

South East secure epic team double at School Games

Author: **Russell Moore**

Posted On: **September 14, 2013**



Delighted SE pair of Weerasinghe and Lawrence, picture courtesy of Trevor Parsons

Boys' Team

England South East's Danny Lawrence earned sweet redemption after sealing a dramatic team victory for his region in the final of the Boys' Team event.

Lawrence who, by his own standards had been struggling for form throughout the early stages of the 2013 Sainsbury's School Games, won an epic five-set encounter with Adam Harrison to seal an outstanding 4-3 win in one of the best team finals ever witnessed at the School Games.

With six of the seven matches going the full distance, there was barely anything to choose between the South East and Midlands boys who absorbed the audience in a terrific display of top-class youth table tennis.

Both South East and Midlands had made the final comfortably, the former beating England North East 4-0, while the latter defeated a plucky Wales side 4-1.

When the final began no-one could have predicted the drama to unfold.

First of all, Sam Mabey recovered from 2-1 down to give Midlands the lead with a 3-2 win over Jared Patel. Then, in a similar vein, Helshan Weerasinghe bounced back from 2-0 down against Adam Harrison to level the scores for the South East.

The title looked to be heading to the Midlands as Tom Jarvis beat the frustrated Lawrence, before Mabey and Harrison produced another recovery from 2-0 down to defeat Weerasinghe and Patel 3-2.

However, the South East fight back began from 3-1 down with Weerasinghe winning his singles 3-1 against Mabey (the only match not to go to five) before Patel brilliantly earned a deciding fixture by shrugging off a 1-11 third game to win consecutive 11-6 games to recover from 2-1 down against Jarvis.

With the hall empty except for the final, all focus was on a crucial title-deciding match between Lawrence and Harrison – and boy did they deliver.

Lawrence was the first to strike, earning an 8-2 lead before holding his nerve to win the opening game 11-8. Then Harrison fought back in the second game but found himself 2-0 down as Lawrence again won a close end 13-11.

It was now or never for the Midlands player who plucked up the courage and determination to win the next two

games 11-9 and 11-8 and force an incredible final set with everything resting on the result.

However, just as it appeared that the tide had turned, the mercurial Lawrence found his 'A' game once again to see off his nerves and fend off Harrison in an 11-5 final game, thus securing the title for South East in the process.

In the third-fourth place play-off, Wales (Conor Edwards, Ryan Oyler, Chris Griffiths and Jac Jenkins) secured a bronze medal with a comfortable 4-0 win over England North East (Abhijay Mishra, David Thompson, James Hobson and Bradley Wood).



Lois Peake and Yuki Wat (SE) seal a crucial doubles, picture courtesy of Trevor Parsons

Girls' Team

It was a double triumph for the South East as the girls, in slightly less dramatic fashion, had earlier secured their own title against England South West.

Led by England star Tin-Tin Ho, who remained unbeaten throughout the tournament, the South East girls won 4-2 with a decisive doubles win actually the reason behind the success.

South West Non-Playing Captain, Rachael Trevorrow, had taken the gamble to drop her no. 1 Maria Tsaptsinos to number three to maximize her potential by avoiding the dangerous Tin-Tin.

It nearly worked as South West took a 2-1 lead following wins by Tsaptsinos (3-1 vs Torkington) and Letitia McMullan (3-1 vs Yuki Wat) after Tin-Tin's opening win against Jazmin Johns.

However, the South West's brilliant plan was foiled by Yuki Wat and Lois Peake who won the doubles encounter 3-0, meaning that the South East just needed one more Tin-Tin victory and one from Torkington.

Duly both players obliged in the next two fixtures in straight games as Tsaptsinos was left to watch her teammates fall 4-2 to the favourites, as the gamble narrowly failed to pay off.

In the third-fourth place play-off, Northern Ireland (Emma Ludlow, Rebecca Finn, Hannah Lynch-Dawson and Erin Thompson) secured bronze with a 4-2 win over England Midlands (Olivia Churchill, Isobel Ashley, Amy Humphreys and Nicole Bird).



Daniel Bullen en route to the decisive victory, picture courtesy of Trevor Parsons

Mixed Disability Team

In a reflection of the drama of the rest of the day, the mixed disability event also went down to the wire as England Midlands and Wales fought out a winner-takes-all final fixture from the round-robin event.

Although Midlands had previously lost to England North East, the fact that they won their remaining games meant a victory against the Welsh would seal the title with the positions decided by head-to-head record and not countback.

It was Wales who made the best start in the 'final' with the undefeated Lawrence John retaining his 100% record in the competition with a 3-0 win over Craig Allen.

However, after Patrick Cox beat Ashley Wray 3-0 it came down to Daniel Bullen (MID) against Cellan Hall (WAL) for the title.

In one of the best competed wheelchair matches of the weekend, Bullen narrowly beat Hall 3-1 (11-8, 13-15, 13-11, 11-5) to steal the title for Midlands by virtue of their head-to-head record.

England North East finished strongly to end up in a bronze medal position. Although they lost two of their first matches to Midlands and Wales, they won all their remaining games to take home a medal.

Credit goes out to all the players who produced a sublime day of table tennis at Ponds Forge. If that standard remains for the singles, Sunday could be another fantastic day of action from the 2013 Sainsbury's School Games.

Results:

Boys' Team:

England South East 4-3 England South West

Sam Mabey (MID) bt Jared Patel (SE) 3-2 (11-7, 5-11, 10-12, 11-6, 11-5)
Helshan Weerasinghe (SE) bt Adam Harrison (MID) 3-2 (6-11, 5-11, 11-8, 11-3, 11-4)
Tom Jarvis (MID) bt Danny Lawrence (SE) 3-2 (11-1, 8-11, 10-12, 11-7, 11-6)
Harrison/Mabey (MID) bt Weerasinghe/Patel (SE) 3-2 (3-11, 6-11, 11-3, 11-7, 11-8)
Helshan Weerasinghe (SE) bt Sam Mabey (MID) 3-1 (11-4, 11-6, 8-11, 11-5)
Jared Patel (SE) bt Tom Jarvis (MID) 3-2 (11-9, 7-11, 1-11, 11-6, 11-6)
Danny Lawrence (SE) bt Adam Harrison (MID) 3-2 (11-8, 13-11, 9-11, 8-11, 11-5)
(Marcus Giles – South East, Alex Ramsden – Midlands did not play)

Girls' Team:

England South East 4-2 England South West

Tin-Tin Ho (SE) bt Jazmin Johns (SW) 3-0 (11-4, 11-3, 11-7)
Letitia McMullan (SW) bt Yuki Wat (SE) 3-1 (11-4, 11-8, 3-11, 11-9)

Maria Tsapsinos (SW) bt Emma Torkington (SE) 3-1 (11-9, 11-9, 5-11, 11-7)
Wat/Peake (SE) bt McMullan/Tsapsinos (SW) 3-0 (11-7, 11-6, 11-6)
Tin-Tin Ho (SE) bt Letitia McMullan (SW) 3-0 (11-4, 11-5, 11-4)
Emma Torkington (SE) bt Jazmin Johns (SW) 3-0 (11-4, 11-1, 11-6)
(Beth Wilson – South West did not play)

Disability Standings:

1st: England Midlands 13pts

2nd: Wales 13pts

3rd: England North East 12pts

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