



Chelmsford & District Closed: Warner aims to defend title

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Entries are up for the 2016 M&G Investments Chelmsford & District Table Tennis League Closed Championships with 86 players having entered this year.

The preliminary stages will take place over the weekend of Friday 29 to Sunday 31 January 2016 at Hylands School, Chelmsford Road, Chelmsford, CM1 3ET. Admission is free and all who are interested in watching are very welcome to drop in over the weekend.

The Chelmsford & District Table Tennis League Committee are extremely grateful for the very generous sponsorship they have received of the Tournament from M&G Investments which dates back to 1999. Anna Emtage, Charity & Community Relations Manager at M&G Investments, had this to say: "M&G Investments is delighted to sponsor the 2016 Tournament. This will be the Company's 16th consecutive year of sponsorship and I am sure the competition will be as exciting as ever."

The blue riband event as always is the Men's Singles and last year's champion Ben Warner will be out to regain his title. He will face fierce competition from the second seed – last year's Southend Men's Singles champion – Tony Halling and a plethora of other strong players which include the other 10 seeded players who are favourites to win their groups.

These are four times champion David Cole, three other former champions Alex Abbott (the winner in 2012 and 2013), Rik James (1998) and Keiran Lally (2003), last year's runner-up Brandon Crouchman, 2014 runner-up Mindaugas Sinkus, impressive newcomers Sam Hume and Reece Seddon and former semi-finalists Paul Davison and Gary Young.

With two players to qualify for the main draw from each group, two groups stand out. Group 13 is certainly going to be "unlucky" for someone as it features Rik James, Steve Kerns, Charles Sweeney and Cameron Gray, whilst Group 12 pairs up Brandon Crouchman, Scott Dowsett, John Cleasby and Chris Hancox.

In recent years the Men's Doubles has been one of the most open events and this year is no exception. There are only four seeded pairs. The holders Brandon Crouchman and Scott Dowsett are top seeds whilst Tony Halling / Ben Warner are seeded second. The joint third seeds are 2014 champions Gary Young / Steve Kerns and another strong pairing, Mindaugas Sinkus / Keiran Lally. Somewhat surprisingly, last year's runners-up – Dave Cole / Rik James and new pairing Paul Davison / Alex Abbott are not seeded this year.

Julie Johnson hasn't played in the league this year owing to injury so her seven year run of Ladies' Singles titles will certainly be coming to an end. In Julie's absence Dawn Baldry is favourite and she will face tough opposition from Jan Fuller, Shirley Carroll, Lin Attridge and Jacqueline Smith.

Last year's champions Shirley Carroll / Steve Whiteley start as favourites in the Mixed Doubles and they face tough opposition from new pairing Lin Attridge / David Cole as well as Jan Fuller / Alex Abbott and last year's losing finalists - Ciaran Whelan / Dawn Baldry.

David Cole is top seed in the Veterans' Singles, as befits his status as holder, and in a strong event

he is seeded to meet Alex Abbott in the final. Third seeds Rik James and Gary Young will both be out to deny them their Finals Night appearance whilst the other players who are seeded to win their groups - Glenn Johnson, John Cleasby, Steve Kerns, Ian Whiteside, Steve Whiteley and Hamish Innes - will all be hoping to upset the rankings.

The holders Gary Young / Steve Kerns will be hoping to win the Veterans' Doubles again but they will be tested by last year's runners-up Dave Cole / Rik James as well as other tricky pairings such as Andrew Huckson / Adam Buxton, John Cleasby / Gary Cattermole, Steve Whiteley / Ian Whiteside and Alex Abbott / Jan Fuller.

The Under-21 Singles should be hotly contested this year and the holder Brandon Crouchman, who played so well in last year's tournament, will face really tough competition from newcomer Sam Hume as well as the 2014 Champion Scott Dowsett and Ryan Gooday and Daniel Berry.

The Divisional Singles events will dominate Sunday's play and Waseem Qureshi will be trying to win the Division two event for a third successive year. He will face tough opposition from the likes of Ryan Gooday, Robert Shrimpton, Daniel Berry, Neil Freeman, Andrew Huckson, Ryan Pitt and Peter Windley.

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