



Chelmsford & District: Halling takes singles crown

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Tony Halling, the 2015 Southend Men's Singles champion and many people's tip to capture the title didn't disappoint and he was crowned the 2016 M&G Investments Chelmsford & District Table Tennis League Men's Singles champion at Old Chelmsfordians Association on Monday February 8.

Known for the variety and strength of his serves, Halling displayed a sureness of touch as well as calmness and confidence under pressure and a dazzling forehand as he beat Dave Cole 3-1 (11-7, 11-9, 9-11, 11-5) in the semi-final and Rik James 3-1 (9-11, 11-3, 11-8, 11-2) in the final.

Rik gave it all in the first game of the final and for a fleeting moment it seemed as if he might just be on the way to capturing the title for a second time. Tony however had other ideas and he powered his way back to level the scores at 1-1. The third game was vital and when Tony clinched it he was able to relax. In the fourth game he hit some truly superbly placed forehands as he powered his way to an 11-2 victory.

In his semi-final, Rik had survived a prolonged onslaught of fierce forehand attacking strokes from Keiran Lally who shaded the first end and stayed in contention throughout four very close games. Rik finally scraped home 3-1 (10-12, 11-7, 11-7, 15-13) after a series of excellent deuce points in the fourth end.

The Ladies' Singles final featured two ladies who like to take the ball early and who both hit very hard, particularly on the backhand. Rallies were short and sharp and at times ferocious as Dawn Baldry captured the title for the first time with a four-game win over Jan Fuller (11-6, 11-8, 7-11, 11-7).

There was an initial success for Melanie Bonnett and Steve Kerns in the Mixed Doubles final. Four times runners-up in this event, they got off to a good start in the final against Linda Attridge and Dave Cole and won the first end decisively 11-4. The second end was very much a reversal of fortunes as Linda / David equalised by the same scoreline.

At this point you would probably have favoured Linda / David but with Melanie playing an ever increasingly assertive role Melanie / Steve shaded the third game 13-11. They in turn made a good start in the fourth end which they managed to hold and this was sufficient to enable them to run out 3-1 (11-4, 4-11, 13-11, 11-6) winners.

The Under-21 Singles final was always going to be a top-class game and 15-year-old left-hander and Essex No 1 Junior Sam Hume turned in a remarkably consistent and mature display to topple the holder and last year's Men's Singles losing finalist Brandon Crouchman 3-0 (11-9, 13-11, 11-6).

Without wishing to put undue pressure on Sam it seems very likely that he will also be challenging strongly for the Men's Singles title within the next three years.

Rik James carried his excellent form into the Veterans' final, a repeat of last year's battle against Dave Cole. Again this match was decided 3-1 but this time it was Rik who ran out the winner. Some of the rallies were truly breathtaking as Rik chased down Dave's angled hits from all over the court. It was certainly a case of Rik James playing at his very best as he ran out a 3-1 (12-10, 11-8, 8-11, 11-8) winner.

The 2016 Men's Doubles champions are new pairing Paul Davison and Alex Abbott. They won two very close encounters in the tournament weekend against Tony Halling / Ben Warner and Gary Young / Steve Kerns and they carried that form in to the final by seeing off last year's champions, the hard-hitting duo of Brandon Crouchman / Scott Dowsett, in four ends – 11-6, 12-10, 11-13, 11-2.

Special guests for the evening included the Deputy Mayor and Deputy Mayoress Councillor Philip Wilson and Mrs Angela Wilson as well Mrs Anna Emtage, the Charity and Community Relations Manager at M&G Investments.

With the reporting on the 2016 M&G Investments Individual Championships having taken priority in the last two weeks, it is now time to update everyone on the latest rounds of league action.

The two outstanding sides in the first division were both held to draws this week and in the case of the leaders Danbury A this represented the first match that they have failed to win. They were held 5-5 by Maldon A for whom Alex Abbott and Colin Stallwood (in his first appearance of the Season) both won twice. Stallwood did well to beat both Charles Sweeney (3-1) and Gary Young (3-2). Perhaps significantly bearing in mind his form in the Chelmsford tournament, Tony Halling won three times for Danbury and this included a quickfire 3-0 (11-7, 11-5, 11-7) victory over Alex Abbott.

Second-placed Bocking A were held by OCs A. Brandon Crouchman was the top player on view and he scored hard-fought 3-2 victories over both Sam Hume and Gary Cattermole.

A dramatic improvement in form has seen Liberal move into third place in **Division Two**. They beat Danbury D decisively 9-1. Both Hector Rogers and Steve Pennell stayed undefeated for the Braintree based side. Liberal were even more impressive against Danbury E and their side of Dean Andrews, Steve Pennell and Hector Rogers won 10-0 – something of a rarity at this level. Steve Pennell eventually beat Tony Forster 3-2 (11-6, 7-11, 9-11, 11-1, 12-10) after a strangely fluctuating match.

Danbury D also missed out 6-4 against Rawreth & Hullbridge. Gus Heath was the Rawreth match-winner with an excellent hat-trick of wins over Chris Buer, Steve Buer and Matthew Brown – all achieved in convincing three-straight fashion.

Hatfield Peverel B, inspired by an undefeated Gary Ward, ran out 7-3 winners over Galleywood B. Gary Brignall excelled for the losers and he recorded two excellent wins over Peter Brownlow (3-0) and John Parodi (3-1).

Chelmsford B scored two very useful 8-2 wins in **Division Three** to climb into fourth place. They beat Maldon B with Mick Richardson (three wins), Alastair Piper (two wins) and Dave Parker (two wins) all playing their part in the success. Mick Richardson started the ball rolling by getting the better of Brian Riedling 3-2 (11-2, 11-5, 5-11, 5-11, 12-10) in a widely fluctuating opening encounter and he also had to fight hard to see off the challenge of Dawn Baldry 3-2 (11-9, 7-11, 11-6, 9-11, 11-8).

Alastair Piper was undefeated in his side's victory over Danbury G. He looked sharp as he brushed aside the challenges of George Ashley (3-1), Dan Richardson (3-1) and Dan Anderson (3-0).

Elmtree Excalibur C look to be near certainties to win this division and in Phil Smith they have a talisman who is yet to lose. Smith made it 27 wins out of 27 as the Elmtree side beat Hatfield Peverel C 7-3. Trevor Collin won twice for the losers with excellent victories over Lin Attridge and Rod MacLennan.

Danbury F had an undefeated Dave Marsh (who boasts an impressive 82 % singles record to date) to thank as they beat Maldon B 6-4. Herbie Smith defeated Dawn Baldry 3-2 (11-8, 13-11, 10-12, 7-11, 12-10) in the closest game of the evening.

In the derby match between OCs D and OCs E it was the E side who came out on top 7-3. David Porter won his three singles for the E team.

In **Division Four** the leaders Danbury H scored their eighth win of the season by beating Hatfield Peverel D 6-4. Maurice Hardy (two wins), Norman Smith (two wins) and Ivan Chaplin (one win) all played their part although they all fell short against Keith Cullen.

Danbury H didn't fare so well against OCs F though and lost 7-3. Charles Yeung led the way with an excellent trio of wins.

Danbury K (Eamon Hall, Dave Hancox and Kevin Willis) made no mistake in beating bottom team Hatfield Peverel D 10-0. Hatfield Peverel will no doubt feel that it might have been a very different evening had Alistair Brown not succumbed 3-2 (9-11, 11-7, 13-15, 11-9, 13-15) to Dave Hancox in the opening game of the match.

Chelmsford E impressed by beating the higher-placed OCs F 7-3. Richard Upson and Richard Baxter were both undefeated with Richard Baxter getting the better of Adrian North in five (5-11, 11-7, 11-9, 10-12, 12-10) in the tightest encounter of the evening.

Danbury J ran out 7-3 winners over Elmtree Excalibur D after Robert Kneale and Dave Powell had both won their three singles. The match between Steve Siggs and Robert Kneale couldn't have been much closer with Kneale eventually triumphing 3-2 (12-10, 13-15, 12-10, 12-14, 11-9).

Danbury L (Mick Robinson, Norman Hayes and Craig Foster) lead the way in **Division Five** and they made no mistake by beating OCs H 9-1. Tanishq Kotwal was on target for the losers and he beat Craig Foster in five ends.

Danbury L scored another clear-cut victory by getting the better of OCs G 9-1. Norman Hayes and Ray Cheung were both undefeated on this occasion and they received backing from Mick Robinson who won twice.

A combined team effort enabled Highwood to beat Elmtree Excalibur E 7-3. Martin Goddard, Kevin Barber and Tim Smith all won twice to counter the two wins that Melanie Bonnett picked up for the Elmtree side. Two games stood out in this match and Melanie Bonnett was involved in both of them. She defeated Kevin Barber 3-2 (7-11, 11-9, 11-6, 3-11, 14-12) but she missed out against Tim Smith in five (11-8, 7-11, 7-11, 11-7, 10-12).

Writtle are in second place and they beat OCs G 8-2. Frank Neill (three wins), Colin Griffiths (two wins) and Andy Fox (two wins) all played their part in this success.

Buttsbury A lead the way in the **CLICK League** and they ran out 4-1 winners over Black Notley. James Hughes beat both Lawrence Grantham (3-2) and Peter Hull (3-0). OCs J were also 4-1 winners over BNCA with Adam Chalk (two wins) and Alan Whitmore (one win) both contributing to the victory. Buttsbury B were narrow 3-2 winners over Chelmsford H. Matthew Elliott beat both Peter Davenport 3-0 (11-9, 11-9, 11-5) and Harry Matthews 3-1 (11-13, 12-10, 11-5, 11-4).

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