

Cheltenham 4* Report

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Oh Danny Boy!

By Geoff Ware.

Just the word 'Cheltenham' sends shivers of anticipation through the spine of thousands of racing enthusiasts the world over and is recognised as one of the greatest festivals of the sport of kings. In table tennis terms we also associate the 'Cheltenham Cotswold' with the Four Star Junior Open, a ten event competition played on eighteen tables and hosted at the Cheltenham College Sports Complex. Over many years it has been a breeding ground for future champions since its origins in 1968.

So picture the scene, it's a beautiful sunny day on Sunday the 1st of April 2012, the nets have been adjusted, tables in position, barriers in place with the blue coats ready and primed for action. The 'runners and riders' are at the start of the main event, the gruelling Junior Boys Open.

It will be a stern test of character in the way they can deal both mentally and physically with the obstacles put in front of them. Anticipation is running high with the players, coaches and parents alike eagerly awaiting the start. The players have warmed up, bats checked by the officials, drink bottles and towels at hand, the announcement from referee Gill Smith gets the groups under way and we are off and running for the £100 first prize and of course, 'Cheltenham glory'.

One of the event favourites; Danny Lawrence, nearly came to grief in the early group stage by Zac Chambers but survived that early stumble. Meanwhile, top seed Jared Patel was in full flight brushing aside the likes of the outsider Chambers, then Matthew Man to get himself into contention. The in-form George Downing was also making giant strides forward in the early exchanges gaining victories over Jack Bennett and Luke Savill to put himself into a challenging position.

Early casualties at the first stage included William Ross, Raphael Lawanson, Ryan Fellows, Tyler Anderson, George Powis, Stephen Ward and Olly Buddell.

Laurence Sweeney was looking strong as was Jarred Knowles until they both lost at the hands of Reece Placid. Lawrence was still pulling hard on the bit and seemed full of running. He cruised past Gabriel Achampong and Daniel Barna to be neck and neck with the other three leaders, Downing, Patel and Placid. The huge crowd were sensing that there could be an upset on the cards with the favourite Patel making some errors before coming through against a tough competitor in Placid in the semi-final.

The winning line was in sight now, in the other semi-final, Lawrence adjusted his game plan to keep it tight with his serves and returns and then get in first against Downing which proved to be a winning strategy with Downing a last flight casualty.

Lawrence now had to face top seed Patel for the title. The Bying Hall, Tunbridge Wells player, Lawrence took command and was full of running throughout the match to reach the winning line by securing a 3-0 victory over Patel; A new 'Kauto Star' is born!



Lawrence will hope to continue his form when he travels to the Channel Islands to mix it with the big boys. They include the likes of Darius Knight, Chris Doran, Matt Ware, Paul McCreery, Damien Nicholls and Mike Marsden who are the top seeds for the Men's event at the NatWest Jersey Open that commences from Friday the 6th to

Sunday the 8th of April.

The Junior Girls Open also played on Sunday had excitement a plenty with thrills and spills galore. Top seed Angharad Phillips got the better of Majada Yasmin at the quarter-final stage, but then came a cropper against Evangeline Collier who won an awesome five game semi-final match over the North Wales star to reach her first ever Cotswold final. It was only fitting after being a regular at Cheltenham over the last few years that the first year Grantham Academy player should reach the last stage in her final year as a Junior.



In the lower half of the draw from South Wales Nicole Hall was making relentless progress through to the last stages. She outpointed Jazmin Johns in the quarters and then got into top gear with a marathon encounter against Jas Ould to reach the final with Collier. Hall took the prize back home to Wales with a close fought 3-1 final win.

Other events staged on Sunday included the Junior Boys banded that went to Jack Bennett from Sussex by getting the better of finalist Daniel Barna. Losing semi-finalists Ryan Oyler and Alex Prosser played their part in a vibrant competition.

Up and coming Hampshire star Letitia McMullen from the Generation Club in Portsmouth took the title of Junior Girls banded winner at the tender age of 13. In the final, after trailing 0-2 in games against Majada Yasmin from Middlesex, she got her act together and showed tremendous character to win the last three games and take the title.

The Cotswold two day event started on Saturday the 31st of March with a combined entry of over 160 entrants. Some outstanding matches on day one occurred in the Cadet Boys Banded where pocket rocket Jac Jenkins last sixteen match with James Garrod finished with a win for the Welsh youngster 3-2 (11-7, 6-11, 9-11, 21-19, 17-15). Jac then lost at the hands of Josh Bennett and he in turn fell victim at the last four stage to Ryan Oyler.

Another great match that had the audience captivated was Liam Grant's epic top half semi-final attack versus chop defence win over Jamie Trevillion from Dorset that went to duece in the fifth end. Grant went one better in the final with an impressive performance over Oyler to take the Cadet Boys banded title back to Surrey.

Jazmin Johns the combination bat player from Devon won the Cadet Girls Banded event by a 3-0 games score over finalist Caitlin Williams from Wales. Laura Edwards and Olivia Churchill were the losing semi-finalists.

Hiba Feredj, the number one ranked player in the Under 13 girls category continued in her rich vein of form by winning the Cadet Girls Open competition at the expense of finalist Chrissie Slot. Hiba has improved beyond all recognition in an amazing short time of fifteen months since she first picked up a bat. The London Academy Greenhouse player trains just twelve hours a week and has immense talent. Feredj's pathway to the title was gained by victories over Zahna Hall and Laura Edwards before she dispatched Chrissie Slot in a topsy turvy five game final. Chrissie outpointed Eda Aydin and then enjoyed a walk over as Kate McGlone had to fly back to Ireland.



The most impressive final of the day was the Cadet Boys Open between Luke Savill and Jack Bennett. The play was magnificent throughout with long hard topspin rallies and total control. It was just unfortunate that Bennett was not able to win this event as it would have been a great birthday present for himself. Losing semi-finalists Hugo Pang and Gabriel Achampong played brilliantly to reach the latter stages.



Feredj made it a brace of titles as she won the Under 13's Girls event against Kate McGlone earlier in the day.

Dorset's own Hugo Pang took the Under 13's Boys title against Luke Savill by three games to one. Losing semi-finalists Josh Bennett and Robert Barker played extremely well to reach the last four.

Times are very tough for many people at the moment and it was most pleasing to report that the entry for this

year's tournament was so large. Parents and coaches alike must take a lot of the plaudits for this as without their support (both emotional and financial) and time, the players would not have been able to compete and do themselves justice.

I would like to personally thank all the members of the organising committee and volunteers from the local leagues in Gloucestershire together with so many ETTA umpires for their tremendous hard work in organising and running this popular event on the ETTA playing calendar.

So many have put their heart and soul into previous Cotswold events, none more so than Ken and Margaret Bridle, Gill Smith and Les Smith, Peter Cruwys and Graham and Lesley Slack to mention just a few.

The prizes were presented by Keith Ponting, President of the ETTA, together with the Mayor of Cheltenham, Mrs Barbara Driver.

Presentations were also made to Ken Bridle, Janie Kirby, Gill Smith and Les Smith for their outstanding contributions to promote table tennis in Gloucestershire over so many years.

For me it is a sad day to report that table tennis in the South West will be devastated at the loss of this event for next year (due to logistical, venue availability and cost implications) that we bid a fond farewell to 'Cheltenham' for the foreseeable future. There is also uncertainty facing the Woolwell Club in Plymouth for their 'greatest ever event last year' at the recent Open tournament which attracted all the countries top men and women players, plus of course the event impact it will create for local young talent in the south west region.

Results from Cheltenham as follows;

Junior Boys Open.

Danny Lawrence (K) bt Jared Patel (E) 3-1 (11-8, 6-11, 11-7, 11-8)

Junior Girls Open.

Nicole Hall (WAL) bt Evangeline Collier(E) 3-1 (11-6, 8-11, 12-10, 14-12)

Junior Boys Banded.

Jack Bennett (Sx) bt Daniel Barna (Sx) 3-1 (4-11, 11-8, 11-9, 11-8)

Junior Girls Banded.

Letitia McMullen (Ha) bt Majada Yasmin (Mi) 3-2 (7-11, 8-11, 11-7, 11-7, 11-5)

Cadet Boys Open.

Luke Savill (K) bt Jack Bennett (Sx) 3-2 (14-12, 10-12, 11-7, 3-11, 11-8)

Cadet Girls Open.

Hiba Feredj (Mi) bt Chrissie Slot (Ha) 3-2 (11-5, 7-11, 11-13, 11-3, 11-8)

Cadet Boys Banded.

Liam Grant (Sy) bt Ryan Oyler (WAL) 3-1 (7-11, 11-8, 13-11, 11-8)

Cadet Girls Banded.

Jazmin Johns (Dv) bt Caitlin Williams (WAL) 3-0 (11-6, 14-12, 11-7)

Under 13 Boys.

Hugo Pang (Do) bt Luke Savill (K) 3-1 (11-8, 11-8, 10-12, 12-10)

Under 13 Girls.

Hiba Feredj (Mi) bt Katie McGlone (IRE) 3-0 (11-7, 12-10, 11-5)

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