



Pitchford and Ho take the Nationals spoils

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Liam Pitchford won his sixth Men's Singles title and Tin-Tin Ho her fourth Women's Singles on Finals Day of the Mark Bates Ltd National Championships.

Pitchford recovered a 2-0 deficit to overcome Paul Drinkhall in six, while Ho was ruthless in ending the fairytale run of 15-year-old Mari Baldwin 4-0.

All the matches on Finals Day were covered live on the BBC Sport website – [click here to watch on catch-up](#).

Ross Wilson won a pulsating encounter with Kim Daybell 3-2 to take the para class 7-10 title and Jack Hunter-Spivey also needed a decider to see off Dan Bullen in the para class 3-5 event.

Pitchford & Drinkhall won the Men's Doubles for the seventh time, withstanding a comeback from Sam Walker & Tom Jarvis to win a decider, while the Women's Doubles saw success for Denise Payet & Emily Bolton who beat Ho & Evie Collier in four.



Tin-Tin Ho

All pictures by Alan Man – [click here to see more on our Flickr page](#).

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The first two days were streamed on the [Table Tennis England YouTube channel](#).

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Men's Singles

Liam Pitchford won his sixth men's singles title after coming from two sets down to beat Paul Drinkhall 4-2 in a highly competitive final decided by small margins.

The first point set the tone for the rest of the match, with an awesome top-spin rally played at lightning speed. Drinkhall fought back from 7-5 down to take the first set 11-8 on his second set point.

In set two, Drinkhall continued where he left off with some huge backhands. He raced into a 9-5 lead with some delicate top-spin strokes, winning it 11-7. Set three started with several touch rallies with Drinkhall keen to defend

his lead. Some brilliant shots from Pitchford gave him the set on his second set point, 11-9.

The fourth set was neck and neck from start to finish. Up to 9-9, there was nothing between them, then some real quality from Pitchford got him over the line to take it 11-9 and level the match 2-2. Drinkhall had a chance to take the lead again in the fifth set, just letting it slip. He had a set point at 10-9 after coming from 7-4 down. Pitchford dug it to win it 12-10, putting him one set away from the title.

The sixth set was a masterclass from Pitchford, showing the home crowd why he has been ranked in the world's top 20. He won it 11-5 in emphatic fashion and moves level with Drinkhall, Alan Cooke and Denis Neale on six Men's Singles titles.

After the match, Pitchford said: "It feels amazing. I'm on the same amount as plenty of good players, so the next step is to keep winning.

"At the start I don't think I played that bad. He was playing really well. Even throughout the whole match I think we both kept a good level. I had a bit of luck at the end of the fifth set and it can change matches. It was a few points here or there today and it went my way."



Paul Drinkhall

Drinkhall said: "He was slightly off at the beginning, then he settled. After that I forced it a little bit. That's why he's a very good player, he kept his composure throughout."

In the first semi-final, Pitchford recovered from being a set down to beat Sam Walker 4-1. Walker made an excellent start, racing to a 6-1 lead with Pitchford making a service fault. Walker's solid play and Pitchford's mistakes gave him the first set, 11-4.

From then on, Pitchford was in control, hitting some huge backhands and putting Walker on the back foot as he took the next two 11-6.

The fourth set was much closer with Walker ahead for the majority of it and Pitchford only going ahead for the

first time in the set at 9-8 – eventually taking it 11-9.

Walker's heavy trapeze back to his corner suggested he was resigned to his fate and it was indeed decided in the fifth, Pitchford winning the match on his second match point, 11-8.

Drinkhall made the final thanks to a clinical display against Tom Jarvis. Jarvis made a great start, saving a set point to take the first 12-10. The second saw Drinkhall fight back, taking it 11-7. The third saw several fast, attacking rallies away from the table as Jarvis took an 8-5 lead, only for Drinkhall to use his experience to level at 8-8 and go on to take the set 11-9.

The fourth saw Drinkhall go 3-1 down and then win the next 10 points, and he wrapped up the match in the fifth set, 11-5.

Women's Singles

Tin-Tin Ho won her fourth women's singles title as she beat surprise finalist Mari Baldwin 4-0.

Ho got off to the best possible start, racing to the first set, 11-4. Baldwin's disruptive backhand didn't faze Ho at all, using all her experience and quality.

The second set was a closer affair, with 15-year-old Baldwin starting to grow in confidence. However, Ho came on strong at the end of the set to take it 11-7.



Mari Baldwin

At the start of the third set, Ho showed no mercy as she hit winner after winner. Baldwin did mount a mini comeback but it was too little too late with the score 11-6 and a repeat of that scoreline in the fourth meant Ho had regained the title she lost last year to Maria Tsapsinos – who had to withdraw from the tournament last week because of injury.

Ho said: "I'm really happy to win the title, every title means a lot. Although the competition was a bit different this year, I always stayed focused. Mari caused a few upsets and her style is quite different, but I was comfortable against it."

"I wanted to get the title back really badly. It was a shame Maria was injured but I was ready to play whoever happened to get through."

Baldwin, who knocked out second seed Denise Payet in yesterday's quarter-finals, said: "It was brilliant. To get this far in my first competition is quite great in itself so I was quite happy to get here, to be honest."

"I wasn't expected to get this far. Maybe one day I will get the gold."

Ho secured her place in the final with a confident 4-2 win over fourth seed Mollie Patterson. It was a tight opening to the match with both players appearing nervous and making several mistakes. However, at the business end of the first set, Patterson saved a set point at 10-9 and went on to take it 12-10.

Ho stepped up at the start of the second, taking a 7-0 lead and winning the set 11-4. It was a similar story in the third with Patterson making two service faults on her way to losing it 11-4.

However, the 17-year-old had a glimmer of hope in the fourth, going 9-6 up before taking the set 11-9 and levelling the match at 2-2.

From here, Ho showed why she is the No 1 seed with her quality and speed too much for Patterson. She won the next two sets 11-2 in a clinical performance.

Patterson said: "I'm very pleased to have made Finals Day for the first time. Coming back after losing the next two showed how tough I can be mentally. I had to reset multiple times and keep fighting for every point and put her under pressure as much as possible."

"I've learned so much from this competition and I'm going to use it and put it into practice with my coaches at Grantham College and try to push on and come back for revenge next year."

Baldwin's sensational run continued as she beat third seed Emily Bolton 4-2 to meet Ho in the final. The 15-year-old's disruptive backhand caused problems for the whole match, with Bolton not being allowed to settle. The first set was extremely tight, with Baldwin saving two set points to take it on her second, 14-12. The second set saw Bolton continue to struggle with Baldwin's backhand, losing it 11-8.

There was very little between them in the third with Baldwin pegging Bolton back to take it 11-8. The third seed started to find her form in the fourth set, winning it 11-7. In the fifth set, Baldwin had four match points, but Bolton stood firm, winning 13-11. The sixth set was clinical from Baldwin, with the 15-year-old winning 11-6 to book her place in the final.

After the match, Bolton said: "It's the first time I've reached the semi-finals, so it's better than last year, but I'm still very disappointed. I got a bad start, so it was always going to be difficult – but credit to Mari, she came out and was fearless."

"She's the Cadet national champion, so she's a good player and it's a completely different style to anyone in England and we don't play against it much. There's no rhythm, you are constantly having to work things out point by point – but I think it's nice to have that style because it gives us something else to play against."

"I'll watch the videos back and watch the sets I won and the sets I lost and hopefully learn and come back better next year."

Para class 3-5



Jack Hunter-Spivey

Jack Hunter-Spivey won the 3-5 wheelchair class event, beating Daniel Bullen 3-2 in a very competitive final, matching the result from when the two met in the group stage.

The first seed took the first set 11-8 after a very tight start. In the second set, Bullen came back, overcoming a 4-6 deficit to take it 11-7.

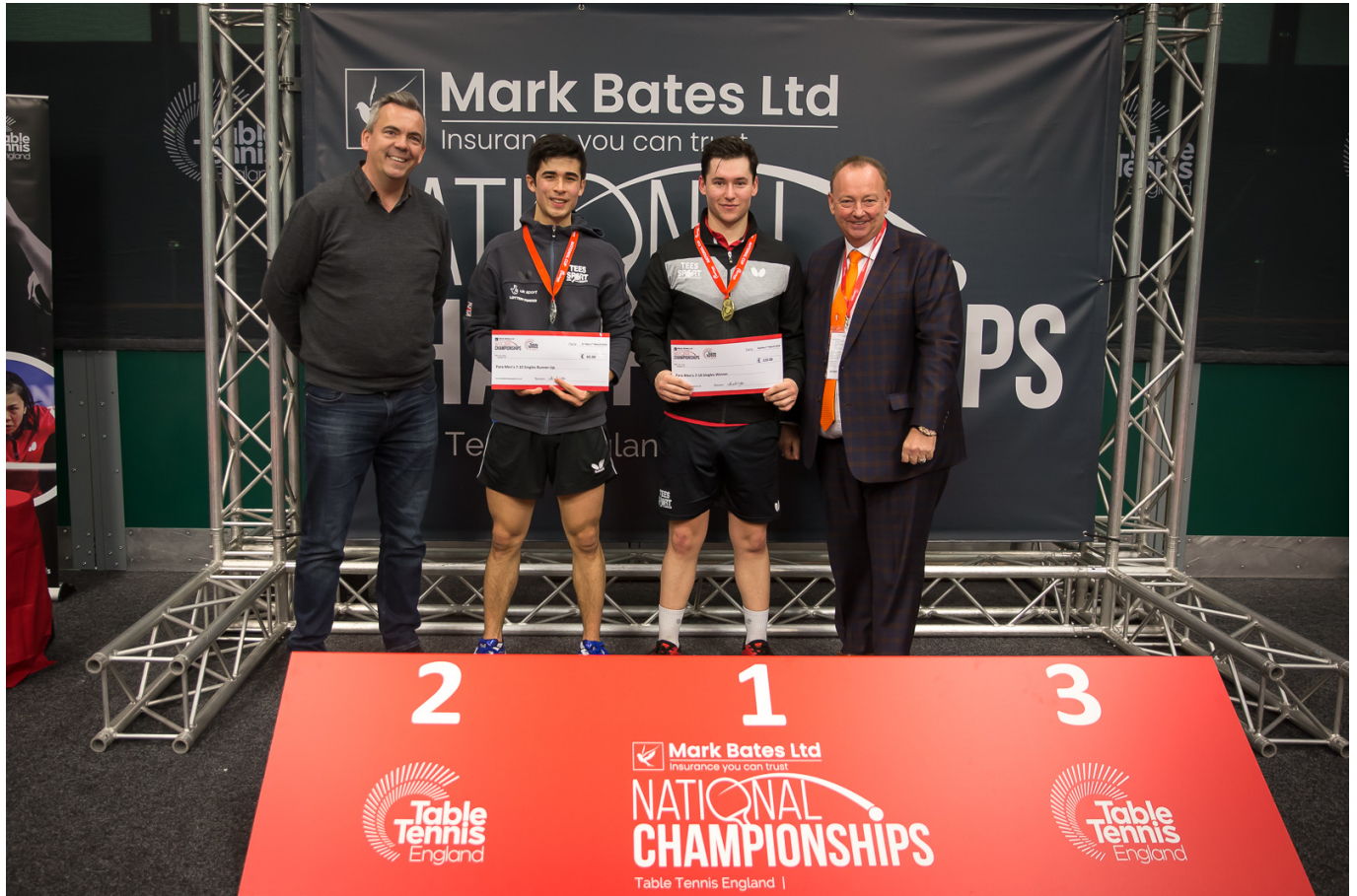
Hunter-Spivey then survived a Bullen comeback from 5-1 up to eventually win the third 11-8. Bullen wasn't done yet, with some fantastic rallies and great use of the angles getting him to 2-2 by virtue of an 11-7 scoreline. However, the number one wouldn't be denied, with a close fifth set going his way, 11-7.

Hunter-Spivey said: "Being English national champion is everything to me. It was really close; I've played Dan so many times and he has really been playing well this weekend. I felt the pressure in the last set and raised my level but so did Dan so it was a good match.

"Dan put me under a lot of pressure and I am the more experienced player but we don't get to play in these sort of situations very often so I really enjoyed being put under pressure in front of a crowd and replicating major championships. For me it is a godsend to have this sort of experience."

Bullen said: "I'm really pleased with how I played this weekend. Everything I am doing in training is starting to come into my matches. Belief is something I have struggled with over the past years so to be able to have a five setter twice here against Jack has really helped me with believing that I can do it."

Para class 7-10



The para 7-10 presentation. From left Table Tennis England Board member Steve Kemish, silver medallist Kim Daybell, gold medallist Ross Wilson and Mark Bates, Managing Director of Mark Bates Ltd.

Ross Wilson came from two sets down to beat Kim Daybell in the class 7-10 standing event, repeating his Commonwealth Games gold medal match victory from 2018.

Daybell quickly raced into a 2-0 lead, dominating the first two sets, 11-6, 11-5. The third was an epic as Wilson led 10-5 but trailed 11-10. He survived that and two more match points to take the third 16-14. The top seed didn't hang around in the fourth set, quickly racing to a 7-0 leading, taking it in to a decider, 11-3.

The fifth set could have gone either way and in the end Wilson survived another Daybell match point to take the title on his second.

Wilson said: "At 2-0 down I was thinking that Kim was playing really well and I'm probably not going to win today. Kim and I have played a million times and sometimes you get the feeling it is just not your day. He was playing so well and I couldn't really get into it and I couldn't find my feet.

"It was just lucky really that I managed to pinch the third set and from there I just tried to build myself back into the game. All credit to Kim though; we've had some great matches and this is one to add to the list I think."

Daybell added: "It was a great match. I got off to a good start but I knew it wasn't going to be a walk in the park because it is so hard to beat a really good player 3-0. Once he got back into it and ran away with that fourth set it was always going to be a tough fight.

"It was 50-50 in the final set as to who was going to take it but it was a good match and I enjoyed it a lot."

Women's Doubles



Table Tennis England Board member Priya Samuel and sponsor Mark Bates with the Women's Doubles medallists

Denise Payet & Emily Bolton upgraded from their silver medal last year to win the women's singles, beating Tin-Tin Ho & Evie Collier in the final. Ho was playing with Collier after her regular partner, Maria Tsapsinos, withdrew.

Ho & Collier won the first set, coming from 8-4 down to win 11-9. Payet & Bolton used their experience as a pair to win the second set 11-7 and cruised to the third 11-1. The fourth set was tight, but Payet & Bolton finally won it on their second match point, 13-11.

After the match, Bolton said: "I'm really happy because it's my first national title in the seniors and to do it with Denise after losing last year's final was a nice way to come back.

"In our first match yesterday, we felt a bit on edge but once we found our rhythm we played well and we had confidence going into the final."

Payet said: "When we were 2-1 up there was probably a bit of pressure because of last year when we were 2-0 up and lost, but we learned from our previous experience to calm down and play one ball at a time, and not to rush.

"We had our tactics for this one clearer – we improved on that from last year and we stuck to those tactics. I feel losing in the singles made me stronger for the doubles because I was a bit angry and wanted that gold."

Silver medallist Collier said: "It was very good having Tin-Tin as a partner, at quite short notice as well. My partner Lois (Peake) pulled out as well, so I wasn't actually preparing to play the doubles, but to have Tin-Tin as a partner was a great experience and I really enjoyed it."

Men's Doubles



Action from the Men's Doubles final

Paul Drinkhall & Liam Pitchford won the men's doubles title for a seventh time as a pair after beating Tom Jarvis & Sam Walker in a close, five-set final. Jarvis & Walker saved three set points in the first, but Drinkhall & Pitchford too it on the fourth, 12-10. After a close start to the second, a huge Drinkhall backhand gave them the lead, taking it 11-6.

In the third set, Jarvis and Walker saved a match point at 10-9, taking it on their second set point 13-11. Then, they produced a set of real quality and aggressive play, putting the top seeds on the back foot. They survived a comeback from 7-2 to 9-9 to take it 11-9. In the decider, Drinkhall and Pitchford were clinical, storming to an 8-2 lead and winning it 11-5.

After the match, Pitchford said: "Every final is hard, at 2-0 we felt comfortable but then we relaxed and let them back in."

Drinkhall added: "Today was a difficult match, they played a great game and credit to them for staying in it. We took control in the last set and it was very good that we did that."

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