

Chinese storm East Midlands 4*

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A Chinese Tsunami hits Grantham

By Geoff Ware,

A tidal wave of seismic proportions devastated the Grantham Meres Leisure Centre on Saturday afternoon, 12th January. For those souls who were there and witnessed the awesome power of total destruction and devastation to anyone who stood in its path, it was truly mind blowing.

I hasten to add I am not describing the terrible flooding that has unfortunately affected huge parts of the country and in this case no lives were lost. However, pride was severely dented for the all the British Junior Girls who took part in the Bribar East Midlands 4* event as to even dare stand in the way of a two pronged Chinese tsunami invasion emanating from Jiwen Xu and Yang Yi.

These two quiet unassuming, toned and supremely athletic young ladies who are regional players from the province of Guangdong, near to Hong Kong, graced our presence with an awesome display of extraordinary proportions to reach the Junior Girls' final.

In the six weeks since their arrival in Skegness with their mentor Hong Hong Peebles, as students in a reciprocal exchange with the Grammar School on the east coast of Lincolnshire, they have made a huge impression wherever they travel and are in great demand.

Unknown and unseeded in the event, they both powered their way through in opposite halves of the draw to meet in the last match and entertain the lucky few who stayed until early evening with a master-class exhibition of table tennis that most British girls can only dream of.

The contrasting styles of all out attack from the 13-year-old Jiwen Xu to that of her older team-mate, 16-year-old Yang Yi with a 'Joanna Parker' style like defence mixed with opportunist attack, made it an exciting final to savour.

You did not want it to end with rallies of sheer brilliance from both players. The tornado like third ball attack from her 'hurricane' rubbers said it all with a mixture of topspin and flat hitting from Jiwen Xu that was simply breathtaking, and she ran out a fairly comfortable Bribar East Midlands Junior Girls' Champion with a score of 3-0 (11-4, 11-4, 11-9).

Top seed for the Junior Girls' Open event was Diana Rusinova from Latvia who had recently moved home to Derby with her mother and is now playing her table tennis at the Draycott and Long Eaton Club. The number 2 Latvian junior star was made to work for her quarter-final place against a gritty display from local player Olivia

Churchill who took her to five games and was leading 2-1 in legs.

Having survived that Lincolnshire battle from Churchill, Rusinova had to face the Asian chopper Yang Yi in the quarters. Yang had earlier destroyed all before her with her almost unreturnable defensive style to reach the last eight. The Latvian did manage to take a game off the Chinese chopper but that was as good as it got with Yang Yi safely through to await her semi-final opponent.

That turned out to be Nottingham's Amy Humphreys who had beaten last 16 competitor Jaz Johns and then outpointed Isobel Ashley in the quarter-final to set up a last four contest. In the trio of one-sided games that followed, Amy could only take 12 points off the Chinese defender as that was the huge gap that existed between the two players.

The lower half of the draw was totally dominated by Jiwen Xu who was in a different class to any of her group opponents – taking no time at all to blast away Megan Knowles in the quarter-final 3-0 after Knowles had previously beaten Katie McGlone from Ireland in the first round.

Lois Peake, the second seed, had eased through her group and then took four games to brush aside Ella Patel in the last 16 stage. She then had to face her Generation 2 Club team-mate Letitia McMullen who had previously come through comfortably against first round adversary Bhavika Mistry. That last eight match was a very close three games going to the England ranked at 7 Junior Lois Peake.

In the first semi-final could anyone get in the way of the Chinese cyclone from Jiwen Xu? It started as a sweet then sour experience as, to her immense credit, the left-handed Peake fought bravely to unexpectedly take the first game 11-6. A fine opening start from the Sussex star who played with great courage and shot making skills to take the first ever game off the Chinese Academy member.

However, it was not to be as Jiwen Xu took command of the match to take the next three games but Peake really impressed with a spirited display coupled with sharp footwork. She is another player from the Charlie Childs' stable of stars who has the potential to go right to the top.

Jiwen Xu ran out a worthy Junior Girls' winner over her team-mate Yang Yi and will take all the stopping in Sunday's Cadet Girls' event. To get to the level this Chinese pair has attained has taken sheer determination, hard work and thousands of hours at the Guangdong Table Tennis academy. Without doubt either of these girls would have won the boys' event!

Junior Boys



Marcus Giles and Tom Jarvis pick up their awards

Just over 100 British competitors fought tooth and nail to be crowned the Junior Boys' (Under18) Open Champion but as the event reached the latter stages it became clear that the younger cadets (under 15) were to totally dominate this event.

The top 3 seeds, Danny Lawrence, Liam McTiernan and Adam Harrison (all juniors), fell by the wayside not even

reaching the last four, whilst another junior Lawrence Sweeney (S7) was an early casualty in the round of last 32.

The last four players left standing were all cadets, namely Luke Savill from Kent and Surrey's Marcus Giles in the top half of the draw, with Chris Wheeler from Scotland and Tom Jarvis from Lincolnshire remaining in the lower half of the draw.

Luke Savill was in devastating form to brush aside the likes of Luke Walsh, Lobsong Lama, Danny Lawrence and Gabriel Achampong to reach the semis, whilst the unflappable and highly talented Marcus Giles saw off the challenges posed by Joseph Pilkington, Joshua Robinson and Adam Harrison to take his place in the last four.

Lower half semi-finalist Chris Wheeler from Scotland disposed of players the calibre of Finn Morgan-Bayliss, Joshua Bennett and Jack Bennett from Sussex (Jack had earlier beaten Joseph Langham Ferreira) to take his place in the semi-final. Also making his passageway to join Chris was the effervescent Tom Jarvis who gained excellent victories over Danny Lewis, Alex Gillen and second seed Liam McTiernan in a five game belter to make up the final quartet.

The roller-coaster last four match between Luke Savill and Marcus Giles was a classic encounter. Luke raced to a two games lead only to be pegged back by Marcus to level at 2-2. The final match winning game was so close to call and huge credit to both players for giving their all. Marcus Giles just shaded the last game 11-8 to reach the final.

Meanwhile, on adjacent courts, the often vocal Tom Jarvis had a very close three game contest with Chris Wheeler to set up the Junior Boys' final with Marcus Giles.

A large crowd had gathered for the final and it lived up to high expectations.

Brilliant and typical fast flowing rallies was the menu on offer from both these very talented players which continued to be the thread of the match with no quarter given.

A top class display that kept the spectators on the edge of their seats with the one year older Marcus Giles at just 14 years of age edging out a brave Tom Jarvis 3-0 (11-8, 11-9, 12-10), and taking the Briar East Midlands Junior Boys' title and trophy back to Surrey.

Banded events



There were three other events staged earlier in the morning that included the Junior Boys' band 1 and band 2, plus the Junior Girls' band 1. All of these competitions were fiercely fought with several groups going to count back right down to points won to determine the winner.

First to finish was the Junior Girls' band 1 and that title went over the channel to Ireland in the capable hands of the unseeded Rebecca Finn. She defeated number 1 seed Bethany Farnworth from Lancashire in a topsy-turvy five game encounter after trailing 2-0.

In the boys' banded events only one player progressed through the groups making life very tough to qualify.

Omar Khassal took the Boys band 1 event by storm to outplay Danny Lewis from Middlesex in the final, whilst the Boys' band 2 champion was Joseph Clark from the Northfield club in Cleveland who enjoyed a 3-0 final victory against Solomon Hayes from Middlesex.

Thank you to all the competitors that took part and especially the parents and coaches who gave up their valuable time to help the youngsters through the long day.

The 'real stars and unsung heroes' of the East Midlands event are the extremely hard working team of volunteers of the organising committee who included Steve Welch, Mike Payne, Margaret Welch, Ken Eliot, Margaret Calver, Cathy Steeples, Betty Brown, and Joyce Stephenson. Without these special people working for the benefit of others year after year there would be no event.

Twenty-four ETTA umpires worked long and tirelessly through 16 hours of play, officiating over hundreds of matches to keep the show rolling and they deserve a huge vote of thanks.

Thank you also to Bribar who sponsored the event and were kept busy all day on the trade stand, offering their expert advice on equipment and all table tennis related information.



Results from Day 1.

Junior Girls' Singles: Jiwen Xu (Chn) bt Yang Yi (Chn) 3-0 (11-4, 11-4, 11-9)

Junior Boys' Singles: Marcus Giles (Sy) bt Tom Jarvis (Li) 3-0 (11-8, 11-9, 12-10)

Junior Girls' Band 1: Rebbecca Fin (IRL) bt Bethany Farnworth (La) 3-2 (6-11, 4-11, 11-4, 11-8, 11-8)

Junior Boys' Band 1: Omar Khassal (Mi) beat Danny Lewis (Mi) 3-1 (11-2, 8-11, 12-10, 11-6)

Junior Boys' Band 2: Joseph Clark (Cv) beat Solomon Hayes (Wa) 3-0 (11-8, 11-9, 11-6)



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