

# Three titles for English stars in Belgium

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## Triple Success in Belgium

The “Grantham Kings”, Evangeline Collier and Emma Torkington and “Unity” Jack Bennett, Danny Lawrence and Sam Mabey took Belgium by storm at the International Youth Cup held in the pleasant city of Hasselt, Belgium from the 26th to 28th of May. It was a tournament played on a grand scale with 700 players from eleven countries competing in 6,524 table tennis matches on 187 tables in seven halls over the three-day event.

The Grantham Kings won the U18 Elite Girls and Unity won the U15 Elite Boys titles. Emma struck double gold by adding the U18 Elite Girls Singles title making this a hugely successful weekend.

In the Girls’ team event, Evangeline was unbeaten in twelve and Emma only lost to the No. 2 seed, Aleksandra Lesnicka (Poland) despite being generally on top, only for edges and nets going against her at crucial times. It happens, but Emma twice had her revenge in the singles.

In the girls’ team final against the No. 1 seeds, West Vlaanderen from Belgium, Emma provided the Grantham Kings with the perfect start with a 3-0 win against Wendel Depuydt to put them 1-0 ahead. Evie made it 2-0 and then gave a Captain’s performance to close out the match against the No. 1 seed in the singles with a fine 3-2 victory to cap a wonderful tournament for the girls.

In the boys’ team event, Unity progressed smoothly to the semis where they beat a good French team 4-2 with two wins apiece for Danny and Sam. In the final, Unity beat a strong Belgium team 4-2 with Jack Bennett leading the way this time by winning his two matches and Danny and Sam winning one each making it a real team effort.

In the singles, the boys won through their respective groups only to each lose in the first round against strong opposition, Danny to the eventual winner from Belgium, Sam to the semi-finalist from Poland and Jack fell in five.

Evie had a tough draw in the singles with the No. 1 seed in her group, which saw her finish third putting her into one of two mini qualifying tournaments against other third and fourth places and group winners from the lower girls division. Evie won through, returning her to the main draw slightly drained after the extra matches in the heat. The hall was very hot as the sun shone outside.

Emma clinched her group with a victory over the No. 2 seed Lesnicka, so it was a surprise later to meet her in the quarter-final of the singles as the Pole had returned to the last 16 via the other mini qualifying tournament and the organisers wished to keep team mates apart as far as possible. Emma imposed herself from the start and for the second time beat her without dropping a game.

The semi-final and the final of the singles were played against opponents with awkward and contrasting styles. In the semi against Michelle Modert (Luxembourg), Emma won the first two games 11-4, 11-3, but suddenly found herself at two games all as her opponent determinedly fought back. In a nail biting fifth game, Emma looking composed throughout triumphed 14-12.

The final against Jeanine Liebold on paper looked straightforward as Emma had beaten her in the team event 3-0 (11-8, 11-6, 11-5), but the German had upped her game in the singles and progressed to the final having unexpectedly knocked out Evie in the last 16, deuce in the fifth.

Emma, always behind in the first game came back to 9-9, but two good serves gave the German first blood, and

the second game followed 11-8 to put Emma two sets down. In the third, at 6-8 Emma was seemingly facing defeat and it appeared that whatever attacking shot she played, the German would get it back, but gradually Emma wore her opponent down to take it 13-11.

The fourth game saw Emma flow with attacking flair winning comfortably 11-4, before clinching the title with another cliffhanger 12-10. Emma showed great character over the weekend, twice winning sets from 10-6 down (one in fifth in the very first match of the competition).



This was a great tournament for the IYS players, providing valuable experience against foreign opposition. Both teams showed great determination and will to win. The medals were simply the icing on the cake.



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