

Sibley beats Parker in 7-game thriller

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Kelly Sibley retained her English Women's Singles National title after an absorbing seven-game final with great rival Joanna Parker which saw both players wear their hearts on their sleeves.

Both players were sensational throughout and only a contest of titanic proportions as they played out was worthy of their immense effort. In the end, Sibley's pure guts and determination saw her over the line to a third consecutive title.

With everything to play for the first game was always going to be important to see what form the long-term team mates are in. Throughout the majority of the opener it was Parker in control with a mix of her defensive qualities and surprise offensive attacks. However, from 8-6 up, Sibley's attacking prowess took control and forced Parker back – eventually securing the game 11-9 on a long rally which resulted in Parker netting a chop.

With the momentum still with her after that late rush in the first game, the defending champion opened up an early gap in the second game after Parker's attempted counter-attack failed to find the table.

The English no. 1 cut a frustrated figure as she fell 9-4 behind, attempting more offensive backhands, but it was to no prevail with Sibley carving open a 2-0 lead (11-7) with Parker slicing into the net.

When Sibley led 4-0 in the third game the match appeared to be quickly falling from Parker's grasp but a spirited fightback got her level at 4-4 through a combination of wonderful defensive strokes and a measure of skilful athleticism.

Parker earned a 6-5 lead through her newly found forehand topspin game and managed to recover from 10-8 down to level the game 10-10 after Sibley netted twice. The defending champion then went long in consecutive points to hand Parker a way back in.

In a crucial fourth game Parker assumed control at 7-3 and 8-4 but Sibley turned on the power and threw the kitchen sink at the remainder of her forehands and she won seven consecutive points to open up a vital 3-1 gap.

The English no. 1s never-say-die attitude was tested to its maximum as she continued to repel attack after attack from the aggressive Sibley. In the fifth game her spirit gave her a 5-2 lead but once she was closed to 5-5, Parker was forced to take her time out.

It worked more as a mental boost than anything, allowing the top seed to keep on top of her game and force a game point at 10-9. Although Sibley saved it, she couldn't save a second and Parker pulled a game back 12-10.

She continued her form in the sixth game, wearing down Sibley who began to look tired. Her six-game victory

over Tin-Tin Ho and seven-game victory against Karina Le Fevre taking the sting out of the attacking players shots.

Parker held her nerve to win the sixth game 11-8 and set up an enthralling deciding end for the title.

Sibley established a 5-2 lead in the seventh and was shocked to see Parker's return hit the table, she could only pop up the reply but Parker's forehand struck the net and looped wide giving Sibley some breathing space.

It was all she needed to rejuvenate herself and she was positive throughout the rest of the end to secure a fourth singles title, and third in a row with an 11-4 game.

Kelly Sibley bt Joanna Parker 4-3 (11-9, 11-7, 10-12, 11-8, 10-12, 8-11, 11-4)

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