



Clacton & District: Wilkin's win in Handicap Singles

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Posted On: February 08, 2016

An assured and polished performance from Adam Wilkin in the Clacton & District League's **Handicap Singles Tournament** saw him take the well-deserved honour of 2016 champion.

At the tournament held at Windsor's St James' Hall venue, he held off the challenge of 39 other would-be contenders to take the title for a first time.

In the final, Wilkin (-10) defeated surprise finalist Scott Campbell (+2) 11-8, 11-8, 11-9, denting the challenge of his younger opponent with some consistent and accurate hitting. The match was not without its drama, Wilkin conceding the first three points of the third set without reply to go 6-0 down. But, keeping his nerve and faith in his own ability, Wilkin won 21 of the next 24 points to take the third set, the match and, most importantly, a well-deserved title.

It capped an excellent day for the likeable 22-year-old who displayed an ability to play handicap table tennis against all standards of opponents.

Wilkin (+1) began by disposing of the dogged and dangerous Derek Willis (-5), a player who rarely fails to give of his best, gradually getting the better of his fellow-Division One rival 3-2 (11-7, 9-11, 3-11, 11-2, 11-1).

Then it was Sandie Isaac (+1) with Wilkin (-3) coming through 3-1 (13-11, 11-8, 10-12, 12-10) in a nip-and-tick contest against one of Division Two's most competitive players.

The quarter-final was something of a rehearsal for the final with Wilkin (-11) facing promising 14-year old Ethan Lloyd (+2) and being forced to show both patience and discipline to retrieve the large handicap deficit 3-0 (11-8, 12-10, 11-8).

Then came a dramatic semi-final – and a match worthy of the final – with Wilkin facing a big test in the form of top-flight player Gavin Price, a left-hander with a penchant for attack and aggression, and a winner of this event in 1997. With both players playing positively from the first point, the match was a no-holds-barred affair – but, more descriptively, it proved the proverbial match of two halves.

With Wilkin (+1) losing the first two sets and looking defeat in the face at 8-6 down in the third, left-hander Price (-3) seemed to have a place in the final on a plate. But, manufacturing a recovery of Lazarus proportions, Wilkin dug deep into his determination bank to take the third set without conceding a further point and then, against

an increasingly-dispirited Price, took the final two sets and the match 3-2 (10-12, 8-11, 11-8, 11-4, 11-2).

Runner-up Scott Campbell, playing in his first Handicap Singles Tournament, impressed the watching spectators throughout the day, not only with his excellent looping and attacking forehands, but also with a composure rare in such an inexperienced player.

Campbell (-3) first eliminated fellow-Division Three player Toni Hayhow-Khan (+1) in three-straight before defeating Jason Gale. Campbell (+2) came back from losing the first two sets to make full use of his handicap advantage to win through 3-2 (10-12, 9-11, 11-6, 11-2, 11-8) against his Division One opponent Gale (-11).

In the quarter-finals, Campbell (+2) found it surprisingly easy against another top-flight player, Lee Harvey (-1), winning in three straight with comparative ease before a memorable semi-final encounter against Doug Green which was, without doubt, the match of the tournament.

Super-veteran Green entered the semi-final in a state of semi-exhaustion, having exceeded all previous efforts in this competition to reach that stage by beating John Long, Lee Allen and then, in a marathon five-set quarter-final, fellow-defender Russell Hillier, a winner of this tournament five years ago.

In a classic match of attacker v defender, Campbell (+1) raced into an early 11-7, 11-3 lead. But Green (-3) is nothing if not determined and he fought back in his own gritty and idiosyncratic away-from-the table style to save three match points in the third set as the match went to fives deuces, eventually taking it 16-14. The fourth set was equally tight and, despite Campbell's constant pounding, Green resisted and saved another two match points before scraping through 15-13. By the fifth set, Green was almost out on his feet and Campbell, showing remarkable calmness for someone on the brink of an unforgettable victory, held his nerve. Despite Green saving another two match points, Campbell took it 11-5 – and a hard-earned place in the final.

Forty players competed for the title this year. It was good to see so many entries from Division Three players, who formed over half the competitors, including many new to the league this season. And, apart from runner-up Campbell, there were promising performances from two other talented juniors, Ethan Lloyd and Liam Harris, also playing in their first Handicap Singles Tournament.

For the record, Adam Wilkin becomes the 27th different player to win the Handicap Singles Trophy in its 34th year of running, exemplifying the wonderfully unpredictable nature of the tournament and its ability to produce unexpected winners.

Main results

Quarter-finals: Wilkin (-11) beat Ethan Lloyd (+2) 3-0 (11-8, 12-10, 11-8); Campbell (+2) beat Lee Harvey (-10) 3-0 (11-5, 11-7, 11-4); Price (-8) beat Ferdy Rodriguez (+1) 3-0 (11-9, 11-8, 11-4); Green (+1) beat Russell Hillier (-3) 3-2 (7-11, 11-8, 6-11, 11-6, 11-4)

Semi-finals: Wilkin (+1) beat Gavin Price (-3) 3-2 (10-12, 8-11, 11-8, 11-4, 11-2); Campbell (+1) beat Doug Green (-8) 3-2 (11-7, 11-3, 14-16, 13-15, 11-5)

Final: Adam Wilkin (-10) beat Scott Campbell (+2) 3-0 (11-8, 11-8, 11-9)

The **Consolation Doubles** also provided entertaining, friendly and competitive table tennis for the first-match losers in the main tournament. The closest match was in the opening round where Paul Woolnough and Tom Collins (-1) defeated John Hatley and Sue Lee (+1) 3-2 (11-5, 11-8, 5-11, 7-11, 12-10).

The final was equally close, and, coincidentally like the 2015 final, ended in an 11-9 in the fifth victory, this season the winners being John Plummer and Kayley Lamb (0) who edged out Jonathan Found and Toni Hayhow-Khan (0) 3-2 (12-10, 9-11, 11-5, 8-11, 11-9).

* Cup-holders Brotherhood B crashed out in **Round Three** of the **Handicap Knock-Out Cup**, going down 5-2 to Brotherhood C in the only all-First Division clash. David North (-1) beat Kevin Pryor (+1) 11-8 in the decider whilst Gracie Edwards (+1) defeated Alan Burgess (-5) by the same score but these were the 'B' team's only successes. Fred Gallone stayed unbeaten in his two doubles and one singles whilst Pryor (+1) dealt the final blow for the 'C' team by beating Martin Edwards (-1) 11-8 in the fifth in match seven.

Two Division One sides made it through at the expense of Second Division opposition. Windsor Condors won the opening two matches against Windsor Harriers whilst the Harriers took the next four. But the Condors snatched the final three matches of the tie to go through 5-4. Colin Stallwood won his two singles and one doubles but, in retrospect, the crucial match turned out to be the opening doubles, Elliott Attrill and Annabelle Rodriguez (-5) of the Condors edging past Ferdy Rodriguez and Jenny Higgins (+1) 11-7 in the fifth.

Walton B were 5-3 winners against Brotherhood E but it was a close-run thing. Gavin Price and John Rankin each won two singles whilst Paul Woolnough (-6) contributed an all-important 11-7 in the decider victory over Duncan Dunne (+1) in what turned out to be the final match of the evening. Brotherhood E took both doubles.

There were two Division One v Division Three clashes and both ended in wins for the top-flight teams.

Windsor Eagles defeated current Third Division leaders Nomads Pumas 5-2. The valiant Pumas' trio came back well after losing the first four matches, Eric Lemke and Lionel Goddard (+2) beating Gary Cattermole and John Hobson (-8) 11-3 in the fifth before Lemke (+2) nudged out Phil Smith (-8) 11-9 in the decider. Gary Cattermole won both his singles whilst Phil Smith and Mark Smith each won a singles and shared a doubles success.

Nomads Lions went through 5-1 at the expense of Walton D with Adam Wilkin and Brian Parish staying unbeaten. The closest victory for the Lions saw reserve Roger Hance and Parish (-8) beat Rivhu Khan and Toni Hayhow-Khan (+1) 11-6 in the decider in the middle-doubles.

The only all-Division Two tie produced something of a surprise with Nomads Jaguars recording a 5-2 victory over Brotherhood H. Caroline North, in her two singles and one doubles, and Kevin Hume, in his two doubles and one singles, proved unbeatable on the night. Graham Parkes and John Wrigley each picked up a point for the losers, both in matches that went the distance.

The Jaguars are now the only Second Division team left in the competition, but two sides from Division Three have made it to Round Four.

Pride of place goes to Nomads Ocelots who were 5-0 victors over Second Division Nomads Bobcats. Two of the five matches went the distance, Tom Collins (+1) beating Harry Beezer (-1) 11-7 in the decider, and Mike Wellum and Scott Campbell (+1) defeating Beezer and Tony Robinson (-1) by the same score.

Last but by no means least, the youngsters of Windsor Ospreys will feel elated with their 5-2 success against fellow-Third Division side Nomads Leopards. The two doubles ultimately proved the pivotal matches, Millie Easton and Maci Harvey (+1) defeating Roger McNaughton and Ethan Lloyd (-5) 11-7 in the fifth, whilst Harvey and Woody Fitzpatrick (+1) beat Jason and Ethan Lloyd (-3) 11-9 in the fifth.

The quarter-finals thus comprise three teams from the Windsor and Nomads clubs, and one each from Brotherhood and Walton. The next round will be played during week beginning February 29. Details of the draw will be sent to Team Secretaries by February 12.

* The only League match played was in Division Two where Lawford defeated Brotherhood I 7-3, Paul Hewitt and Richard Spence staying unbeaten. Tom Wilkin and Maurice Hardy, with an 11-9 in the fifth win over Ian Sherwood, took a point each for the losers. Wilkin and Mark Beckham combined to take Brotherhood's third point, winning the doubles 3-2 (10-12, 11-8, 2-11, 14-12, 11-5) against Hewitt and Spence.

* The Windsor Quiz Evening takes place on Saturday February 20 at St James' Hall, Clacton-on-Sea. The cost is £5 per person for teams of up to six people. For more details contact Jenny Higgins on 01255 432397 or 07790 240566, or e-mail mahiggins@talktalk.net.

RESULTS

Knock-Out Cup, Round 3

Walton B 5 Brotherhood E 3

Windsor Condors 5 Windsor Harriers 4

Brotherhood H 2 Nomads Jaguars 5

Windsor Eagles 5 Nomads Pumas 2

Windsor Ospreys 5 Nomads Leopards 2

Walton D 1 Nomads Lions 5
Brotherhood B 2 Brotherhood C 5
Nomads Ocelots 5 Nomads Bobcats 0
League
Division 2
Lawford 7 Brotherhood I 3

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