

Walker and Ho are champs on Nationals day 1

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Sam Walker and Tin-Tin Ho have regained their under-21 National Singles crowns.

The top seeds both won the titles two years ago but lost them last season – and both were in the mood to get them back at the Redbridge Sports & Leisure Centre today.

Walker, 19, from Worksop, beat 17-year-old Helshan Weerasinghe 3-1 (11-6, 11-8, 8-11, 11-5) in the men's final, while 16-year-old Londoner Ho won 3-0 (11-6, 11-5, 11-9) against Maria Tsaptsinos.

Mike O'Driscoll beat Lorestas Trumpauskas 3-1 to retain the Veteran Men's Singles title, while Jane Vickers beat Des Norbury in the one-off Veteran Women's match to take the trophy back to Derby.

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Under-21 Men's Singles



Sam Walker in action today (picture by Michael Loveder)

Walker always had something in hand over the rest of the field, seeing off Luke Savill in the quarters and Sam Mabey in the semis, both 3-0, before meeting the second seed in the final.

Weerasinghe made the better start as he took the first three points before Walker got on the board with the aid of a net cord.

The younger player was still in contention at 6-6, but five points on the spin saw Walker take the advantage.

He extended his lead in the second, but National Junior champion Weerasinghe hit back to take the third. However, Walker, who recently climbed to No 175 in the world rankings, always had the edge in the fourth and closed it out to regain his title – which Gavin Evans had taken from him last year.

Walker said: "It feels good – I wanted to regain it after last year and I did the job.

"I was No 1 seed, so I put the pressure on myself. I expected to win and would have been disappointed if I hadn't. But the more important things are coming tomorrow and Sunday.

"I've been training in Germany and it's really helped my game. In the final, I felt I was stronger and had a little bit more, even when it was really tight. I was always confident I could produce my best when it mattered."

Weerasinghe said: "He was a bit more solid in stock shots than I was. I hit some good shots with good power, but I would miss three or four in a set and it all adds up.

"It's disappointing for me because I don't think he played unbelievably, I've seen him play better, so I'm disappointed I couldn't take advantage.

"I didn't think I was 100 per cent at any point throughout the day. I had a good head but I felt I always had to try to focus – other times I focus naturally and my shots flow, but today it just didn't click."

Earlier in the day, several players pulled off crucial last-ditch victories to book their places in the knockout stages.

Karim Khassal came from 2-0 down against Tim Denby to win 3-2 (3-11, 7-11, 11-2, 11-8, 11-8) and join Tom Jarvis in advancing from group 4.

James Smith was 2-1 behind before overcoming Artur Caltabiano 3-2 (11-5, 9-11, 8-11, 11-6, 11-4) in group 8. Group winner Gabriel Achampong had his own five-setter, seeing off Matt Leete 11-9 in the decider.

Two medallists from last week's Cadet Masters continued their good form. Ethan Walsh, third in Burton, beat Jack Dempsey in the final match of group 5, 3-2 (11-9, 8-11, 6-11, 11-9, 13-11) to join Adam Harrison in advancing.

Meanwhile, Masters silver medallist Joe Clark, seeded four in group 11, won all three matches, including beating Marcus Giles in four. Giles won his other two matches to join Clark in the knockouts.

Luke Savill won group 10, but only with a five-set victory over Billy Forster along the way – he came from 2-1 down and won 11-9 in the fifth.

It wasn't the last five-setter for him. With Giles having finished second in his group, he and Savill clashed in the first knockout round. When Savill took the first two, he seemed set fair to go further, only for Giles to rally, taking it to a decider and leading 8-4 in the fifth before Savill got on a run to take the last 11-9.

Clark, meanwhile, beat Lucas Papantoniou in four to set up a meeting with Danny Lawrence. And there his run ended as Lawrence won in three.

The pick of the quarter-finals saw Mabey defeat Tom Jarvis in five and it was another fine comeback. Although Mabey took the first 11-9, it looked for all the world as if he would exit the competition when Jarvis took the next two 12-10, 11-8. But Mabey seized back the momentum, levelling with an 11-8 game and then running away 11-2 to reach the last four.

Lawrence saw off Jack Bennett in four and the other two quarters were sorted out in three straight as Walker beat Savill (5, 10, 3) and Weerasinghe beat Achampong (7, 8, 4).

Under-21 Women's Singles



Tin-Tin Ho in action at Redbridge (picture by Michael Loveder)

Tsaptinos has had a hold over Ho in recent meetings – in the Seniors last year, the Junior Nationals in November and at the Junior Masters in January, the latter by an impressive 3-0 score.

And she started the quicker, going into a 5-2 lead. From there, Ho won nine of the next 10 points to take the first 11-6.

And she never looked back, with 11-5 and 11-9 sets, although an increasingly frustrated Tsaptinos did lead 4-0 and 6-2 in the third.

Champion Ho said: "I feel really happy. I had some tough matches today and I'm happy I could win them and regain the title.

"I was extra motivated after losing to Maria last year and at the Juniors. I think this time I relaxed a bit and tried to play my game and not worry about anything else. I felt quite stable, I didn't miss much and had more control."

Tsaptinos said: "No disrespect to Tin-Tin because she played really well, but I just felt I was never there.

"Coming off the court, everyone was telling me I didn't dominate and play my own game, I just let it happen. I think she was definitely extra motivated.

"After the semis I was exhausted – and I want to say that Emily Bolton gave me a great game – so I need to be fitter."

Earlier, there was no surprise that Ho and Tsaptinos won their groups, but the second places behind them were hard-fought.

It was Megan Knowles who advanced at the expense of Amy Blagbrough in group 1, coming from two down to

win 3-2 (11-13, 5-11, 11-0, 11-3, 11-6). In group 2, Kate Cheer also had a fightback win, against Isobel Ashley, prevailing 3-2 (11-3, 14-16, 8-11, 11-8, 11-9).

There was a remarkable preliminary round match between Denise Payet and Megan Knowles. Payet led 2-1 before a monumental fourth went 22-20 in favour of Knowles. That in no way took the wind from either's sails though, as the decider was won 14-12 by Knowles.

The knock-on effect was that Tsaptsinos had to wait for her quarter-final, beating a tired Knowles 3, 4, 4.

Already through were Ho, who lost the first to Abbie Milwain before winning 3-1 (9-11, 11-7, 11-7, 11-6), Lois Peake, a 3-0 winner over Yolanda King (8, 8, 5), and Emily Bolton, 3-1 over Emma Tovey (5, 9, -7, 4).

Bolton and Tsaptsinos met in the last four and it went to five sets before Tsaptsinos shook off her stubborn opponent 3-2.

Ho was also extended by Peake. The first two sets went according to seeding (both 11-7) before Peake reduced the deficit 11-8 in the third. The fourth saw Peake save seven match points – including coming from 10-6 down – and Ho save three game points before the latter finally took it 17-15.



Veteran Men's medallists, from left, Lorestas Trumpauskas, Mike O'Driscoll, Costas Papantoniou and Nigel Eckersley (picture by Michael Loveder)

In the Veteran Men's, Mike O'Driscoll was the defending champion and delivered a repeat performance by once again defeating Lorestas Trumpauskas, as he had last year in Sheffield.

Trumpauskas, seeded one, took the first 11-9, in the battle of the left-handers. But the next three went to O'Driscoll 11-6, 11-5, 11-8.

The winner said: "Lorestas is ranked No 1 and it's always nice to beat him. It sets me up nicely for the men's tomorrow."

He had earlier won in three straight against Jojo Senorin in the quarters and Nigel Eckersley in the last four, while Trumpauskas saw off John Payne and Costas Papantoniou.

Trumpauskas said: "I played quite well. It was a tough game. He's a better player than me but I had a chance – I just didn't take it."



Veteran Women's winner Jane Vickers (centre) with runner-up Des Norbury (left) and Table Tennis England Deputy Chair Susie Hughes

The Veteran Women's came down to a straight shootout between Jane Vickers and Des Norbury, and it was Vickers who took it 11-9, 11-8, 11-8.

She said: "I'm very proud, even though there weren't very many of us. I think my hitting, my topspin was a little more consistent and that made the difference."

Des Norbury, playing only her third event after a long injury absence, said: "Not taking anything away from Jane, because she played well, but I wasn't able to build up to a final, with it being just one match. It's a shame there aren't more women entrants, it's pretty disappointing."

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