New stars emerge at National Championships

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John Hardcastle Cup - Photo by Michael Loveder Photography

With a number of the GB Performance Team competing in Hungary or absent due to injury this year's Butterfly Michael Hawkesworth Championships (aka BTTAD National Championships) provided a chance for some of the young, up-and-coming players to shine in Bristol. This included 11 year old Shae Thakker, who was runner-up in the Junior Class 6-11 Singles, reached the semi-finals of the Class 10 Singles and won the John Hardcastle Cup for Junior Player of the Tournament.

Liverpool teenager Jack Hunter-Spivey fought back from 1-2 down in the final of the Men's Wheelchair Open event to beat defending champion Kevin Plowman 3-2 and add the Open title to the Class 5 title he had won the previous day. Paralympic bronze medalist Sara Head took the Ladies' Wheelchair Open title and Bristol Academy player Rajan Waterman won the Men's Open Standing title.

Hunter-Spivey was avenging his defeat by Plowman in last year's final and looked in trouble at 1-2 down but ran away with the fourth game and then held on to win 11-7 in the fifth. "I've played quite well at this tournament," said Hunter-Spivey, "not my best table tennis but I fought through and that's the main thing. I changed my tactics at the end of the third game – his cross over is different to other players as he plays with a different rubber. It means everything for me to be National Champion."

Sara Head defeated World championship silver medallist Sue Gilroy to take the Ladies Wheelchair Open title and was delighted with her performance after an interrupted preparation to the new season due to illness.

"I'm really surprised that I've played so well here," she said. "It's been a difficult winter but in a way that has made me more determined."

Sue Gilroy won the Class 4 Singles title and the Wheelchair Doubles with her coach Arnie Chan. "The National Championships have always been important to me," said Gilroy, "and I really enjoyed playing in the mixed doubles with Arnie and winning it. We don't play together normally but had some really good matches. My training has gone really well this winter and I am looking forward to playing in Italy this week."

Rajan Waterman took full advantage of the absence of Class 10 Singles winner Kim Daybell on the Sunday to win the Men's Open Standing title, withstanding a strong challenge from 16 year old Lawrence John in the final. The two players had met in the semi-finals of the Class 10 Singles on Saturday with Waterman edging it 11-9 in the fifth and it was a similar story in the Open final with John fighting back to level at 2-2 but the greater experience of Waterman helping him to clinch the match 11-7 in the fifth.

"I started well but Lawrence came back strongly," said Waterman. "I looked across at my coach in the fifth and that spurred me on. Bristol Academy has given me so much support so it's the perfect place to do it."

Despite his narrow defeat it was a successful weekend for John, from Swansea, winning the Junior Class 6-10 Singles and the trophy for Player of the Tournament.

Also among the winners were Daniel Bullen (Junior Class 1-5 Singles), Craig Allen (Class 9 Singles), Kevin Plowman (Class 1-3 Singles), David Wetherill (Class 6 Singles and Standing Doubles with Kim Daybell), Alex Bland (Class 7 Singles), Paul Waumsley (Class 8 Singles) and Adam Thompson (Class 11 Singles).

Video's from the event:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doJOoL1VgXo Shae Thakker @ BTTAD Championships 2015 Shae vs Alax Part 1 semi's
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZn98uKfeuM Shae Thakker @ BTTAD Championships 2015 Shae vs Alax

Part 2 semi's
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwQnEq8yaoE Shae Thakker @ BTTAD Championships 2015 Shae vs Alax
Part 3 semi's

Photo's from the event:

https://www.flickr.com/photos/tabletennis/sets/72157650929730337/

Gerry Cronin

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