



Youngsters hit the Premier League standard

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Youngsters showed off some impressive table tennis skills at the Premier League 4 Sport tournament in Birmingham.

Dozens of young people aged 14 to 18 represented 14 different football clubs at the event.

England table tennis legend Desmond Douglas and current women's No 1 Kelly Sibley – fresh from competing at the World Team Championships in Malaysia – were on hand to offer advice and tips and pose for photos, as well as play a scintillating exhibition match.

The tournament saw Blackburn and Wigan win the two groups, with Newcastle and Sunderland also going through to the semi-finals.

Blackburn and Newcastle won the last-four ties and faced each other in a thrilling and high-class final, which ended 2-2. Blackburn were declared winners on points difference.

The other clubs represented at the event at the Lighthouse Young Peoples Centre were: Tottenham, Aston Villa, Plymouth, Swansea, Stoke, West Brom, Arsenal, Hull, Manchester United and Southampton.

Players also had the chance to pose for photos with the Barclays Premier League trophy as well as enjoy the social area where they could interact with each other and play pool and Xbox games and less competitive table tennis.



Youngsters had the chance to interact in the social area as well as play competitive table tennis. Photo by Alan Spink <http://actionphotography.photoshelter.com/>

"I like sport because it's something to get away, it releases stress from home or any situation in college. It's just somewhere to escape and have fun," said 18-year-old Tatiana Brazao, representing Stoke City.

Jessica Pires De Arajulo, 16 and representing Arsenal, added: "I love that it's fun – isn't that how sport is supposed to be anyway? It's competitive, but it's like a polite sport."

"It's nice to play against people that aren't in your school and aren't in your team and it's a great way to experience a new sport for me."

Isabelle Priory, a Burnley supporting representing Lancashire rivals Blackburn said: "I love today because, even though I have to wear a Blackburn Rovers shirt and I support Burnley, it was really good fun and I got to meet Kelly!"

Kelly Sibley, who will be defending her English national title this weekend, said: "What a brilliant day, it was great to see so many young people participating in table tennis and amazing to see them enjoying a fabulous event."

The Blackburn fan added: "Special congratulations to Blackburn for the win!"



The winning Blackburn team with Kelly Sibley. Picture by Alan Spink

<http://actionphotography.photoshelter.com/>

The Premier League 4 Sport programme was set up in 2009 and sees 36 Premier League and Football League teams provide opportunities for young people aged 14–25 to get involved in 12 different sports. It is funded in partnership between Sport England, the Premier League and National Governing Bodies including Table Tennis England.

“It was great to see so many young people, with varying levels of table tennis ability enjoying the PL4Sport Table Tennis national event today,” said Jo Moss of Sport England.

“It’s been a relaxed, fun day with no pressure to be the best but to simply give table tennis a go and, if you want, you’ve been able to learn some new skills on the way. Table Tennis England have got the balance of this event just right.”

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