



Baldwin's bold win earns spot on Finals Day

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Mari Baldwin caused the upset of the day as she defeated second seed Denise Payet to reach the Women's Singles semi-finals at the Mark Bates Ltd National Championships.

The Devon youngster joins top seed Tin-Tin Ho, plus third seed Emily Bolton and fourth-ranked Mollie Patterson in tomorrow's semi-finals.

In the Men's Singles, the top four seeds are through, with Liam Pitchford to play Sam Walker and Paul Drinkhall to face Tom Jarvis.

The same four will be involved in the Men's Doubles final, in which Pitchford & Drinkhall will be defending their title, while the Women's Doubles final will see top seeds Ho & Evie Collier take on second seeds Bolton & Payet.

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Men's Singles

The top four seeds duly reached the semi-finals, though there were almost a couple of banana-skin moments for top two Liam Pitchford and Paul Drinkhall on the way.

That first match, against a player who has already got several matches under their belt – and often has nothing to lose – can see the top player take a little time to click into top gear.

And so it was for Pitchford against national Junior champion Ethan Walsh, who led 1-0 and 2-1, taking each

game 12-10. The third game was particularly eye-catching as he came from 10-4 down through a combination of picking off his own chances and seeing Pitchford miss his.

Walsh continued to keep Pitchford honest but class will out and in the end it was 4-2 to the defending champion (10-12, 11-3, 10-12, 11-4, 11-7, 13-11).

Drinkhall, in contrast, had no problems finding his range against Under-21 champion Luke Savill as he powered into a 3-0 lead for the combined loss of only 14 points. But Savill edged the next and, finding confidence, began to trade blows and increasingly to land some punches. When he took the sixth 11-5, the momentum was all his. And at 5-5 in the decider, it was intriguingly poised.

Once again, class came out and Drinkhall won six of the next seven points, Savill just failing with a diving effort on match point as it ended 4-3 (11-2, 11-7, 11-5, 9-11, 10-12, 5-11, 11-6).

Savill said: "From 3-0 down, I didn't expect anything was possible. To lose 4-3, I'm gutted I didn't win, but happy at the same time. To go to the seventh with Paul Drinkhall is better than I expected.

"This tournament has been the best for me for quite a while and makes me believe I can play well and be close to these players."

Drinkhall admitted he had possibly relaxed too much at 3-0 up and then couldn't find the same level as Savill raised his.

"He did play well," said Drinkhall. "I can't say I ever thought I was going to lose but I was overthinking things and maybe getting a bit nervous. Once it was 3-3, I was quite relaxed again."

Elsewhere in the last 16, Josh Bennett caused the upset of the round as he won a real tussle with eighth seed Michael O'Driscoll 11-8 in the seventh. Bennett was never behind in a match in which there was very little between the players and he just shaded it 11-5, 11-9, 9-11, 9-11, 11-5, 9-11, 11-8).

It was 4-2 for Helshan Weerasinghe, the seventh seed, against James Hobson. The Yorkshireman held his own for four sets before Weerasinghe put his foot down to take it 10-12, 11-7, 11-8, 7-11, 11-3, 11-8.

Tom Jarvis conceded the fourth set against Sam Wilson but never allowed his opponent to gain a foothold apart from that, while it was 4-0 for Chris Doran, David McBeath and Sam Walker against, respectively, Shayan Siraj, Sam Mabey and Jack Bennett.

And so on to the quarters, where 'normal service' was resumed for Pitchford and Drinkhall. Liam got past Weerasinghe 7, 8, 4, 6 and it was and even more thumping margin of 5, 3, 5, 3 for Paul against Josh Bennett.

Jarvis too needed four to see off Doran (11-2, 11-7, 11-9, 11-8) and the only losing player to get a mark on the board was McBeath, whose match with Walker hinged on a prolonged fourth, which Walker took 16-14. The final reckoning was 4-1 (9-11, 11-8, 11-3, 16-14, 11-9) in his favour.



Chris Doran

Tomorrow's semi-finals will see Pitchford up against Walker at 10.15am, with Drinkhall playing Jarvis at 11.45am.

Women's Singles

The biggest shock of the quarter-finals came as second seed and under-21 champion Denise Payet was knocked out by Mari Baldwin. Payet was never allowed to settle as Baldwin put her disruptive backhand to great use. The 15-year-old came from 2-1 down to win 4-2 (4-11, 11-8, 7-11, 11-7, 11-5, 11-7).

Baldwin said: "It's brilliant, I didn't expect to get this far. Every time I've played her before, I've lost pretty convincingly and when I got it back to 2-2 I thought she would step up a gear, but I managed to find a way.

"I've been training with Craig (Bryant) and he really helps make a difference, particularly with my consistency."

Mollie Patterson had a very entertaining match with Anaya Patel. The fourth seed came through a tight fifth set, eventually winning 4-2 (11-7, 4-11, 11-3, 7-11, 12-10, 11-7) to set up a semi-final with Tin-Tin Ho, who dispatched Charlotte Bardsley in straight sets.

Third seed Emily Bolton beat Jasmin Wong 4-1 (11-6, 11-5, 11-6, 7-11, 11-3) to set up a semi-final meeting with Baldwin.

The biggest shock in the round of 16 saw sixth seed Evie Collier lose to Patel. Despite dropping the first set, the 15-year-old kept her composure to win the next four, taking the match 4-1 (6-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-7, 11-7).

Payet was tested by Xiaoman Ji, dropping two games, but coming through comfortably in the end. The result, 4-2 (11-7, 10-12, 11-3, 11-4, 9-11, 11-3).

Baldwin also had a tough task as she beat Letitia McMullan. After splitting the first two sets, McMullan had set points in the third. However, Baldwin took it 15-13. She then accelerated towards the finish line, winning the next

two sets 11-9 and 11-4.

Bardsley and Ho breezed into the quarter-finals with straight set wins. Ho saw off Sara Williams 11-4, 11-5, 11-5, 14-12 while Bardsley beat Gemma Kerr 11-8, 11-7, 11-3, 11-4.

Both players who got a spot in the last 16 as a lucky loser lost 4-1, Lisa Rinnhofer to Bolton and Amy Marriott lost to Wong. Patterson got through by beating Millie Rogove 4-1.

The semi-finals tomorrow see Ho play Patterson at 9.30am and Bolton against Baldwin at 11am.

Men's doubles

Liam Pitchford & Paul Drinkhall eased in to the final with a comfortable win over Luke Savill & Joe Cope. Pitchford and Drinkhall have won the men's doubles six times as a pair and were in no mood to hang around. Drinkhall had an epic, seven-game encounter with Savill earlier in the day, but didn't allow that to faze him. The final score was 11-9, 11-4, 11-3.

They will face Sam Walker & Tom Jarvis in the final after they beat David McBeath & Michael O'Driscoll 3-0 (11-9, 11-4, 11-3), stepping up their game after a tight first and producing some outstanding shots.

All four quarter-finals were decided in straight sets, with the biggest shock being when Cope & Savill comfortably beat fourth seeds Chris Doran & Sam Wilson. The attack and defence combination of Doran and Wilson never settled, perhaps tired from coming from two sets down to win in the first round.

Pitchford & Drinkhall were given two tough sets by James Smith & Ethan Walsh, but were clinical in the third with a 3-0 (11-9, 12-10, 11-1) win.

Jarvis & Walker beat Josh & Jack Bennett to set up their semi-final with McBeath & O'Driscoll, who beat Alim Hirji & Lorestas Trumpauskas.



Ethan Walsh & James Smith on their way to beating Zak Cantor & Adam Jepson

Walsh and Smith came from 2-1 down to beat Zak Cantor and Adam Jepson in the first round, and at the same stage Doran and Wilson came from two sets down to beat Shaquille Webb-Dixon & Connor Whitehead 3-2 (9-11, 6-11, 11-5, 11-4, 11-5).

Trumpauskas & Hirji had a tough, five-set win over the two defensive backhands of James Hobson & Israel Awolaja. They came from 2-1 down to win 3-2 (7-11, 11-7, 7-11, 11-6, 11-6).

Third seeds McBeath & O'Driscoll dropped a set on the way to a 3-1 (11-4, 7-11, 11-8, 11-8) win over Graeme Barella & Ben Piggott.

Josh & Jack Bennett beat Louis Price & Josh Weatherby in four sets, while Walker & Jarvis defeated George Downing & David Gotton in straight sets.

Cope & Savill dispatched Naphat & Naphong Boonyaprapa 3-0 (11-8, 11-7, 11-8) to set up their match with Doran & Wilson.

Women's doubles

Evie Collier & Tin-Tin Ho made the final with a tight four-set win over Charlotte Bardsley & Jasmin Wong. The left-hand, right-hand combination of Ho & Collier had to wait until their fourth set point to take the first set, 11-8. Wang & Bardsley then got back into the match by taking the second set, but gave the top seeds the advantage by dropping the third. The fourth was close from start to finish, with Ho & Collier winning it on their second match point, taking the match 3-1 (11-8, 8-11, 11-8, 12-10).

They will face last year's finalist Denise Payet & Emily Bolton in the final after they eased past Mollie Patterson & Lois Perryman. Payet & Bolton saved a set point in the first set, but from then on it was plain sailing, winning 3-0 (13-11, 11-6, 11-7).

In the quarter-finals, all four seeded pairs made it through. Top seeds Ho & Collier thrashed Gemma Kerr & Amy Marriott 3-0 (11-5, 11-4, 11-3).

Second seeds Payet and Bolton also eased through. They beat Anna Green & Megan Jones 3-0 (11-5, 11-7, 11-9).

Patterson & Perryman had a tricky time against Erin Green & Anaya Patel. They lost the first set and faced set point in the second. However, they managed to come through 3-1 (11-13, 12-10, 11-6, 11-9).

Wong & Bardsley made up the final four pairs with a straight sets win over Millie Rogove & Mari Baldwin.

Both first round matches in the women's doubles were pushed to five sets. Green & Jones came from 2-1 down to win. They won 12-10 in the fifth set.

Marriott & Kerr also came from 2-1 down to beat Kirsty Maull & Rebecca Savage 3-2 (11-13, 11-5, 8-11, 11-8, 11-9).



Amy Marriott & Gemma Kerr celebrate their win

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