



Titles wide open after first day of School Games

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Posted On: September 04, 2015

South East girls and Midlands boys are well placed to defend their team titles after the first day's competition at the 2015 Sainsbury's School Games in Manchester.

Both advanced to the semi-finals but will face tough tasks if they are to emerge victorious in Saturday's knockout stage.

There is likely to be a new winner of the disability team event as two defeats from four matches have left Wales with arguably too much to do to retain their crown.

The competition resumes at 9am on Saturday.

Boys

If Midlands manage to successfully defend their title, they will have done it the hard way, having been taken the distance by Scotland, South East and Wales in their group matches.

Chris Wheeler beat Alex Ramsden in five – staving off a comeback to triumph 11-8, 11-9, 8-11, 7-11, 11-9 – to put Scotland ahead, but Matt Leete levelled with a five-set win of his own against Yaser Razouk (11-8, 11-8, 5-11, 7-11, 11-4).

The two sides then traded blows before Leete took the decider against Calum Morrison 3-1 (11-5, 11-8, 10-12, 11-8).

In the match against South East, there were four five-setters – Ramsden coming from 2-0 down to beat Omar Khassal and from 2-1 down to defeat Josh Bennett and teaming up with Nathan Butler to beat Khassal and Shaquille Webb-Dixon in a monumental doubles (14-12, 8-11, 13-11, 11-13, 14-12).

Webb-Dixon was the other five-set winner, against William Hornsey, but he was defeated in the deciding rubber as Leete was again the match-winner, 3-0 on this occasion (9, 9, 6).

Against Wales, Hornsey won the decider 3-1 against Joshua Stacey after Callum Evans had kept Wales in the tie with a five-set triumph against Nathan Butler to make it 3-3 overall. It was Evans second five-set victory of the tie, having seen off Hornsey earlier.

Scotland clinched second place with a 4-3 victory over South East, Chris Wheeler completing his unbeaten day.

North East came through the other group alongside Northern Ireland, both having won their opening two matches to ensure the meeting between the two sides in the third session was largely academic.

North East started their day with a 4-3 win over North West. Billy Forster was the match-winner, defeating James Chappell 3-1 (7-11, 11-8, 11-8, 14-12) in the decider.

They followed up by beating South West 5-2.

Northern Ireland beat both South West and North West 4-3 in their opening two matches. They were not taken to deciders in either, having gone 4-2 up on each occasion.

Zak Wilson was the spearhead of those performances as he won all four singles without dropping a set, and also claimed both doubles alongside Owen Cathcart.

Wilson completed an unbeaten day against North East, seeing off James Hobson in four and partnering Cathcart to doubles victory over Alec Ward and Forster, again in four.

With Cathcart having beaten Forster in five (11-7, 11-7, 10-12, 6-11, 12-10) and Ryan McConkey also winning in five against Ward (6-11, 11-8, 1-11, 11-7, 14-12), that gave the Irish an unassailable 4-0 lead.

Both teams then agreed to end the contest, although the final result was recorded as 5-2, thanks to some creative conceding of the three outstanding matches.

North West ended their first day on a high by beating South West 4-3, Robert Barker winning the decider 3-0 (5, 4, 5) against Daniel McTiernan.

McTiernan also went down in a pulsating clash with Chappell, being edged out 15-13 in the fifth.

For South West, Hugo Pang ended the day unbeaten in singles.

Tomorrow's matches

Semi-finals

Midlands v North East

Northern Ireland v Scotland

Places 5-8

Wales v South West

North West v South East

Girls

South East girls were braced for hard work from the start, following the late withdrawal through injury of Tin-Tin Ho.

In the event, Kate Cheer stayed unbeaten in singles and, with Denise Payet only losing one singles all day and Isabelle Joubely chipping in some solid results, they beat North East and South West by matching 5-2 scorelines in their opening two matches.

They clinched the group with a 6-1 scoreline over Northern Ireland, Rebecca Finn getting the Irish point with a hard-fought 3-2 over Payet (7-11, 11-3, 9-11, 11-7, 11-8) and also taking Cheer to five before succumbing 14-12 in the decider.

With the other squads all having one victory each, it was South West who advanced thanks to their 5-2 defeat of North East in the final match, which featured no fewer than five ties which went to a fifth set.

South West won four of those – two for Letitia McMullan and one each for Amy Blagbrough and Katie Holt – but Jasmin Wong & Gauri Duhan took the doubles in a decider for North East.

In the other group, North West and Scotland advanced to the semi-finals.

Scotland's heroine was Alisha Khalid as she won deciding rubbers against both Midlands and Wales.

In the former, she defeated Charlotte Bardsley 3-2 (11-9, 9-11, 11-9, 9-11, 11-8) and in the latter Soffi Jenkins 3-1 (10-12, 11-7, 11-4, 11-4).

Rebecca Plaistow also played a key role in the defeat of Wales, coming from 2-0 down to defeat Anna Hursey 3-2 (8-11, 6-11, 11-9, 11-1, 11-6).

It set up a crucial clash against North West to decide the winners of the group, North West having earlier also needed a decider to see off Wales – Bethany Farnworth coming out on top against Kate Roberts 3-2 (9-11, 11-9, 11-13, 11-5, 11-9) – before beating Midlands 5-2.

What was not predicted was the 7-0 scoreline in favour of North West when the two top teams met.

Farnworth, Emily Bolton and Megan Dillon blazed a trail through the fixture, although Khalid kept up her good form in a tight five-setter against Dillon, which the North West girl won 3-2 (11-5, 8-11, 11-13, 11-9, 11-9).

The final clash between Midlands and Wales turned into a marathon, with four five-setters and two more going to four, which meant the final scoreline of 6-1 to Midlands was somewhat lop-sided.

Wales' victory came courtesy of Hursey, who beat Bhavika Mistry in five, while Bardsley, Molly Patterson and Mistry all won over the full distance for Midlands.

Tomorrow's matches

Semi-finals

South East v Scotland

North West v South West

Places 5-8

Northern Ireland v Wales

Midlands v North East

Disability

England North East and South East are the front-runners to take the title having gone through the first day unbeaten.

North East made a good start, lowering the colours of defending champions Wales 3-0 in the first match, with all matches going to four sets.

Scotland and Northern Ireland were beaten by the same scoreline before a 2-1 victory over North West rounded off their day, with wheelchair player Megan Shackleton and standing disability player Alex Bland both undefeated.

South East's squad of Jack McDonagh (standing), Hamish Friell (learning) and Nicko Anderson (wheelchair) saw off Northern Ireland 3-0, North West and Scotland both by 2-1 and then Wales 2-1.

Wales had come back from their opening defeat to North East to win 2-1 against Midlands thanks to a five-set triumph for Cellan Hall over Daniel Bullen in the wheelchair match decider.

They also beat South West, before that defeat against South East in their final match of the day left them relying on other results if they are to defend their title.

Also unbeaten on the day from an individual perspective were South East's Anderson, South West's Billy Shilton (standing) and North West's Jordan McGarry (learning).

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