

Cream Rises To The Top

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Fred Button

The cream rose to the top in the Clacton and District Table Tennis League's 2011 Closed Championships, held last weekend at the Coastal Academy Sports Hall, with seven of the eleven events won by the top seeds.

Pride of place goes to Greg Green who became only one of a handful of players in Clacton table tennis history to win the Mens Singles title in successive years, and the first player to do so since Derek Wood in 1993.

But, as the twenty-year old Green had predicted, it was no easy task, having to eliminate John Hobson, Fred Button and, in the semi-final Peter Burrows, before being made to fight every inch of the way by his doubles' partner, Gary Young, in the final.

The match was one of the highest quality and excitement, the best Mens Singles' final in recent memory, the play littered by long rallies with the two combatants standing back from the table, neither giving any quarter.

With both Green and Young displaying athleticism and total commitment, the match ebbed and flowed, Green taking a two-set lead before Young moved up the gears to level at two-all and then take a 5-2 lead in the fifth set.

But Green showed his champion's mettle to fight back to retain his title 12-10, 11-8, 10-12, 9-11, 11-9 in a match played in excellent spirit that was a credit to both players.

It was, nevertheless, a bitter disappointment for Young, a winner of this event in 2004 but now three times a losing finalist.

But Green joins an elite group – Ken Gladwell, Dave Binns, Dave Birkett, Lawrence Rutter, Darren Jones and Derek Wood – who are the only players in the League's history to have successfully defended their Mens Singles title in consecutive years.

Three-time champion Martin Hogg maintained his fine record in this event – he has reached the semi-finals eleven times in the last fourteen seasons – by beating number two seed Colin Stallwood

11-9 in the fifth, before succumbing to Young in the semis.

And though fourteen year-old James Denyer was outgunned by Young 9-11, 7-11, 13-11, 3-11 in the quarter-finals, his time will surely come.

Division Two player John Fenton will feel pleased, and surprised, to have reached Round Two proper after the Group stage, whilst Alan Burgess' nail-biting 8-11, 11-4, 10-12, 11-2, 17-15 win over Mark Gale in Round One was a show-stopper, both literally and actually.

The Mens Doubles event went strictly to form, 2010 champions Greg Green and Gary Young facing Martin Hogg and Colin Stallwood, winners in 2008 and 2009, in the final.

Green and Young were not to be denied and successfully defended their title 11-7, 11-9, 11-9 in competent fashion against opponents unable to move their game into Championship-winning gear, the victory giving Green a second Tournament trophy.

Although the top seeds made it to the final, there were two unexpected semi-finalists, James Denyer and Felipe Rodriguez beating the ranked pairing of Alan Burgess and Martyn Green, John Patrick and Mark Smith beating Peter Burrows and Colin Dearman.

Sue Welham, a legend in the Colchester League where she has been Ladies Singles champion on twenty-two occasions, has never before competed in the Clacton Championships.

But, at her first attempt, Welham took the Ladies Singles title, beating former title-holder Annabelle Rodriguez 11-9, 11-8, 11-4 in a cagey and tense match, Annabelle unable to break down the stern defence of her more experienced opponent.

It was a heart-breaking blow for Rodriguez whose confidence had been boosted when – for the first-time ever – she'd beaten Welham 9-11, 13-11, 12-10, 17-15 in the Group stage but, alas, she was unable to repeat her success in the final.

Annabelle has now been Ladies Singles runner-up for the last three years, defeated on each occasion by a different opponent, Jenny Binns and Gill Locke the victors in previous years.

There was a disappointing entry in this event but an honourable mention should go to Sandie Isaac who played with her usual zest in the Group stage to beat Isabel Barton, whilst taking Annabelle Rodriguez close before losing to 11-8 in the decider.

Gary Young and Sue Welham each took a second winner's trophy after combining in the Mixed Doubles to beat Colin Stallwood and Annabelle Rodriguez.

The final score was 11-7, 4-11, 11-8, 11-6, the winning pair too consistent for their opponents, a result which also meant that both Stallwood and Rodriguez were destined to go away from the Championships with a second loser's medal.

There was a sense of déjà vu in the two Junior events which saw a repeat of both the finalists, and the winners, as last year.

In the Junior Singles James Denyer retained his title by beating Mark Smith 6-11, 11-7, 13-11, 11-8, a very similar scoreline to the 6-11, 13-11, 11-9, 11-7 scoreline of 2010.

In truth, Smith was a little under par and, with both players so evenly-matched, he would have hoped to have come closer but, for a third year, had to settle for the runner-up trophy.

There was a minor surprise in the Group stage where Kelvin Olano unexpectedly made it through to the semi-final at the expense of Ian Porter.

But there was an element of revenge for Smith in the Junior Doubles where the Mark Smith/Adam Wilkin pairing repeated their win of last season against James Denyer and Ian Porter, this year taking it 11-8, 12-10, 11-9.

It was a third successive Junior Doubles title for Smith and a third successive final defeat in this event for Denyer.

There is no doubt that there is both quality and quantity in the Junior ranks but the entry for the two Junior events was disappointingly low.

Having twice lost in the final of the Veterans Singles, it was third time lucky for Alan Burgess who took the title by defeating top seed Peter Burrows 11-7, 11-8, 11-8 more comfortably than he might have expected.

It was a well-merited success for Burgess who had eliminated twice-champion Martin Hogg at the semi-final stage with a tight

5-11, 11-2, 5-11, 14-12, 14-12 victory.

Burgess was this year's top seed in the Super-Veterans Singles but he reckoned without the persistence and determination of Fred Button, a previous winner in 2005.

In the final, Button produced a performance of monumental grit to win 12-10, 5-11, 11-5, 7-11, 11-8, thus denying Burgess the honour of being the first player to take the Veterans and Super-Veterans titles in the same year.

Button also reached the final of the Restricted Singles where he faced John Owen, who was also aiming to set a

record – the first player to win this event twice.

But Fred thwarted both Owen and the record book, both players sweating blood and giving their all in a titanic tussle before Button won by the narrowest of margins, 11-7, 11-8, 9-11, 7-11, 13-11.

In the earlier rounds, Russell Hillier had played well to beat Andy Vincent to reach the semi-finals, whilst Ferdy Rodriguez had given John Owen a scare in the Round One, just losing 11-7.

For his performances in the Super-Veterans and Restricted Singles, and for reaching the quarter-finals of the Mens Singles, Fred Button was awarded the Victor Trophy for the outstanding performance of the Tournament.

'Evergreen' is an inadequate description for Terry Kirby but the octogenarian Kirby showed all his guile and experience to retain his Division Two Singles title, beating Chris Petrou 11-7, 11-9, 7-11, 11-8.

But it was a good effort from Petrou, reaching his first Championship final the hard way by overcoming John Harvey, number two seed Colin Beaumont, and then team-mate Frank Burbidge.

And there was a fine performance from sixteen-year old Jack Bruce who reached the semi-finals by beating Brian Thiel and then ranked player David North, 14-12 in the fifth.

The most heart-warming final was the Division Three Singles which was contested by two unseeded fourteen-year olds, Kelvin Olano and Tom Burton.

In a final of uninhibited play, Kelvin took the title against his Brotherhood J team-mate 7-11, 11-8, 11-9, 11-5.

Olano had surprised two older opponents to get to the final, eliminating ranked player Brian Baines and then Gerald Batt – conqueror of second seed Ian Porter – in the semi-final.

Burton had an even tougher route to the final, edging out David Wilkin 11-9 in the fifth in Round One, ranked player Tony Rayner 13-11 in the decider in the quarters, and then top seed Barry Allen 11-9 in the fifth in the semis.

Overall, sixty-eight players competed in the Championships, defying the warm weather outside to enjoy two days of hard-fought, competitive table tennis, which gave fulsome entertainment to the packed auditorium.

As ever, the League is indebted to the Championships' main sponsor Paul Newbould Planning and Building Design Services for their continued support, now in its eighteenth year.

And, as always, the Championships were organised with quiet efficiency and assurance by the Tournament Sub-Committee led by Peter White and Brian Rowlen.

(An abridged version of this report has been sent to the local newspapers)

2011 CHAMPIONSHIPS RESULTS

Mens Singles : G Green beat G Young 12-10, 11-8, 10-12, 9-11, 11-9.

Ladies Singles : S Welham beat A Rodriguez 11-9, 11-8, 11-4.

Mens Doubles : G Green/G Young beat M Hogg/C Stallwood 11-7, 11-9, 11-9.

Mixed Doubles : G Young/S Welham beat C Stallwood/A Rodriguez 11-7, 4-11, 11-8, 11-6.

Veterans Singles : A Burgess beat P Burrows 11-7, 11-8, 11-8.

Super-Veterans Singles : F Button beat A Burgess 12-10, 5-11, 11-5, 7-11, 11-8.

Junior Singles : J Denyer beat M Smith 6-11, 11-7, 13-11, 11-8.

Junior Doubles : M Smith/A Wilkin beat J Denyer/I Porter

11-8, 12-10, 11-9.

Division Two Singles : T Kirby beat C Petrou 11-7, 11-9, 7-11, 11-8.

Division Three Singles : K Olano beat T Burton 7-11, 11-8, 11-9, 11-5.

Restricted Singles : F Button beat J Owen 11-7, 11-8, 9-11, 7-11, 13-11.

Victor Trophy : F Button

By Tony Oswick

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