

Clacton & District League Closed set to be keenly contested

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Paul Hume

The Clacton & District League's Closed Championships, once again sponsored by Paul Newbould Planning and Building Design Services, take place this weekend (April 18 and 19) at the Clacton Coastal Academy Sports Hall.

Seventy players will be competing for 11 titles over the two days.

No 1 seed in the **Men's Singles** is the reigning champion, 18-year old James Denyer. Denyer is the most gifted home-grown player of recent years whose talent is undeniable but whose form has been patchy of late, and he seems likely to face a strong four-pronged challenge for his title.

With three-time champion Kevin Gowlett an absentee this year, Peter Burrows' excellent league season has rightly earned him the No 2 seeding. Burrows is an obvious leading contender – but he's never appeared in the final of this event before and only once, four years ago, reached the semi-final stage. Meanwhile, there are a trio of ex-champions – Gary Young (2004), Colin Stallwood (2009) and Greg Green (2010 and 2011) – who will be itching to get their hands on the trophy again.

But if you're looking for dark horses, look no further than Paul Hume, a deceptively clever player, the vastly-experienced John Monk playing in his first Clacton Closed Championships – or could this be the break-through year for 14-year old sensation Sam Hume?

With an excellent entry of 41 players for this event, the initial rounds will be played in groups of three or four, with all seeds included.

In the **Men's Doubles**, holders Greg Green & Colin Stallwood are seeded to meet the 2013 winners and last season's runners-up James Denyer & Felipe Rodriguez in the final. But the entry is littered with a veritable throng of strong pairings – John Monk & Colin Webber, Peter Burrows & Colin Dearman, Derek Willis & Gary Young, Gary Cattermole & Phil Smith, Paul Hume & Sam Hume – which make this one of the most open events of the Championships.

Three-time **Ladies' Singles** champion Gill Locke is unable to defend her title this year and, with Sue Welham also out through injury, the way is open for a probable final between Annabelle Rodriguez, a winner in 2006 and 2007, and the young pretender, 13-year-old Gracie Edwards. Sandie Isaac and Isabel Barton are the potential semi-finalists.

Sandie Isaac & Gracie Edwards are top seeds in the **Ladies' Doubles**, with the pairing of Annabelle Rodriguez & Caroline North seeded to meet them in the final – with only the experienced Windsor duo of Isabel Barton & Jenny Higgins seemingly able to cause an upset.

With James Denyer & Gill Locke not defending the **Mixed Doubles** title they've won for the last two years, Colin Stallwood & Annabelle Rodriguez will be aiming to repeat their 2009 success. Paul Hume & Gracie Edwards are their main challengers whilst the scratch pairing of Sam Hume & Caroline North look to be the best of the rest.

Sam Hume is the hottest of hot favourites to take a first **Junior Singles** title. Gracie Edwards is seeded No 2, with Tom Wilkin and Morgan Harvey the players expected to emerge as semi-finalists from the group stage.

In the **Veterans' Singles**, which has which has attracted a bumper entry of 37 players, 2008 and 2014 champion Peter Burrows, and 2013 runner-up Colin Stallwood are the top seeds. But it would be folly to make any rash prediction in a competitive field that includes players of the calibre of Gary Young, John Monk, Derek Willis, Alan

Burgess, Gary Cattermole and Colin Webber.

Alan Burgess has featured in five of the last seven finals of the **Super-Veterans' Singles**, winning it on three occasions (2008, 2010 and 2014) and he deservedly starts as No 1 seed ahead of Colin Webber, Derek Willis and Martin Edwards.

The **Division Two Singles** is always a keenly-contested event with the winner this year surely coming from one of the top four players, Frank Burbidge, Russell Hillier, Lee Harvey or Grant Sharpe, none of whom has ever won this title before.

By contrast, it will be a major surprise if the final of the **Division Three Singles** is not a contest between the top two seeds, odds-on favourite Ray Chillingworth and the ever-reliable Mike Hillier.

There are no seedings in the **Restricted Singles** where there's a plethora of proficient players waiting to take the title – so take your pick from any one of Derek Willis, Paul Meikle, Gavin Price, Martin Edwards or John Hatley.

Because of the above-expected number of entries, play will start at 9am on both days. All entrants should have received details of check-in times (which, it should be noted, are check-in times and not playing times). Any player who has not received this information should contact Tony Oswick or Peter White without delay.

The finals of the six minor events are scheduled to take place from approximately 3.30pm onwards on Saturday, with the finals of the five major events taking place at the same time on Sunday.

Admission to the Championships is free and spectators are welcome. Light refreshments will be available as usual.

Tony Oswick
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