

Pitchford and Sibley take titles on amazing day

Author: Paul Stimpson

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Liam Pitchford and Kelly Sibley won the national singles titles in two spellbinding finals at Redbridge today.

Pitchford came from 3-0 down to defeat Paul Drinkhall and take home the trophy for the third successive year, while Sibley triumphed 4-2 against Tin-Tin Ho to claim her fifth crown.

Pitchford and Drinkhall won the men's doubles title, while the women's doubles went to Ho and Maria Tsaptsinos.

Men's singles

Wow, what a classic! Spellbinding, world class, whichever description you choose, this final merits it.

Paul Drinkhall, 3-0 up and seemingly cruising, saw Liam Pitchford, who was playing well but was seemingly powerless to stop his opponent, come through 4-3 to retain his title, completing a hat-trick in the process.

The first three sets have almost become lost in what followed. But it was Drinkhall who controlled them, his speed of thought and deed just too quick for Pitchford.

But the Chesterfield player hung in and took a 10-5 lead in the fourth. When that became 10-9, he could have wobbled. He didn't, and the comeback was on.

The fifth saw the tension and the quality ratcheted up. 10-7 to Liam . . . back to 10-10, then 11-10 to Paul, championship point. Liam saves. 12-11 Paul, profiting from a net cord. 12-12, Liam's turn to get the benefit of a net cord. Liam goes 13-12 up but dumps the next in the net. No matter, a fearsome forehand gives him a game point, which he takes.

3-2, pause for breath.

At 8-4 to Liam, frustration takes over for Paul and he hurls two barriers out of position. The inevitable yellow card follows. Liam sees it through 11-6, though not without missing a put-away smash at 10-5.

So to the decider. At 4-4, it's anyone's, and Liam takes a big step with the next three points. Both players benefit again from a net cord as the game unfolds to 9-8 in Liam's favour. And the defending champ keeps his title with the next two points, sinking to his knees in delight.



Liam Pitchford celebrates his victory (picture by Alan Man)

Liam said: "It feels amazing. It was a great final, Paul will be disappointed.

"I just told myself to stick in there. I was playing well enough to win in the first three sets, I didn't do a lot wrong but he was on his game. But I gradually got better and better and my tactics got better.

"I think it was just a great match, there were some fantastic rallies."

Paul's verdict was: "I'm disappointed only in the reason that I lost the game. He stayed in it and stayed at the same level from start to finish. The first three games I was that little bit too quick and strong, then I dipped.

"Without taking anything away from him, I feel I lost the game. If he outplayed me, there's nothing I could have done about it, like I did to him in the first three when I was putting the pressure on him.

"I had two match points and looking back I could have done something different, but that's easy to say."

Earlier, the first five matches of the day had resulted in 4-0 scorelines, though that obscured the full story in a

couple of cases.

Perhaps none more so than in the first men's quarter-final, when Darius Knight gave Drinkhall a real test in the first before gradually falling away.

That scoreline in the first was 16-14, Drinkhall saving two game points before Knight served into the net. The Londoner saved that game point and then saw two more of his own fall by the wayside before Drinkhall clinched it.

That could have been the prelude to a classic but Drinkhall was having none of it and stamped his authority on the game to take the next three with margins of 3, 7, 7.

David McBeath's 4-0 win over Chris Doran was perhaps more one-sided than expected – Doran admitted he played badly – but Sam Walker's victory over Adam Nutland, who profited from the absence through illness of Andrew Baggaley, was less so.

Danny Reed gave Pitchford a few headaches, particularly in the first when he held a game point. But once Pitchford had won that 14-12, he took more control to see it through in four straight.

The first semi then saw Drinkhall in dominant form against McBeath, who had chances in the second and fourth but was always chasing the game.

The exception to the run of 4-0s was when Walker took on Pitchford. The teenager, who recently climbed to a career high No 175 in the world, took the first before Pitchford issued a reminder about his own status in the top 50, with an 11-3 scoreline in the second

The third followed 11-8, but Walker, already the owner of the Under-21 singles and senior Mixed Doubles title, was not going to go quietly and levelled in the fourth, 12-10.

But Pitchford had spoken before the event about how important a hat-trick of National titles was to him and he stepped it up again to take the next two for six and five against.

Women's singles



Kelly Sibley celebrates her fifth title (picture by Alan Man)

It's five for Kelly Sibley as she moved to within two titles of record-holder Jill Parker.

But young pretender Tin-Tin Ho, searching for a fourth title of the event, made her dig deep to clinch it.

An extended first set the tone for an absorbing match full of high-class rallies, in which Sibley's experienced tactical approach was arguably the key factor.

In the event, it took Kelly five game points to hold off Tin-Tin, who herself held one after coming back from 10-7 down. 14-12 was the final balance and the momentum went firmly to the favourite in the second, which she took 11-3.

Cue tiger Tin-Tin, a born fighter. 11-9, 11-9 scores brought her level, no mistakes on her first game points in each set.

When the teenager went 3-0 up in the fifth, spectators sensed she would force home the momentum shift.

But Kelly reinforced her tactics, moving Tin-Tin around the table shrewdly to take it 11-6.

She then went 6-2 up in the sixth and the end was in sight. In a matter of seconds, it seemed, it was 6-6.

That became 7-7 and 8-8. A brutal forehand made it 9-8 to Kelly, and the next point followed. The first championship point was dumped into the net. Timeout for Kelly, time to refocus, time to seize the moment. Tin-Tin drifts a shot wide, the title is won.

The 26-year-old from Leamington Spa said: "It's obviously fantastic, I'm really, really pleased.

"I always knew it was going to be a tough final, but all the matches were really tough and I knew I had to keep my focus. As the No 1 seed, I'm the one everyone wants to beat, so I had to focus on my own game and keep my head clear.

"If I had lost that last set and it had gone to 3-3, anything can happen. I had a 6-2 lead and she played some fantastic points to pull it back, but my experience helped and grit and determination got me to that fifth title, which I'm over the moon with.

"I thought I kept fighting really well and kept a cool head and it's the outcome I wanted.

"It shows my experience as well that I can put the mixed doubles behind me and focus on the singles. A few years ago, I maybe would have let that affect me."

Tin-Tin, though, could be proud after taking three titles in Redbridge. She said: "Overall, I'm quite happy. It would have been nice to win the women's singles but Kelly is really strong.

"I feel I have a few things to work on and I need to be more clever in the way I play."

The semi-finals had seen Sibley in magnificent form against Maria Tsaptsinos, showing class in both shot-making and tactics to dominant her young but game opponent. Tsaptsinos played some great points of her own, but not in enough quantity to trouble the top seed, who won it 4-0 (7, 2, 3, 6).

Ho had some trouble shaking off a resilient Emma Vickers in five, her opponent levelling at 1-1 and never letting Ho pull far ahead, though the teenager generally had a small edge.

In the quarters, only Sibley had an unblemished record as she saw off Natalie Slater.

The other matches all had a story behind them – and when Ho trailed Yolanda King 2-0, it looked as if a big story was developing. But Tin-Tin, naturally, displayed her tigerish qualities and after she took the third 11-6, she put her foot on the accelerator. In the sixth and last, only a point at 0-10 saved King from a whitewash.

Vickers and her doubles partner Karina Le Fevre traded the first four, the latter twice levelling, before Vickers found an extra gear.

The final quarter was a classic as Tsaptsinos took on Hannah Hicks in an intriguing clash of styles. Hicks led 1-0 and then fought back from 3-1 down to level, helped by a productive timeout in the sixth at 1-4 down. That kick-started a run of points, including one high-quality and lengthy exchange in which both players attacked and defended in equal measure and Hicks eventually took it 11-7. With the rally length climbing and neither player giving an inch, Tsaptsinos found a couple of key winners to take the decider 11-8.

Men's doubles



Liam and Paul took the title in Redbridge (picture by Alan Man)

Paul Drinkhall & Liam Pitchford found their rhythm in the nick of time to keep the trophy in their hands for a third successive year, coming from 2-0 down to beat Sam Walker & Danny Reed 3-2.

Walker & Reed dazzled their loftier opponents with a barrage of shots to open up a 1-0, 5-3 lead and force Drinkhall & Pitchford into taking their timeout.

The break didn't have an immediate effect as the set went 11-7 to the challengers, but the champions were starting to get their short game going and built a 10-6 lead in the third.

When the gap closed to 10-9, the final arguably rested on the next point. It went to the champions and they never looked back, taking the next 11-6 and finally getting their noses in front at the start of the fifth. That is where they stayed, clinching the hat-trick of titles 11-5.

The semi-finals were of contrasting lengths. Not surprisingly, Pitchford & Drinkhall outclassed Matt Ware & Tom Maynard 3-0 (8, 2, 4), but the other match-up went the distance as Gavin Evans & Tom Jarvis took on Walker & Reed.

The lower-ranked pair struck first and then levelled after Walker & Reed had moved 2-1 ahead. But the senior pair shaded it on crucial points in the decider as they took it 11-9.

Reed said: "We had a perfect start, 2-0 up. I thought we played really well, much better than the Commonwealth Games. We've improved, which is a real positive.

"I think we caught them a bit cold and a bit surprised. The third set was obviously crucial, when we got back from 10-6 to 10-9.

"They were good once they found the level but I was happy with the improvement.

"I thought we played really well in the mixed, but they were more composed and calm and took the important points."

Pitchford added: "We were just a little bit off the game at the start and they were attacking everything and playing with confidence.

"The third set was the turning point but they're a good pairing. It's good that we have two good doubles pairs for England."

Women's Doubles



Tin-Tin and Maria celebrate (picture by Alan Man)

New champions in an event dominated for so long by the Sibley & Drinkhall (Parker) combination as Tin-Tin Ho & Maria Tsaptsinos beat Karina Le Fevre & Emma Vickers 3-1 to take their first senior national doubles title.

The young combination started positively in thought and deed, taking the first 11-5. The second was closer, two good points at 9-9 winning it for Ho & Tsaptsinos.

It seemed as if the power base had shifted as greater experience told in the third and errors began to creep in to the young pair's play as Le Fevre & Vickers took it 11-4.

The fourth was well matched and the key point came at 9-8 to Ho & Tsaptsinos. They won that one to bring up two championship points, and needed only one to get their name on the trophy.

Tsaptsinos said: "It's really good. Hopefully we can do it for many more years to come and it's not just a one-off.

"Last year we beat them in the semi-finals, so we had one up on them already. We felt we had to play our own game and dominate from the beginning.

"We made too many unforced errors in the third and they got on top of us, but we relaxed in the fourth.

"I'm really happy to have beaten Hannah Hicks, I wasn't expected to get beyond the quarter-final.

"I had no chance against Kelly. She was one shot ahead of me every time, but next year I'll come back and we'll see."

It was a poignant triumph too as the Kingfisher club player added: "I'd like to dedicate my win to the late Brian Halliday (who died earlier this year), he was inspiration to me and drove me to what I am today! No other man would have made me love the sport as much as him, and I'm ever so grateful."

The semi-finals had both been won 3-0, Tsaptsinos & Ho seeing off Abbie Milwain & Natalie Slater (7, 5, 10) and Le Fevre & Vickers having too much nous for the Cadet pair of Denise Payet & Kate Cheer (6, 8, 7).

Results

Men's Singles

Quarter-finals

Paul Drinkhall bt Darius Knight 4-0 (16-14, 11-3, 11-7, 11-7)

David McBeath bt Chris Doran 4-0 (11-5, 11-8, 11-6, 11-4)

Sam Walker bt Adam Nutland 4-0 (11-3, 11-7, 11-4, 11-9)

Liam Pitchford bt Danny Reed 4-0 (14-12, 11-3, 11-5, 11-7)

Semi-finals

Paul Drinkhall bt David McBeath 4-0 (11-3, 11-9, 11-5, 11-9)

Liam Pitchford bt Sam Walker 4-2 (7-11, 11-3, 11-8, 10-12, 11-6, 11-5)

Final

Liam Pitchford bt Paul Drinkhall 4-3 (8-11, 6-11, 7-11, 11-9, 15-13, 11-6, 11-8)

Women's Singles

Quarter-finals

Kelly Sibley bt Natalie Slater 4-0 (11-6, 11-2, 11-5, 11-4)

Maria Tsaptsinos bt Hannah Hicks 4-3 (9-11, 11-6, 11-6, 11-2, 7-11, 7-11, 11-8)

Emma Vickers bt Karina Le Fevre 4-2 (11-8, 10-12, 13-11, 4-11, 11-7, 11-2)

Tin-Tin Ho bt Yolanda King 4-2 (9-11, 8-11, 11-6, 11-4, 11-5, 11-1)

Semi-finals

Kelly Sibley bt Maria Tsaptsinos 4-0 (11-7, 11-2, 11-3, 11-6)

Tin-Tin Ho bt Emma Vickers 4-1 (11-8, 11-13, 11-9, 12-10, 11-8)

Final

Kelly Sibley bt Tin-Tin Ho 4-2 (14-12, 11-4, 9-11, 9-11, 11-6, 11-9)

Men's Doubles

Semi-finals

Paul Drinkhall & Liam Pitchford bt Matt Ware & Tom Maynard 3-0 (11-8, 11-2, 11-4)

Sam Walker & Danny Reed bt Gavin Evans & Tom Jarvis 3-2 (9-11, 11-8, 11-4, 9-11, 11-9)

Final

Paul Drinkhall & Liam Pitchford bt Sam Walker & Danny Reed 3-2 (6-11, 7-11, 11-9, 11-6, 11-5)

Women's Doubles

Semi-finals

Karina Le Fevre & Emma Vickers bt Denise Payet & Kate Cheer 3-0 (11-6, 11-8, 11-7)

Tin-Tin Ho & Maria Tsaptsinos bt Abbie Milwain & Natalie Slater 3-0 (11-7, 11-5, 12-10)

Final

Tin-Tin Ho & Maria Tsaptsinos bt Karina Le Fevre & Emma Vickers 3-1 (11-5, 11-9, 4-11, 11-8)

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