

Five unbeaten after exciting Day One at Masters

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Marcus Giles was unbeaten on Day One in Harlow. Picture by Michael Loveder

Marcus Giles and Tom Jarvis set the standard with 100 per cent records of six out of six on Day One of the Junior Masters as defending champion Helshan Weerasinghe made a stuttering start to his defence.

Meanwhile, girls champion Tin-Tin Ho was in sublime form, winning her first six matches without dropping a set – a feat matched by Maria Tsaptsinos – with Lois Peake also unbeaten.

With the boys' field at the Batts club in Harlow featuring 12 of the top 13 ranked players, there was a feeling that anyone in the line-up could beat anyone else in the round-robin format.

Even with shocks in the offing, Weerasinghe's defeat in five by Cleveland's Billy Forster was probably not predicted by many.

The top seed took the first comfortably enough at 11-6, but saw his opponent shade the second 12-10 and then move into the lead 11-6 in the third.

Weerasinghe took the fourth by the same score to level but found himself 7-4 down in the decider. After trading points, Forster put a brilliant backhand down the line to bring up four match points. And he needed only one as Weerasinghe dumped the next point into the net.



Billy Forster on his way to beating defending champion Helshan Weerasinghe. Picture by Michael Loveder

The champion bounced back to take the first two against Hugo Pang, only for his opponent to fight back to level, taking the fourth 15-13.

At 7-9 down, Weerasinghe was staring at the unwelcome prospect of two defeats from two, but he found his form when it mattered, taking the next four points.

Pang had also fought back from 2-0 down in his first match, against Sam Mabey. On that occasion, he also held a match point, but the No 2 seed saved it before taking the decider 12-10.

Forster looked set for back-to-back wins when he led Danny Lawrence 2-0, but the No 3 stormed back to take it 3-2 – his second win. Tom Jarvis, Mabey and Marcus Giles also had 100 per cent records after the first two rounds.

Lawrence and Mabey lost their unbeaten records in round 3, Lawrence in five to Gabriel Achampong and Mabey in four to Forster. Weerasinghe saw opponent Alex Ramsden save four match points before clinching it in four sets at the fifth attempt.

Weerasinghe was again extended in round 4 as Omar Khassal twice led and then saved two match points in the fifth before squandering one of his own. The top seed was eventually relieved to seal it 13-11 on his third match point.

No such dramas for Giles and Jarvis, who kept up their unbeaten records against Achampong and Forster respectively, while Ramsden got off the mark with a four-set win over Mabey.

Ramsden continued his form into the next round against Tom Jarvis, opening up a 2-0 lead and threatening Jarvis' unblemished run. But the No 4 seed turned it around to win 3-2.

Giles also kept up his momentum with a 3-1 win over Achampong, while Weerasinghe at last enjoyed a more routine victory, in three straight over Alec Ward.

Savill and Lawrence stayed in the hunt with their fourth wins, respectively beating Khassal and Pang – Savill taken to a decider by the London Academy player.

Savill ended the day by beating Forster in three, while Weerasinghe again had to come from behind to see off Achampong in four – a 12-10 scoreline in the second shifting the balance.

But Lawrence dropped down the pecking order as Ramsden came back from 2-0 down to win in five. Lawrence is ranked joint fifth after Day One, alongside Mabey, who ended by triumphing 12-10 in the fifth against Ward, having come from 2-1 down.

At the top, Giles beat Khassal and Jarvis overcame Pang to end with perfect records.

Giles said: "I think I played well today. I'm pleased to get six under my belt – it gives me a good position for tomorrow."

Jarvis' reaction to his first day's work was: "It can be quite a worrying day because you're playing players who, on rankings, you should beat, so I'm glad I didn't let that pressure affect me."



Tin-Tin Ho was one of three unbeaten girls. Picture by Michael Loveder

In the girls' competition, the top three seeds pulled clear of the rest of the field – champion Tin-Tin Ho and No 2 Maria Tsaptsinos particularly hitting their straps, not losing a set between them in the first six matches.

Lois Peake was hot on their heels, also winning her six matches, though she was taken to five sets by Isabelle Joubely, twice being pegged back before taking the decider 11-4.

Amy Humphreys won five of her first six to hang on to the leaders' coat-tails, as did Denise Payet, who bounced back after losing her first match to Bethany Farnworth.

Few matches went the distance but Olivia Churchill was involved in two of them, being beaten by Farnworth and Amy Blagbrough.

The three leaders were all happy with their performances on day one, but mindful of bigger challenges ahead on Sunday.

Tsaptsinos said: "The first matches are always the hardest because you've got to get your game going – not just your forehand and backhand but how you're thinking. But I'm doing all right."

Ho's verdict on day one was: "I'm playing well, I'm happy with the day. But tomorrow's another day and I have to prepare myself for that. I'll be playing the higher-ranked players – it will be tougher, but I'm ready."

And Peake said: "I'm playing well so far and getting through some difficult games. Isabelle played well so I did well to keep my cool and win that one in five. I'm just trying to be positive in every match."

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