

Police National Championships Report

Author: Paul Stimpson

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Sarah Hudson 2012 Police National Champion

The Police National Table Tennis Championships were held between the 8th – 10th May 2012 at Potters Leisure Resort, Great Yarmouth, with over 400 competitors taking part in a variety of indoor sports comprising officers from numerous forces throughout England, Scotland and Wales.

Sarah Hudson (Bedfordshire) finally achieved her ambition of becoming National Police champion at her fifth attempt, having been runner-up on four previous occasions! However, this was to be her year as she swept all before her, winning the title without a single loss.

Sarah defeated Lesley Slack (Gloucestershire) in a one-sided final, her power game proving simply too much for her opponent, though Lesley should be extremely proud of her achievement having reached her first ever final after a pulsating five-game victory over number 2 seed Jane Ellis (Lincolnshire) coming back from 2-1 down to win 11-6 in the deciding game. Sarah defeated Elizabeth Henry (Scotland) in her semi-final, Elizabeth herself doing extremely well to reach the last four of the competition.

It was a fitting result for Sarah to gain her first ever victory as she has been one of the leading players in recent years for the British Police Table Tennis team in the European 6 Nations over the last five years and her hard work and commitment has finally paid off at National level. Whilst many would have given up after losing so many finals, Sarah showed her true fighting spirit in bouncing back and finally got rid of her bridesmaid tag!

Ian Ferguson (West Midlands) was equally as dominant in the Men's singles section, retaining his title and winning it for the third time in total thus justifying his number 1 seeding. With a 3-0 victory over Metropolitans Simon Dilkes, in a one-sided affair, Ferguson controlling the game from the start with his touch allied with power proving decisive in the final.

Ferguson had overcome Ernest Mpundu (South Yorkshire) in the semi-final, once again 3-0, whereas Simon Dilkes won a tight four-gamer against his colleague Winston Wong in the other semi-final. Yet perhaps the result of the tournament was the 3-0 demolition of number 2 seed Steve Cowley (British Transport Police) by Winston Wong in the quarter-finals. Cowley had withdrawn from the veterans event prior to the tournament in a bid to enhance his chances in the men's singles due to a nagging hamstring injury but it backfired as he was totally outplayed by Wong who ran home in three straight games 11-7, 11-9 and 11-7.

Wong was to perhaps be the unluckiest competitor at the tournament despite some incredible individual performances, as he not only lost in the men's singles semi-final, but he came runner-up in both the veterans singles where he lost 16-14 in the third to Mark Pugh (North Wales) and along with his partner James Craggs, was to be on the wrong end of a 3-0 drubbing in the veterans doubles final at the hands of Ian Marshall and Neil Harris (West Yorkshire).

Craggs was to gain some consolation though as he and his partner Simon Dilkes were to defeat reigning champions Ian Ferguson and Leigh Bradford in one of the closest men's doubles finals ever seen at the Championships. Both pairs slugged it out and before they knew it the match was poised at 2-2 and 9-9 in the decider.

Ferguson and Bradford went 10-9 up and gained their first match point only for the Metropolitan pair to remain calm and level at 10-10. The West Mids pair of Bradford and Ferguson then saved a match point against them before blowing their second match point at 12-11. Eventually it was Craggs and Dilkes who crossed the finish line, gaining a memorable 14-12 final set victory and with it the title.

In the women's doubles, Elizabeth Henry and Lorraine Swords (Scotland) defeated Debbie Murray and Sheila Price (North Wales) in another enthralling five-gamer and Debbie Murray was to be once again on the wrong

end as she and partner Mark Pugh succumbed to Janet West and Ian Marshall (West Yorkshire) in the mixed doubles final.

In the retired singles events, Bassam Mocharrafi (Metropolitan) fulfilled a lifetime ambition by winning his first ever title at the Police National Championships.

Despite losing to Michael Grout (Essex) in the group stages of the event, when the pair were to meet again in the final, Bassam rose to the occasion and reversed the result with a wonderful display of control, retrieving balls that Michael would have been forgiven for thinking were outright winners. Having duly won 3-0 (11-8, 11-8, 11-8), the joy was there for all to see as an emotional Bassam thanked everyone for their support. However, it was a gracious Michael who congratulated Bassam before anyone else and the mutual respect between both players was there for all to see.

Last years retired women's winner Fiona Cartwright (Lincolnshire) once again found herself in the final of the newly named 'Calver' cup, in recognition for the 21 years of tournament organising and refereeing by Dennis and Margaret Calver. However, Fiona was to be denied the opportunity of retaining her title as Julie Parker, returning from injury, proved too strong for Fiona and duly won the title with a wonderful display of deft touches around the table, combined with numerous winning forehand topspins.

Following the presentation of the awards, Anthony Pitt (PSUK secretary) announced that the British Police Table Tennis team had also retained their European 6 Nations title held only two weeks previously in Dronten, Holland against opposition from Holland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Austria and Germany and presented team Captain Ian Ferguson with the perpetual trophy.

Tony then proceeded to present Ian with a gift from the team in recognition for his achievements as team Captain over the previous five years, GB having their most successful period under Ian's leadership, having won the title 3/4 years the 6 Nations was held in his period of tenure as Captain. An emotional Ferguson duly accepted the gift and thanked everyone for their support and duly announced that due to work commitments he was stepping down as Captain.

Adam Ellis (Nottinghamshire) accepted the position as team Captain for the foreseeable future and Police Sport UK, along with the whole Police Table Tennis community wished him the best of luck.

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