



Weerasinghe and Tsaptsinos are Masters champs

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Helshan Weerasinghe bounced back from a tough first day to retain his Junior Masters title, while Maria Tsaptsinos claimed the girls' crown by sweeping aside big rival Tin-Tin Ho 3-0 in a winner-takes-all final tie.

A thrilling second day at Batts saw a series of memorable matches, none more so than the five-set thriller between Weerasinghe and Tom Jarvis in the eighth of the 11 round-robin rotations.

Jarvis went into the clash still unbeaten, and both players knew the outcome would go a long way to determining the destination of the title, particularly as head-to-head record is used to separate players who finish level.

Weerasinghe started strongly, opening up a 6-1 lead, but Jarvis came back to force deuce, only for Weerasinghe to close it out 13-11, aided by Jarvis stumbling on game point.

When the champion went on a run of eight points from 6-2 down in the second, prior to clinching it 11-7, it seemed as if he had an unassailable lead.

Jarvis took a timeout at 3-1 down in the third and then levelled at 3-3. That was the prelude to a game in which neither player led by more than one. Jarvis missed a game point at 10-9 up, and then saved a match point at 11-10 down. The next game point was for Jarvis and he took it to close the gap.

By contrast, the next game was a blitz in favour of one player – Jarvis going from 3-1 to 9-1 up and sealing the game at 11-3.



Helshan Weerasinghe in action in Harlow today. Picture by Michael Loveder

But the best was saved to last. Weerasinghe's timeout at 5-2 down set him on the road to eventually take a 9-8 lead. Jarvis levelled at 9-9 and from then on, again, the pair traded points. Jarvis saved three match points, then brought up one of his own, only for Weerasinghe to stave off that one.

It was now 13-13, and the match was the last of the round to finish, with a sizeable crowd marveling at the skill and tenacity of both players.

Two more match points came and went for Weerasinghe before he finally took the seventh as Jarvis went long

to give the top seed a 17-15 win.

Earlier, Marcus Giles had seen his 100 per cent record come to an end 3-0 at the hands of Danny Lawrence, in Round 7.

Giles kept himself in contention by defeating Sam Mabey in five, coming from 2-1 down.

To stand a chance of taking the title, he had to beat Weerasinghe in Round 10, and he took the match to the wire, coming from 1-0 down to lead 2-1 before ultimately subsiding 11-9 in the fifth.

It meant only Mabey could stop Weerasinghe and the champion, although not having things all his own way, duly won it 3-1 to retain his title – which he adds to the National championship he won in Preston in November.

Giles held off a spirited Luke Savill 3-2 in the final round to seal third place.

Champion Weerasinghe said: "I knew that I wasn't 100 per cent against Billy and was a little nervous and not confident enough.

"After that, I thought that if I lost any more matches I couldn't win the tournament. Even at 9-7 down in the fifth against Hugo, and match point down against Omar, I thought to myself 'let it go'. I was tense, so I relaxed and thought I'd been in that position and pulled through before, so why not now? It worked and, after that, my other matches were better.

"Tom was the decider match and the key moment was probably 7-4 down in the fifth when I just swung and got one on the table. 7-5 down was a lot better than 8-4. I thought if Tom had a match point he would win, but fortunately he didn't and I took one of mine in the end."

The second day also saw Cleveland's Alec Ward get himself off the mark with a 3-0 win over Hugo Pang in Round 7.

Ward was then defeated by Omar Khassal in a protracted four-setter, Khassal breaking his own duck for the tournament with a 4-11, 11-6, 17-15, 13-11 victory.

And Round 9 saw Pang pick up his first win of the competition, 13-11 in a deciding fifth against Khassal.



The top three boys Helshan Weerasinghe (centre), Tom Jarvis (left) and Marcus Giles. Picture by Michael Loveder

Final order: 1 Helshan Weerasinghe, 2 Tom Jarvis, 3 Marcus Giles, 4 Luke Savill, 5 Gabriel Achampong, 6 Alex Ramsden, 7 Danny Lawrence, 8 Billy Forster, 9 Sam Mabey, 10 Hugo Pang, 11 Omar Khassal, 12 Alec Ward.



Maria Tsaptinos in action at Batts. Picture by Michael Loveder

There were few dramas by comparison in the girls' event as the three unbeaten girls from day one, Tin-Tin Ho, Maria Tsaptinos and Lois Peake, all kept their runs going, not dropping a set between them in Round 7 or in Round 8.

Round 9 saw the first pivotal clash of the event at the top as Ho and Peake met. And the top seed and defending champion Ho continued to sweep all before her with a 3-0 scoreline.

Tsaptinos was with her every step of the way, though, her ninth 3-0 victory coming against Olivia Churchill.

Ho's 3-0 victory over Amy Humphreys was matched by Tsaptinos over Peake in Round 10, ensuring the top two seeds would meet in a winner-takes all clash in the final rotation.

With both players having won 30 straight sets, anticipation was high for a memorable encounter.

In the event, the quality was certainly high, but Tsaptinos won all three sets to end with an unblemished record.

The first was close, Tsaptsinos taking it 11-9 on the second game point. She went into a 3-0 lead at the start of the second and maintained that advantage to 8-5 before pulling away further to take it 11-6.

Ho came out with her best run of points at the start of the third, going 4-0 up. But Tsaptsinos fought back to level, prompting Ho to take the timeout at 4-4.

That seemed to do the trick as she pulled out a 10-6 lead and it looked as if a fourth set was in the offing.

But Tsaptsinos had other ideas, whittling away the lead and then setting up a match point for herself at 11-10. Ho saved that one, but Tsaptsinos was not to be denied and took her second chance and with it the third set 13-11 – and with it the title.

So Tsaptsinos matched Weerasinghe's feat of adding the Masters title to the National crown she won in Preston in November.

The champion said: "I played some of the best table tennis I've ever played. I focused on every match – and every match was different. People have different styles and you've got to impose your games on them and not let them dominate.

"I never give up, and that showed against Tin-Tin when I was 10-6 down in the third and I still thought I could do it. I'm so happy to not drop a set."

Other day two highlights included a first victory of the event for Katie Barlow, against Isabelle Joubely in Round 9.

Joubely had broken her personal duck in Round 7, and it was a hard-won victory at that, by a 3-2 scoreline against Amy Blagbrough (11-8, 12-14, 11-9, 9-11, 13-11). Joubely backed that up in Round 8 with her second success, a 3-0 win over Stephanie Cross.

Cross was the lowest-ranked player at the event, and there was good news for her in the final match as she beat Barlow 3-1 to ensure every player took at least one victory home from the competition.



The top three girls Maria Tsaptsinos (centre), Tin-Tin Ho (left) and Lois Peake. Picture by Michael Loveder

Final order: 1 Maria Tsaptsinos, 2 Tin-Tin Ho, 3 Lois Peake, 4 Kate Cheer, 5 Amy Humphreys, 6 Bethany Farnworth, 7 Denise Payet, 8 Amy Blagbrough, 9 Olivia Churchill, 10 Isabelle Joubely, 11 Stephanie Cross, 12 Katie Barlow.

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