

Oxford triumph in Midland League Junior Tournament

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Champions Oxford A: Jack Shardlow, Simon Price, Lewis Sumner (Cpt) and Karl Bushell (Oxon Head Coach)

Oxford A gave a superlative performance to win the Midland League Junior Team Tournament, held at Kidlington Forum on Sunday, although it needed a count-back to separate them from Coventry, whose best player, Aaron Riley, went through the day undefeated. Lewis Sumner won 7/10 in the top ranking position and got magnificent support from numbers two and three, Jack Shardlow and Simon Price, who strained every sinew to cling onto the summit, as the competition reached its climax. Simon had a particularly exhausting day with seven of his 10 matches going the distance, including the one he lost to Timmy Cooper (Leamington), who saved one match point by lobbing over the lights, a feat rarely seen.

Oxford A began with a far-from-routine 6-0 win over Oxford B, with both Ethan Ball and Niall Harris taking Simon to the limit, Niall losing at 11-8 in the fifth, after leading 2-0, and Ethan losing at 11-9 in the decider.

Meanwhile, Coventry were beating Newbury 4-2 and Leamington prevailed over Birmingham by the same score. Leamington's hopes took a dive in the second round, as Oxford A moved ahead with a 5-1 victory. Solomon Hayes had a torrid time, unable to fathom Jack for two games, then pulling back to 2-2, but losing at 8 in the fifth, then losing to Lewis 12-14 in the last, with Lewis saving match points in the third and decider (with a baseline edge). Small consolation that this was one of the matches of the day, causing play to stop briefly on the other three tables!

For Oxford B, captain Jonah Stott competed extremely well throughout, coping with adversity (of which he was always going to have his fair share at no 1) better than team-mates Niall and Ethan, whose frustration continued, as he lost to both Newbury players in the fifth: one win each for Jonah and Niall was not enough to prevent Newbury from achieving their first victory.

The third round saw the clash of the two unbeaten teams: Lewis came straight down from the mountain onto a very flat plain, losing to Coventry no 2, Taran Dhillon, a languid, but deceptively effective opponent. With both Aaron Riley (C1) and Simon Price (OA3) taking maximums, it was left to Jack Shardlow to get a draw for Oxford by beating George Allison in straight games. Birmingham got their first win, a surprising 5-1 over Newbury, as did Oxford B, whose 4-2 over Leamington was their peak achievement for the day, with two excellent wins from Jonah and one each from Niall and Ethan over Tom Meldrum.



Runners-up Coventry: Taran Dhillon, Aaron Riley and George Allison with Karl Bushell (Oxon Head Coach)

Coventry and Oxford A then steamrolled their way forward with 6-0 wins over Oxford B and Birmingham respectively, leaving Oxford A still with a crucial three game advantage heading into the last round, while the other four teams disputed the minor placings. Leamington stayed the pace well, giving Coventry a close match, and for Newbury talented cadet Leo Long caused Oxford A great grief by beating both Lewis and Jack, which left Simon having to sweat it out against Mikey Jones and James Elliot.

However, his two wins and one each from Lewis and Jack carried the home side to a very hard fought team victory over Coventry. Birmingham took third place, with two wins for Dapo Balogun and one each for Sam Henderson and Todd Marshall, as Oxford B ended the day disappointingly.

The whole event was closely contested with 90 individual matches completed during the day, 28 of which

extended to five games. A notable feature was the number of cadets taking part, of whom Leo Long (Newbury) was the most successful, but the two youngest ones, George Allison (Coventry) and Timmy Cooper (Leamington), also played extremely well and the next youngest, Todd Marshall (Birmingham), has ominously begun to improve his forehand attack to complement his useful long-pimpled backhand defence: they will all be forces to be reckoned with in the years to come. A special mention should also be given to Newbury, who stepped into the breach when Gloucester withdrew, and proved to be ideal replacements.

Team	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	For	Against	Points
Oxford A	5	4	1	0	24	6	9
Coventry	5	4	1	0	21	9	9
Birmingham	5	2	0	3	13	17	4
Leamington	5	1	1	3	12	18	3
Newbury	5	1	1	3	12	18	3
Oxford B	5	1	0	4	8	22	2

Top Individual Averages

1. Aaron Riley (Coventry) 10/10
2. Simon Price (Oxford A) 9/10
3. Leo Long (Newbury) 8/10
3. Jack Shardlow (Oxford A) 8/10

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