

Can Charles & Vansertima Retain Titles

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This year's M&G Investments Chelmsford & District Table Tennis League Closed Championships have attracted an excellent 104 entries and they will take place at the Anglia Ruskin University, Mildmay Sports Hall, Bishops Hall Lane,

Rivermead Campus, Chelmsford. Play commences on Friday 04 February 2010 at 19.00 hours and will continue until Sunday night. Spectators are welcome and admission is free. A separate Finals Night will take place at Old Chelmsfordians Association, Lawford Lane on Monday 14 February 2011, starting at 19.30 hours.

The highlights of the weekend will be the attempts by Neil Charles to win the Mens Singles for a third time in four years and for Julie Vansertima to capture an incredible eighteenth Ladies Singles crown.

Neil Charles (currently ranked no. 39 in England), somewhat appropriate in his 39th year is playing as well as ever and he will be a heavy favourite to take the title. His expected Final opponent is Steve Joslin (Champion in 1995 and 1996 and Colchester League Mens Singles Champion last year). The expected Semi-Finalists are the evergreen Dave Cole (Champion in 1986, 2005, 2006 and 2009) and the all-action Minda Sinkus (a Semi-Finalist last Season). All 14 Mens Singles groups are headed by a seeded player and the other nine seeded players are Kevin Read, Peter Hayden, Gary Young, Steve Kerns, Kevin Gowlett, Alex Abbott, George Reeves, Paul Cuming, Michael Andrews and Hamish Innes. A revitalised Alex Abbott, rapidly returning to top form after 20 years away from the Sport could be a dark-horse in this event.

The Ladies Singles should be a straight fight between Julie Vansertima and Debby Auvache. They met in the Final last Season and it was Julie who came out on top after five games of hard-hitting counter-attacking Table Tennis. Sue

Hickman and Linda Attridge are expected to contest the Semi-Finals.

This year's Tournament sees a return of the Over 50s Singles after a six year gap and Alex Abbott is seeded to play George Reeves in the Final. Hamish Innes and Ian Whiteside are the expected Semi-Finalists.

The Veterans Singles will be keenly contested and many players will be out to make their mark before Neil Charles reaches Veterans status next year. The holder Rik James is top seed and he is expected to meet the 2007 and 2009

Champion Dave Cole in the Final. Other players who will be hopeful of progressing are Peter Hayden, Alex Abbott, Steve Kerns, George Reeves, Paul Cuming and Hamish Innes.

Greg Green, the holder is top seed in the Under 21 Singles where he is expected to play Bradley Hudgell (Champion in 2007, 2008 and 2009) in the Final. Both players will be fully aware of the likely challenges they will receive from the Hylands School pairing of Brandon Crouchman and Scott Dowsett and Mark Smith.

The Mens Doubles has an open look to it. Whatever happens there will be new Champions this year as no former winning pairs are entered this time. George Reeves/Kevin Read are top seeds with Steve Kerns/Peter Hayden seeded second.

However, there are numerous other pairing who have a chance. These include -Steve Joslin/ Michael Andrews, Bradley Hudgell / Dave Cole, Mindaugas Sinkus/Charles Sweeney. John Cleasby / Neil Charles, Alex Abbott / Hamish Innes, Richard Brown / Gary Young, Greg Green / Kevin Gowlett and Ian Whiteside/David Evans.

The holders Julie Vansertima / David Cole will be bidding to win the Mixed Doubles for a sixth time and they are due to meet Steve Joslin/Linda Attridge in the Final. Other pairs to look out for are Paul Cuming/Debby Auvache and Steve Kerns/Melanie Bonnett.

The Ladies Doubles will be played as a round robin event and last year's winners – Julie Vansertima / Debby Auvache will be playing with different partners this time. Debby is paired with Linda Attridge whilst Julie teams up with newcomer Allison Barker, returning to the Sport after a 26 year lay-off. The tried and tested pairing of Melanie Bonnett and Nicola Phippen should also be in the mix for honours and they will be joined by Jacqueline Smith / Emily Knight.

Three players stand head and shoulders above their rivals in the Junior events – Brandon Crouchman, Scott Dowsett and Mark Smith. Expect these three players to dominate the Under 18 Boys Singles with Crouchman and Dowsett to have it

pretty much their own way in the Under 16 Boys Singles. Top seeded Chris Denyer is expected to face Sarah Austin in the Under 14 Singles Final.

Sarah Austin is favourite for the Junior Girls Singles and she should come out on top in a round robin tournament against Emily Knight, Rebecca Denyer, Jennie Crapnell and Kirstie Lamb.

Sunday's play will be dominated by the Divisional events, often the most evenly fought competitions of the whole weekend. The 2 Down Singles is traditionally the hardest event to predict and it is not unusual for the top seeds to fall in the early rounds. Robert Burton, an outstanding winner last year is top seed this time with Bradley Hudgell seeded second. Mathew Brown and Adrian Pitt are seeded joint third with Trevor Carter, Waseem Qureshi, Peter Barrett and Peter Mynard making up the minor seedings. Interesting first round encounters include Mike Johnston versus Steve Northcott, Steve Buer against Bradley Hudgell and Waseem Qureshi against former winner Nigel Lamb.

Richard Hiskey looks a more clear-cut favourite for the 4-Down Singles with Graham Briggs seeded second. Allan Thompson and Guy McKenzie make up the seeds in this event.

The 6-Down Singles could see League History being made. A father and daughter Singles final is on the cards, almost certainly for the first time. Ian Austin will be looking to beat his daughter Sarah in the final.

Steve Kerns

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