



## Enigmatic Akindaya stars on Nottingham GP opening day

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Nigerian Ismaila Akindaya lit up the opening day of the Nottingham Grand Prix on a day notable for fine performances and repeat performances. In one of the more extraordinary outcomes to a grand prix schedule, four of the five morning bands were contested by players who had already met in the group stages.

### Men's Band 1

Explosive talent Ismaila Akindaya won the standout match of the day to see off Liam McTiernan late on at the Nottingham Grand Prix in five pulsating sets.

Akindaya, from Nigeria but living in Bedford, showed his promise in reaching the band 2 final earlier in the day, but really excelled in the afternoon as his energetic and enthusiastic style lit up the venue.

After winning group 7 with victories over Joe Pilkington and Noor Owadally he beat Joe Killoran in three ends, Jack Bennett in four and Matthew Leete 3-2 in a brilliant (14-16, 11-5, 15-13, 2-11, 11-6) semi-final.

In the final he faced McTiernan, who entertained in his own way throughout the afternoon following a couple of big victories. The youngster won his group comfortably with three 3-0 wins but had to work hard to defeat Jannik Larsen by the somewhat strange scoreline of 3-2 (11-8, 8-11, 6-11, 14-12, 11-0).

After that he beat both Dominic Sussex and Gavin Maguire in straight sets to secure his place in the final.

It appeared to be going well for McTiernan, who led 2-1 and had a matchpoint in the fourth, but Akindaya – roared on by his enigmatic compatriot and coach, saved the point and took a game point of his own to force the decider.

The final set, taking place shortly after the centre tannoy announced that the venue was closing (22:00), was end-to-end with great cheers from Akindaya's coach, followed by a riposte from the University of Nottingham players, who were supporting McTiernan.

In the end Akindaya was able to force his way ahead and closed out the final game 11-7 in a classic contest. Much is now expected of the Nigerian's presence in the men's singles on Sunday who could become a major hurdle for one of the pre-tournament favourites.

### Women's Band 1



Emily Bolton and Tin Tin Ho

Top seed Tin Tin Ho warmed up perfectly for Sunday's challenging women's singles with a fine all-round performance in the women's band 1 by taking the title without dropping an end.

The English no. 2, who faces no.5 Karina Le Fevre tomorrow and potentially matches against no.1 Kelly Sibley, no.4 Maria Tsaptsinos, Welsh no. 1 Charlotte Carey or Italian Chiara Colantoni, wanted to achieve some rhythm ahead of the testing singles schedule.

She was in supreme form to win her group with four consecutive 3-0 victories, including a 3-0 (11-7, 11-8, 19-17) win over her eventual final opponent Emily Bolton.

The pair then met surprise semi-finalists Kate Cheer and Emma Ludlow in the last four. Ludlow, who defeated Emma Torkington, Yolanda King, Abbie Milwain and Cherith Graham faced Ho, while group winner Cheer paired up with Bolton after defeating Graham, Milwain, King and Ludlow.

The semi-finals were of contrasting nature as Ho cruised into the final with another 3-0 win over Ludlow while Bolton had to fight hard to see off the challenge of Cheer 3-2 (11-7, 9-11, 11-6, 7-11, 11-7). When the pair met once more in the final, the result was the same as earlier with England's no.2 capping off a fine day with a 3-0 win.

## **Men's Band 2**



Ismaila Akindaya and Kim Daybell

Kim Daybell overcame an opening match defeat to Ismaila Akindaya to win the men's band 2 title after returning the favour against the Nigerian in the final.

Akindaya cut the spitting image of Commonwealth Games hero Segun Toriola as his backhand serves and blistering forehands lit up the play early at Nottingham Grand Prix. Daybell must've thought he was in cruise control after winning the opening two games of their encounter 11-3, 11-7 but the Nigerian was only warming up, storming back 12-10, 12-10, 11-8) to seal an unlikely win.

Neither player conceded an end during the rest of the group and duly sealed their places in the knockout rounds.

From there Akindaya blew past Bryan Kwan (3-1), Matthew Leete (3-0) and Jannick Larson (3-0) while Daybell also ensured progress with straight games wins over Lucas Papantoniou and Dominic Sussex before battling past Mitchell Jones 3-2 (5-11, 11-8, 10-12, 11-7, 11-3) in their semi-final.

In the re-match between group 1's best duo, Daybell once again started well, winning the opening two games, before Akindaya – as he had done previously, won a tightly contested third end, This time, however, Daybell did not allow his explosive opponent to complete the comeback as he kept himself ahead during the fourth end to secure a 3-1 victory 11-7.

## Women's Band 2



Beth Farnworth and Mollie Patterson

Mollie Patterson emerged victorious from women's band 2 at the Nottingham Grand Prix with an excellent comeback triumph over Beth Farnworth in the final – completing three consecutive five-end victories to secure a well-deserved crown.

Patterson and Farnworth initially met in the group stages where the Lancastrian was able to emerge on top in a tight clash 3-2 (5-11, 11-8, 9-11, 13-11, 11-5) before both were victorious in their respective semi-finals.

Group 2 winner Farnworth defeated group 1 runner-up Kate Cheer 3-1 (4-11, 11-8, 12-10, 11-3) while Patterson secured the second of her five-set triumphs 3-2 (12-14, 12-10, 12-6, 4-11, 11-8) over the top seed Emily Bolton.

When the pair met in the final it was Farnworth who started the stronger once more, taking two close opening games 11-9 and 12-10, but a powerful comeback from Patterson saw her claw back three consecutive 11-8 ends to take home the top prize.

### Men's Band 3





Ross Wilson and Shayan Siraj

Ross Wilson won the men's band 3 title at Nottingham Grand Prix – fending off the challenge from spirited cadet Shayan Siraj in the final.

The day didn't begin well for the Kent player as he fell to defeat in his very first match – a 3-2 (11-7, 5-11, 5-11, 11-9, 15-13) loss to Olly Tyndall meaning that he had to settle for second place in the group.

Not deterred by this indifferent start, he battled his way through back-to-back five set encounters against Anthony Constantinou 3-2 (11-8, 6-11, 9-11, 13-11, 11-9) and Lucas Papantoniou 3-2 (6-11, 11-4, 8-11, 11-9, 11-9) before really hitting his stride and seeing off both Billy Shilton (3-0) and William Hornsey (3-1) to make the final.

On the other side of the draw, Olly Tyndall was making great strides, defeating Tim Denby and Jamie Fisher to reach the semi-finals, but he was halted at that stage by the impressive Yorkshire cadet Siraj.

The 14-year-old, who won group 4 and defeated Jamie Rule 3-2 (11-6, 9-11, 11-9, 12-14, 11-9) and Tommy Gritton 3-0 (13-11, 11-4, 15-13), then stunned Tyndall 3-0 (11-9, 12-10, 11-8) to set up a final meeting with Wilson.

This time, however, Wilson was too strong and was in control throughout to seal a 3-1 victory and the band 3 title.

### **Women's Band 3**



Amy Blagbrough and Kitty Chow

Kitty Chow, the morning band 4 winner (below), was on form once again in Nottingham to win the women's band 3 title ahead of Amy Blagbrough.

Just like earlier, Chow recovered from a group stage defeat to claim the crown, with the unfortunate Blagbrough suffering her only defeat in the final stage.

Chow, who had already qualified for the knockout stages, lost to Anne Hudson 3-1 (11-4, 9-11, 11-4, 11-9) but was still able to advance in first place in group 1, ahead of Lauren Evans, who had earlier also made the band 4 final.

This time Evans was unable to follow her into the final as Blagbrough, the winner of group 2, maintained her form to beat Evans 3-1 (7-11, 11-7, 11-6, 11-9) in their semi-final. In the other semi-final Chow defeated Amelia Chan 3-0 to avenge her morning defeat to the same opponent.

By this time, Chow was on top form and despite a drop in the second game, she came through in fine fettle to emerge triumphant 3-1.

#### **Men's Band 4**



Billy Shilton and Jamie Fisher

Billy Shilton won a dramatic final against Jamie Fisher in front of a big crowd at the Nottingham Grand Prix to secure the men's band 4 title.

Shilton, part of the BTTAD squad, secured a steady progression to the knockout stages with three comfortable victories in group 10 before seeing off Jamie Davies 3-0 in the first round. He had a much trickier time of it in his second match against group 1 winner Andrew MacPherson but was still able to emerge on the right side of a 3-2 (11-13, 11-8, 11-3, 11-13, 11-8) win. Two more victories over Reece Chamdal (3-0) and Charles Fitzgerald (3-1) saw him claim his place in the final.

On the other side of the draw Fisher dropped just one game en route to his spot in the last stage. A 3-0 win over group 2 winner Jens Salvesen was followed up by a 3-1 win over Chris Price, a 3-0 victory against Mark Firth and another 3-0 triumph in his semi-final, this time over Lewis Carby.

The Hertfordshire youngster then took control of the final – leading 2-1 having come from behind. But, in the midst of some excellent rallies, Shilton fought his way back into the encounter and levelled the match 2-2 with a 12-10 game. The deciding set was just as tense, with the result hanging in the balance, until Shilton was finally able to hold his nerve at 13-11 and win the band 4 title.

#### Women's Band 4





Lauren Evans and Kitty Chow

Kitty Chow emulated her group victory over Lauren Evans in the women's band 4 final to take the first title of the Nottingham Grand Prix.

It wasn't all plain sailing for Chow, though, as her group campaign finished in a tight countback call between three players. Her 3-1 (11-6, 6-11, 11-6, 11-5) win over her final opponent, Evans, proved crucial in the overall standings as she progressed top of group 1, with Evans in second and the unfortunate Amelia Chan third despite her 3-2 (10-12, 11-9, 3-11, 11-4, 11-9) win over Chow.

The group one pair then progressed through their respective semi-finals, Chow with a four end win over Grace Porter, while Evans defeated Christine Wright in three. However, when they met in the final stage, the Cleveland player was once again too strong for her Staffordshire opponent – this time securing the win in three straight games.

#### Men's Band 5



Dylan Grace and David Buck



David Buck ensured an excellent end to a long day on his return to competitive table tennis with a victory in the men's band 5 final.

Taking to the table for the first time in 22 years, the Welshman showed his old form by remaining unbeaten throughout the day to win back-to-back titles in Nottingham.

Emerging from a three-man group with two 3-0 wins, Buck went on the rampage once again and saw off three more adversaries in straight games; Yi Zhou, Kwan Lin Lui and Adam Gittings, before defeating Ethan Chapman 3-1 (4-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-4) in the semi-finals.

Waiting for him in the final was earlier band six runner-up Dylan Grace. He also won through his group without dropping an end before advancing through the knockout stages with further wins over Clark Ross (3-0), Conor Gallagher 3-2 (9-11, 8-11, 12-10, 11-9, 15-13), Matthew Clewett (3-0) and Lee Dorning (3-1).

Just like in the morning, Buck found himself behind, but came back to deny Grace revenge. At 2-1 down he drew on his experience to win the final two games 11-5, 11-8 and seal a second triumph of the day.

#### Men's Band 6



Dylan Grace and David Buck

David Buck staged a terrific comeback victory against Dylan Grace to claim the men's band 6 title.

Incredibly the pair were drawn together in group 9's opening fixture yet managed to win all the way through the competition to meet again in the final. Welshman Buck won the opening encounter – displaying a hint of what was to come – a tense 3-2 (10-12, 11-7, 11-6, 9-11, 11-8) victory en route to top spot.

From there, the Welshman defeated Jiten Pitamber (3-0), Jack Finney (3-2) and Matthew Clewett (3-0) in the knockout rounds to reach the last stage. Grace meanwhile, had to battle through an extra qualifying round match against Benjamin Knight (3-1) before he defeated top seed Phil Barnish (3-0), Craig Allen (3-0) and Kwan Lin Lui (3-2) to join Buck once again.

Grace may have thought his fortunes had overturned as he took a 2-0 lead in the final, but, not to be denied the main prize, Buck was able to replicate his form of earlier and seal three crucial ends to sneak home 3-2.

#### Nottingham GP Results:

##### Men's Band 1

Ismaila Akindaya bt Liam McTiernan 3-2 (10-12, 11-3, 9-11, 12-10, 11-7)

**Women's Band 1**

Tin-Tin Ho bt Emily Bolton 3-0 (11-9, 11-5, 11-6)

**Men's Band 2**

Kim Daybell bt Ismaila Akindiya 3-1 (11-6, 14-12, 9-11, 11-7)

**Women's Band 2**

Mollie Patterson bt Beth Farnworth 3-2 (9-11, 10-12, 11-8, 11-8, 11-8)

**Men's Band 3**

Ross Wilson bt Shayan Siraj 3-1 (11-9, 1-11, 11-5, 11-7)

**Women's Band 3**

Kitty Chow bt Amy Blagbrough 3-1 (11-9, 3-11, 11-8, 11-4)

**Men's Band 4**

Billy Shilton bt Jamie Fisher 3-2 (11-8, 3-11, 8-11, 12-10, 13-11)

**Women's Band 4**

Kitty Chow bt Lauren Evans 3-0 (14-12, 11-5, 11-6)

**Men's Band 5**

David Buck bt Dylan Grace 3-2 (3-11, 11-9, 5-11, 11-5, 11-8)

**Men's Band 6**

David Buck bt Dylan Grace 3-2 (7-11, 9-11, 11-9, 13-11, 11-5)

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