

Chelmsford & District Individual Championships: James and Cole are top seeds

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It's that time of year again. The 2015 M&G Investments Chelmsford & District Table Tennis League Individual Championships have come around and they take place over the weekend of Friday January 30 to Sunday February 1 at Hylands School, Chelmsford Road, Chelmsford, CM1 3ET. Finals Night will again take place at the Old Chelmsfordians Association, Lawford Lane, Roxwell Road, Chelmsford at 7.30pm on Monday February 9 2015.

Disappointingly, the overall number of entries are down this year although pleasingly the number of entries on Sunday in the four divisional Singles events and the two Handicap events are up.

In the "blue riband" event – the Men's Singles – Steve Joslin, the champion in 2014 and Alex Abbott, the 2012 and 2013 winner are missing and this gives two other former champions – top seed Rik James, (1998) and the No 2 seed Dave Cole (1986, 2005, 2006 and 2009) a great chance of adding to their already impressive list of honours.

In League matches this season Rik has won 18 out of his 20 games whilst Dave has won 10 singles out of 11. Gary Young and Ben Warner are seeded joint third whilst other players to watch out for include Brandon Crouchman, Peter Hayden, John Poysden, Simon Webber, Scott Dowsett, Steve Kerns, Alistair Hill, Chris Jacob and Hamish Innes.

Group 10 looks to be the most competitive. Poysden is favourite to win it but he won't have it all his own way against Waseem Qureshi and Adam Buxton. "Wild cards" could include leading division two players – Sid Dorn and Lee McHugh.

Julie Johnson will be bidding to win the Ladies' Singles for a truly unprecedented 23rd time. Her final opponent is expected to be Dawn Baldry, which will be a repeat of last year's finals night encounter.

The next most successful lady players in the League's history – June Crozier and Marjorie Shipstone have won the Ladies' Singles title four times. The evergreen Shirley Carroll, a three time champion in 1968, 1969 and 1974 will be aiming to take the title again 40 years after her last success.

Rik James and David Cole are heavy favourites to progress to the Veterans' Singles final in an event where neither of last year's finalists – the winner Kevin Gowlett and runner-up George Reeves – have entered. The likes of Gary Young, Peter Hayden, Steve Kerns, John Poysden, Hamish Innes and Ian Whiteside will all be determined to ensure that Rik and David have to battle hard to progress to the final.

Sixteen pairs will be bidding to win the Men's Doubles title. Last year's winners Gary Young / Steve Kerns are the top seeds with Dave Cole / Rik James – the champions as far back as 1990 – seeded second. Other pairs to watch out for include Scott Dowsett / Brandon Crouchman, scratch-pairing Ben Warner / Robert Burton, Alistair Hill / Simon Webber and new-pairing Peter Hayden / Adam Buxton.

Dave Cole / Julie Johnson will be hot favourites to win the Mixed Doubles title for a 10th time and for a sixth successive year. They should have too much in hand for the other better pairings – such as Steve Whiteley / Shirley Carroll, Ciaran Whelan / Dawn Baldry and Rik James / Emily Wood.

The Under-21 Singles which produced such a compelling final last year is again of a high standard. Scott Dowsett, the champion in 2014 will face tough opposition from Brandon Crouchman, the winner in 2011, impressive newcomer Sid Dorn, Ryan Gooday and Daniel Berry.

County No 5 Junior Boy Sid Dorn is the top seed in the Junior Boys' Singles and his main opponents will be Ryan

Gooday, Chris Denyer and Daniel Berry and in the Under-16 Singles Dorn is again expected to come out on top. Ryan Gooday is the player expected to cause him the most trouble.

Emily Wood, the champion last year will be out to retain her Junior Girls' Singles title but she will be hard pushed to beat Sarah Austin, the winner in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013.

The Over-60 Singles looks to be a very competitive event this year. Last year's winner – Chris Jacob will face very tough opposition from John Holland, the winner in 2013, Ian Whiteside and Hamish Innes. Group one should be a cracker and Chris Jacob goes face-to-face with Steve Whiteley and Mike Johnston.

The Over-50 Singles should also be a well contested event. Steve Kerns, John Poysden, Hamish Innes, Chris Jacob and Ian Whiteside are the leading protagonists.

Sunday's play should be dominated by the Divisional Singles events. Expect Sid Dorn (12 wins out of 15 in League matches to date) to be amongst the forerunners in the Division Two Singles, whilst others who will be difficult to beat will be last year's champion Waseem Qureshi, Steve Whiteley, Robert Burton, Tony Hallett, Lee McHugh and Mike Johnston. Group four looks to be particularly strong. Burton will have to overcome both Graham Briggs and Neil Gooday to get through as the Group winner. Group five is also difficult to predict. McHugh is expected to progress as the winner, but Brian Riedling and Richard Storey won't be easy to beat.

The Division Three Singles is particularly well supported and looks to be very evenly matched. Players expected to progress as Group winners include Chris Hancox, Neil Freeman, Neil Gooday, Ryan Gooday, Frank Hodge, Ken Sheard, Brian Riedling, Tom Elder and Daniel Berry. Group two which features Freeman, Colin Napper and Chris Denyer and group five which includes Hodge, Steve Scholz and Paul Nicol look particularly hard to predict.

In the Division Four Singles the group winners should be Wiktor Delimat, Steve Scholz, Victor Chan, Ciaran Whelan, Peter Windley, Dave Moles, Daniel Richardson and Daniel Anderson. Whelan will be tested in his group matches where his opponents will be Maldon team-mate Colin Napper and Mohammed Mohseni.

The Danbury Club look to have a great chance of taking the Division Five singles trophy. Daniel Anderson, Daniel Richardson and Cameron Gray are all expected to win their groups and they should be joined in the later stages by Chelmsford's Adam Pitt.

Best of luck to all entrants and the league committee hope you all have an enjoyable weekend.

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