



Chelmsford & District: Ex-champs ready to contest title

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All four Men's Singles semi-finalists in this year's M&G Investments Chelmsford & District Closed Table Tennis Championships have experience of playing on Finals Night and three of the players are former winners of the title.

Finals Night takes place on Monday February 8 at Old Chelmsfordians Association, Lawford Lane, Chelmsford at 7.30pm and admission is free.

David Cole, a four-time former champion, booked his appearance in the semi-finals by ousting Steve Kerns in five ends (5-11, 11-8, 11-9, 7-11, 11-7) and then last year's champion Ben Warner 3-1 (6-11, 11-5, 11-3, 11-4).

David will play Tony Halling, a semi-finalist in Chelmsford in 2014 and last year's Southend Men's Singles champion. Tony cruised past Robert Shrimpton 11-5, 12-10, 11-3 and last year's runner-up Brandon Crouchman 11-5, 11-4, 11-7. In the quarter-final Paul Davison fared little better with Tony powering his way to another 3-0 (11-5, 11-2, 11-6) success.

In the other half of the draw Rik James, the champion in 1998, impressed greatly with 3-0 wins over Scott Dowsett, Gary Cattermole and Mindaugas Sinkas. Cattermole had seen off the challenge of the seeded Sam Hume in five ends.

Rik will play another player with a fine tournament pedigree – Keiran Lally, the Chelmsford champion in 2003. Keiran looked to be in fine form as he ousted Simon Webber 3-0 (11-3, 11-6, 11-4) and then second seed Alex Abbott 3-1 (11-4, 6-11, 15-13, 12-10) in the quarter-final.

The excitement wasn't just confined to the main rounds of the competition. Group No 12 was full of surprises. Chris Hancox scored a superb 3-2 win over Scott Dowsett (9-11, 12-10, 9-11, 11-8, 12-10) but Scott still went through on count-back as he defeated John Cleasby 3-0 (11-9, 12-10, 11-9).

Group 13 also produced a close finish and Steve Kerns finished as runner-up (behind Rik James) by defeating Charles Sweeney 3-2 (11-5, 9-11, 7-11, 11-8, 12-10).

The Ladies' Singles final will be between Dawn Baldry and Jan Fuller. Dawn booked her place in the final with a 3-0 victory over Jacqueline Smith whilst Jan had to fight back from 2-0 down to see off the challenge of Lin Attridge. This game went all the way to the wire before Jan finally sneaked home 8-11, 4-11, 11-9, 11-8, 12-10.

In another close match, this time in the group stages Jan just managed to get the better of Shirley Carroll in five (11-5, 7-11, 10-12, 11-7, 13-11).

The Men's Doubles featured some of the most fiercely contested matches of the weekend as is often the case. The holders – Scott Dowsett and Brandon Crouchman – are again in the final but they had all manner of problems in booking that berth. New pairing Sam Hume and Gary Cattermole just wouldn't give in and they only succumbed 3-2 (8-11, 11-7, 6-11, 13-11, 10-12) after a truly spell-binding match.

The other half of the draw was equally well contested and another new pairing – Paul Davison / Alex Abbott finally made it through to the final. They beat Steve Kerns / Gary Young 3-2 (8-11, 12-10, 11-6, 11-13, 11-8) in the penultimate round having seen off the challenge of second seeds Tony Halling / Ben Warner in five (11-5, 11-3, 6-11, 9-11, 13-11) a round earlier. Kerns / Young had ousted Rik

James / Dave Cole 3-1 (11-9, 11-0, 9-11, 13-11) in the quarter-finals.

So often in the frame for honours in the past, Melanie Bonnett / Nicola Phippen finally captured the Ladies' Doubles title. They scored two notable victories, defeating Dawn Baldry / Shirley Carroll 3-0 (11-6, 11-7, 11-7) and Lin Attridge / Jan Fuller 3-1 (11-8, 10-12, 11-9, 11-8).

Melanie Bonnett will also feature in the Mixed Doubles final. Paired with Steve Kerns, they defeated last year's champions Steve Whiteley / Shirley Carroll in five ends (11-7, 5-11, 11-9, 10-12, 11-3).

They will face the formidable challenge of David Cole / Lin Attridge in the final. David and Lin impressed greatly with a 3-0 (11-7, 11-6, 11-9) victory over Ciaran Whelan / Dawn Baldry. The other fancied pairing – Alex Abbott / Jan Fuller had been beaten in the first round in four ends by Whelan / Baldry (11-9, 11-13, 11-2, 11-4).

This year's Veterans' Singles final will be a repeat of last year's. Dave Cole will be bidding for his sixth title and he looked to be at his best as he ousted the challenges of Adam Buxton (11-4, 11-9, 11-8), David Gatherall (11-9, 11-5, 11-3) and Gary Young (11-8, 11-9, 10-12, 11-5).

In the bottom half of the draw second seed Alex Abbott was a quarter-final faller over four ends to Steve Kerns (9-11, 11-3, 6-11, 7-11) but Steve could make little impression against Rik James in the semi-final with Rik frequently bamboozling Steve with his huge variety of topspin shots. Rik raced to a 3-0 (11-9, 11-4, 11-6) success and he will be bidding for his fourth title, having last won in 2010.

Dave Cole / Rik James were also successful in the Veterans' Doubles, a title they last won in 2010. In a fluctuating final they beat Gary Young / Steve Kerns – the holders in five ends. Rik / Dave finally triumphed 11-8, 8-11, 9-11, 11-9, 11-6.

The Over-50s' Singles had a very open feel to it with the top seed Rik James withdrawing. Steve Kerns, the second seed, beat Steve Whiteley 3-1 but he could find no way past the backhand counter-punching skills of John Cleasby. John came through their semi-final quite comfortably 11-8, 11-7, 11-8 to book his final appearance and he duly defeated Lin Attridge 3-1 (7-11, 11-7, 13-11, 11-8) to capture the title.

Lin had battled her way to the final with three hard-fought successes. She beat David Parker 3-2 (7-11, 8-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-9) and then Steve Siggs 3-1 (9-11, 12-10, 11-8, 11-5) and, most impressively, Mike Johnston 3-1 (11-7, 11-9, 6-11, 11-3).

Former Chairman of the league Ian Whiteside – the Veterans' Champion as far back as 1987 – is this year's Over 60s' Singles champion. He beat three fancied contenders to capture the title. Ian saw off the challenge of Steve Whiteley by a last gasp 3-2 (8-11, 13-11, 11-8, 9-11, 11-9) scoreline and then John Cleasby surprisingly comfortably 3-0 (11-4, 11-7, 11-6) and in the final Ian defeated Trevor Carter 3-1 (11-2, 11-7, 11-13, 11-9).

The Under-21 Singles final will be played on Finals Night and it will feature Brandon Crouchman – the Champion in 2011 and 2015 – and Essex No 1 Junior Sam Hume. Brandon booked his final appearance by getting the better of Daniel Berry 3-0 (11-7, 11-8, 11-5) after Daniel had upset the seedings by getting the better of Scott Dowsett in four (9-11, 11-9, 11-8, 11-3).

Hume made no mistake in his semi-final with a 3-0 (11-2, 11-1, 11-9) victory over Ryan Gooday. Gooday scored a

big win in the group stages of this event as he defeated the 2014 champion Scott Dowsett in three (11-9, 11-6, 11-5).

There was further success for Sam Hume, who won both the Junior Boys' Singles and the Under-16 Singles titles. In the Junior Boys' Singles Sam beat Daniel Berry 3-0 (11-6, 11-9, 11-1) in the semi-final and Ryan Gooday 3-1 (12-10, 6-11, 11-4, 11-7) in the final. Ryan had booked his final appearance with a 3-0 (11-4, 11-5, 11-6) victory over Nathan Fry.

At Under-16 level Sam Hume was perhaps not surprisingly in a class of his own. He raced to the title with 3-0 wins over Adam Chalk, Matthew Elliot and Nathan Fry.

Nathan had fought hard to make the final, beating James Hughes by a rollercoaster 11-7, 14-12, 11-13, 14-16, 11-5 margin and Alex Healey 3-0 (12-10, 11-2, 11-7).

There was even more success for Sam Hume in the Junior Doubles. Paired with Connor Payne, the pairing fought back from 2-0 down to get the better of top seeds Ryan Gooday / Daniel Berry 3-11, 8-11, 11-4, 11-9, 11-8 in the final.

Lewis Wilson is the 2016 Under-14 Singles champion. He annexed the title with a 3-0 win over Harley Dawson in the semi-final and a 3-1 victory against Rio Tiplizki in the final. After losing the first end Lewis came through strongly to win 3-1 (7-11, 11-4, 11-7, 11-6).

Daniel Berry captured the Junior Handicap Singles title with wins over Adam Chalk (3-0), Harrison Matthews (3-1), Ryan Gooday (3-2) and Harry Rogers (3-0). The final against Harry was particularly closely fought with Daniel winning in three (12-10, 12-10, 14-12).

Sunday's play was dominated by the Divisional Singles clashes and there was a third successive triumph for Waseem Qureshi in the Division Two Singles.

Waseem beat Daniel Berry 3-0 (11-7, 11-9, 12-10) in the final having beaten Ryan Pitt 3-0 (11-7, 11-9, 11-9) in the semi-final and Peter Windley in three (11-9, 11-8, 12-10) in the quarter-final.

Daniel Berry battled his way through to the final by getting the better of Chris Hancox 3-1 (9-11, 11-5, 11-8, 11-7), Daniel Richardson in five ends (12-10, 9-11, 11-8, 8-11, 11-4) and Ciaran Whelan in four (6-11, 11-6, 11-3, 11-8).

Ciaran Whelan, the No 1 seed, came out on top in the Division Three Singles. He needed four games to get the better of Cameron Gray 11-6, 9-11, 11-7, 11-5 followed by three very close games as he saw off Dan Anderson (11-9, 11-9, 11-9) and in the final he beat David Gatherall 3-0 (11-8, 11-5, 11-6). David Gatherall had seen off Steve Siggs (12-10, 11-7, 11-4), Daniel Richardson (11-8, 8-11, 11-9, 11-6) and, most impressively, Robert Shrimpton 3-1 in the semi-final (11-7, 11-5, 4-11, 11-4).

Roger Hance, another player who was the top seed, was the winner of the Division Four Singles title. It took five very close games for him to finally get the better of Mark Glenister in the first round (6-11, 13-11, 6-11, 11-9, 11-9) and he beat Colin Barham 3-0 (16-14, 11-8, 11-4) in the semi-final. He captured the title by getting the better of Charles Yeung 3-1 (11-6, 8-11, 11-8, 11-7) in the final. Charles Yeung had battled his way to the final with hard-fought wins over David Gatherall (11-8, 11-6, 5-11, 11-6) and Dave Moles (11-8, 8-11, 9-11, 11-6, 11-5).

From a small entry Roger Hance also came out on top in the Division Five Singles. He beat Mark Glenister 3-1 (11-4, 11-9, 13-15, 11-8) in the crunch encounter.

Entries were down in this year's Handicap Singles event. Mark Glenister (playing off a handicap of 51) always looked a strong contender to take the title and he did so without dropping an end. He beat Reece Seddon (21-15, 21-12), Charles Yeung (21-14, 21-18), Dan Anderson (21-15, 21-12), Ken Sheard (21-17, 21-16) and in the final he defeated Ryan Gooday (21-12, 21-16).

In the Handicap Doubles it was Ciaran Whelan, paired with Ken Sheard, who came out on top. They beat Trevor Collin / Mark Glenister in the final to capture the title.

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