



Clacton & District: Denyer completes the set

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Posted On: February 10, 2020

In his comparatively short 14-year table tennis career in the Clacton & District League, James Denyer has accumulated an unprecedented mass of honours and trophies – the Knock-Out Cup three times, the Division One title seven times, a winner of the Closed Championship's Mens Singles twice, Mens Doubles twice and Mixed Doubles twice, Junior Singles champion five times, Junior Doubles champion twice, and twice a winner of the Junior Combination.

It's a considerable portfolio of honours – although there was one missing trophy. But last Saturday, Denyer, still only 24 years of age, rectified that omission by adding the Handicap Singles Cup to his trophy cabinet, taking the title with a confident and commanding win in the final over surprise finalist Gary Stallwood.

In the final, Denyer (-6) always looked in control, producing his trademark forehand strikes with daunting precision. And although Stallwood (+2) found more rhythm as the match progressed and, towards the end, was exchanging blows with equal power, the force was with Denyer who took the title 3-1 (11-9, 12-10, 0-11, 11-8).

It was an impressive display by the likeable Denyer, a runner-up in this event in both 2010 and 2012, although the day had not been without its ups and downs, with some nail-biting battles on the way to the final.

In the preliminary stages he qualified as group winner with fine wins over both Greg Green and Colin Dearman although, in his opening group match (on -10), he suffered his only defeat of the Tournament, losing 11-9 in the fifth to Barry Allen (3).

In Round One of the knockout stage, he faced formidable opposition in the form of Gary Cattermole (+2) but Denyer (-1) edged past his fellow-Division One opponent in a match of fearsome hits and counter-hits, winning 3-1 (11-6, 12-14, 12-10, 11-8).

Then it was the quarter-final where he met another Division One player, John Hobson (+3), a losing semi-finalist last season and always a fierce competitor. But Denyer (-8) it was who swept past his more experienced opponent 3-0 (12-10, 11-8, 11-7) and on to the semi-final where he was pitched against his great friend and

Nomads Panthers' team-mate, Paul Hume.

And, in what turned out to be the contest of the tournament, the two players provided an exhilarating display of table tennis in a match played off scratch and as close as the 3-2 (10-12, 11-6, 11-5, 6-11, 16-14) score-line suggests, with Hume saving five match points in a knife-edge final set. After such a magnificent victory, it was difficult to see Denyer conceding ground in the final.

Stallwood had a less precarious path to the final, although he only just scraped through his group as the runner-up. But thereafter it proved only slightly less strenuous than Denyer, defeating (on -6) the indefatigable and unconventional Doug Green (+1) 3-0 (11-9, 11-6, 12-10), before (on -1) eliminating his Walton E team-mate Mark Ratcliffe (+1) 3-1 (11-5, 8-11, 16-14, 11-7) in a cagey cat-and-mouse quarter-final.

In the semi-final he met another of his team-mates, Mark Gale (+1), to whom he'd lost in four earlier in the day in the group stage. But this time Stallwood (-1) made no mistake, winning 3-1 (11-7, 4-11, 11-8, 11-8), thus denying Gale, a previous losing semi-finalist in this event in 2010, his place in the final.

Despite his defeat, it was an excellent performance from Stallwood and it's somehow difficult to believe that, in his stop-start League table tennis career, he was a beaten semi-finalist 30 years ago in 1990.

A word of mention should also go to Barry Allen who enjoyed a day of notable victories on his way to the quarter-finals, which included the scalps of both Denyer and Greg Green in the group, and last year's beaten finalist Liam Harris in Round One, before losing out to Hume in the round of the last eight.

For the record, Denyer becomes only the second player in League history to hold both the Men's Singles and the Handicap Singles titles at the same time, having won the Men's Singles at the last year's Closed Championships. Steve Kerns, in his sole season in the league, is the only other player to have achieved this, having won both titles in 1995.

And it would be remiss to omit the fact that, in winning the Handicap Singles, James is following in the inestimable foot-steps of his Dad, Allen, who won the title in 2014.

Main results – Final : James Denyer (-6) beat Gary Stallwood (+2) 11-9, 12-10, 0-11, 11-8; Semi-finals : Denyer (0) beat Paul Hume (0) 10-12, 11-6, 11-5, 6-11, 16-14; Stallwood (-1) beat Mark Gale (+1) 11-7, 4-11, 11-8, 11-8; Quarter-finals : Denyer (-8) beat John Hobson (+3) 12-10, 11-8, 11-7; Stallwood (-1) beat Mark Ratcliffe (+1) 11-5, 8-11, 16-14, 11-7; Hume (-10) beat Barry Allen (+3) 11-9, 11-8, 11-9; Gale (-5) beat Ferdy Rodriguez (+1) 9-11, 5-11, 11-9, 11-7, 11-9.

There was a total entry of 32 players, half of whom were from Division One, including five of the League's top 10 players, the highest quality field in this tournament for many seasons.

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