

Chelmsford & District Championships: Crouchman and Dowsett are the stars

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Two young and fast-improving players Brandon Crouchman, aged 20, and Scott Dowsett (19) were the stars of the weekend at the 2015 M&G Investments Chelmsford & District Table Tennis League Championships played at Hylands School – whilst 17 year-old Sarah Austin, who battled her way to the Ladies' Singles final, wasn't far behind.

However, the biggest shock of all took place in the Mixed Doubles. Dawn Baldry and Ciaran Whelan scored a superb win over top seeds and nine-times champions Julie Johnson and David Cole. Elsewhere, 15-year-old Ryan Gooday had a great weekend with four successes – winning the Under-16 Singles, Under-18 Singles, Senior Handicap Singles and Senior Handicap Doubles.

The two Men's Singles semi-finals which will take place on Finals Night on Monday February 9 at the Old Chelmsfordians Club will feature top seed Rik James versus Brandon Crouchman and joint third seed Ben Warner versus the in-form Scott Dowsett.

The 1998 champion James fought his way past Simon Jacob (3-0) and Steve Kerns (3-1) whilst Crouchman defeated Adam Buxton (3-0), Graham Briggs (3-1) and then most impressively joint No 3 seed Gary Young 3-0 (11-9, 11-8, 11-5). The improving Briggs beat Alastair Hill 3-2 (11-2, 10-12, 16-14, 12-14, 12-10) – the closest match in this event.

Warner battled his way through with 3-0 wins over Mike Johnston and Hamish Innes whilst Mike Johnston secured a fine 3-0 (11-5, 11-9, 12-10) win over Simon Webber and Innes saw off another rising star – Sid Dorn – 3-1 (11-5, 6-11, 11-5, 11-9).

Warner will face the surprise package of the event – the hard-hitting Scott Dowsett (who played so well on Finals Night last year to beat Crouchman in the Under-21 Singles final). Dowsett scored an excellent 3-1 (9-11, 11-7, 11-6, 11-6) victory over John Poysden and then an even bigger 3-2 (11-9, 11-9, 13-15, 6-11, 11-5) win over second seed and four times champion David Cole.

Julie Johnson will be bidding for her 23rd Ladies' Singles title and she eased her way into the final with a 3-0 victory over Jacqueline Smith who had impressed by defeating Emily Wood 12-10, 11-4, 11-6 in the group stages.

Julie will play Sarah Austin in the final. Sarah made her mark in the group stages and she scored a fine 3-1 (8-11, 11-4, 11-3, 11-4) win over Shirley Carroll. This was merely a prelude to her next game and she played superbly as she defeated second seed Dawn Baldry 3-1 (9-11, 11-6, 11-9, 11-9).

Few would have bet against David Cole and Julie Johnson in the Mixed Doubles. Unfortunately, Ciaran Whelan and Dawn Baldry hadn't read the script. They beat Steve Siggs / Jacqueline Smith 3-0 and then David / Julie in a thrilling match 3-1 (11-7, 4-11, 16-14, 14-12).

They will face Steve Whiteley and Shirley Carroll on Finals Night. Steve and Shirley beat Rik James / Emily Wood 3-1 (11-7, 11-9, 7-11, 11-7) at the penultimate stage.

Carroll & Baldry became Ladies Doubles champions for the first time. They beat Julie Johnson / Jacqueline Smith 11-9, 11-9, 11-7 to claim the title.

The "young guns" – Crouchman and Dowsett – have fought their way through to the Men's Doubles final for the first time. In an event marred by withdrawals the No 3 seeds produced an all-action display to beat the holders – Gary Young and Steve Kerns in the semi-final 3-1 (6-11, 11-7, 11-6, 11-9).

They will face the six times former champions Dave Cole and Rik James in the final. Rik and Dave beat Simon Webber and Alistair Hill in the penultimate round 3-1 (11-5, 9-11, 11-4, 11-7).

The Veterans' Singles went with the seedings and the four top-seeded players fought out the semi-finals. The final will be contested between the favourite and three times winner James and second seed and four times champion Cole. Waseem Qureshi produced the shock of the event by beating the seeded John Poysden 3-2 (13-15, 6-11, 11-7, 11-7, 12-10) before missing out 3-1 (7-11, 3-11, 11-5, 8-11) to Steve Kerns.

James beat Ian Whiteside 3-0 (13-11, 11-6, 11-9), Peter Hayden 3-1 (4-11, 11-9, 14-12, 11-5) after a real tussle and then Steve Kerns 3-2 (12-10, 8-11, 11-4, 9-11, 11-5). Cole looked to be playing really well as he eased past Adam Buxton 3-0 (12-10, 11-8, 11-8) then Hamish Innes 3-0 (11-5, 11-5, 11-9) and then Gary Young 3-1 (9-11, 11-8, 12-10, 11-2).

Gary Young / Steve Kerns became the Veterans' Doubles champions for a third successive year. They beat Steve Siggs / Dave Moles (3-0) and then Steve Whiteley / Ian Whiteside (3-0) and they produced a fine controlled display to beat Cole / James 3-1 (11-7, 6-11, 11-5, 11-3) in the final. Dave and Rik beat Peter Hayden / Adam Buxton 3-1 (11-5, 10-12, 12-10, 11-5) in a fast and furious semi-final encounter.

John Poysden won his first Chelmsford title by annexing the Over-50s Singles crown. Dave Moles scored a real upset win when he beat Ian Whiteside 3-1 (11-9, 11-13, 11-8, 11-9) and he then held match-point against third seed Hamish Innes before succumbing 3-2 (10-12, 11-5, 6-11, 11-8, 10-12). Innes eventually missed out in four ends against Steve Kerns 3-1 (5-11, 13-15, 11-7, 3-11) in the semi-final.

In the other half of the draw Poysden beat Charles Yeung 3-0 (11-8, 11-7, 11-9) and then Chris Jacob 3-1 (11-4, 9-11, 11-8, 11-5). The final was a fluctuating affair but the fifth end became something of a procession as Poysden ran away with it to defeat Kerns 3-2 (11-6, 7-11, 11-6, 4-11, 11-3) to claim the title.

Top-seeded John Holland became the Over-60s champion for the fourth time. Holland eased past Colin Barham (3-0), Chris Jacob (13-11, 11-8, 12-10) and he beat Steve Whiteley 3-2 (11-4, 8-11, 11-5, 9-11, 11-1) in a widely fluctuating five game final. Whiteley had beaten Hamish Innes 3-2 (7-11, 13-11, 12-10, 6-11, 11-7) in a very keenly contested semi-final, the best match of this event. Jacob had earlier defeated Ian Whiteside 3-1 (3-11, 11-7, 11-3, 11-8).

The Under-21 Singles final will be a repeat of last year's Finals Night encounter. Scott Dowsett will face his Doubles partner Brandon Crouchman. Scott had the tougher semi-final. He was stretched to beat Sidney Dorn 3-1 (11-8, 11-5, 9-11, 11-6) whilst Crouchman raced through his two games seeing off Wiktor Delimat and Ryan Gooday both 3-0.

Gooday excelled to win the Under-16s Singles. He beat top seed Sidney Dorn 3-2 (8-11, 11-2, 12-14, 9-11, 11-7) in a thrilling and well contested final. Both players had won their semi-final matches 3-0. Dorn beat James Hughes whilst Gooday saw off Patrick Bugg.

Gooday made it a double cause for celebration on the Saturday by beating Peter Windley 11-4, 11-5, 13-11 to take the Junior Boys' Singles title. Both players faced some anxious moments in their semi-final matches. Windley needed five games to beat Chris Denyer 3-2 (11-5, 11-7, 9-11, 9-11, 11-4) whilst Gooday dropped an end against the very promising Cameron Gray before he won 3-1 (11-6, 11-6, 10-12, 11-7).

Matthew Elliott is the Under-14 Singles champion. He scored two well executed wins after qualifying from his group. He beat Harry Rogers 3-0 (14-12, 13-11, 11-6) and James Hughes in the final 3-0 (11-6, 11-6, 11-6). Hughes booked his final appearance by beating Tom Picton 3-1 (11-5, 11-8, 8-11, 13-11) in the semi-final.

There was an upset of sorts in the Junior Doubles. Team-mates Peter Windley and Daniel Berry scored a fine four games win in the final to beat top seeds Ryan Gooday and Sidney Dorn 11-7, 5-11, 11-4, 11-3. They had required five ends to beat Cameron Gray / George Ashley 11-6, 6-11, 6-11, 11-5, 11-3 a round earlier. Gooday / Dorn had beaten Chris Denyer / Jamie Brooks 3-0 at the same stage.

Sarah Austin, the star of the Ladies' Singles, became Junior Girls' champion for the fifth time. She beat Emily Wood 3-0 (11-8, 11-8, 11-9) in a well contested final.

Peter Windley added a second title to go with his Junior Doubles success by picking up the Junior Handicap Singles. He beat Tom Picton (3-1), Cameron Gray (3-2), Sidney Dorn (3-1) and in the final he defeated Sarah Austin (3-1). Austin knocked out Alex Headley (3-0), Daniel Berry (3-0) and James Brooks (3-1).

Sunday's play was dominated by the four Divisional Singles competitions which pleasingly included a much increased entry. Top seed Waseem Qureshi retained his Division Two title and in the process became the first three-time champion. He had to do it the hard way beating the very in-form Ryan Gooday twice – in the group stages and in the final.

Group seven produced the closest finish in League history. Mike Johnston, Neil Freeman and Chris Hancox finished tied at one win apiece and Johnston emerged the winner on count-back with a points record of 93-92 with Hancox (94-94) placed second and the luckless Freeman (101-102) eliminated.

All-round player Qureshi stormed through to the final beating Chris Denyer (11-5, 11-4, 11-7) and Daniel Berry (11-8, 11-9, 12-10) and in the final he eclipsed Gooday 3-2 (11-5, 3-11, 8-11, 11-5, 11-4). Gooday impressed greatly. He beat Graham Briggs 3-0 (15-13, 11-7, 11-9), then Tony Hallett 3-0 (11-9, 15-13, 11-7) and best of all second seed Steve Whiteley 3-1 (11-9, 13-11, 2-11, 11-9).

With such an impressive showing in the Division Two Singles you might have expected Gooday to dominate in the Division Three event as well. It didn't work out that way. Gooday ran into the ever determined figure of Tom Elder in the semi-final and Elder ran out a five-game winner: 5-11, 11-2, 9-11, 11-6, 11-8.

Another ace defender Brian Riedling dominated the other half of the draw. He beat David Gatherall 3-1 (11-7, 11-7, 6-11, 11-7), then Neil Gooday 3-0 (11-5, 11-6, 11-7) and then Neil Freeman by a very tight 3-0 (12-10, 11-8, 12-10) margin. Riedling claimed the title by beating Elder 3-0 (13-11, 11-8, 11-7) in a well contested final.

The Division Four Singles final was contested by the top two seeds – Colin Napper and Peter Windley – and it was second seed Windley who took the title. He beat Steve Siggs 3-1 (6-11, 11-8, 11-8, 11-9) and Dave Moles 3-0 (11-8, 13-11, 11-6) and in the semi-final he saw off Ciaran Whelan in five ends (11-5, 8-11, 8-11, 13-11, 11-7). The final was also a close fought affair and Windley defeated Napper 3-1 (12-10, 11-9, 4-11, 11-7) to be crowned champion.

Daniel Richardson is the Division Five Singles champion and he had to overcome three determined adversaries to win the event. It took him four games to get the better of Adam Pitt (11-13, 11-5, 11-8, 11-2) and the full five games to get the better of Daniel Anderson (11-5, 6-11, 11-8, 10-12, 11-8) and the final against George Ashley was also hard-fought. Richardson had to dig deep to win 3-1 (11-6, 12-10, 8-11, 12-10).

What had already been a great weekend for Ryan Gooday took an upwards turn when he won two more titles on Sunday afternoon with successes in both Senior Handicap events. In the Senior Handicap Singles final his opponent was again Steve Whiteley and he won 2-0 (21-13, 22-20) having beaten Ken Sheard 2-0 (21-14, 21-17) in the penultimate round. Whiteley defeated Chris Hancox by a last gasp 2-1 (14-21, 21-11, 22-20) at the same stage.

Ryan, paired with Colin Barham also won the Handicap Doubles title and they beat Paul Nicol / Lee McHugh in the final. They had to fight back in their semi-final to address a heavy first game defeat to beat Rod MacLennan / Colin Napper 2-1 (10-21, 21-15, 21-17). Nicol / McHugh beat Ciaran Whelan / David Gatherall 2-0 (21-17, 21-17) at the same stage to book their final appearance.

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