

Chris Edwards wins Bristol Hard Bat

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Chris Edwards with the John Mycroft Boucher trophy

As the oldest and continuous table tennis league in the world, it is good to see that the Bristol & District Table Tennis Association is still maintaining the link to its prestigious past in running its ever-popular annual Hard Bat competition. Bristol has always been proud of its table tennis heritage and this event reminds its members not only of its own proud history and a bygone era that is sadly now lost, but of one that should never be forgotten. This particular event is unique in that it only allows the bats that are provided for play on the day of competition to be used, all of which are identical and which makes for a fair and very welcome competition.

The final twenty four competitors, ranging from Premier division players down to division seven, gathered at the Civil Service TTC on Saturday 18 January 2014. Players were to face each other in six groups of four, with the highest two in each progressing to the Main Competition and the remainder ending up in the Plate Competition. The top two in each would then progress to four three-way semi-final stages in order to determine the finalists, which was an arrangement that ensured that all players were kept busy and interested for most of the day. Games were nostalgically played up to the old 21 target, and the familiar sound of ball on wood reverberating around the room once again brought back some distant and fond memories for many players, all of whom

ended up thoroughly enjoying the experience.

Unfortunately, the last three years' winners, **Steve Hall, Martin Gunn and David Reeves** were all unavailable, and knowing that in all the years that this competition has been staged, no individual's name has yet appeared twice on either trophy, which highlights the uniqueness and fairness of this event, everyone present knew that they were in with a chance, especially as last year's Plate trophy recipient was from the lowest division defeating a Premier player in that final! Anyway, in the Plate Competition final this time around the oldest entrant, 78 year-old **Dennis Coombe**, triumphed in three sets over last year's winner, **Andy Cooper** (19-21, 22-20, 21-13), and in the Main Competition final, **Paul Hooper** fell just short in two sets (23-25, 14-21) to a jubilant **Chris Edwards** who did not lose a game all day.

The photograph above shows Chris clutching the **John Mycroft Boucher** Hard Bat trophy, which is in honour of the very first winner of the Gloucestershire Championships way back in March 1902 held in Clifton. For anyone interested, video footage of the above, as well as the 2012 final, can currently be viewed on YouTube. Further information on the above event, as well as access to some of our historical archives, can also be obtained from the B&DTTA website.

John Ruderham, B&DTTA (January 24, 2014)

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