

HEATT Harbat BATTs Open report

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BATTs OPEN HARDBAT

Report by Chris Pickard

The latest HEATT Hardbat Tournament was held at the BATTs club in Harlow on Saturday 25th August 2012. The standard of play was exceptionally high throughout with the usual friendly atmosphere which was added to by the wonderful performances of some of our emerging young players. The play and sportsmanship in this tournament was a great advert, not just for Hardbat but for Table Tennis itself.

If proof was needed that Hardbat is gaining in popularity, it was clearly shown by the fact that a small party of spectators (yes, you've read that correctly folks, **SPECTATORS!**) travelled from Jersey to watch because they had heard of our HEATT tournaments and wanted to see it first hand. They sat enthralled throughout the day and enjoyed themselves enough to have said they will be coming to watch our next tournament, which is on 20th October 2012 at the Draycott Club, Derbyshire.

Two outstanding 16 year olds, Luke Walsh and James Denyer, showed superb technique and skill with huge improvement, as well as outstanding temperaments, to qualify for the Band 1 knock-out stages. These two very likeable and modest young lads are now starting to trouble the established stars and it won't be very long before they start to beat them regularly.

Three other stars of the future also showed their promise. A budding actor, the talented 12 year old Adam Wilson was playing in his first Hardbat tournament and found himself in a tough group. Whilst he didn't win any matches he impressed all with both his play and his temperament. His younger brother, 11 year old Sam Wilson has played regularly in our tournaments and he is certainly starting to show his ability now, with two good Group wins against very experienced opposition to qualify for the Band 2 knock-out stage.

However, the star of this tournament was undoubtedly 10 year old Ethan Walsh with some jaw-dropping displays of controlled hitting on both wings that belied his age, young Ethan regularly brought the whole hall to a standstill while everyone clapped and cheered his skills. With four Group wins against very good opponents which included both attackers and defenders he showed an adaptability and temperament that is rarely seen in a player of this age. He easily qualified for the Band 2 knock-out, and was so very close to qualifying for Band 1. A remarkable performance throughout the day. Well done Ethan!

Each qualifying Group had 10 players which guaranteed everyone a minimum of 9 matches. The top 4 gained a place in the Band 1 knock-out, with the players finishing in 5th > 8th places playing in the Band 2 Knock-out.

Qualifying Group 1

This Group went pretty much to form with top seeded Trevor Kerry winning all his games 2-0 but was taken close 21/19, 21/17 by Paul Worrallo who finished 2nd in the Group and by Martin Gunn 21/19, 21/18 who finished 3rd. Martin was given a huge fright by James Denyer 22/20, 19/21, 21/15 who, with some solid and consistent play, finished 4th. Sam Wilson had a good win against newcomer Mick Bushell and an excellent victory against the experienced Jimmy Farrow 7/21, 21/17, 21/17 to clinch his place in the Band 2 knock-out.

Qualifying Group 2

A bit of a topsy-turvy group with some surprise results. The no.2 seed Graham Sandley was serenely dispatching

everyone 2-0, with the exception of Jimmy Walsh who took him to 3. Jimmy led the Walsh clan's excellent day by beating both Tony West and Egle Adomylete to finish in 2nd place. However, the no.5 seed Tony West was having a bad day losing to both Jimmy and Dave Langham. Another out of form was our leading lady Egle Adomylete, losing to both Jimmy and Tony and only just edging out Dave Langham 23/21 in the third. The result was a 3-way tie for places 3>5 and on count-back Tony West was 3rd, Dave Langham 4th and Egle finishing 5th and so only qualifying for Band 2. An interesting newcomer was Emma Rose who qualified for Band 2 and showed some fine attacking skill and that, with more practise and consistency and experience in Hardbat, she will be a hard player to beat in the future and could be a threat to Egle as our leading lady.

Qualifying Group 3

A highly competitive group, with all three leading players beating each other. On count-back no.3 seed Joe Kennedy finished 1st, Colin Wilson (father of Adam & Sam) was 2nd and no.6 seed Billy Pegg 3rd. Robert Harmon got the better of Gary Young to grab the last qualifying spot for Band 1. While all this was going on Ethan Walsh was lighting up the tournament, with a narrow loss to a good defender, Gary Young 22/24, 21/23, a magnificent win 17/21, 25/23, 26/24 against that wily old campaigner Dave Bowles, a 2-0 win against Frank Chapple and finally a gutsy win against newcomer Dave Miller 19/21, 21/19, 21/19.

Qualifying Group 4

Another sparkling display from a Walsh! This time it was Luke's turn. Expected to finish about 6th in this group he had great wins against the higher ranked Fred Dove, Keith Baker, and Alan Cherry and, to top it all, he beat no.4 seed Chris Bartram in a comfortable 2-0, his only loss being to no.8 seed Chris Pickard. Chris Pickard then lost to Chris Bartram which resulted in a 3 way tie at the top. On count back Chris Pickard was 1st, Luke Walsh 2nd and Chris Bartram 3rd. Fred Dove qualified in 4th place.

Band 2 Knock-Out (for players finishing 5th>8th in the Qualifying Groups)

Round 1 threw up some close games with Dave Bowles beating John Monk 22/20, 21/23, 21/15 and Chris Jacob beating the higher rated Keith Baker 21/11, 14/21, 23/21 but the match of the round was Django Fung's narrow win against Ethan Walsh. The whole hall stopped to watch, and clap, and cheer as this game reached its climax with Ethan hitting ball after ball and Django using all his pen-hold guile and experience to keep making Ethan play just one more ball. Django squeaked through 17/21, 21/16, 22/20 and both players were given a well deserved standing ovation at the end.

The quarter-finals were a bit of an anti-climax after the "Fung v Walsh" epic, with 2-0 wins for Andy Warner over Dave Bowles, Django Fung continuing his good form with a win over Alan Cherry and Egle Adomylete showing her class against Clifford Grant. The only match to go to three was Gary Young's 21/11, 17/21, 21/13 win over Chris Jacob.

The semi-final's resulted in a close win for Andy Warner over his club-mate Gary Young 21/18, 21/19 and for Egle Adomylete against Django Fung 21/18, 21/16.

The final was a classic attack v defence with Andy retrieving and coming in to hit some big back hands when Egle didn't keep it short enough and with Egle hitting from both wings and then putting in the drop-shot's. The first game went to Andy 21/17 with the second to Egle, with her hitting and drop-shot's proving to good, 21/13. Andy built up a useful lead in the third game with his patient defence and big hit's but seemed to tire and lose confidence at the end and Egle somehow sneaked back into the game and pinched it at the death 21/19.

Band 1 Knock-Out (for players finishing 1st>4th in the Qualifying Groups)

Round 1 of the main event saw comfortable 2-0 wins for no.1 seed Trevor Kerry over Fred Dove, for no.6 seed Billy Pegg over Jimmy Walsh, no.7 seed Martin Gunn over Luke Walsh, no.3 seed Joe Kennedy over Dave Langham and for no.2 seed Graham Sandley over Robert Harman. No. 8 seed Chris Pickard had to use all his experience to beat the confident James Denyer 13/21, 21/16, 21/18 and Colin Wilson had the usual epic game with no.5 seed

Tony West winning 22/20, 21/23, 21/15 and Paul Worrallo had a good 16/21, 21/18, 21/12 win over no.4 seed Chris Bartram.

In the quarters there was a terrific hitting and counter hitting game between Trevor Kerry and Billy Pegg which went Billy's way 17/21, 22/20, 21/13. Joe Kennedy used all his guile and clever angles to beat Martin Gunn 21/19, 21/10. Colin Wilson showed all his class and all-round technique to beat Chris Pickard 21/12, 21/13. Graham Sandley's class eventually told in a game of big-hitting with Paul Worrallo 18/21, 21/13, 21/10.

The semi-finals had 3 lefties out of 4 with Billy Pegg the odd one out, and Joe Kennedy's angles were just too good for Billy with scores of 21/14, 21/7. Those two good friends, ex-England and Middlesex players Graham Sandley and Colin Wilson were expected to produce a close game but Graham was on fire and in no mood to take prisoners and simply hit Colin off in a very impressive display 21/10, 21/10.

The final saw Graham in exactly the same form as the semi and, trying everything as he did to counter Graham, Joe just couldn't contain a rampant Graham, with some of Graham's sublime backhand hitting showing his world class pedigree. A very worthy winner indeed, who played impeccably throughout the day, with no-one really being able to get close enough to put him under pressure. On this sort of form he is clearly the best English player and it's going to take a special performance from someone to beat him.

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