

Knight dethrones the King at Bristol Grand Prix

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Mutual respect between Knight and Jenkins after a classic final

Men's Singles

Darius Knight produced a fiery spectacle of aggressive table tennis to win a star-studded Bribar Bristol Grand Prix after victories over Paul Drinkhall and 'Grand Prix King' Ryan Jenkins.

Knight, who only two days earlier had been in Germany at the World Tour, managed to beat both of the top seeds who, between them, have won 15 National Singles titles.

The 23-year-old could've been let off for feeling jet lagged after his later journey but wasted no time in comfortably winning his group before dispatching Adam Curran, Jojo Senior and George Downing in straight games to set up a mouth-watering semi-final with Drinkhall.

Their meeting was typically of the highest class. Drinkhall, returning from injury, had been faultless in reaching the last four and was imperious in his quarter-final demolition of Richard Andrews.

However, Knight was on top form and dominated the rallies with his lightning-fast forehands – frequently pushing the four-time National Champion back. After a close 12-10 first game, the Battersea-born player benefitted from Drinkhall serving long at 9-8 in the second game to seal it 11-9.

At 6-1 up in the third, the Londoner was cruising to the final but had to hold his nerve after Drinkhall rallied to 7-7 before finally edging home 12-10.

On the other side of the draw Ryan Jenkins had proven his domestic pedigree by quietly coasting through to the semi-finals. Wins over Rajan Waterman, Richard Main, and Thomas Maynard were all recorded in straight games before his meeting with Matt Ware.

Ware had been on inspired form throughout the tournament and battled past both Mike Marsden 3-2 (11-6, 11-8, 7-11, 7-11, 13-11) and Mike O'Driscoll 3-1 (11-7, 11-5, 9-11, 11-6) before coming up against Jenkins.

Unfortunately for Ware, despite playing some excellent table tennis and leading several times, he lost a tight encounter 3-0 (12-10, 11-9, 11-9) – the scoreline harsh on the Englishman.

Therefore the best two players justly made the final and their meeting was greeted with an extraordinary first game. Knight, leading 9-2 was cruising to a 1-0 lead but the wily Jenkins somehow stole back and claimed a 12-10 game in dramatic fashion.



Darius celebrates the Bribar Bristol GP win

Knight started well again in the second, leading 4-0 and 7-3, but was once again pegged back by the 11-time Welsh Champion before he could finally level matters with a 12-10 game of his own.

The duo then traded blows in the third and fourth ends – Jenkins striking first 11-7, before Knight responded 11-8, setting up a one-game showdown for the title.

In truth it could've gone either way but the Englishman won the point of the tournament to lead 8-6, a lead he would eventually convert into an 11-9 game and the Bribar Bristol Grand Prix title.



Joanna and Kelly played each other for the first time since Nationals

Women's Singles

Kelly Sibley repeated her victory from the 2012/13 English National Championships Final over Joanna Drinkhall to take home the Women's Singles prize from the Bribar Bristol Grand Prix.

With just one point separating the pair in the national rankings before play began they were competing for the top spot in England, as well as the title in Bristol.

Neither player wasted any time in reaching the final stage although Sibley experienced a much more difficult group than her rival, Drinkhall. While Joanna was benefitting from only having a single other participant in her group, Sibley had to claw her way back from 8-2 down in the first game of her match against Yuki Wat to register the second of her three wins.

In the knockout stages, both players recorded perfect results. Drinkhall's three wins coming against Amy Blagbrough, Maria Tsaptsinos and Emma Vickers while Sibley's victories came over Jas Ould, Natalie Slater and Yolanda King.

When they met in the final neither player had dropped a game in the tournament but Sibley would be the first to strike. Her 11-8 opening game paved the way for an 11-4 second game as she quickly assumed control.

Drinkhall tried desperately to combine her natural defensive abilities with a fresh attacking impetus to find a way back in, briefly giving her respite with a 4-1 lead in the third game. However, despite maintaining her lead to 9-8, Sibley's strong topspin attacks finally won through as she secured both the Women's Singles title and top spot in the English rankings.



Mark Scutts and Marco Tang

Men's Under-21s

Marco Tang was denied a third title of the weekend as Sussex player Mark Scutts won the Men's Under-21s title at the Briar Bristol Grand Prix.

Scutts, who was the second seed, dropping just one game in winning his group before he embarked on a series of testing knockout encounters. He first beat Ryan Fellows 3-1 (6-11, 11-8, 11-6, 11-9), before surpassing Adam Curran 3-1 (7-11, 11-3, 11-8, 11-3). However, his biggest test came in a pulsating semi-final with Bristol Academy player Christoph Zickert.

With a partisan 'home' following behind him, Zickert pushed Scutts to five terrific ends but fell short of giving his following their dream result as the Sussex player had just enough to sneak home 3-2 (11-5, 9-11, 11-6, 9-11, 11-8) to make the final.

On the other side of the draw, Tang had a similar run and had to overcome a similar large hurdle in the form of Dominic Sussex when they met in the quarter-finals. Sandwiched between wins over top seed Lawrence Sweeney (3-1) and Matthew Man (3-0), Tang had to recover from two games down to beat Sussex 3-2 (5-11, 8-11, 11-4, 11-5, 11-4).

When they met in the final Scutts was quick out of the blocks and established a strong 2-0 lead. However, just

like in his quarter-final, Tang fought back to level the match with back-to-back ends. But, unlike his earlier victory, Tang was unable to complete the turnaround as Scutts held on to win the final game 11-9.



Women's Under-21s

Despite struggling in her band on Saturday, Yolanda King kicked into her stride late on Sunday evening to deservedly win the Women's Under-21s title at the Briar Bristol Grand Prix.

Unlike on Saturday, the Sussex star made the most of her top seeding to progress through her group confidently and set up a quarter-final berth against Irish defender Chloe O'Halloran. The Irish girl had been on form all weekend, winning two bands on Saturday, and she proved no pushover against King, forcing the National Under-21 runner-up to pull out her best in a 3-2 (11-4, 11-4, 8-11, 9-11, 11-4) win.

She followed that up with another difficult full-distance tie against Jas Ould in the semi-final. Just like the previous game, King went 2-0 ahead before being pegged back, yet still retaining enough effort to come through in the decider 3-2 (11-4, 13-11, 8-11, 7-11, 11-7).

Wat meanwhile had to mount her own recovery from 2-0 down in her semi-final with Emma Tovey just to make the final. Although she eventually beat Tovey 3-2 (10-12, 4-11, 11-4, 11-5, 11-6), she was no match for a free-flowing King in an all-Sussex final as the latter won comprehensively to end proceedings at the UWE Frenchay Campus.



Open Doubles

Matt Ware and Mike O'Driscoll continued their blossoming doubles partnership with another impressive title in Bristol.

The second seeds were dominant in their group with two 3-0 wins before extending their form in an impressive semi-final win against Anthony Kent and James Meyers 3-0 (11-1, 11-8, 11-8).

In the final they met Paul and Joanna Drinkhall, who were looking to make amends for their respective singles

finals defeats, and whom had confidently made the last hurdle – dropping just one game in the process.

However, it was there that the former English no. 1s would stumble as Ware and O'Driscoll's formidable left-hand/right-hand combination proved too powerful for the couple who had to settle for second.



Costas' 'scary' forehands did the job in Bristol

Veterans

Costas Papantoniou and Jimmy Walsh contested a surprisingly energetic Veteran's Singles final despite the long weekend of action forcing their final to take place beyond 7pm on Sunday evening.

Both their players had won their groups before Papantoniou saw off Tony Clayton (3-1) and Sanja Clements (3-1) and Walsh defeated Martin Gunn (3-1) and Jojo Senorin (3-0) during their knockout campaigns.

In the final Papantoniou's short and sharp forehand blows proved too much for Walsh who couldn't get on top at any stage during the match despite battling hard.

Sudden Death

An opportunistic George Downing made the most of his first Sudden Death entry by earning a scratch entry and claiming the prize to become the latest maiden Champion of the single point competition.

Taking the place of Amy Blagbrough, Downing beat Peter Wilkinson, Martin Matuvecious, Dave Waddington and Joe Killoran before seeing off John Wilson in the final.

Wilson was a surprise finalist himself but made the most of the single point regulations to run past Adam Curran, Matthew Man, Ed Slot and Gary Whyman to come within touching distance of the cash prize.

Bribar Bristol Grand Prix Results

Men's Singles

Darius Knight bt Ryan Jenkins 3-2 (10-12, 12-10, 7-11, 11-8, 11-9)

Women's Singles

Kelly Sibley bt Joanna Drinkhall 3-0 (11-8, 11-4, 11-9)

Men's Under-21s

Mark Scutts bt Marco Tang 3-2 (11-9, 11-3, 4-11 9-11, 11-9)

Women's Under-21s

Yolanda King bt Yuki Wat 3-0 (11-4, 11-4, 11-9)

Open Doubles

Matt Ware/Mike O'Driscoll bt Joanna Drinkhall/Paul Drinkhall 3-0 (11-9, 11-7, 11-6)

Veterans

Costas Papantoniou bt Jimmy Walsh 3-0 (11-2, 11-6, 11-6)

Sudden Death

George Downing beat John Wilson

Written by Russell Moore (November 17, 2013)

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