



Midlands and South East retain School Games titles

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Posted On: September 05, 2015

Midlands boys and South East girls retained their team titles and North East claimed the disability crown on day two of the 2015 Sainsbury's School Games in Manchester.

All eight regions won at least one podium place across the three sections after a day and a half on intense competition.

The individual groups have begun today, with the knockout stages tomorrow.

Boys



The winning Midlands team, from left: Alex Ramsden, Will Hornsey, Matt Leete, Nathan Butler

England Midlands came good when it mattered most as they successfully defended their boys' team title.

Having laboured in three 4-3 victories in their qualifying group yesterday, they enjoyed comparatively easier scorelines as they defeated North East 4-2 in the semi-finals and Northern Ireland 4-1 in the final.

Not that everything was straightforward – particularly in the semi-final as Billy Forster beat Nathan Butler to put North East ahead. They also levelled at 2-2 by winning the doubles, Forster & Alec Ward seeing off Butler & Alex Ramsden in five. Ramsden won his second singles of the tie to put Midlands back in front, and Butler finished it off by beating Abhijay Mishra in four.

In the final, Ramsden and Matt Leete won their singles to put Midlands 2-0 up, before Zak Wilson maintained his unbeaten singles record through the tournament by beating Butler in four. But Ramsden & Leete won the doubles and it was left to Ramsden, the only returning member of last year's victorious team, to clinch the title against Owen Cathcart.

The Irish boys had reached the final with a 4-2 win over Scotland. Both sides went in with an unbeaten player in singles – Wilson for Ireland and Chris Wheeler for the Scots. In the event, they did not face each other and so both retained their records.

Wheeler's two victories gave Scotland their two points, but he and Yaser Razouk lost the doubles to Wilson and Cathcart in three.

Scotland went on to take the bronze medal, winning their play-off against North East 4-2.

Wheeler preserved his unbeaten singles record by beating Forster to put Scotland 3-0 up following victories for Razouk over James Hobson and Calum Morrison over Ward. Ward & Forster then won the doubles in five and Hobson reduced the deficit further, beating Morrison 3-2 (11-8, 9-11, 8-11, 11-9, 11-4). But Razouk overcame Forster in four to clinch the bronze.

South East claimed fifth spot with a 4-3 win over South West, for whom Hugo Pang completed an unbeaten singles record over the tournament.

Pang saw off Liam Grant in five and Omar Khassal in three, and Daniel McTiernan also beat Grant to make it 3-3 – levelling after South East had notched points through Khassal (against Jimmy Yeung), Shaquille Webb-Dixon (against McTiernan) and the doubles (Webb-Dixon & Josh Bennett against Oang & Ben Cawston).

The decider saw Webb-Dixon overcome Yeung 3-0 to seal fifth place.

In the earlier play-off matches, Yeung won the decider for South West as they overcame Wales 4-3, beating Marc Castro 3-0 (12, 8, 10). Pang kept up his unbeaten run by seeing off Josh Stacey in four and Callum Evans in three.

It was also 4-3 in favour of South East when they took on North West, with no fewer than five five-setters.

Khassal won the first against Robert Barker but Joe Pilkington levelled by beating

Grant. South East moved 3-1 ahead before Pilkington beat Khassal 3-2 (15-13 in the decider) and Barker won a five-setter against Bennett to level. That left a shoot-out between Grant and Kin Fung Chan, and it was Grant who won it in the decider to put South East into the play-off for fifth.

Wales finished seventh courtesy of a 4-1 win over North West, for whom Pilkington picked up the solitary point against Stacey. Jac Jenkins won two and Evans one singles and the pair combined to win the doubles.

Final order: 1 Midlands, 2 Northern Ireland, 3 Scotland, 4 North East, 5 South East, 6 South West, 7 Wales, 8 North West.

Winners' reaction

Will Hornsey, 16, from Scunthorpe: "It's amazing, really – it's my first School Games and we've won. We get on which each other really well so we've had a good team spirit, which really helped."

Nathan Butler, 15, from Grantham: "Obviously I'm really happy – thanks to the other boys for their support along the way. I think it was our fight and determination on the big points that made a difference."

Matt Leete, 15, also from Grantham: "I've been first reserve for the last two years and didn't quite get in, so I'm happy that the first time I played, we've won. We didn't give up in any match and always had great support from the team."

Alex Ramsden, 15, from Northampton: "It was really good to defend the title. On paper we probably weren't the strongest team but I knew we could win.

"Some other teams probably didn't know each other that well but this team had good chemistry."

Girls



South East Girls, from left: Kate Cheer, Denise Payet, Isabelle Joubely

South East's three-strong team retained the title for their region with a 4-1 final victory over North West.

But they had to come from behind as North West's Emily Bolton ended the 100% singles record of Kate Cheer in four sets in the opening match.

Denise Payet and Isabelle Joubely beat Beth Farnworth and Amy Hutchings respectively and Payet & Cheer then took the doubles against Bolton & Farnworth, all in four sets.

Payet then mounted a comeback to beat Bolton 3-2 (8-11, 11-8, 8-11, 11-9, 13-11) and ensure the title stayed in the South East – a great achievement considering they had to contend with the late withdrawal through injury of Tin-Tin Ho.

South East had seen off Scotland 4-0 in the semi-finals as all three players won their singles and Cheer & Payet sealed victory with a 3-2 victory over Rebecca Plaistow & Hannah Robb in the doubles (11-3, 7-11, 13-11, 10-12, 11-8).

North West overcame South West, coming from 1-0 down after Letitia McMullan had beaten Beth Farnworth in five sets in the opener.

Two singles wins for Emily Bolton – who sealed the victory with a 3-2 win over McMullan – and one for Amy Hutchings, plus a five-set doubles triumph for Bolton and Farnworth over McMullan and Amy Blagbrough, enabled the northern team to turn it around.

The bronze medal went to South West, who beat Scotland 4-2 in the final play-off.

Scotland led 2-1 after the first round of singles, with Plaistow and Robb beating Blagbrough and Katie Holt respectively and McMullan responding for South West against Alisha Khalid.

McMullan & Blagbrough then won the doubles and five-set victories for McMullan over Plaistow (12-10, 8-11, 11-8, 15-17, 11-4) and Holt over Khalid (11-9, 11-8, 6-11, 13-15, 11-4) sealed the podium finish for South West.

Midlands claimed fifth place with a 4-0 win over Northern Ireland after Charlotte Bardsley set them on their way with a 3-2 victory over Rebecca Finn (17-15, 11-6, 11-13, 8-11, 11-7). Singles wins for Amy Humphreys and Bhavika Mistry, followed by Humphreys and Mollie Patterson in the doubles, rubber-stamped the result.

North East beat Wales 4-1 to take seventh place, despite trailing early on after Anna Hursey beat Katie Barlow. Gauri Duhan (2) and Jasmin Wong won their singles matches and teamed up to take the doubles as North East bounced back.

Earlier, the Irish girls beat Wales 4-1, with five-set wins in the first two matches for Finn, over Hursey, and Lucy Craig, over Soffi Jenkins.

Meanwhile, Humphreys came from 2-0 down to record a five-set win over Wong as Midlands beat North East 4-2. Bardsley won both her singles matches for the Midlands.

Final order: 1 South East, 2 North West, 3 South West, 4 Scotland, 5 Midlands, 6 Northern Ireland, 7 North East, 8 Wales.

Winners' reaction

Isabelle Joubely, 15, from Purley: "The standard was strong all the way through, so it was hard work. We started slowly but we improved and I saw another level from us today.

"I like the way they make the event like a mini UK Olympics, with the parade and the accreditation and everything, it feels really professional."

Denise Payet, 14, from Enfield: "When Tin-Tin pulled out I think it made us work harder. Obviously we missed her being here but it was nice to win for ourselves and not have to rely on her.

"We all know each other really well and there was a great team spirit. It's a great tournament – the atmosphere and support is really good and I love the parade before play starts."

Kate Cheer, 15, from Crawley: "It's really good because it's the first year here for all of us. It would have been nice to have Tin-Tin here but it was also nice to have a team of three and we all had to play all the time, which made us a little bit more together."

Disability



The victorious North East team, from left: Alex Bland, Adam Gittings, Shaun Alvey (NPC) and Megan Shackleton

England North East went through the competition unbeaten to lift the title, with South East beating defending champions Wales to silver on countback.

Two unbeaten individual records went in Saturday's first round of matches as Midlands' Daniel Bullen beat Nicko Anderson of South East in the wheelchair section (11-7, 11-6, 11-4) and Billy Shilton (South West, standing) defeated North East's Alex Bland (11-8, 11-9, 11-4), maintaining his own 100% record in the process.

Megan Shackleton's unbeaten run was ended by Anderson in Round 6, but the North East's 2-1 victory meant they could not be caught.

And they duly completed the perfect tournament with a 2-1 win over Midlands.

Shilton and North West's Jordan McGarry (learning) ended the competition with 100% win records.

The winning team of Shackleton (wheelchair), Bland (standing) and Adam Gittings (learning) were all thrilled to take the title.

Adam, 18, from Doncaster, said: "It's great because it's our first time as champions and it's my first School Games, so that's even better. We're strong in all areas but we had some tough matches and four other teams took points off us.

"My toughest match was against North West because my opponent (Jordan McGarry) was unbeaten and I only lost to him 11-8 in the fifth)."

Todmorden athlete Megan, 16, said: "It's really good to have won the event, particularly for me and Alex who have competed here before and it's nice to see improvements have been made.

"It's made a big difference that we all know each other really well and know each other's games so we have a good support network for each other."

Alex, who is 16 and from Rotherham, said: "It feels good. We've got a strong team overall, all three of us are a good unit."

Non-playing captain and coach Shaun Alvey added: "I can't remember any team going through unbeaten in the past. I've worked with these guys for five years and we've got a bond. I think that's a big thing and it's a proud achievement to see them come through unbeaten."

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