

# Tsaptsinos takes gold in shock School Games girls' singles

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Gold medal winner Maria Tsaptsinos, picture courtesy of Trevor Parsons

## Girls' Singles

Maria Tsaptsinos emerged as the 2013 Sainsbury's School Games Girls' Singles Champion after she capitalised on Yuki Wat's earlier giant-killing of South East teammate, Tin-Tin Ho.

Tin-Tin, a regular senior England international and heavy favourite for the School Games title, had been comfortably unbeaten throughout the first two days of action and advanced to a semi-final berth with Wat unperturbed.

However, her South East teammate Wat, produced the result of the weekend by inflicting Tin-Tin's only defeat after an astounding display of rapid close-to-the-table hitting.

European no. 4 Tin-Tin was knocked off her feet by the surprise nature of Wat's counter-attacking and had no response as she fell 3-0 (13-11, 11-9, 11-6) to a flying Wat in front of a stunned Ponds Forge audience.

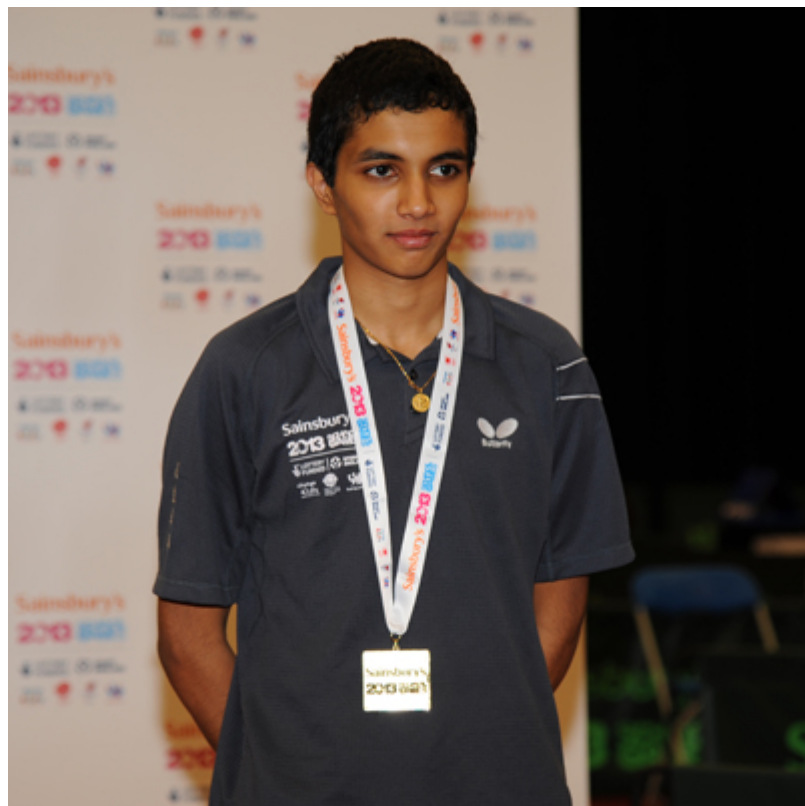
That allowed second seed Tsaptsinos, another England regular, to take advantage of her opportunity to secure a surprise Sainsbury's School Games gold medal.

After beating Lois Peake (South East) in the semi-final, the girl from the South West took upon her task with her usual exuberant gusto to storm the first game of the final 11-5.

A shell-shocked Wat was unable to recover in the second game as she conceded a 2-0 lead to Tsaptsinos, but she was at least able to give herself a lifeline in the third with an 11-3 game to reduce the deficit to one.

It appeared as though the tide had turned with Wat winning the crucial points in game four, but an amazing recovery by Tsaptsinos from 10-7 down saw her level at 10-10 – much to the delight of a vociferous South West support.

Despite missing out on two championship points, she took a third at 14-13 to seal a dramatic title and her first-ever School Games individual gold medal.



2013 Boys' Champion Helshan Weerasinghe, picture courtesy of Trevor Parsons

### Boys' Singles

There was also high drama in the boys' singles as Welshman Conor Edwards surprised second seed Sam Mabey en route to the individual final, only to eventually lose to tournament favourite Helshan Weerasinghe.

In fact it was tough work for all four semi-finalists as each one had to win a marathon five-game tie to even reach the last four stage.

Top seed Weerasinghe (South East) got the better of young Scottish prodigy Chris Wheeler 3-2 (12-14, 11-4, 3-11, 11-4, 11-9), while his semi-final opponent, teammate Jared Patel, only just scraped past England Midland's Adam Harrison 3-2 (14-12, 9-11, 9-11, 11-8, 11-9).

In the other half of the draw Conor Edwards beat Tom Jarvis 3-2 (9-11, 11-7, 6-11, 11-7, 11-9) in his first round match, while second seed Sam Mabey battled past the South East's Marcus Giles 3-2 (11-2, 9-11, 7-11, 11-6, 11-8).

Both Weerasinghe and Edwards then won their semi-finals 3-1 against Patel and Mabey respectively to set up a mouth-watering finale.

Unfortunately for the neutrals, and the numerous Welsh supporters, Edwards spirit was broken by back-to-back 12-10 opening game defeats – the first of which saw Weerasinghe recover from 10-5 down, as the Englishman took control.

When the English junior no. 1 completed the victory with an 11-5 third game it was an anti-climax for what had been a tremendous tournament.



Undefeated Lawrence John (Wales), picture courtesy of Trevor Parsons

### **Disability – Standing**

Welsh junior Lawrence John remained unbeaten throughout the 2013 Sainsbury's School Games to emerge as the gold medalist from the Standing disability singles.

He had been the standout performer throughout and made short work of beating both Craig Allen (Midlands) and Billy Shilton (South West) 3-0 in the semi-finals and final respectively.

Shilton had earlier worked hard to see off Conor Gordon 3-2 (15-13, 7-11, 7-11, 11-7, 11-7) in the semi-final and deservedly earned his silver medal.



Champion Patrick Cox, picture courtesy of Trevor Parsons

### Disability – Learning

England Midland's Patrick Cox picked up a shock learning disability title after defeating the previously unbeaten Jordan Abbott.

Cox, picked as the face of the 2013 Special Olympics, only just made the final after an epic semi-final with Wales' Ashley Wray. It went the full distance with Cox winning a vital fourth game 12-10 en route to a 3-2 (11-8, 7-11, 9-11, 12-10, 11-6) victory.

Abbott was stunned at Cox's quality in the final and felt uneasy despite levelling the scores at 1-1 in the second game. His concerns were well merited as the Midlands star won the next two games against the boy from the North West to win his first School Games gold medal.



Nico Anderson (2nd from left) with the other medalists, picture courtesy of Trevor Parsons

### Disability – Wheelchair

In the best individual final of the weekend (second only to the astonishing boys' team final between South East and Midlands on Saturday), Nico Anderson won a thrilling 3-2 encounter with Daniel Bullen.

Anderson, from the South East, and Bullen, from Midlands had been head and shoulders above their fellow competitors and each secured their own passage to the final with 3-0 victories in the semi-finals.

Anderson beat Lucie Bouron (Midlands) and Bullen beat Cellan Hall (WAL), who can both be proud at picking up bronze medals.

When it came to the final it was neck and neck throughout as the duo matched each other blow for blow. Anderson struck first in the opening game before Bullen replied in the second and the pattern repeated again in games three and four.

However, when it came to the crucial deciding game it was the South East champion who took control and broke away with confidence from 6-4 to 11-4, meeting each point with a passionate 'cho' as he took the gold medal home.

## **Overall**

South East were crowned the overall champions after a successful 2013 Sainsbury's School Games across the board.

The picked up titles in the boys' team and girls' team on Saturday and cemented those with individual titles for Helshan Weerasinghe in the boys' singles and Nico Anderson in the wheelchair singles on Sunday.

2012 winners England Midlands finished second while Wales performed well to finish third with strong performances from the boys' team and disability squad.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks as always go to all the staff and volunteers behind the scenes who gave up their time to make the 2013 Sainsbury's School Games a success.

From the Chef de Mission, through the team leaders, officials, volunteers and umpires, the event would not have been as efficiently run without the commitment from each member.

We hope you enjoyed your time and look forward to another successful edition in 2014.

## **Final Results:**

### **Boys' Singles:**

Helshan Weerasinghe (SE) bt Conor Edwards (WAL) 3-0 (12-10, 12-10, 11-5)

### **Girls' Singles:**

Maria Tsapsinos (SW) bt Yuki Wat (SE) 3-1 (11-5, 11-8, 3-11, 15-13)

### **Standing Disability Singles:**

Lawrence John (WAL) bt Billy Shilton (SW) 3-0 (11-5, 11-5, 11-9)

### **Learning Disability Singles:**

Patrick Cox (MID) bt Jordan Abbott (NW) 3-1 (11-7, 5-11, 11-6, 11-8)

### **Wheelchair Disability Singles:**

Nico Anderson (SE) bt Daniel Bullen (MID) 3-2 (11-9, 5-11, 14-12, 4-11, 11-4)

Written by Russell Moore (September 15, 2013)

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