

Walker claims maiden under 21s crown

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Number 1 Junior Sam Walker won his maiden Men's Under 21s title following a dramatic final victory over an inspired Richard Andrews.

Walker, who had impressed on the international circuit over the last 12 months, was extremely professional in his route to the final with straight games victories over Danny Lawrence, David McBeath and Sean Cullen in the knock-out stages.

Walker's victory over last year's runner-up McBeath was particularly impressive with the first two games a sheer display of dominance from deep in the court which led him to two 11-5 games. Although the third was a close 20-18 game, it was a deserved quarter-final win.

On the other half of the draw, top seed and defending champion, Gavin Evans was surprisingly knocked out by Lewis Gray in the quarter-finals. Gray took the first game 11-5, before the former European Cadet Champion raced back into a 2-1 lead with 11-9 and 11-4 games.

However, Gray wasn't finished and blew his opponent aside with an 11-2 fourth game before securing a shock victory with an 11-4 decider to set up a semi-final with Andrews who had beaten Daniel Basterfield in another five-game thriller.

Similar to the rest of the tournament, the semi-final between the pair was full of tension, drama and high-quality table tennis over a pulsating five ends.

Gray won the first game 11-8 but Andrews retaliated 13-11 in the second. After two more games were shared between the duo, Andrews opened up a sizeable gap in the decider 8-4. However, Gray pulled back to 9-9 before agonisingly falling short against Andrews who clenched his fists and wiped his brow on sealing match point at 11-9.



More was to come from the final as the dogged Andrews gave Walker more problems than he had faced all day. The Junior no. 1 appeared in full control after an 11-7 first game but Andrews opened up a 5-0 lead in the second, eventually converting it 11-3.

What followed in the third game was purely sensational entertainment. Andrews saved an amazing five game points to eventually take the lead with a 17-15 mammoth end that would grace any title-decider.

However, Walker refused to give in and levelled the match at 2-2 with an 11-8 fourth game – taking the third final of the day into a deciding fifth game.

The game drifted to 9-9 before the drama climaxed with an incredible rally won by Andrews after Walker's clip of the net flew long for 10-9. However, a second consecutive net for Walker helped him to save the match point before earning, and winning, his only match point to strike a huge blow to the outstanding effort Andrews had put in all day.

Sam Walker bt Richard Andrews 3-2 (11-7, 3-11, 15-17, 11-8, 12-10)



Mutual respect after an incredible final

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