

Giggles galore on the Blackpool Tour!

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Adam Gigli with his trophies

Adam Gigli from the Fusion Club in Kent was a double bubble winner of the Men's Band five and Band six singles events in his first Grand Prix for over four years on day one of the Tees Sport Blackpool Grand Prix (the ninth in the series of fourteen Grand Prix tour events) and held at the Sports Centre in West Park Drive on Saturday the 16th of April.

The first event to finish was the Men's Band 6 and involved finalists Adam Gigli and last year junior player Reece Lo. Adam who is currently an apprentice with the company Skanska that by a happy coincidence are building the Olympic Village in Stratford in preparation for the 2012 London Games, employed his soft hand's blocking to control the final over the young Grantham Academy player Lo, (incidentally in his first ever senior Grand Prix). Reece came out with all guns blazing with his vicious loops on both wings taking a one game lead, however the lefthander from the Fusion Club in Kent, Gigli was undeterred staying up to the table forcing his younger opponent back from the table and was unrelenting in taking the next three games and thereby running out a 3-1 winner proving himself a worthy band six champion. Reece took all his k/o round matches by 3-0 scores over; Rob Sampson, Stuart Fowler and his last four opponent Dominic Temperton. Adam dropped only one game on his route to the final out pointing; Gary Keenan, Wilson Chen (who took that one game) and semi final opponent Gary Sangster.

Adam then went one better in the higher band 5 competition by taking a brace of title victories against brave finalist Blair Fowler who took Gigli right to the bitter end of a five set marathon. However the day belonged to the one time Grantham Academy player Adam Gigli and he rightly deserved all the headlines having come through a total of fifteen gruelling match's en- route to his double celebrations. Tomasz Halucha and Josh Robinson were the losing semi finalists.

The up's and downs of Grand Prix table tennis was epitomised admirably by Dean Cundy, from the Filton Academy in Bristol, who played with great fight, determination and gusto to win his morning band 2 competition and with it his first ever banded grand prix win. Yet later in the afternoon in the slightly easier band 3 event he went crashing out in the group stage which just goes to prove it's a funny old game that's almost impossible to predict with a varied clash of styles.

The unseeded Cundy progressed unscathed through his group to then meet a double Irish challenge in his first two k/o rounds in the form of Mark O'Flynn who stormed into a 2 game lead, however Dean setting the precedent for the morning by digging deep and pulling out a win in five games. He then met his second of our neighbours from across the Irish Sea which was Ryan Flood (who had come through a fantastic last eight attack versus defence match) against John Magnall from the Isle of Man. Dean was again in cruise control and closed the Flood gates to win this semi final 3-0, which put him safely through to the final.

In the top half of the draw top seed Dan O'Connell after winning his group enjoyed a four set thriller over Calum Main to meet Chris Lewis in the semi-final. In what turned out to be an incredibly hard fought match the TTK Greenhouse London based player Lewis came through in the closest of Five sets, to set up a rollercoaster, "Pepsi-max" final with Dean Cundy. This final was to be closer than anyone could have predicted as Lewis raced into a 2-0 lead but Cundy to his eternal credit pulled it back to 2-2 to make it a fantastic 5 setter and in the fifth game Lewis was unable to contain Cundy's ball retrieving and never say die attitude then a spectacular rally set up match point and Dean took it with both hands.

In the Women's equivalent band 2 played in the morning the recently crowned Veteran Women's National Champion Sue Collier was in total control throughout all her matches culminating in a clinical 3-0 final victory against Megan Phillips. Sue showed us all why she is our National Champion with no crisis arising in her faultless and totally controlled performances over all her rivals. Megan cruised to the final after an immaculate display in

the group stage to then set up a straight games destruction of Lucy Elliott, but was always playing second fiddle in the final with Sue.

The Men's band 4 event was equally enthralling with David Graham coming through as the worthy winner treating us to a fantastic final. Neither player had an easy route to the final with David beating; Mike White, Chris Kendall and Stephen Arliss in the Semis. The losing finalist Reece Placid had to overcome; Mohammad Khan, Michael Hahn and Rob Owen to claim his place in the final. Even the top tipster Willie Thorn could not have called the final result, as David won the first game convincingly and the reverse was true of the second, the 3rd saw David take a 5-0 lead then Reece showed his determination to pull it back to 8 all. A close deuce game followed and David took the game in gritty style 12-10. That was all the confidence David needed and he ran out in the fourth game 11-5 with his endeavour and work rate shining through. It has to be said that Reece was Placid by name and Placid by nature showing true sportsmanship even in defeat.

As the day progressed with so many top quality matches to enjoy the top banded Men's and Women's events were reaching a climax. In the Women's Band 1 Round Robin of five players it was the Filton Academy "chop till you drop" Melissa Wright who deservedly won this close fought event. Melissa was crowned the winner after a count back as both her and Charlotte Carey won 3 matches each and lost 1 each with Charlotte losing her only match to Melissa. Charlotte took the silver with Sue Collier finishing in third place with 2 wins and 2 losses, whilst Angharad Phillips took fourth spot by virtue of a sole win over her twin sister Megan who took that most coveted of prizes, the wooden spoon.

Mental strength combined with flair and imagination where instinctive movements, lightning quick reflexes and shot selection are such an important ingredient to success and without question Alim Hirji possesses these attributes. He looked strong throughout this top band 1 event taking a 3-1 final game victory against Neil Charles. Alim eased through his group and then displaced Emran Hussein and last four opponent Ryan Owen (the comeback king after being out of table tennis for several years with a severe injury) to take a well deserved winner's cheque. Neil had also enjoyed a great run to the last match gaining wins over Simon Nouch and last four opponent Scott Barton but alas could not contain the all action Alim Hirji.

The last banded events to complete the long day's play were the band 3 Men's and Women's competitions. Great to report that after several attempts Paulina Orzechowska took the Women's title against finalist Lucy Elliot with losing semi finalists Annie Hudson and Jie Xin Cao making their mark on the event. Whilst in the Men's equivalent Richard Wesley took top honours over losing finalist Conor Edwards with losing last four competitors Gary Young and Brian Wright adding that extra spice to a close fought event.

Results from day one at Blackpool as follows:

Men's Band 1

Alim Hirji (Mi) beat Neil Charles (Mi) 6-11, 11-3, 11-7, 11-7

Women's Band 1 (Round Robin)

Winner Melissa Wright (Av) with runner up Charlotte Carey (WAL)

Men's Band 2

Dean Cundy (WAL) beat Chris Lewis (Sy) 6-11, 13-15, 11-6, 11-9, 11-6

Women's Band 2

Sue Collier (Ch) beat Megan Phillips (WAL) 11-4, 11-4, 11-9

Men's Band 3

Richard Wesley (Ys) beat Conor Edwards (WAL) 5-11, 11-9, 11-3, 11-13, 11-8

Women's Band 3

Paulina Orzechowska (La) beat Lucy Elliot (SCO) 11-5, 11-7, 11-5

Men's Band 4

David Graham (Nd) beat Reece Placid (Mi) 11-7, 6-11, 12-10, 11-5

Men's Band 5

Adam Gigli (Nk) beat Blair Fowler (SCO) 11-8, 12-14, 7-11, 11-7, 11-7

Men's Band 6

Adam Gigli (Nk) beat Reece Lo (Y) 8-11, 11-8, 11-9, 12-10

By Geoff Ware

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