

Chop till you drop!

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Melissa Wright and Alice Loveridge

Filton Academy based defensive player Melissa Wright (S2) chopped and defended her way to a famous title victory in the Women's Band 1 event on day one of the Tees Sport Doncaster Grand Prix on Saturday the 12th of February.

Melissa had to slug it out against top seed Alice Loveridge from Guernsey in an exciting final, twice coming back from a losing point's position at 2-5, and 4-8 down in the fifth end to crown a magnificent win doing it the "Wright" way. Alice to her immense credit fought hard for every long rallied point and looked the likely winner with her controlled heavy topspin game interspersed with short returns in that tense and last game final. However, Melissa was not to be denied as she was in her earlier Women's Band 2 final, where she lost to Sue Collier. Melissa was so determined not to be a losing finalist twice, the steely look in her eyes told the story of another top class true grit "chop till you drop" performance from the Avon star to take the Band 1 title. Alice had earlier displaced Sue Collier in straight games to reach the final whilst Melissa got the better of Chloe Thomas 3-0 in her earlier semi final.

The day for me started with a packed hotel at breakfast time with over 100 model railway enthusiasts cramming into the small restaurant eager to get an early start and join the 8,000 crowd that will visit the Doncaster Racecourse Grandstand which was holding the Doncaster Model Railway Exhibition, one of the largest in the country. I then had the pleasure of joining a long queue of lovely young ladies who were also in Doncaster as part of team GB Women's deaf squad of Footballers in training for the forthcoming European Team Championships, so breakfast was a little late and hurried!

Back with the action and Scotland player Richard Main unlike my earlier "breakfast crowd" was not to be derailed in the afternoon's top Men's Band 1 event and in a simply superb display of stunning table tennis throughout the competition he kept his momentum on track to every challenge thrown at him to win the event. What was even more remarkable was the fact that he came from an unseeded position, had never even got through his groups in previous Band 1 attempts, yet disposed of players the calibre of Chris Lewis (after trailing 0-2 in games) quarter finalist Alim Hirji by 3-0, semi finalist Craig Gascoyne 3-1, and then go and terminate top seed Justin Ma by the same score in the final! The flying Scotsman has come of age and his recent progression has been just incredible. Losing semi finalist Will Maybanks enjoyed good performances against Ryan Owen, Chris Main (Richard's brother) but his downfall was at the hands of Justin Ma (in five superb games) whilst last four player Jersey's Craig Gascoyne displaced Jon Hall and Ian Musk but could not contain the Scottish Sensation.

Kim Daybell the GB Para-Olympian had a great day at the office by taking the Men's Band 2 competition at the expense of finalist Chris Main. Kim, a Crooks TTC, Sheffield club player was just too clever for k/o round opponents Pawel Orzechowski, Jon Hall and his last four opponent Chris Lewis. Losing finalist Chris Main ended the challenges of Helshan Weerasinghe and last four opponent Owe Karlsson but lost out 1-3 to Kim in the last match.

Losing quarter finalist at the World Veteran Women's Singles Championships in China Last year, Sue Collier from the Halton Table Tennis Club was far too cute clever and experienced for all her rivals including finalist Melissa Wright to run out a comfortable Women's Band 2 winner. Sue removed Modesta Vaitkeviciute and losing semi finalist Jurate Brazaityte from the event and then raised the bar again to outplay Melissa in the final with very clever and commanding attacking play.

A fast and furious final of Men's Band 3 was played out by young gladiators Nathan Thomas and Richard Wesley in an all action final with the Welshman Thomas taking the title in three close games. Losing semi finalists Peter Morgan and Ivan Lewis played very well to reach the latter stages.

The last of the Women's events to be played was Band 3 and the superb glassware trophy went to another valiant Vet in the form of Cheshire player Jan Johns who outfought Charlotte Binley in the final. Losing last four competitors Hannah Winfield and Naomi Jackson enjoyed a good event.

Nottingham University undergraduate Nav Matharu who plays in the local league and trains once a week at the Grantham Academy was the winner of Men's Band 4. However he had to pull out all the stops over the ever improving 13 year old Danny Lawrence in a splendid five game final. After his title victory Nav said "During the week I trained with Alex Perry and had some multiball which really sharpened me up and the invaluable advice I got from Alex on my movement was the deciding factor to my title victory". Spare a thought for the brave cadet Lawrence who was absolutely brilliant in the all action final and will have gained so much experience from his efforts plus the advice he received afterwards.

Later in the day Danny did learn from that earlier Band 4 final by running out a comfortable title winner in men's Band 5. The likeable diminutive Lawrence is a definite future star of our sport and always seems to attract a spellbound audience with his shotmaking skills and sheer exuberance. Danny took a straight games final win over David Graham. Losing last four players Ed Slot and Rob Owen played their part in a highly competitive event.

Last but certainly not least was the Men's Band 6 competition and that trophy went back to Dewsbury in Yorkshire in the hands of Veteran Mark Land. The Wakefield based player who happens to be the Head Wine Buyer for a well known Supermarket chain and has recently returned from a buying trip in California was never really hard pressed to take this title. Mark's last opponent was "new kid on the block" 13 year old Raphael Lawanson from the St Michaels Greenhouse club in London, and he too like young Danny Lawrence has a bright future ahead of him in table tennis after competing in his first ever Grand Prix.

Results from day 1 at Doncaster:

Men's Band 1

Richard Main (SCO) beat Justin Ma (Y) 11-7, 11-7, 4-11, 11-2.

Women's Band 1

Melissa Wright (Av) beat Alice Loveridge (GGY) 8-11, 11-9, 13-11, 5-11, 11-8.

Men's Band 2

Kim Daybell (Ys) beat Chris Main (SCO) 9-11, 11-7, 11-7, 11-5.

Women's Band 2

Sue Collier (Ch) beat Melissa Wright (Av) 11-5, 11-7, 11-7.

Men's Band 3

Nathan Thomas (WAL) beat Richard Wesley (Ng) 12-10, 11-6, 11-6.

Women's Band 3

Jan Johns (Wo) beat Charlotte Binley (Np) 11-1, 11-4, 5-11, 14-12.

Men's Band 4

Nav Matharu (Wa) beat Danny Lawrence (K) 11-9, 10-12, 11-4, 4-11, 14-12.

Men's Band 5

Danny Lawrence (K) beat David Graham (Nd) 11-7, 11-8, 11-8.

Men's Band 6

Mark Land (Y) beat Raphael Lawanson (Sy) 13-11, 11-6, 11-6.

By Geoff Ware

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