Clacton & Dist: Gale blows opposition aside

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Posted On: February 14, 2022

Jason Gale triumphed with a tip-top performance in the Clacton & District League's **Handicap Singles Tournament** held at the Coastal Academy Sports Hall on Sunday.

It was a hard-earned and well-deserved success for Gale who, during the day, defeated no fewer than four previous champions to take the trophy for the first time.

He produced a series of seven unbeaten performances, culminating in an epic final victory (on +2) over reigning champion James Denyer (-8) 10-12, 11-4, 6-11, 11-8, 11-2.

In previous years, Gale may have succumbed to the Denyer flair but he stuck to his task admirably despite twice, in the first and third sets, seeming as though he might falter.

Showing both maturity and determination, as well as sensible shot selection, he refused to be brow-beaten and, as the match progressed, his confidence grew. And, with that added consistency, he was able to nullify many of Denyer's best shots and produce excellent counter-hitting winners of his own.

Gale, who'd reached the final only once before in 2006, enjoyed a fine day's table tennis in a tournament where stamina and fitness were required as much as talent and ability.

In the opening stage, he topped his Group with wins over Paul Newbould in three, Paul Metcalf in four and (on -8) against the 2014 champion Allen Denyer (+2) 10-12, 8-11, 12-10, 11-4, 11-5.

Gale followed this with three victories over resilient opponents in the knockout stage to reach the final. In round one (on +1) he beat 1997 champion Gavin Price (-5) 11-7, 11-13, 11-4, 11-7, in the quarter-finals (on +2) he beat Daniel Young (-8) 13-11, 11-3, 8-11, 11-6, before (on -1) defeating a weary 2019 champion John Barton (+1) 11-8, 3-11, 11-7, 11-7 in the semi-final to secure his final place.

Denyer, the current Handicap Singles champion, had arguably the toughest group to contend with but he won three difficult matches against three tricky opponents, Gavin Price, Adam Wilkin and Gary Young, the last a

match played of scratch which Denyer edged 3-2 (11-2, 6-11, 11-7, 6-11, 11-8).

He received a bye in round one of the knockout stage but followed his group success with wins over Andy Cawley in the quarter-finals and, in the semi-finals, Paul Hume, the player he'd beaten at the same stage of the 2020 competition. But whereas two years ago Denyer had edged it 16-14 in the fifth, this time he found it more straightforward, winning 3-1 (6-11, 11-4, 11-9, 11-8) in a scratch match.

Honourable mentions should go to John Gallagher, who topped his group unbeaten, and John Plummer, who both made it through to the knockout stage where the pair met in round one, Gallagher winning it before bowing out to John Barton (-8) 5-11, 1-11, 14-12, 11-5, 11-8 in one of the hardest-fought matches of the tournament.

Main results – Final : Jason Gale (+2) beat James Denyer (-8) 10-12, 11-4, 6-11, 11-8, 11-2; Semi-finals : Gale (-1) beat John Barton (+1) 11-8, 3-11, 11-7, 11-7; Denyer (0) beat Paul Hume (0) 6-11, 11-4, 11-9, 11-8; Quarter-finals : Gale (+2) beat Daniel Young (-8) 13-11, 11-3, 8-11, 11-6; Denyer (-10) beat Andy Cawley (+3) 12-10, 11-7, 4-11, 11-9; Barton (-8) beat John Gallagher (+1) 5-11, 1-11, 14-12, 11-5, 11-8; Hume (-10) beat Barry Allen (+3) 11-9, 13-11, 4-11, 12-10.

A total of 28 players competed on the day, over half from Division One, and including nine previous winners of the trophy. And the competition certainly lived up to its reputation for unpredictability, with Jason Gale being the 32 different winner in the tournament's 39-year history.