



Devon Schools: Record entry as champs are crowned

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There was a record entry of 72 in the under-11 section of the Devon Schools Championships, the winners of which will go on to represent Devon in the national finals in Aldersley on April 23.

Coombe Dean School provided the venue, as well as a willing team of young leaders who officiated and facilitated the competition.

The high entry was the result of a year-long project to promote table tennis amongst the primary schools in the county, especially within Plymouth.

Five groups of girls and six groups of boys played in a round-robin competition before the top two from each group progressed to the knockout stages.

Erin Richards from Widey Court Primary narrowly lost out to Rhian Somerville Houlford of Woolacombe Primary in the girls' final while an even tighter contest in the boys' final saw Jakub Piwowar of Queensway Primary (Torquay) beat Luke Bennett from Okehampton Primary. The amazing point about Jakub's victory is that he is only eight years old and has another three years in the competition.

Joola Plymouth Table Tennis Club ran a festival for Under-9 students from local schools, also at Coombe Dean, at the same time as the county event. Watch out, in years to come, for the names of players from St Andrew's Primary, a number of whom were top performers in the skills and drills delivered by the Joola coaches.

Meanwhile, the Under-13, U16 and U19 competitions were held at Eggbuckland Community College.

After hard-fought group rounds throughout the morning, the afternoon saw table tennis of the highest quality in the knockout stages. A total of 141 competitors from 23 schools were eventually whittled down to six winners.

The U19 Girls' event was won by Elsa Perry from King Edward VI Community College, Totnes; the U19 Boys' event by Kelvin Cheung from Stover School, Newton Abbot; the U16 Girls' event by Holly Johns from King Edward VI CC; the U16 Boys' event by Dan Kerr from St Boniface College, Plymouth; the U13 Girls' event by Gemma Kerr from Notre Dame School, Plymouth; and the U13 Boys' event by Herbie Sage from Paignton Community College.

Testimony of the success being delivered by the Talent Development Centre run by Joola Plymouth at the College is the fact that three of the six winners train there and, in the U16 Boys' event, all eight of the quarter-finalists are trained at the Centre.

Graham Pearson, the tournament organiser and Secretary of Devon Schools Table Tennis Association, said: "The sport is progressing at so many levels. The Ping Project which had its national launch in the City last year saw huge numbers of participants playing the sport socially while a number of juniors, under the guidance of Paul Whiting, the Coaching Director at the City's Talent Development Centre, are moving rapidly up the national ranking lists."

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