

Dutch honour upheld by Martin Groenewold

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Leyton Orient FC Chairman meets BATTs players. L-R: Eric Todd (Chairman), Ted Van Der Meer (Dutch Promotor), Mardy Henrikson (World Hardbat Champion), Barry Hern, Joey Kennedy (player), Fred Dove (player/organiser), Chris Bartram (National Veterans Champion), Neil Brierly (Secretary) Picture by Steve Weemes, Harlow Star

The BATTs Club in Harlow hosted their first "Elite" Hard Bat Tournament of 2011 on Saturday 30 April 2011 and the addition of a top class complement of players from Holland helped to make it another day to remember. The rules were simple – BATTs provided the standard Rubber bats and at the end of each end these had to be left on the table so that the next end would be played with the bat from that end. Scoring was 21-Up.

An interesting observer was legendary Sporting impresario Barry Hearn, taking a look at the UK version of Hard Bat Table Tennis after recently running a massive event in America. Going forward Barry is going to be talking with Sky TV very shortly and he is confident that they can be persuaded to televise a major Hard Bat event in the near future. This could be a landmark moment in the upsurge of Hard Bat table tennis in this country. All Table Tennis players should watch developments with interest.

Il eyes were on Netherland's Marti Hendriksen, the 2010 WUTTO (Standard Bat) World Champion who had ousted the incomparable Jan-Ove Waldner en route to the Final. However, this wasn't to be Hendriksen's day. He was beaten in the Groups by the inform Fred Dove and in the Competition Proper he fell in the first round to a fired up England no. three Veteran Chris Bartram 22-20, 21-18. Even in the Band One Consolation event Hendriksen had to give second best. Essex's Tony West beat the Dutch star in a three game thriller – 21-16, 16-21, 23-21.



It was Hendriksen's team-mate Martin Groenewold who went on to take the title. Groenewold who had missed out in the Group stages against Trevor Kerry (Notts) hit top form and raced through to the title without dropping a game. He beat Paul Worrallo (Staffs) 21-16, 21-8, fellow countryman Lars Adema 21-18, 21-14, the inform Chris Knight (Kent) 21-7, 21-16 and in the Final he nailed Chris Bartram 21-19, 21-14. Chris made a good start in the Final and he led 13-8 in the first game. But it was Groenewold who finished the stronger and after taking the first game he always looked the more likely winner. He eventually took the title and the £ 250.00 first prize amidst rapturous applause from his team-mates. Chris Bartram made his way to the Final after his superb win over Hendriksen by ousting Suffolk's Wayne Shaw (21-14, 21-10) and Nottingham's Trevor Kerry (21-13, 22-20).



The battle for third place between tried and tested Hardbat specialist Trevor Kerry (he isn't bad with a normal bat either!) and Kent's Chris Knight was as exciting a game as you will see anywhere. Inventive, bold, daring and downright courageous are just some of the phrases that come to mind as Trevor fought back from 20-16 down in the final game to win a truly pulsating match 21-14, 14-21, 23-21.

Other results that caught the eye were Fred Dove's 21-17, 23-21 win over Billy Pegg and Chris Knight's excellent 23-21, 21-17 victory over Fred Dove whilst Nick Brown made his mark by defeating Egle Adomelyte 21-8, 21-19. Joe

Kennedy and Tony West were both first round fallers. Joe missed out narrowly 22-20, 19-21, 18-21 to Lars Adema whilst Tony took the first game against Trevor Kerry and came close in the second end, before sinking to a 21-11, 18-21, 11-21 defeat.

The Band two Competition (for the players finishing third and fourth in their Groups) was notable for the level of players taking part. Leading British League Premier Division player Omkar Torgalker was a first round faller to Steffen Greup (Netherlands) 14-21, 21-11, 17-21 whilst the vastly experienced Tom Cutler was beaten in the second round by Keith Baker (Staffordshire) 21-12, 23-21. Another very experienced player – John Payne (Essex) said his “goodbyes” in the second round when he was defeated by Derek Balding 23-21, 16-21, 21-14. It was Keith Baker who stormed through to take the title without dropping a game. He beat Rob Fern (Nottingham) in the Semi-Final 21-17, 21-18 and Derek Balding 21-14, 21-13 in the Final. Balding’s Semi-Final victim was Alan Cherry (21-10, 21-16).

Band three (for the players finishing fifth and sixth in their Groups) was won by Steve Kerns (Essex) who had finished bottom in his preliminary group. Steve battled his way through to the title with wins over Chris Jones (Norfolk) 21-17, 21-16, Glenn Johnson (Essex) 21-15, 21-16, Dave Langham (Hertfordshire) 16-21, 21-16, 21-17 and Tony Comiskey (Cambridgeshire) 21-9, 19-21, 21-17. The hard-hitting Tony Comiskey (playing with a Hard-Bat for only the second time) had ousted Gary Young (Essex) 21-15, 21-16, Paul Beurskens (Netherlands) 21-12, 21-18 and Aartjan Provost (Netherlands) 21-19, 19-21, 21-17 to reach the Final.

A major feature of the day was the atmosphere of the tournament. It is obvious to all spectators, and not just Table Tennis aficionados, that the Hard Bat game is fundamentally more interesting and strategic and just as exciting to watch as the version played with “normal” bats. There was no lack of competitive spirit. But while the matches were tense and keenly fought, the whole thing seemed more friendly and the spectators were much more engaged by the spectacle.

Finally Congratulations are extended to Fred Dove for his amazing energy and enthusiasm in spreading the Hard Bat gospel. And thanks also to his excellent band of helpers who made the day run smoothly, and also to Neil Brierley and the team at BATTs for looking after everyone so brilliantly.

Other results –

Band One Consolation Final – Joe Kennedy (Kent) beat Tony West (Essex) 21-16, 21-12.

Band Two Consolation Final – Kevin James (Essex) beat David Tiplady (Cambridge) 25-23, 21-18.

Band Three Consolation Final – Gary Young (Suffolk) beat Chris Jones (Norfolk) 14-21, 21-17, 21-17.

By Graham Frankel / Steve Kerns

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