

Morais strides clear on Nationals weekend in Blackpool

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Men's Band 1

The joint favourites for the Men's Band 1 title at the Tees Sport Blackpool Grand Prix met at the final hurdle on Grand National day as Igor Morais and Chris Wheeler clashed late on Saturday night.

Having started their campaigns about the time that Pineau De Re was riding to glory at Aintree, Morais and Wheeler were set for a long afternoon of chasing through the field to reach the finishing line first.

Both players successfully won their groups before meeting respective opposition from a strong Greenhouse entry. The young Scot, Wheeler, overcame Chris Lewis in a tight 3-1 (16-14, 11-13, 11-9, 13-11) match while Morais defeated coach Dan Basterfield in a classic 3-2 (9-11, 11-8, 9-11, 11-6, 11-7).

The Englishman followed this success with a 3-1 semi-final victory over Michael Marsden to set up a final with Wheeler, who triumphed in an all-Scottish clash against Richard Main 3-0 (11-8, 11-7, 11-8).

On paper the two players were neck-and-neck and set for a photo finish but this was not to be the case as Morais excelled over four ends to seal a relatively comprehensive win and band 1 title from Blackpool.



Women's Band 1

Scottish National Women's Singles Champion Gillian Edwards continued her fine form by picking up the Tees Sport Blackpool Grand Prix Women's Band 1 title in an all-Scottish final against Lynda Flaws.

Both Scots won their groups at the Blackpool Sports Centre although both had to endure matches that went the full distance. Edwards had one victory – a 3-2 (11-6, 11-9, 9-11, 6-11, 11-9) win over Emily Bolton while Flaws beat off both Zoe Cheesman 3-2 (7-11, 11-9, 12-10, 4-11, 11-3) and Natalie Slater 3-2 (11-7, 11-7, 9-11, 8-11, 12-10).

Flaws, it appeared, had a taste for going the full distance and experienced back-to-back five-setters as her match with Slater was followed by her 3-2 (6-11, 11-8, 9-11, 11-8, 11-8) semi-final win over Nicole Hall – the same opponent she lost to in the band 2 final.

Edwards, meanwhile, had a less dramatic 3-1 (11-3, 13-11, 8-11, 11-9) semi-final victory over Zoe Cheesman.

When the pair met in the late final on Saturday night it was Edwards who played stronger throughout, securing the title and the winners' cheque in four ends.



Men's Band 2

Jack Grant won his first Grand Prix since a triumph back in the old Barnsley GP as he beat Greenhouse player Chris Lewis in an entertaining final.

Lewis began as the top seed from the band and duly won his group before wasting no time in seeing off Jody Bevington 3-0 (11-7, 11-3, 11-6) and Callum Evans 3-0 (14-12, 11-6, 11-9) to reach the final.

Grant, meanwhile, had a tumultuous ride to the final which included a slow start in his group where he only finished runner-up to Joe Pilkington.

In the knockout stages he beat group 5 winner Jack Grant 3-1 (5-11, 12-10, 11-6, 11-8) before humbling the second seed Stephen Joslin 3-0 (11-3, 11-8, 11-7). These two victories set up a crunch semi-final with Martin Matuzevicius, which went right down to the wire 3-2 (5-11, 11-9, 11-7, 7-11, 11-7).

In the final, it was Grant's aggressive attack that made the early running, only to be frustrated by a series of fine fishing rallies from Lewis – allowing the Surrey player to take a tight first game 18-16.

However, Grant, exhausting himself through fervent attacks, slowly broke through Lewis' stubborn defence and secured the win in three more competitive ends; 11-9, 11-6, 13-11.



Women's Band 2

Nicole Hall picked up another Women's Band 2 title to keep up her challenge at the top of the end of season standings.

The Welsh girl, who has been consistently picking up points all season, made more strides towards the big money prize at the Tees Sport Blackpool Grand Prix with a steady series of performances.

After winning her group, the top seed received a bye to the semi-final where she met Maria Lebedeva. The duo fought out a well-contested match but, despite being stretched, Hall continued her season's progress with a 3-1 (16-14, 11-7, 9-11, 11-8) win.

That set up a final with Scottish girl Lynda Flaws, who had earlier won her group and beaten Paulina Orzechowska 3-1 (5-11, 13-11, 11-9, 11-3) in a solid day's work.

Unfortunately for the Scot, she wasn't able to match Hall's level of form as the final was sealed in three straight games by the Welsh youngster.



Men's Band 3

Ryan Jenkins was the proud dad once more as he handed over the band 3 prize to son Jac after the youngster's

fine performances earned him another piece of grand prix glassware.

In a day when the favourites seemed to profit on the North West coast, Jenkins took advantage of his high seeding by winning group one and earning a bye into the last 16.

Throughout the knockout stages he remained dominant and dropped just one end en route to the title.

A 3-0 victory over Neil Pickard started the run before victories over David Thompson (3-0), Jack Dempsey (3-1) and finally Alex Ramsden (3-0) saw the Welsh youngster to the title.

Ramsden, the sideshow in Jenkins' storm to the title, had previously been in impressive form, winning group 11 before facing few problems in dispatching Martin Matuvecius (3-1), Nick Ryder (3-1), Ashley Facey-Thompson (3-0) and Jack Anthony (3-0).



Women's Band 3

Welsh youngster Danielle De Jong won the Tees Sport Blackpool Grand Prix Women's Band 3 after taking the hard route through the competition following a shaky start.

De Jong encountered trouble in group 3 after losing to Sandra Rider and only just beating Amy Wells 11-9 in the fifth.

Having secured a runner-up berth, she went on to beat Paulina Orzechowska 3-1 (11-9, 11-9, 11-13, 11-5) and Bethany Farnworth 3-0 (11-3, 11-7, 11-6) to set up a final with Saturday morning's band 4 champion.

Hall, who won her group, encountered her own difficulties against Maria Lebedeva in their semi-final but the left-hander had enough in the final game to progress to the last stage following a 3-2 (11-8, 11-6, 10-12, 9-11, 11-5) win.

The Greenhouse player then started stronger in the final by securing an 11-5 first game but De Jong showed great composure and consistency to comfortably seal the next three games and a band 3 title to boot.



Men's Band 4

Hampshire's Ben Cawston won his first-ever Grand Prix title at the Tees Sport Blackpool Grand Prix but only after saving a match point in the final against Reece Lo.

Cawston overcame the odds in his group to finish top and earn a friendly third seed position which he took advantage of by beating Stephen Gray 3-1 (11-8, 11-8, 7-11, 11-9), Peter Wilkinson 3-0 (12-10, 11-9, 11-5) and Joel Webb 3-0 (13-11, 13-11, 11-8) to make the final.

His opponent, equally young Reece Lo, had a more difficult draw despite winning group 13. He had to face an extra fixture but still managed to progress against Stephen Grimes (3-0), Jack Anthony (3-2), Richard Hague (3-0) and Andrew McPherson (3-1).

The final proved a close affair despite none of the opening four games ending closer than 11-6. The deciding game was much closer though as Cawston trailed both 9-6 and 10-9 before converting on his first match point for a 12-10 win and his maiden title.



Women's Band 4

Zahna Hall was the first winner at the Blackpool Sports Centre on Saturday morning as the Greenhouse girl saw off fellow youth prospect Bethany Farnworth in the Women's Band 4 final.

The pair had earlier met in the group stages where Hall recorded a comprehensive 3-0 (11-8, 11-2, 14-12) win.

However, after Hall had seen off a spirited Lydia John in the semi-final 3-0 (11-4, 11-5, 11-9), she found Farnworth a much tougher prospect at the last hurdle when the couple clashed again.

Farnworth, who beat Tracy Jenkins 3-2 (7-11, 9-11, 11-6, 11-6, 11-3) in the semis, began well with an 11-7 opening game but had to pull out all the stops to stay in the game in the fourth end after falling 2-1 behind.

In the end Hall took a comfortable lead in the decider to seal the title 3-2 (7-11, 11-8, 12-10, 8-11, 11-7).



Men's Band 5

Kenneth Lindsay appeared victorious from a congested Men's Band 5 with 24 players emerging from the group stages to contest the title.

Lindsay, from Warwickshire, was in fine form to reach the semi-finals after winning group 6 and beating both Andrew McPherson 3-1 (11-9, 11-9, 9-11, 11-8) and Sam Clayton 3-0 (11-6, 11-9, 11-7).

On the other side of the draw his eventual final opponent, Ethan Davies, had actually finished runner-up in group six behind Lindsay, yet also managed to battle his way to the final.

Davies beat Jack Gordon (3-0), Dave Billington (3-0) and Dominic Greene (3-1) before both players met their toughest tests.

While the Welshman had to benefit from a couple of slices of luck against cadet star Shayan Siraj 3-1 (17-15, 2-11, 11-8, 11-6), Lindsay himself fought through a mammoth five-setter with Lawrence John 3-2 (11-4, 4-11, 11-3, 7-11, 11-9).

In the end the final turned out to be somewhat of an anti-climax as their second meeting went the same way as the first with Lindsay emerging triumphant to claim the Blackpool glassware.



Men's Band 6

Ethan Davies returned to Grand Prix action with the Band 6 title from the Blackpool Sports Centre.

After winning his group he excelled in his position as the second seed to cruise past fellow Welshman Lawrence John 3-1 (11-8, 11-8, 5-11, 11-7) and Sanga Quamina 3-0 (11-8, 11-3, 11-6) to make the final.

There he met Conor Gordon, previously part of a successful School Games team and now hoping to impress for the Para GB squad, who was also a group winner after finishing top of group 6.

Gordon then beat James Berry (3-1), Macauley Morgan (3-1) and Dominic Green (3-0) to set up the meeting with Davies. However, at the final stage he was no match for his Welsh opponent who sealed a comprehensive win with a smooth backhand down the line.

Tees Sport Blackpool Grand Prix Results

Men's Band 1:

Igor Morais bt Chris Wheeler 3-1 (11-6, 12-14, 11-7, 11-4)

Women's Band 1:

Gillian Edwards bt Lynda Flaws 3-1 (11-9, 11-7, 9-11, 11-5)

Men's Band 2:

Jack Grant bt Chris Lewis 3-1 (16-18, 11-9, 11-6, 13-11)

Women's Band 2:

Nicole Hall bt Lynda Flaws 3-0 (13-11, 11-6, 11-8)

Men's Band 3:

Jac Jenkins bt Alex Ramsden 3-0 (12-10, 11-8, 11-8)

Women's Band 3:

Danielle De Jong bt Zahna Hall 3-1 (5-11, 11-5, 11-9, 11-6)

Men's Band 4:

Ben Cawston bt Reece Lo 3-2 (11-6, 3-11, 5-11, 11-4, 12-10)

Women's Band 4:

Zahna Hall bt Beth Farnworth 3-2 (7-11, 11-8, 12-10, 8-11, 11-7)

Men's Band 5:

Kenneth Lindsay bt Ethan Davies 3-0 (12-10, 11-7, 11-3)

Men's Band 6:

Ethan Davies bt Conor Gordon 3-0 (11-6, 11-8, 11-7)

By Russell Moore (April 5, 2014)

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