

Clacton & District League: Cup triumph a breeze for Brotherhood

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Posted On: May 11, 2015



The Brotherhood team with the trophy. From left: David North, Martin Edwards, Gracie Edwards

It was success all the way for Brotherhood B as they became the 2015 winners of the Clacton & District League's Handicap Knock-Out Cup.

In the final played at Clacton's Brotherhood Hall, Martin Edwards, Gracie Edwards and David North inflicted a comprehensive 5-0 defeat on fellow Division One side Walton C, barely needing their marginal handicap advantages to complete the task.

Hampered by the absence of stalwart skipper Mark Gale through illness, it was a bad day at the office for Walton's Derek Willis, Paul Meikle and Jason Gale, the trio rarely showing the flair and ability that had got them to the final.

The opening doubles saw four aggressive players on show, with North and 13-year-old Gracie Edwards (+1) in opposition to Meikle and Gale (-3). In an entertaining, attacking match, the Walton pair had their chances, retrieving the handicap deficit in the first set to level at 6-6, and, in the third set, to get as near as 8-7 down. But the young Brotherhood duo produced the goods at the right moments to open with a three-straight victory.

And there was also a three-straight win for Martin Edwards (+1) against the obdurate Willis (-3) in match two, with Edwards' consistent looping and telling winners proving too much for an under-par Willis, whose dogged defending in the Closed Championships a fortnight earlier had earned him two prestigious titles.

Things went from bad to worse for Walton in match three when Gracie Edwards (+1) defeated Gale (-3). Gale, when taking the initiative, was able to produce convincing winners – and he had his chances, recovering the handicap at 3-3 in the first set and 7-7 in the third set. But his rustiness in match-play was obvious, and teenager Edwards – showing greater composure and consistency – thundered winners at the crucial times to take it three-straight.

Match four was a must-win game for Walton if they were to stay in the final – and although they came close, Brotherhood made it 4-0 as North (+1) edged past the experienced Meikle (-3) 7-11, 11-9, 8-11, 11-1, 11-7 in the best table tennis contest of the evening.

Meikle started like a steam train and it seemed his looping attacks would overwhelm his younger opponent. But North, to his credit, fought back and, when able to get in first, produced a stunning series of positive shots to take the second and fourth sets.

But in the fifth set, Meikle failed to heed the old adage of handicap table tennis – get a good start – with North racing into a 7-0 lead. And although Meikle reduced it to 7-4, he could never close the gap any further, North running out a deserved 11-7 in the fifth winner in an excellent see-saw encounter.



The Walton C team of Derek Willis, Paul Meikle and Jason Gale

Thereafter, it was a formality as North and Martin Edwards (+1) dispatched the now-disheartened Walton pairing of Willis and Gale (-3) in three easy sets to clinch the Cup for Brotherhood B, their confident and committed approach throughout making them worthy Cup winners.

For Martin Edwards it was a second Cup triumph, his last success being 30 years ago with the all-conquering Great Holland A side. But it was a first Cup trophy for both Gracie Edwards and David North, Gracie becoming the

first female Cup-winner since 2000. And history was created when, for the first time ever, a grandparent and grandchild – Martin and Gracie Edwards – appeared in a Clacton League Cup final.

So Walton C were left pondering what might have been, the final ending in a 5-0 score-line for only the third time in the last 40 years.

Finally, a mention for John Owen, Brotherhood's fourth player who dropped out of the team for the final, and for Walton's Mark Gale whose unbeaten record in singles in his side's Cup run had been so important, and whose influence was missed on the night.

Final results (*Brotherhood players first*): G Edwards/D North (+1) beat P Meikle/J Gale (-3) 11-9, 11-6, 11-7; M Edwards (+1) beat D Willis (-3) 11-3, 11-6, 11-2; G Edwards (+1) beat J Gale (-1) 11-3, 11-5, 11-8; D North (+1) beat P Meikle (-5) 7-11, 11-9, 8-11, 11-1, 11-7; M Edwards/D North (+1) beat D Willis/J Gale (-3) 11-1, 11-0, 11-2.

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May 11, 2015

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