

27th Wheelpower Inter Spinal Unit Games

Author: Russell Moore

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Wheelpower Inter Spinal Unit Games 8-10 April 2014



The Inter Spinal Unit Games (ISUG) celebrated its 27th year of competition at the birthplace of the Paralympics – Stoke Mandeville Stadium.

Supported by ETTA Coaches Shaun Newcomb and Karl Bushell, the annual multi-sports event allows those who have recently experienced a spinal injury to try out a range of accessible wheelchair sports under guidance from Paralympians and high-level coaches.

The event is open to all the 13 major spinal injury and rehabilitation units where the participants gain points for their own unit by competing in the five major core sports and having a go at other sports on offer. Additional points are on offer for the top four placings in each of the four classes – male and female paraplegics and tetraplegics.

Since the start of the event in 1988, table tennis has been one of the core sports and gave several of our top players their first taste of competition.

This year's ladies' tetraplegic event was won by Isabel Maceda from the Sheffield Spinal Injuries Unit (SIU) who showed good touch and composure to beat the very determined Geraldine Lavelle from the Dublin Rehabilitation Centre. While the final score was 3-0, it was closer than the score suggests with the second and third sets going to deuce.



Incredibly, Lavelle has only been playing for four and a half weeks and was one of the most severely disabled competitors in the whole event so she richly deserved the additional special recognition gained at the presentation evening, winning the "Marchday Shield" for individual achievement. Winning the third/fourth play-off was Louisa Tempest from the Pinderfields Unit with Maggie Butcher from Salisbury taking fourth.

The male tetraplegic winner was Kadakwashe Mushava (KJ) from Stanmore SIU. This final proved to be the closest of all – a nail biting five-setter against KJ's very worthy opponent Mark Bonner of Middlesborough.

Left-handed penholder KJ's great touch allowing him to drop the ball short and to gain tight angles, preventing Mark Bonner from reaching the ball. In third place Michael Kowalczy (Belfast) beat Isoa Qalabau from the services rehabilitation centre at Headley Court.

The female paraplegic gold belonged to Issy Bailey of the host unit Stoke Mandeville whose table tennis skills were exceptional amongst the women players. What made her win an even greater achievement was that while her main injury was within the back, she had also suffered a neck injury which has left her with significant weakness in her non playing arm/hand meaning that she could have competed in the tetraplegic division. Her opponent and silver medallist Christina Storey (Salisbury) gave her all and continued to smile throughout the competition. In third was Irene Frost (Stoke Mandeville) and fourth Janice O'Brien (Dublin).



The male paraplegic final was an excellent contest which would not have been out of place in a much higher level tournament, Dublin's Tim Creedon appearing at least, to be extremely calm against Stoke Mandeville's very talented and determined Peter Scott who had reached the final without dropping a set.

Some of the rallies were truly superb with Creedon eventually winning 3-0, though needing all his skill and

composure, pushed all the way to a 12-10 finish by Scott.

Winning the bronze medal play-off was Liam Morris (Southport) who incidentally had been introduced to the game by seasoned wheelchair campaigner and volunteer at the unit, Ian Littlewood. In fourth place was David Blakesdon from the Pinderfields unit.

The current Minister for Disability, Mike Penning visited the Inter Spinal Unit Games on Thursday and was impressed by the level of play.

Shaun Newcomb and Judy Rogers

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