



Ramsden and Finn take School Games gold

Author: Paul Stimpson

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Alex Ramsden and Rebecca Finn were the singles champions as the individual competitions at the 2015 Sainsbury's School Games came to a thrilling climax in Manchester.

Daniel Bullen, Adam Gittings and Billy Shilton won the three disability titles in front of a great crowd at the Manchester Regional Tennis Centre.

[Click here to read the report of the team competitions](#)

Boys



England Midlands' Alex Ramsden in action at the table tennis during the Sainsbury's 2015 School Games at the Regional Tennis Centre. PA Photo

Alex Ramsden went one better than last year by claiming gold against surprise finalist Shaquille Webb-Dixon.

The scoreline read as a 7, 7, 7 heaven for Ramsden in the final and made it a double gold for the 15-year-old from Northampton, who was part of the Midlands squad which won the team competition.

He said: "I came in wanting to do better than last year and when Marcus Giles and Luke Savill pulled out beforehand I knew I would have a good chance of winning.

"But I also knew it would be a very tough challenge and a strong competition – even though I was No 1 seed there was quite a lot of pressure on me, so it's good to win."

Webb-Dixon had been called up after Savill's withdrawal and was surprised to reach the final.

"To be honest, I didn't really mind if I won or lost, because I'm not even meant to be here and I was surprised to get past the last 16.

"I just kept focused and tried to keep my head and not get angry with myself if I was down or losing."

After beating South East team-mate Josh Bennett in the first round, Webb-Dixon had ended Hugo Pang's (E-SW) unbeaten singles record in the quarter-finals, when he triumphed 3-0 (6, 8, 14) despite Pang saving several match points.

He then saw off Alec Ward (E-NE) in the last four, coming from 2-1 down to take a high-quality match 3-2 (12-10, 10-12, 8-11, 11-8, 11-7).

Ramsden's path to the final saw him also start against a team-mate – Will Hornsey, who took him to four sets.

Chris Wheeler (SCO) also took a set off Ramsden in the last eight – the Scotsman had won the team clash between the two and they might have met at a later stage had Wheeler not lost his unbeaten singles record for the tournament in the group stages, 3-0 (12, 6, 9) at the hands of Abhijay Mishra.

Ramsden said: "After losing to Chris in the team, I was very keen to beat him in the singles."

Ramsden's opponent in the semi-finals was the unbeaten Irishman Zak Wilson, but Ramsden ended that 100% record throughout the tournament as he took it 3-1 (12-10, 11-9, 7-11, 11-9).

Girls



Rebecca Finn with her gold medal

Rebecca Finn twice beat Denise Payet on her way to taking the gold medal for Northern Ireland.

The 15-year-old from Belfast triumphed over Payet (E-SE) in the group stages and repeated the feat in the final, coming from two sets down and eventually sealing it 3-2 (6-11, 7-11, 13-11, 11-7, 13-11) on her fourth match point.

"I didn't expect it when I was 2-0 down," admitted Finn. "I feel beating her in the group did help me – I thought I knew what tactics to use against her and I had the psychological advantage over her.

"But my team cheering me on was definitely my biggest weapon."

Finn's path through the KO stage saw her taken to four sets each time, by Anna Hursey (WAL) in the first round, Charlotte Bardsley (E-M) in the quarter-finals and Amy Humphreys (E-SW) in the last four – the latter scoreline 11-3, 9-11, 11-5, 12-10.

Payet, in the bottom half as a result of her group defeat to Finn, got past Letitia McMullan (E-SW) in four and then her great friend and team-mate Kate Cheer in the quarters – a cracking clash with Payet took 3-2 (9-11, 11-7, 6-11, 11-8, 11-9). The semi-final saw her beat Gauri Duhan (E-NE) 3-1 (5-11, 11-4, 11-7, 11-9).

As well as Finn's victory over Payet, the group stages produced some other eye-catching results, notably Wong's 3-2 victory over South East team champion Isabelle Joubely (10-12, 11-7, 8-11, 11-5, 11-7) and Anna Hursey of Wales beating Mollie Patterson (Midlands) in a match that was a lot closer than the 3-0 scoreline suggests – 12-10, 19-17, 11-9.

Standing Disability



Gold medallist Billy Shilton

South West's Billy Shilton finally got his hands on gold after winning silver in three previous School Games.

The 16-year-old from Stonehouse, who trains full-time in Sheffield with the GB para team, beat Tam Eastwood of Wales 3-0 (11-7, 13-11, 14-12) in the final.

It completed an unbeaten tournament for Shilton, in both the team and individual events – the only athlete to achieve that feat.

He said: "I've got silver three years in a row so to get gold is brilliant. I had extra motivation and I also think I've improved since I've been training full time in Sheffield.

"It's good to win every single match, it keeps my good form going for other competitions."

Shilton had beaten Scotland's Conor McAdam in his semi-final, having some tough moments before triumphing 3-1 (11-6, 11-8, 9-11, 11-6).

Eastwood's semi-final was against Alex Bland (E-NE) and it was a classic encounter which the Welshman won 3-2 (9-11, 11-9, 8-11, 11-8, 11-6).

Bland had earlier been taken all the way by McAdam in the groups, finally sealing a 3-2 victory (17-15, 11-7, 7-11, 10-12, 11-9).

Learning Disability



Adam Gittings with his gold medal

Adam Gittings made it double gold after being part of the victorious North East team.

Not only that, but he ended the 100% tournament record of Jordan McGarry in the final match, prevailing 3-1 (11-13, 11-4, 12-10, 11-4) against his North West opponent, who had beaten him in five sets in the team event.

Gittings, 18, from Doncaster, said: "It was my aim to win two golds but I thought it would be very, very hard and it was. I had to work extra hard, all the other players played well.

"I think my work ethic was the key. I believe if you work as hard as you can, the results will come and you've got to keep your focus too."

McGarry had come close to losing his unbeaten record in a brilliant semi-final against Archie Taylor (E-M), eventually sneaking home 3-2 (18-16, 7-11, 11-8, 13-15, 11-9).

He also had to dig deep to keep his run going with a 3-2 victory over defending champion Ashley Wray (WAL) in the groups, prevailing in a close match 9-11, 11-2, 11-7, 11-13, 11-5).

Gittings' semi-final was a more routine 3-0 (11-5, 11-8, 13-11) win over Wray.

Wheelchair



England Midlands' Daniel Bullen in action at the table tennis during the Sainsbury's 2015 School Games at the Regional Tennis Centre. PA Photo

After winning silver for the past two years, Daniel Bullen was delighted to get his hands on a gold.

The St Neots athlete, representing England Midlands, beat Megan Shackleton (E-NE) 3-0 (11-9, 11-4, 12-10) to take the title.

The 17-year-old Bedford College student said: "I'm over the moon, really. After coming away last year I worked my socks off to get better.

"I've got more experience and I've come straight back from a (GB Para) training camp in Slovenia, which helped. Also, I had my own coach in my corner this year (Mark Mitchell)."

Bullen reached the final thanks to a monumental comeback against Nicko Anderson. He had beaten Anderson 3-0 in the team competition but when Anderson took the first two sets it appeared that a reversal of that result was on the cards.

But Bullen found another gear and turned it around to win it 3-2 (14-16, 7-11, 11-9, 11-3, 11-5).

Bullen said: "He played really well the second time. I had to really fight to get that win. He didn't want to give away his title."

Shackleton, who had beaten Bullen in the groups, beat Cellan Hall of Wales 3-0 (8, 3, 4) in her semi.

Overall



The victorious Midlands team

When all the points were added up from the team and individual competitions, England Midlands were declared the overall winners.

There was also a nice moment when some of the volunteers at the event were presented with bats signed by England stars Paul Drinkhall, Kelly Sibley and Sam Walker and National Performance Coach Alan Cooke. Table Tennis England chairman Sandra Deaton made the presentation.



The volunteers with Table Tennis England Chairman Sandra Deaton

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