

Steve Hall Mighty In Bristols Hard Bat

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The sound of ball on wood could once again be heard reverberating around the main hall at the Civil Service club when the Bristol & District TTA held its fourth annual John Mycroft Boucher Hard Bat competition at this new venue on Saturday 15 January.

With a marked resurgence in the interest of hard bat play being seen around the country these days, an even keener curiosity this year was taken by many of our Premier league players towards this competition and the standard of play being witnessed on the day at times by all participants using only the identical bats that were allowed to be used was awesome. The use of identical bats ensures that this event remains a fair and unique competition for all concerned, as well as continuing to be a great advertisement for the nostalgic devotees of this branch of table tennis.

The tried and tested format of seeding all players into groups of four with the top two progressing to the Main competition and the lower two to the Plate competition also made for continuous and competitive play throughout most of the day, and some were even looking to ensure their places for next year's event before the warm-up!



Steve Hall

As for the matches themselves, last season's Main competition winner, Shaun Fitzpatrick, encountered Gary Baldwin and Sven Petterson in his group and he could only book his place this time around in the Plate event, where he was to succumb to the eventual Plate winner, Terry Toghill, whose game seemed to improve as the day wore on. Although exhausted at the finish, Terry was ecstatic to win his first individual trophy, but reluctantly for the paparazzi refused to give his usual quote this year!

In the Main competition, last year's runner-up, Paul Hooper, was unexpectedly ousted in the second phase by some sheer brilliant play at times by his group opponents, and had to be content with watching some even more remarkable play in the two semi-final stages. The match in particular between Steve Hall and recently England Top 20 ranked Garth Kinlocke was outstanding for two protagonists who had not used these bats before today, although Garth was very lucky indeed to see off a determined Rob Chandler in his previous match – 21-19 in the third. The final itself then saw Steve Hall take on his son, Shaun Hall, who currently holds the record for being the youngest ever winner of the Bristol Closed Men's Singles title in March 2005 at the age of just 14 – an event that has been running since 1919 and has included such notable exponents of the hard bat in the past such as World number 4, Aubrey Simons, Gilbert Belsten and Clifford Axe. However, in a truly fantastic see-saw three game battle, and with many spectators still unable to believe that such great play could be achieved using bats without sponge, it was the experienced father, Steve Hall, who ran out the fourth different winner of this competition and so ended another great day in Bristol's hectic table tennis calendar.

By John Ruderham
B&DTTA Executive Committee

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