

Jack Petchey Finals captivate London's youth

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The victorious Morpeth Acedemy Under-19 side with ETТА CEO Richard Yule

By Phil Jeffery (Pictures courtesy of Michael Loveder)

A fantastic turnout from competitors and parents alike made for a captivating day of sport at the 2013 Jack Petchey London Schools' Team Table Tennis Finals.

The Jack Petchey foundation's annual team event was a rousing success that saw a host of schools from all reaches of London competing against one another.

Dozens of tables were set out at the brilliant venue at the Redbridge Sports & Leisure Centre in Essex, with exciting features including an interactive hands-free table tennis Xbox game and even a robotic opponent to test the player's skills to the max!

The matches were brilliantly contested throughout the tournament, with hundreds of youngsters from different age groups showing off their skills to earn a place in their respective finals. All of the spectators were treated to watching an impressively high standard of table tennis along the way.

Eventually a winner had to emerge. In the girl's U-19 category, Bilkis Begum, Sayeeda Miah, Danae Rogers and Catherine Maltby claimed victory for Morpeth Academy School, beating City of Westminster 6-2.

Then came the turn of the boys to battle it out for glory. Burlington Danes Academy, represented in the U-19s by Igor Morais, Ezra Myers, Daniel Ozoholie and Daniel Nwafor, edged a close encounter against Ernest Bevin by five games to three.



Burlington Danes Under-19 star player Igor Morais in action

The absorbing atmosphere was felt by everyone involved in the tournament right up to the final presentations, which congratulated each winner in their respective age groups.

But it was clear throughout the day that winning was not the sole aim of the competition, nor was it the attitude of the participating schools.

Richard Hudson, the tournament's organiser, said: "I think one of the most important things is for the children to come to an event like this and see a set-up with so many tables.

"I think it's memorable for children. I was a teacher for a very long time and it's these sorts of things that stick in your mind more than the lessons that happen in school. Also, there are a lot of players here with a lot of skill, so in a sense this is the pay-off for all those hours of practice. Whether you're at a high level or not, it's the chance to show off what you can do."

Also in attendance was Richard Yule, Chief Executive of the English Table Tennis Association. He said: "I think this is a superb event. Table tennis is a sport that is becoming more and more popular in schools in and out of the curriculum and it's shown here. It gets to parts of the community that other sports will never reach and it's very accessible. You can hear the schools really get behind their teammates. The standard of the competition's improving each year.

"Our support from Jack Petchey has been remarkable. It's a tremendous help and we're really grateful to the foundation for supporting this whole initiative. Their contribution has enabled us to up the presentation, the prizes at the end, everything surrounding the event. It just lifts the whole enterprise."

Stephan Hastings, Deputy Principle of London Academy School in Edgware, was likewise full of praise for the tournament, saying: "It's a great experience, absolutely. We want our players to experience the day out, and for them to see the passion and the enthusiasm is great."

The competitors themselves clearly adore the sport, with one young group saying: "We enjoy it because it's more competitive than other sports. You've got to think more and use your brain. It's easier to make friends and fit in, too.

"We love days like these. We're buzzing!"



Judging by the enthusiasm seen here, it looks as if next year's installment will attract an even higher amount of interest.

2013 Jack Petchey London Schools' Team Finals Results:

Boys Under-11:

Fox Primary School (round-robin) (Edward Sonin, Kidi Martin-Paulo, Saul Sarne, Benji Mencer)

Girls Under-13:

Burlington Danes Academy (round-robin) (Demi-Chante Reid, Starsky Waithe, Paulina Gornika, Amika Salihu)

Boys Under-13:

Burlington Danes Academy (Jassin Seddik, Nathaniel Nwafor, Cachevel Hirjah, Lucillo Burrel) **5-3 Morpeth** (Jamie Dignum, Rijul Roychoudhury, Murhad Hussain, Rayan Aitsillaibi)

Girls Under-16:

Bridge Academy (round-robin) (Zahna Hall, Zeniece Hall, Viona Fejzullahu, Sofia Enyi)



English Cadet international Gabriel Achampong focuses for London Academy Under-16s

Boys Under-16:

London Academy (Gabriel Achampong, Karim Khassal, Omar Khassal, Charlie Austen) **6-2 Ernest Bevin** (Lobsang Lama, Joseph Langham-Ferreira, Ovi Eyarhono, Andre Dunkley)

Girls Under-19:

Morpeth Academy (Bilkis Begum, Sayeeda Miah, Danae Rogers, Catherine Maltby) **6-2 City of Westminster** (Gwendelyn Bulosan, Jillian Allen, Amber Bleasby, Namu-Ujin Natsagnyam)

Boys Under-19:

Burlington Danes Academy (Igor Morais, Ezra Myers, Daniel Ozoholie, Daniel Nwafor) **5-3 Ernest Bevin** (Murray Wilson, Anthony Patton, Ross Hogen, Kudis)

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