

Any Ware returned on the table!

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Blackmoor Vale Hard Bat Tournament: Winner – Geoff Ware, Runner-up – Clive Cornford, Equal 3rd – Keith Anthony and Francis Greaser

A night of pure nostalgia was re-created by fifteen Blackmoor Vale Table Tennis league players when they played their annual hard bat tournament. The event was staged on three tables at the Child Okeford village hall set in deepest Dorset on Wednesday evening the 26th of October 2011.

I suppose deep down every player who has enjoyed our wonderful game has a “soft spot” for the old fashioned yet highly skill full hard bat era. It was how table tennis was first enjoyed by so many more players than the present time. Hard bat table tennis from the forties to the sixties was played everywhere in works canteens, office premises, youth clubs, church halls, working men’s clubs, village halls throughout the country. Well before sponge changed the game forever in my early days it seemed everyone was playing table tennis. Dad would take me to his working men’s club in Hayes Middlesex on a Sunday morning where forty enthusiasts would go hammer and tongs at one another on the four old heavy wooden Jacques tables with defender against attacker matches being the highlight of my weekend. Rallies seemed to go on for up to twenty to thirty exchanges where you had to create openings through skill full play with everyone playing on a level playing field.

Sadly these days are few and far between apart from a renaissance in certain groups who are bringing back the good old days. These stalwarts enjoy long rallies that modern day players would not dream of playing with now so much emphasis put on third or fifth ball kill.

The evening’s format of fun yet highly competitive play was started off with three groups of five with all play all. All the same hard bats were provided by the club so that everyone had the exact same equipment to play with. These matches involved just one game up to eleven (no duece) to determine the seedings for the knock-out stages where everyone took part. The following knockout matches were played as best of three games so at least everyone on the night enjoyed a minimum of five matches.

Clive Cornford was emerging as the one to beat being a twice previous holder of the trophy that dated back to 1992. He narrowly won his group defeating his four rivals although he had to be at his best to beat first time hard bat player Geoff Ware by 11-10.

Clive took the top seeded position and made stealthy progress to the latter stages displacing Ronnie Shaw, Stuart Angell and Francis Greaser to book his place in the final. Meanwhile in the lower half of the draw Geoff Ware was emerging through the rounds accounting for Pete Bond, Nigel Bastable and Keith Anthony to take his place in the final with Clive.

The stage was set for a best of five games final up to eleven points as per the modern game with the former champion Clive Cornford looking the warm favourite. But as we all know favourites often get beaten and with Geoff Ware adapting well to the hard bat, started to grow in confidence taking his attacking play to Cornford. Ware took control of the match to run out a 11-5, 11-7, 11-3 winner and take his first ever hard bat title trophy.

Ware was quoted following his victory as saying “ It was a most enjoyable evening played in a friendly yet competitive spirit. I had some tough matches to endure none more so than my semi final with Keith Anthony who played extremely well. It was so hard at times to win a point as you have to put in so much effort with long rallies. A great evening and many thanks to the organisers”.

Everyone thoroughly enjoyed themselves with the evening running as smooth as silk by the efforts of the organising team that comprised of Eric Williams, Simon Crichton and Blackmoor Vale Tournament organiser Stuart Angell.

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