

Defending Champions fall on first day of Nationals

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The first day of the 55th English Senior National Table Tennis Championships saw defending champions fall at the final hurdle as both Tin-Tin Ho and Sam Walker were denied back-to-back titles by the enigmatic Maria Tsaptsinos and effervescent Gavin Evans respectively.



Gavin Evans with his second Under-21s title

Men's Under-21s:

Gavin Evans displayed his devastating old self to earn his second Men's Under-21 title following a straight games final win over defending champion Sam Walker at Ponds Forge on Friday night.

The former European Cadet Champion, who won his first title in 2011/12 with a 3-1 victory over David McBeath, had to battle hard and show his destructive power against Lewis Gray to recover from 2-0 down in their semi-final to book a place at the last stage.

The Buckinghamshire player, who had earlier seen off the challenges of Ashley Facey-Thompson and Adam Nutland, was within two point of defeat when he trailed Gray 2-1 and was tied at 9-9 in the fourth. However, his battling spirit shone through and he took the next two points before blitzing the final game 11-5 to earn his spot in the final.

There he met Walker who had continued his form from 2012/13 to seal a second consecutive Under-21s final spot after seeing off a spirited challenge from Helshan Weerasinghe in their semi-final match-up.

The Worksop youngster had already defeated both Dominic Sussex and Sean Cullen in three straight games but found the prospect of the recent National Junior Champion Weerasinghe a much more difficult encounter. Despite taking a close first game 12-10, he trailed 2-1 following 11-9 and 11-5 ends for Weerasinghe.

However, the defending champion showed his resolve and booked the meeting with Evans by closing out 11-4 and 11-8 games in the fourth and fifth ends.

When the duo met in the final their encounter produced powerful rallies with each player preferring attack through their stronger forehand sides. This, despite Walker's best efforts, suited Evans as his additional strength and speed took him through three tight ends 3-0 (11-8, 14-12, 13-11).



Maria Tsaptsinos lifts her first U21 crown with ETTA CEO Sara Sutcliffe

Women's Under-21s:

Maria Tsaptsinos continued her jinx over international team-mate Tin-Tin Ho by adding the National Women's Under-21 title to her National Junior title that she picked up against the same opponent.

Typically for the Berkshire junior, her tournament was a battle against-the-odds but one that her determination and courage saw her through.

Her first task came against Hampshire girl Tressa Armitage who conceded a 10-5 lead in the opening game, only to fight back to win a nip-and-tuck opener 19-17. That should've been an open invitation for Armitage to force her way ahead but Tsaptsinos fought back in three battling ends (11-6, 13-11, 11-9) to secure a semi-final place.

There, she met Sussex girl Yolanda King who herself was hoping to exact revenge on Tin-Tin for defeat in the 2012/13 final. However, despite five pulsating ends of drama and nerves – in particular an extremely tense final game, Tsaptsinos once again came out on top as her never-say-die attitude helped her to a 3-2 (9-11, 11-6, 11-9, 3-11, 16-14) win.

This set up her final with English No. 1 Junior Tin-Tin, who had typically cruised to the final following a 3-1 win over Vicky Smith before an electric 3-0 victory over a shell-shocked Abbie Milwain in the semi-final.

Not for the first time therefore, Maria and Tin-Tin met in the final of a national championships.

While Maria's appearance was her first at under-21 level, Tin-Tin had last year's successful title challenge to build from as they clashed late on Friday night and typically it was full of characteristic rallies. Tin-Tin was at her best from the serve, quickly getting on top in points and using her speed to her advantage, however, Maria, well used to Tin-Tin's technique, replied by looping top-spins from deep to make the Paddington youngster push away.

After two games secured apiece, the duo headed into a final end with everything to play for.

In a repeat of the National Junior title, it was the Berkshire girl who came out on top – securing the final end 11-9 with an unfortunate ending to the match as Tin-Tin faulted on serve to give her great rival her first Under-21s crown.



Mike O'Driscoll (l) pictured with runner-up Chris Bartram (r)

Veteran Men's Singles:

Mike O'Driscoll won his maiden Veteran Men's Singles title – in the process denying Lorestas Trumpauskas a fourth consecutive crown as the former international continued his return to the game.

Following a brief exodus from high-level competition, O'Driscoll stormed back into the English circuit over the last 12 months and secured his first Veteran's title after difficult matches against Stephen Horsfield, Trumpauskas and Chris Bartam in the knock-out stages.

Yorkshireman O'Driscoll was in sublime form to see off both Horsfield 3-0 (11-7, 11-8, 14-12) and Trumpauskas 3-0 (11-5, 11-2, 11-4) in straight games before he set his sights on a place in the final against Kent player Chris Bartram.

This time the duo appeared a lot more evenly matched, particularly in the first and third games which both went well into deuce – the first an 18-16 win for Bartram and the second a 16-14 success for O'Driscoll which gave him a 2-1 lead. That clearly broke his opponent's defiance as just 13 points later and O'Driscoll was champion – steam-rolling the fourth end to claim the crown.

Bartram may have been tired from his earlier exertions in his classic quarter-final with doubles partner Andrew Trott that he only sneaked through 3-2 (8-11, 13-11, 3-11, 11-8, 13-11).



Emma Rose and Sanja Clements swept up in the Veteran Women's events

Veteran Women's Singles:

This year the Veteran's Women's Singles took place over a single round-robin group stage and saw Emma Rose come out on top for her first national singles title. She won all three of her matches, including a crucial victory over runner-up Sanja Clements to secure the main prize.



Lorestas Trumpauskas and Mike O'Driscoll celebrate their doubles win

Veteran Men's Doubles:

Mike O'Driscoll doubled up his winnings from the 55th Senior National Championships by securing both the singles and doubles titles from Ponds Forge. The left-hander, who won the title last year with Paul Beck, found new partner Lorestas Trumpauskas was equally efficient in disposing of the opposition as they romped home on Friday night.

Seeded into the semi-finals the duo fended off the Stephen Horsfield/Andrew Horsfield challenge in the semi-finals 3-0 (12-10, 11-9, 11-6) before recovering from an opening end loss to defeat Chris Bartram and Andrew Trott 3-1 (8-11, 11-6, 11-7, 11-3) in the final.

Veteran Women's Doubles:

The Veteran's Women's Doubles took place over just a single match but still managed to see Emma Rose and Sanja Clements, winner and runner-up in the singles, combine forces to win their second doubles title following a similar success in 2011/12.

The duo beat off the challenge of partners Sue Collier and Sandra Rider 3-1 (13-11, 8-11, 11-8, 11-4) in the only match of the day.

55th Senior English National Championship Results:

Men's Under-21s:

Gavin Evans bt Sam Walker 3-0 (11-8, 14-12, 13-11)

Women's Under-21s:

Maria Tsaptsinos bt Tin-Tin Ho 3-2 (11-7, 9-11, 12-10, 9-11, 11-9)

Veteran Men's Singles:

Mike O'Driscoll bt Chris Bartram 3-1 (16-18, 11-5, 16-14, 11-2)

Veteran Women's Singles:

Emma Rose won round-robin, Sanja Clements runner-up

Veteran Men's Doubles:

Lorestas Trumpauskas/Mike O'Driscoll bt Chris Bartram/Andrew Trott 3-1 (8-11, 11-6, 11-7, 11-3)

Veteran Women's Doubles:

Sanja Clements/Emma Rose bt Sue Collier/Sandra Rider 3-1 (13-11, 8-11, 11-8, 11-4)

Find all the day's knockout draw results [here](#)

Find Friday's [live stream feed here](#)

Russell Moore (February 28, 2014)

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