

# Stokes victorious in first WCPP Qualifier

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## Stokes denies Neale in Qualifier Classic

Barry Hearn's Matchroom Sports World Championship of Ping Pong Series exploded into action at the first qualifier event and delivered a World class extravaganza of epic Ping Pong play with the Brit, Ashley Stokes, coming out victorious against a strong international field.

Eighty players from seven Countries, including the Nigerian ante-post favourite Kazeem Adeleke and strong Dutch contingent, descended at the BATTs Table Tennis Club in Harlow dreaming of qualifying for the Matchroom Sport WCPP Finals, which are being shown live on Sky Sports over the weekend 4/5<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

Play commenced with eight groups of 10 competitors, the top four qualifying through to the last 32 knockout phase.

Group 1 saw the favourite Kazeem Adeleke comfortably through alongside the classy Adam Nutland and defender Richard Hutchinson. Keith Baker provided the first seeding upset by defeating Kevin James and Clifford Scott through his classic Chinese penholder style attack.

England's Chris Doran, last year's WCPP semi-finalist, comfortably won Group 2. Gabriel Achampong impressed many with his silky attack qualifying fourth behind Israeli, Eli Baraty, and Fred Dove.

Legendary 68-year-old and five-time English National Champion, Denis Neale, won Group 3, but not before being pushed to the limit by youngster and newcomer Omar Khassal. Jimmy Walsh eased through in second but drama ensued as Chris Pickard, Omar Khassal and Wayne Shaw all finished tied on 6 wins and 3 defeats. Khassal unfortunately missed qualification on count back.

Graham Sandley, the ex-England No 1 and top seed in Group 4 was taken down in straight sets by the ever impressive Egle Adomelyte from Lithuania, they were joined in qualification by Dave Tiplady and Derek Balding who beat the top English woman Emma Vickers on count back.

Group 5 proved to be full of quality and surprises with eventual winner Ashley Stokes only managing third spot behind young rising stars Luke Walsh and James Denyer. Vidal Graham, a previous top 30 ranked UK player showed his class by beating the highly entertaining Andy Warner into 4th place.

The strong Dutch contingent was spearheaded by the charismatic Lars Adema and he duly obliged by winning Group 6, however Paul Worrallo, a sandpaper expert, only just managed to qualify in 4<sup>th</sup> after losing to

Philippines' JoJo Seniorin and club mate Ryan Fellows.

Steffen Greup, another top ranked Dutchman improved as the day progressed to win Group 7.

Joe Kennedy held the challenge of the classy newcomer and experienced English player Michael O'Driscoll to take Group 8.

The last 32 knock out phase started with a huge win for Paul Worrallo after he outplayed No 1 seed Kazeem Adeleke to win in straight sets and blow the tournament wide open. JoJo Seniorin also belied his 80/1 odds by winning a tight match against Fred Dove.

Denis Neale had a classic encounter with James Denyer in the last 16. James won the first leg and held two match points in the second, but Neale kept fighting and producing vintage attacking play, which was matched by Denyer, only for Neale to win tight in the third and set up a mouth watering quarter-final clash against his fellow Ex-English No 1 Graham Sandley. Neale again lost the first leg and it looked ominous for the veteran, but using his vast experience he managed to pin down his opponent on the backhand wing, and somehow managed to fight his way into the semi-finals by winning the last two legs.

Ashley Stokes began to come good as he defeated Eli Baraty and powered through against Group 8 winner Joe Kennedy. He faced the buoyant Paul Worrallo in the quarter-finals and just came through in three sets with some incredible attacking from both players.

Another classic international encounter saw Lithuania's Egle Adomeleyte go the distance with JoJo Seniorin. Egle's sublime backhand attack was neutralised by Seniorin's defensive craft and classic counter-hitting. The match swung both ways, but it was Adomeleyte who marched into the quarter-finals.

It was here that Adomeleyte had another duel, this time with young Luke Walsh. This was attack versus attack with winners flying from all angles. Adomeleyte looked beaten as Walsh powered to 13-10 in the final leg, requiring just two points for victory, but somehow she raised her game to squeeze through by the narrowest of margins 16-14.

Chris Doran eased his way to the semi-finals with wins over new boys Vidal Graham and Mike O'Driscoll. In the quarter-finals he demonstrated his world class ability by producing truly amazing defence and counter hitting skills to dispatch the strong attack of Adam Nutland.

The semi-finals saw Stokes stamp his mark on the tournament with a ruthless display of potent attack against Adomeleyte, winning in straight sets.

The second semi-final was a classic; Neale's relentless attack against Doran's elegant and assured defence. Doran looked, and played like the favourite, against the tiring Neale. The crowd were in awe as each point produced amazingly long rallies; both players gave everything and sent the match into a deciding leg. Neale found extra reserves of will and determination and took the final leg 15-8. The standard of play from both players in this match was simply incredible.

So it was an all-British final, which saw Stokes start strongly as he went head to head against Neale's attack. The rallies kept flowing and Stokes took the first game 15-10. It looked all over, but once more Neale fought his way back into the match with some vintage winners taking the second set 15-10. The final leg was absorbing for the crowd with phenomenal shots powering over from both players, but it was Stokes that produced the goods, winning 15-8.

The consolation event, for players who finished outside of the top 4 positions at the group stage, saw Suffolk's Andy Warner against Staffordshire's Jason Jones in the final. Jones took the initiative sending attacking shots flying, but Warner matched his opponent with superb defence and counter hitting to take the match close in the third.

The World Championship of Ping Pong series continues on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2013. [See the full results from the first event here.](#)

For more information about The World Championship of Ping Pong Series see [www.worldchampionshipofpingpong.net](http://www.worldchampionshipofpingpong.net) or email [f.dove@btinternet.com](mailto:f.dove@btinternet.com) for more info.

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