



South Shields success for Howieson and Sibley

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Men's Singles

Scottish international Craig Howieson was in dominant form to blitz his way to the Men's Singles title at the South Shields Grand Prix with a series of no-nonsense wins.

The Scot was a heavy favourite coming into the weekend with a number of the usual top seeds, including this season's previous winners Ryan Jenkins, David McBeath and Tom Jarvis, absent from proceedings.

Regardless of the expectations, Howieson went about his job professionally, winning his group with three successive 3-0 wins, including a one-sided affair against cadet Shayan Siraj, who would eventually be named Player of the Tournament after a fine weekend.

Howieson's only minor hiccup came against Joseph Clark in the first round when he took the second game 11-9 en route to a 3-1 (11-9, 9-11, 11-6, 11-5) defeat.

From there on in, the Scot's performance was flawless.

In wins over Anthony Phoenix, Calum Morrison and the final victory over Jack Bennett, his points conceded read; 5, 6, 0, 3, 8, 4, 4, 8, 4.

Bennett, on the other hand, had a much more energy-sapping route to the final with three consecutive five-game wins.

After winning a three-man group with Stephen Brunskill and Edger Berridge, he beat Lucas Papantoniou 3-0 to make the first round. However, things would prove difficult from there on with tense victories over Martin Lowe 3-2 (10-12, 7-11, 11-8, 11-4, 11-0), Alec Ward 3-2 (8-11, 11-1, 9-11, 11-5, 11-8) and second seed Chris Wheeler 3-2 (8-11, 11-4, 16-14, 9-11, 11-8) in the semi-final to follow.

The final step-up proved too much for the Sussex youngster, but his weekend's performance was worth the £130 runners-up prize, while the dominant Howieson walked away with £320.



(l-r) Jack Bennett, Table Tennis England Treasurer
Keith Thomas, Craig Howieson

Women's Singles

Just like Howieson, Kelly Sibley also ran riot at South Shields – the England international dropping just a solitary game in six matches to clinch her first Grand Prix success of the season.

With the three previous winners this season; Charlotte Carey, Xioxin Yang and Maria Tsaptsinos not in attendance we were guaranteed a fourth winner and Sibley kept her foot on the gas to ensure the honours returned to Nottingham.

In her group she eased past Beth Farnworth, Isobel Ashley, Holly Williams and Lydia John before taking her place in semi-finals.

There she met Megan Phillips who had an interesting route to the final four – scraping through her group on countback thanks to a 3-0 win over Lynda Flaws, who was unfortunate to finish third despite upsetting second seed Karina Le Fevre 3-2 (8-11, 11-9, 6-11, 11-8, 11-5).

Phillips then defeated her twin sister Angharad 3-0 (11-7, 11-4, 11-8) in the quarter-finals and became the first, and only, person to take a game off the English no.1 when she levelled their semi-final clash at 1-1. She could've taken the match to a decider but was unable to take advantage of a 7-2 lead in the fourth as Sibley fought back for a 13-11 hold.

On the other side of the draw, Saturday's band 1 and 2 winner Emily Bolton won her group on countback and beat Isobel Ashley 3-0 to reach the semi-finals.

Karina Le Fevre, having recovered sufficiently from her shock defeat to Lynda Flaws to win group 2, met Bolton in the last four and finally ended her campaign 3-1 (11-8, 11-8, 5-11, 11-8).

The final was set up to be a closely fought affair but Sibley raced out of the blocks to take the first end 11-3 and lead 10-3 in the second en route to a 11-8 game and 2-0 lead. The third was neck-and-neck throughout but, despite saving two match points, a net call on a third match point defeated Le Fevre and provided Sibley with the South Shields Grand Prix title.



(l-r) Kelly Sibley, Table Tennis England Treasurer Keith Thomas, Karina Le Fevre

Men's Under-21s

Men's Singles runner-up Jack Bennett tasted another bitter final defeat as his run towards the under-21 men's singles title was cut short by an in-form Shaquille Webb-Dixon.

Bennett, who started late due to his men's singles commitment, was forced to play back-to-back games throughout his under-21s campaign but managed to successfully pull his body through the rigours each time.

He made short work of his group, winning each contest 3-0 against Jonathan Meikle, Sam Hitchen and James Rule respectively before completing more straight sets victories over Fraser Riley (4, 5, 7), Lucas Papantoniou (8, 9, 9) and Liam Rowson (4, 5, 6) to make the final.

His opponent at the last stage was Grantham College's Shaquille Webb-Dixon who was equally impressive in his afternoon campaign.

Using a similar strong attacking style to Bennett, he beat Lee Edlington (3-0), Sean Gleghorn (3-1) and Matthew Stephens (3-0) to take top spot in group 5.

After overcoming impressive cadet Shayan Siraj 3-1 (11-6, 11-13, 11-7, 12-10) in the first round, Webb-Dixon picked up form to brush aside Matthew Leete 3-0 (11-7, 11-5, 11-9) and defender James Hobson 3-0 (11-5, 11-6, 11-8).

Webb-Dixon continued his streak into the final, edging a close opening game 12-10 but emerging a deserved victor with back-to-back 11-5 games to claim his first ever men's under-21s title.



(l-r) Jack Bennett and Shaquille Webb-Dixon

Women's Under-21s

Three was the magic number for Emily Bolton at South Shields on Sunday as she wrapped up the women's under-21 title.

Her victory in the round-robin at the Temple Park Centre was her third triumph of the weekend following her band 1 and 2 success on Saturday, while it was also a first under-21s win for the season after finishing runner-up at both Aldershot and Bristol earlier in the year.

Bolton was comfortable in her opening three fixtures against Lydia John, Holly Williams and Kitty Chow, winning all three 3-0 before completing her success with a 3-1 (11-6, 11-7, 6-11, 11-4) win over eventual runner-up Katie Barlow.

Bolton now takes command of the overall standings in the under-21s with a commanding points lead over her rivals.



(l-r) Emily Bolton and Katie Barlow

Veterans'

A battle-weary Tomas Rzeszotko won the Veterans' singles at South Shields after a long weekend of action over the two days at the Temple Park Centre.

Rzeszotko was the top seed for the event but was visibly affected by his exploits in Saturday's banded events and the morning's singles. Despite this, he was able to win his group with victories over Gary Whyman and Robert Reed before beating Mark Christie 3-1 (11-3, 11-5, 10-12, 11-2) and Jevon Chan 3-1 (11-8, 10-12, 11-8, 11-2) to make the final.

Meeting him there was fourth seed Dave Robson who beat David Randall and Brian Cowan in his group before dispatching Peter Wilkinson 3-0 (12-10, 11-9, 11-7) in the quarter-final.

The Northumberland player then produced an excellent comeback against Martin Lowe to sneak into the final. From 2-0 down he won the next three games 11-6, 11-8, 11-3 to book his place against Rzeszotko.

He started well in the last stage with a tight 16-14 opening game, but the wily Rzeszotko would not be denied his second veterans' title of the season as he won three consecutive games 11-6 to seal the title.



(l-r) Dave Robson and Tomasz Rzeszotko

Open Doubles

Scottish doubles pair Craig Howieson and Chris Wheeler won the open doubles event at South Shields, defeating Bryan Kwan and Chun Yin Yu in the final.

The no.1 and 2 seeds for the men's singles were favourites for the title and proved to be worthy as they quickly chalked up the win.

After beating Michael Fraser and Jack Dempsey 3-0 in the group they saw their other two group opponents concede, giving them free reign into the semi-finals. Once there they beat fellow Scots Calum Morrison and Keir Morton 3-0 (11-8, 11-4, 11-9) to meet Kwan and Yu in the final.

Their opponents had won both their group games 3-0 against Steve Gallagher/Clark Ross and Keir Morton/Calum Morrison before knocking out Fraser/Dempsey in the semi-final 3-1 (9-11, 11-8, 11-5, 11-8).

In the final, the Scots took a 2-0, before Kwan and Yu fought back to take the third game 11-8. However, before any thoughts of a comeback could be mustered the Scottish pair powered home 11-0, sealing a fine day for Howieson and saving an underwhelming weekend for Wheeler.



(l-r) Chun Yin Yu/Bryan Kwan and Chris Wheeler/Craig Howieson

Results:

Men's Singles

Craig Howieson bt Jack Bennett 3-0 (11-4, 11-8, 11-4)

Women's Singles

Kelly Sibley bt Karina Le Fevre 3-0 (11-3, 11-8, 12-10)

Men's Under-21s

Shaquille Webb-Dixon bt Jack Bennett 3-0 (12-10, 11-5, 11-5)

Women's Under-21s

Emily Bolton wins round robin. Katie Barlow runner-up.

Veterans'

Tomasz Rzeszotko bt Dave Robson 3-1 (14-16, 11-6, 11-6, 11-6)

Open Doubles

Craig Howieson/Chris Wheeler bt Bryan Kwan/Chun Yin Yu 3-1 (11-3, 11-9, 8-11, 11-0)

Player of the Weekend

Shayan Siraj – winner of band 3 and picked up big wins en route to men's singles quarter-final.



Player of the Weekend Shayan Siraj

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