

England 1 – Germany 3

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Is this the result of next Sunday's possible last sixteen World Cup football match in South Africa against the old enemy Germany, without enduring the nail biting agony of a losing penalty shootout and those loud vuvuzela's?

Hopefully not, but this WAS the result of the Briar Hereford Grand Prix Men's Open final between Chris Doran (England) 1, and Ricardo Walther (Germany) 3, on Sunday the 20th of June. Chris Doran (aka) Peter Crouch rising high to strike the first goal, going 1-0 up in sets. Were we restoring some national pride, have some cause for celebration by taking that early lead? Surely you must know the plot by now, as the German player Ricardo Walther changed tactics and attacked Doran on both wings, then the heart of the defence by scoring a tremendous hat trick to take the £305 title winner's prize purse back with him to Cologne. Chris played up to his very best but in the end could only admire the multi talented German champion.

The tournament was billed as the Rumgay v Nicholls Grand Prix point's leaders contest and who could gain that vital advantage going into the last Grand Prix in Doncaster in two weeks time. However the plot was spoiled by a certain 18year old from Cologne, Ricardo Walther. Before the event had started Damien Nicholls held a slender lead over 2nd placed Gavin Rumgay (with that £1750 prize money on offer at the end of the GP season). With 2nd seed Chris Doran losing a match to the talented Swede Tobias Bergman in his group which meant that Chris had to face Damien (S5) in the very first round. Doran took that match 3-1, and in doing so threw the event wide open in terms of the GP prize fund race. Chris went on to the final beating Alim Hirji, Matt Ware, and then foiled the challenge of GP points 2nd placed Gavin Rumgay 3-0, to meet the German in the final. Ricardo Walther (S3) had eased his way through the rounds displaying that "German like" attitude with his mental strength, serious discipline, and calm and efficiently cool attributes. His range of shots are incredible having the ability to change pace and spin at an instant, brilliant retrieval "fishing" qualities lobbing back from the table from any angle, and then dynamically turn defence into offence. Having this arsenal of playing options makes him stand out from the crowd and the fact he is an accomplished Bundesliga player who represents Julich in the 2nd division. He was responsible for the departure of Dan O'Connell, Jonathan Crawford, followed by beating his younger brother Gianluca then semi finalist Norbert Tofalvi (who had gained his revenge on Tobias Bergman in the qtrs). It was a pleasure for so many to admire the skills Ricardo brings to the table and for our younger players to copy and gain inspiration from this pleasant young man.



With the Women's Open in full flow it was soon emerging that the player to beat was warm favourite Naomi Owen from Wales. All the remaining top three seeds had reached their allotted placing in the draw after the group stage and preliminary round with Karina Le Fevre (S2) Emma Vickers (S3) and Hannah Hicks (S4) safely into the quarter finals. Naomi easily took care of Barbara Zink to fill the first semi final place whilst Emma Vickers also in the top half of the draw had a real tussle on her hands against Jasmine Yang which turned out to be the thriller in Manilla. Were we back and involved again in World Cup football antics with yellow and red cards being shown by the umpire? Oh yes we were, with this incredible match going the full distance after Emma had taken a 2-0 lead in sets, to be pegged back to 2-2 by the Chinese penhold style player and all out attacking opponent. Apparently the official had given Jasmine a verbal warning for slow play and time wasting, particularly between points, which led to her receiving a first yellow card early in the 5th set. With the result poised on a knife edge at 10-9 to Emma, the Chinese player once again took so much time to be ready whilst Emma was poised to serve. The umpire then gave a red card to Jasmine which meant the loss of that last point and awarded Emma the victory at 11-9.

In the lower half of the draw Karina Le Fevre had to pull on her wealth of International experience to halt the determined challenge from Yolanda King with an 8-11, 11-8, 9-11, 3-11, 21-19 sensational score to reach the 3rd semi final placing. The last of the semi finals involved Hannah Hicks (S4) against the heroine of yesterday

Lauren Spink. This match did not disappoint with once again yet another comeback. With Lauren finding it hard to penetrate the Hicks defence and soon in trouble going 0-2 down in sets. With advice from her coach and a few tweaks in her game, patience was the vital key to unlock the cast iron defensive skills Hannah exudes. Spink came back to level at 2-2, and with that patient attacking style interspersed with deft short play saw her take a brilliant win over the highly ranked Hampshire and England International squad player. Onto the last two semi finals and with the wind in her sail, Lauren was simply awesome in her straight sets superb victory to end the run of yet another top class England International, Karina Le Fevre to reach the Women's Open final. In the last semi final Naomi Owen was just too strong for gallant Emma Vickers with a 3-0 win to face the in-form Lauren Spink in the final. To her credit Lauren was the only player to take a set off the BTTF podium squad member based at Sheffield and gave it her best shot however the top seeded Owen prevailed by three sets to one to pick up her well deserved Champions cheque for £175.

Just ten players contested the under 21 Women's event. Karina Le Fevre (S1) confirmed her ranking by taking the title over unexpected finalist Yolanda King. Yolanda had competed brilliantly throughout gaining fantastic victories over Annabelle Morle and semi finalist Emma Vickers and took Karina all the way to an incredible five set final epic. Evangeline Collier once again played above her level to reach the semi final and surely benefited from the experience gained from her last four encounter with Champion Karina Le Fevre.

Ricardo Walther was in a different class to all his opponents in winning the Under 21 Men's Open. Ricardo had outplayed Adam Nutland, Dean Cundy, semi finalist Matt Ware (who had a titanic 5 set win against Danny Lowe) and then take his 2nd title of the day with an awesome display over brilliant finalist David McBeath. Alim Hirji, Chris Doran and Damien Nicholls all fell by the wayside at the hands of David McBeath who was just playing fantastic and controlled table tennis to reach his deserved final spot. Although David took the first set off the German in the final, from there on in it was the Bundesliga player who simply took control to run out a comfortable Champion.

Umair Mauthoor won the mixed restricted singles event getting the better of Jonathan Crawford in a five set tussle. Losing semi finalists Andrew Hodges and David Arrowsmith enjoyed a good tournament.

Tomasz Rzestokto was the main man in the Veterans competition taking a straight sets title win against Tony Wilson. Making up the last four competitors were John Magnall and Rob Wylie. The player of the tournament award and a £50 Bribar voucher was presented to Lauren Spink for her superb performances throughout the two day event.

Many thanks to the team of Organisers led by Mick Strobe ably assisted by Roger Vardon and Dianne Kirkwood , plus the boys in blue that did us proud in the smooth running of this Grand Prix event.

Finally a reminder that the last Grand Prix of the present playing season is to be held at Doncaster over the weekend of Saturday the 3rd and Sunday the 4th of July.

Day 2 results from Hereford as follows:

Men's Open. Ricardo Walther (GER) beat Chris Doran (Np) 12-14, 11-6, 11-5, 12-10.

Women's Open. Naomi Owen (WAL) beat Lauren Spink 11-4, 11-8, 6-11, 11-8.

Under 21 Men. Ricardo Walther (GER) beat David McBeath (Ha) 9-11, 11-4, 11-9, 11-4.

Under 21 Women. Karina Le Fevre (Cv) beat Yolanda King (Sx) 9-11, 11-8, 11-8, 8-11, 11-7.

Restricted Singles. Umair Mauthoor (E) beat Jonathan Crawford (Cu) 13-11, 8-11, 8-11, 11-4, 12-10.

Veteran Singles. Tomasz Rzestokto (Ch) beat Tony Wilson (Cv) 11-5, 11-5, 11-8.

Image 1: Chris Doran (Np) left runner up in Men's Open with Ricardo Walther (GER) right

Image 2: Naomi Owen (WAL) pictured left winner of Women's Open with Lauren Spink (Nk) runner-up

By Geoff Ware.

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