

Swede sensations win admirers

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Jan-Ove Waldner in action on the DONIC Legends Tour. Picture by Michael Loveder

Table tennis legends Jan-Ove Waldner and Jörgen Persson put on a thrilling show during a two-day tour of London.

The Swedish duo began the DONIC Legends London tour, presented by Topspin Sports, at BATTS TTC in Harlow. The day started with a masterclass coaching session, with Waldner and Persson providing expert coaching tips to a full hall of junior players from the host club, plus selected players from the South East.

The morning session finished with a round-the-table challenge with the junior players taking on the legends. The last two remaining players, Luke Walsh and Reiss Vydelingum, then played them in a doubles challenge up to five points – and won!

The afternoon saw a packed hall treated to an exhibition match between the Swedish legends that had the audience enthralled by their audacious skills. They finished the event by taking on challenges from players and chatting to guests.

Graham Frankel from BATTS TTC said: “The two Swedish stars did more than share their skills. They were wonderful ambassadors for the sport, chatting with all the juniors and the other visitors.”

The next stop was Wilton’s Music Hall in London’s East End, the world’s oldest surviving music hall dating back to 1850, which is run as a multi arts performance venue and also hosts extremely popular social ping pong tournaments.

The 200-capacity venue was sold out as the evening entertainment started with a 16- player invitation one game to 11 knockout tournament. Players included Filip Szymanski, who flew over specially from Poland, Niall Cameron, fresh from the Commonwealth Games playing in a kilt, sandpaper champion and leading lady player Egle Adomelyte and last-minute replacement Craig Bryant signed up to play from the bar a few minutes before the start.

To make things even more interesting the players had to contend with a sloping floor that made one end of the table much higher than the other.

The first eight matches of the Wilton’s tournament started the proceedings before Waldner and Persson put on a wonderful exhibition match showcasing their amazing skills. They also showed great humour inviting players from the audience to play and performing unbelievable trick shots and rallies.

The match was followed by a short Q & A session, before a frenetic 32-player one-point knockout tournament from members of the audience and then on to the remaining knockout rounds of the 16-player tournament.



Jorgen Persson shows his skills. Picture by Michael Loveder

The evening’s finale saw Waldner take on the 16-player invitation tournament winner Craig Bryant. In a good-natured match, Bryant showed just how amazing his serves are by frequently bamboozling the former Olympic and world champion and won the match in a close third game.

The final leg of the tour saw the DONIC Legends move on to Fusion TTC’s new venue next to Millwall Football club in South London, co-inciding with the grand opening of the 24/7, 14-table venue.

The day, co-sponsored by LVA Europe, started with the One Star ranking tournament featuring a strong field that included Szymanski, Darius Knight, Kazeem Adeleke, Cameron and young rising star Joseph Langham Ferreira.

The semi-finals saw Knight beat Cameron and Szymanski beat Langham Ferreira, who himself had beaten Kazeem Adeleke deuce in the fifth after coming back from 10-6 down in the quarter-finals.

Knight saw off Cameron and Szymanski defeated Ferreira which set up a final between the top two seeds. The final displayed a lot of high level table tennis with Szymanski getting a very good start in the deciding game to secure the trophy.

Fusion TTC was officially opened, with Waldner and Persson assisting two of Fusion TTC's youngest and oldest members to symbolically cut the ribbon from the show court table.

A host of dignitaries were invited, including the deputy mayors from Lewisham and Southwark London boroughs and Board member Kelly Skeggs representing Table Tennis England.

After the official opening Waldner and Persson played challenge matches against Junior Boys winner Daniel McTiernan and Persson played challenge matches against Szymanski and Knight before a final exhibition match between the DONIC Legends that had the packed audience in rapturous applause.

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