and into the main draw. That's the goal for me."

Megan Jones, who came third, said: "I wasn't really expecting it. I was one of the lowest ranked in my group, but I managed to play really well and make it through to the knockouts.

"There were some really close matches for me this weekend – six of them went all the way to five.

"The highlight for me was beating the top seed, Amy Marriott – I have never beaten her before."

Rebecca Savage, who came fourth, said: "I'm happy with how I played. I was hoping to make it into Senior Nationals and I've achieved that."

Erin Green, who came fifth, said: "I'm really happy. I thought I played well overall. I had a few ups and downs, but I have had some good matches.

"It'll be my first time at Senior Nationals and I'm really excited about that and getting to play against older people. I will give it my best shot. I would like to play against Tin-Tin Ho."

Mya Sultan, who took the sixth spot, said: "I'm feeling really good. I didn't expect to get in to Nationals, although I

was hoping to. I'm really proud. It has been a tough and intense weekend.

"I'm quite excited for Nationals and I'm just going to see what I can do when I'm there against the top players and see how far I can go.

I would love to play Maria Tsaptsinos because I feel that we have very similar styles and I'd be really excited to see how each point would play out."

Samadhi Udamulla, who came seventh, said: "I'm feeling pretty good. I didn't have any expectations coming here because it is a senior event and I am still a junior.

"I played particularly well on the Saturday by coming second in my group, which I wasn't expecting because there were much higher ranked players than me.

"It will be my first time at Nationals and I'm looking forward to the experience."

Emily Haskell, who came eighth, said: "It's been a good weekend. I felt I played a bit rubbish yesterday, but today I played well.

"It's the first time I have qualified for Nationals and I think the main event will be good. I'm just going to see how it goes. I'm just really happy to have made it into the top eight. It is great."

Top seed **Amy Marriott**, took the ninth spot, but had already qualified via ranking. She said: "I didn't perform to my best at this tournament, but I managed to pull through. I love playing the Senior Nationals because it is such good experience."

Anna Green, the youngest competitor on the field, took the 10th spot, and will be joining her sister, Erin, in the main event. She said: "I'm quite proud because I didn't expect to make it as I'm the youngest one here.

"I just thought it would be some match practice for me I didn't expect to make it into the top 10.

I'm glad I made it as well as Erin. I didn't want to be the sibling to not do it.

"At Nationals I want to make a name for myself so that people know that I'm there."

Kirsty Maull, who came eleventh in the tournament, will be joining the other 10 as Amy Marriott had already qualified via ranking. She said: "I'm ecstatic. It was tough but I get there in the end. I'm nervous about Senior Nationals but it will be good experience. I've just got to keep my head and play well and do the best I can and keep pushing through."

Senior National Championships

All 21 players will return to the David Ross Sports Village in Nottingham, next month when it hosts the most eagerly anticipated event on the domestic calendar.

It will take place from Friday February 28 to Sunday March 1.

The event carries extra significance this year as we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Senior National Championships.

Tickets are on sale on the Ticket Factory website. To buy, click the button below.

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