

Silence is Golden

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Sam Walker celebrates a superb day at the Tees Sport Grand Prix

Fifteen year old England Cadet International Sam Walker played in deadly silence showing no vocal emotion throughout all his fourteen matches in the Men's band one and two competitions being totally professional for one so young. It was refreshing to admire the silenced talents of the vastly improved Worksop junior as he was unquestionably the star of the day winning all but two of those matches, on day one at the Tees Sport Doncaster Grand Prix, on Saturday the 3rd of July.

After suffering an early defeat in his group to Ashley Robinson, Sam then carved a pathway to the final of band one enduring five tough sets against Tom Maynard plus having the fighting qualities to withstand the challenge from number 3 seed Niall Cameron in another five set thriller. He then went on to face a dangerous opponent in the form of Mike Marsden (S2) in the last four. The Tees Sport Marketing Manager took a quick 2 sets to love lead in impressive fashion putting the younger player firmly on the ropes. Getting back into the match, Walker's crisp movement using the wide angles put a semi fit Marsden into trouble and from there on in he levelled at 2-2. In a tense last set Walker got it in the bag with an 11-9 score to reach the final against Damien Nicholls. Top seed for the event, Nicholls, had his work cut out to repel the challenges from Scott Crawford, Sam Perry and then an incredible semi final with David McBeath that could have gone either way, coming through 18-16 in the fifth set. Damien's superior experience allied with his range and variation had the ability to withstand and counter every variety of shot that Walker threw at him with Nicholls running out a worthy band 1 champion.

Sam had earlier played brilliantly throughout in band 2 to take the title at the expense of finalist Daniel O'Connell in straight sets. Probably his toughest match in this event came from Great Britain Paralympian Will Bayley. Taking a two sets to one lead Bayley looked very positive with pinpoint blocking from the Walker attack. Sam then tweaked and changed his game plan with more variation in spin and pace to get his nose in front by 11-9 in the fifth leg. Losing finalist Daniel O'Connell somehow got past Mark Jackson (who was playing brilliantly removing 2nd seeded Stig Owe Karlsson) in a close five sets semi final, but was no match for the scintillating Walker in the last match. Sam was definitely the "flavour" of the tournament.

Having played so very well at the earlier Hereford Grand Prix, Lauren Spink continued in her devastating form in winning Women's band one from finalist Chloe Whyte. Lauren was also responsible for the departure of Chloe Thomas at the last four stage. In the first round you had to feel for Angharad Phillips in the all Welsh clash with Charlotte Carey losing the match 11-13 in the fifth leg after being 10-6 up holding four match points. Charlotte to her credit weathered that valley storm but was overwhelmed by Chloe Whyte in the semi final.

England Cadet and Junior International Lucy Davidson was in a class of her own in winning both the Women's band 2 and 3 events. The fifteen year old who has recently signed to play for club Pontoise Cergy near Paris in the French league this coming season stopped off at Doncaster for some warm up matches prior to her impending visit to Turkey for the European Youth's. A fully fit Lucy after her three month absence with back ligament problems dropped just two sets on her way to collecting the band 2 and 3 glassware prizes being far too strong for gallant finalist 13yr old Isobel Ashley winning both events in straight sets. Isobel has jetted back from Ireland where she

performed very well to win bronze in the singles and silver in the team event at the British Schools Internationals. Charlotte Airey enjoyed some good wins to reach the last four losing out to Isobel Ashley whilst Nicole Finn who endured a five set marathon against 2nd seed Sarah Timlin to reach the semi final. Isobel had no answers in both these finals for tournament double winner Lucy Davidson.

No stranger to the winner's enclosure, Grantham academy based star Dan O'Connell added another band three prize to his trophy cabinet in a nerve tingling final all Welsh five set final against the dynamic Lee Morgan. It was a brilliant match where both players were winners and attracted a large audience. In the rounds O'Connell displaced Ernest Mpundu then in the quarter final went one better against our very own British league press officer Steve Kerns followed by a win over brave semi finalist Aaron McKibbin. Lee Morgan's route to the last match saw him get the better of Tony West, Nathan Thomas, and last four opponent Bradley Tuttle.

Men's band 4 event went Halton British league player Ernest Mpundu who had a final match to savour against GB disability squad member Farrell Anthony that went to four sets. Farrell the fantastic Paralympian competing in his first Grand Prix final who had competed in the 2000 Sydney Games gave it his best shot but could not cope with the clever skills of Mpundu. Ernest (SI) came through the rounds brushing aside Yoni Caspi, and semi finalist Richard Element, whilst Farrell impressed over Matthew Knott, Laurence Sweeney and last four adversaries Neil Irwin to reach his final with Mpundu.

Sheffield based cadet Eric Wan was the top player in Men's band 5 proving too strong for all his opponents. He weathered a five set rousing final against Middlesex competitor Mikael Papantoniou. Semi finalists Richard the "Lionheart" Beattie (who was the points winner in band 6 and in 4th position in band 5) played to the very best of his ability, taking finalist Papantoniou right to the wire, whilst losing last four player James Houghton enjoyed another great run in this higher band.

Houghton the "come back king" who had been away from table tennis for 4 years due to his studies at University came through to take Men's band 6 in his first appearance in a Grand Prix for several years. The local Rotherham league player had to survive a match point down and come back from a 2 sets to 1 deficit in his semi final against Zak Chambers. He weathered that storm to come through that match and face John Bousfield in the final. He was on song throughout over Bousfield in the final match taking the title 3-0.

Results from day one at Doncaster.

Men's Band 1. Damien Nicholls (Sp) beat Sam Walker (Ng) 11-6, 11-8, 11-5.

Women's Band 1. Lauren Spink (Nk) beat Chloe Whyte (Cv) 11-7, 8-11, 11-7, 15-13.

Men's Band 2. Sam Walker (Ng) beat Dan O'Connell (WAL) 11-2, 11-9, 11-3.

Women's Band 2. Lucy Davidson (Dy) beat Isobel Ashley (Dy) 11-6, 11-7, 11-4.

Men's Band 3. Dan O'Connell (WAL) beat Lee Morgan (WAL) 7-11, 11-6, 12-10, 4-11, 11-3.

Women's Band 3. Lucy Davidson (Dy) beat Isobel Ashley (Dy) 12-10, 11-7, 11-4.

Men's Band 4. Ernest Mpundu (Ys) beat Farrell Anthony (Ys) 11-3, 14-12, 4-11, 11-4.

Men's Band 5. Eric Wan (Ys) beat Mikael Papantoniou (Mi) 8-11, 11-4, 11-6, 5-11, 11-7.

Men's Band 6. James Houghton (Y) beat John Bousfield (Cv) 11-4, 11-8, 11-7.

Grand Prix Points Winners Results for 2009/2010

Men's Band 1.

1st Matt Ware (Ha) 161 pts. 2nd Mark Simpson (Du) 142. 3rd Niall Cameron (SCO) 127. 4th Tom Maynard (Bk) 124. 5th Patrick Thomas (WAL) 90. 6th Emran Hussein (E) 88.

Women's Band 1.

1st Charlotte Carey (WAL) 107 pts. 2nd Su West (Do) 82. 3rd Annabelle Morle (Ha) 52. 4th Gosia Muda (Mi) 16. 5th Emily Ross (La) 1pt.

Men's Band 2.

1st Tomasz Rzeszotko (La) 148 pts. 2nd Dan O'Connell (WAL) 145. 3rd Jojo Seniorin (Mi) 88. 4th Ceri James (WAL) 87. 5th Lloyd Gregory (Av) 69. 6th Wayne Mason (Nk) 60 pts.

Women's Band 2.

1st. Gosia Muda (Mi) 107 pts. 2nd. Su West (Do) 104. 3rd. Annabelle Morle (Ha) 87. 4th. Charlotte Carey (WAL) 73. 5th Charlotte Airey (Li) 64.

Men's Band 3.

1st Dan O'Connell (WAL) 164 pts. 2nd Edward Fambely (Y) 124. 3rd Ceri James (WAL) 115. 4th equal – Wayne Mason (Nk) Dean Cundy (WAL) 102. 6th Scott Cundy (WAL) 100.

Women's Band 3.

1st Emily Standing (Cu) 86pts. 2nd Charlotte Airey (Li) 68. 3rd Chrissie Slot (Ha) 57. 4th. Paulina Orzechowska (La) 29. 5th Emily Ross (La) 22.

Men's Band 4.

1st Ernest Mpundu (Ys) 143 pts . 2nd Lewis Williams (WAL) 136. 3rd Daniel Fielding (Ca) 130. 4th Lee Morgan (WAL) 119. 5th Matt Rogers (Do) 100. 6th Andy Smith (Av) 85.

Men's Band 5.

1st Matt Lancey (WAL) 134 pts . 2nd Lee Morgan (WAL) 113. 3rd Ed Slot (Ha) 105. 4th Rick Beattie (La) 97. 5th Anthony Constantinou (Mi) 91. 6th Mark Stanfield (Ng) 82.

Men's Band 6.

1st Rick Beattie (La) 65 pts. 2nd Dean Cundy (WAL) 32. 3rd Matthew Knott (Ca) 29. 4th William Ross (La) 22. 5th Mark Stanfield (Ng) 13. 6th Andy Lerner (K) 10.

By Geoff Ware

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