

Cardiff and BATTS fly high in SBL play-offs

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Ethan Walsh picked up some key victories for BATTS. Picture by John Upham

Cardiff City and BATTS have joined the elite of the British League after finishing in the top two at the play-offs at Crippenham.

But while it was a relative cruise for Cardiff, BATTS were made to sweat as their promotion campaign went all the way to the wire.

With York Gardens Angels, Rotherham Scorpions and Greenhouse also in the mix, there were some terrific encounters over the two days.

Cardiff and BATTS made the perfect start as they defeated York and Greenhouse respectively at the start of the weekend, the former by a 7-1 margin and the latter by a closer 5-3 scoreline.

Ethan Walsh was the star for BATTS – not for the last time over the weekend – as the youngster secured two crucial wins that ultimately sealed victory for his side after his dad Jimmy and brother Luke, plus team-mate Jack Bennett all recorded a win apiece.

The game was in the balance at 3-2 when Luke lost to Tony Wilkinson, whom Ethan had already beaten. However, Bennett's five-set victory over Daniel Basterfield, followed by Ethan's comfortable win over Ovigwe Eyarhano, secured victory. Joseph Langham-Ferreira won two for Greenhouse.

BATTS sat out round two as Cardiff registered their second victory, 6-2 over Rotherham, despite Scorpions' Mark Short picking up a superb double with victories over Yongbo Zhang and Simon Nutch, the latter being clinched 12-10 in the fifth.

Meanwhile, Greenhouse's hopes all but vanished as they fell to their second 5-3 defeat of the day against York Gardens, for whom Richard Carden won two.

Cardiff made sure of their place in the top flight as they hammered BATTS 8-0 in the third session as their opponents had no answer to Zhang, Wiktor Dzwonowski and Nutch, who raced to straight sets wins over Jimmy Walsh, Bennett and Ethan Walsh respectively. Jordan Wykes took Paddy Thomas to a decider and Nutch also needed five to see off Jimmy Walsh, but it was Cardiff's day.

York Gardens defeated Rotherham Scorpions in the other match, Carden the star as he clawed his way to victory over Richard Smith in the final set of the day, saving several match points in taking the fifth 15-13 to secure the win for York.

BATTS took a massive step towards promotion with a 5-3 win over York Gardens in the first fixtures on day two, with two wins apiece from Bennett and rising star Wykes. The pivotal moment came in the fifth set as Bennett magnificently came from 2-0 down against Brian Li to claim victory.

Scorpions defeated Greenhouse 5-3, with Jack Grant the star of the match as he registered victories over Langham-Ferreira and Eyarhano, whilst team-mates Short, Smith and Ben Barlow claiming one apiece.

It meant the clash between BATTS and Rotherham in the final session was a promotion decider, with the former needing only a draw to secure their goal. That was exactly as it turned out as the Harlow club did enough with a nervy 4-4 draw.

There was little to split the two teams as results went back and forth. Two wins courtesy of the excellent Short over Bennett and Luke Walsh had been cancelled out by wins apiece for Bennett and Ethan Walsh, who defeated Stephen Horsfield and Jack Grant respectively in five.

In the end, Ethan's victory was particularly significant as he saved two match points. Had he not, Rotherham would have gone up.

Wykes put BATTs in the lead with victory over Smith in a victory that moved BATTs just one point off promotion. However, they couldn't get over the line easily as Grant defeated Luke Walsh 3-0 to level the match again.

It was down to youngster Ethan to secure promotion, with the former doing so with a superb 3-1 win over Smith, whilst Horsfield's victory over Wykes in the fifth ended the match in stalemate.

Cardiff ended the weekend uneaten after they thrashed Greenhouse 7-1 with two wins apiece for Wiktor Dzwonkowski and Paddy Thomas.

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