



Drinkhall and Ho are national champions

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Tin-Tin Ho won her first Women's Singles title and Paul Drinkhall his fifth on a big day of live televised table tennis at the PG Mutual National Championships in Hatfield today.

Ho twice came from behind to win it 4-2 (5-11, 11-9, 3-11, 11-9, 11-9, 11-6) and complete a treble of titles having successfully defended both the Women's Doubles and Mixed Doubles earlier in the day.

And Drinkhall saw off Sam Walker 4-2 to get his hands on the Guernsey Trophy for the first time since 2012, Walker having earlier ended the three-year reign of Liam Pitchford in the semi-finals.

The two singles finals, plus the men's doubles were covered live on ITV4, who presented three hours of coverage from the Hertfordshire Sports Village, in front of a sellout crowd.

The first trophy of the day was won by Walker & Ho who took the Mixed Doubles title for the third successive year, beating David McBeath & Emma Vickers.

Ho & Tsaptsinos then retained their Women's Doubles title, beating Karina Le Fevre & Vickers.

Pitchford & Drinkhall were then in blistering form as they made it four Men's Doubles titles in a row with a demolition of Chris Doran & Mike O'Driscoll.

There was also a special presentation to England Leopards Drinkhall, Pitchford and Walker after their bronze medal at the World Team Championships in Malaysia earlier this month. The trio received a standing ovation for their heroics.

Men's Singles



Paul Drinkhall celebrates his fifth singles title (picture by Alan Man)

Paul Drinkhall won his first title since 2012 by beating an England team-mate in the final. But on this occasion it was not Liam Pitchford but Sam Walker, who had ended Pitchford's reign in seven in the semi-finals to reach his first men's singles final.

It was a 4-2 win for Drinkhall, and might have been more comfortable had he not let a 9-5 lead slip in the first. But the champion felt he was always in control of the final.

"The fourth game I think he played tactically better but apart from that I felt I was tactically on top, better and stronger and could find a way to keep him out," said Drinkhall.

"He's on a high after the Worlds, like we all are, and he knew he could have a go at me and Liam.

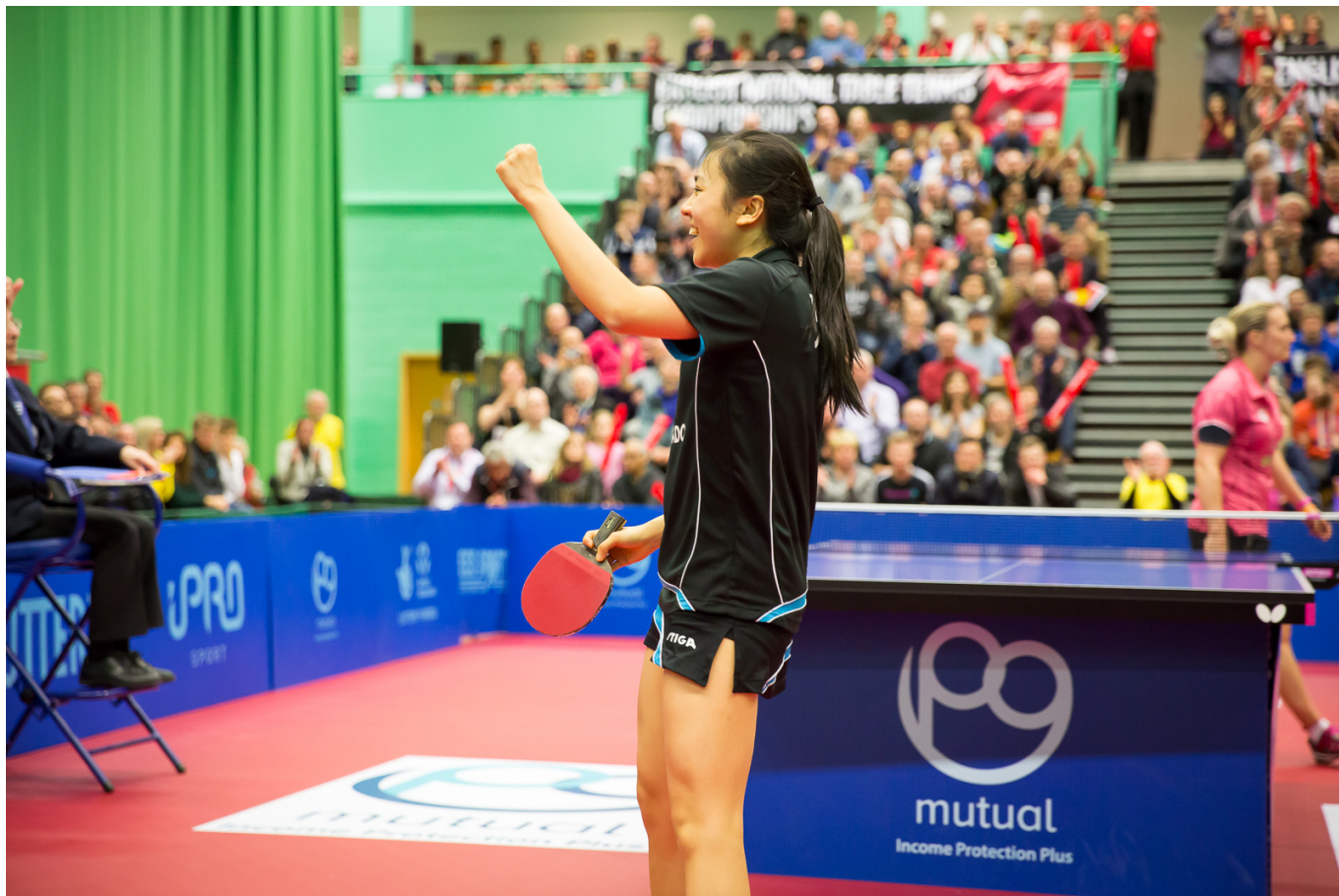
"It's great to win, obviously after three years and for a fifth time. It's just as good, if not better than the others, to get it back. Hopefully I can get a few more in the future."

Walker's semi-final win was – no surprise – a high-quality affair which swung one way, the other and back again before Walker's decisive move from 3-2 down in games.

The other semi-final, if not providing a changing of the guard, did offer a glimpse of the future as Under-21 champion Tom Jarvis, 16, took on Drinkhall.

Having been well beaten by Drinkhall at last year's championships, Jarvis showed he has grown since then, taking the third game and having some good moments in others. Ultimately, though, Drinkhall had too much class.

Women's Singles



Tin-Tin Ho beats Kelly Sibley to win her first title (picture by Alan Man)

Tin-Tin Ho earned her first victory over Kelly Sibley and in the process took her first senior singles title, twice coming from a game down to defeat the No 1 seed, who was chasing a sixth title of her own.

The second game was the crucial one as Ho went on a run of six points from 9-5 down and made it 1-1, when it appeared she was heading for a 2-0 deficit.

It was an emotional triumph for the 17-year-old, who shed tears of happiness in the media area afterwards.

"I'm really happy. I always believed I could do it but cannot believe I have actually done it, if that makes sense!" she said. "She's such a strong player. Every time I've played her it's been so tough and I've never even beaten her in training.

"She's amazing and I really respect her, and I'm pleased I found a way to beat her."

Ho advanced to the final courtesy of a 4-1 victory over Tsaptsinos and it was revenge – not that Ho would see it quite that way – for defeat in the dramatic Under-21 final of last night.

No such theatre this time, though Ho had to come from a game down. And Tsaptsinos did stake a claim for return of the day, a diving effort from the back of the court which was, however, in vain.

The other semi-final was more routine as Sibley showed her hunger for that sixth national title by defeating Hannah Hicks at a canter, conceding only 18 points across the four games.

Mixed Doubles

Sam Walker & Tin-Tin Ho celebrated a hat-trick of Mixed Doubles titles as they sunk David McBeath and Emma Vickers in three straight.

Walker in particular unleashed a barrage of shots which the silver medallists had no answer to as the top seeds

– who had faced elimination in the semi-finals at three match points down – took the trophy.

Walker said: “It’s great to win it again – that’s the hat-trick and it was good to keep my momentum up.

“The semi-final was really tough, but to be honest, I think we should have won it 3-0 and shouldn’t have really given them the chance, but they managed to pull it back and should have won.

“We got some good balls back and had a bit of luck, but you need that, and we were confident going into the final.”

Ho added: “It feels good to win it again, for the third year in a row. Sam’s a great doubles partner. The semi-final was really tough but we got it at the crucial point and took our chance.”

Silver medallist Vickers admitted Walker’s power was a decisive factor: “The quality of Sam’s shots is so difficult, especially for me.

“We’re pleased because we weren’t expected to get to the final, but no one wants to lose or be satisfied with silver.”

McBeath said: “It’s the second time we’ve lost to them in a final, so it’s a bit disappointing, but they definitely played the better game. I don’t think we really got started and we were struggling from that point.”

It was a case of match points missed and taken in the two semi-finals. In the first match, the two Under-21 singles champions, Tom Jarvis & Maria Tsaptsinos, having twice fought from a set down to level, had their chance at 10-9 up in the decider, only for McBeath & Vickers to take their first chance two points later.

Walker & Ho saw two match points saved by Chris Doran & Hannah Hicks in the fourth game of the second semi and then themselves faced three in the decider.

The defending champions were not about to go quietly though, saving those with the aid of an edge to make it 10-10. They duly completed a run of five successive points to book their place in the final.

Women’s Doubles



Champions Tin-Tin Ho & Maria Tsaptsinos and silver medallists Emma Vickers & Karina Le Fevre (picture by Alan Man)

Tin-Tin Ho & Maria Tsaptsinos won their second titles of the tournament as they defeated Karina Le Fevre & Emma Vickers in four.

A one-sided first game was not an indicator of things to come as the beaten pair went toe-to-toe with the champions for the rest of the match, losing a narrow second before closing the gap in the third.

But the champions were not in the mood to fall victim to a comeback and they took the fourth to ensure their second successive title in this event.

For Ho, it added to the mixed title won in the previous match, while Tsaptsinos yesterday took the Under-21 crown in dramatic fashion against Ho.

There was no hangover from that as the two good friends teamed up today, and Tsaptsinos said: "We're always friends but you have to be professional when you play each other.

"I'm still not 100 per cent after yesterday but I played better than I thought I would and it's really good to win. Now we want to win it again many times, we don't just want it twice."

Ho said: "It's always good to retain a title and always good to win with Maria. It sets us up well for the international scene."

Le Fevre said she had been nervous in the first end but had then found her form. She added: "We played quite well in the third and fourth ends but it's little points that make the difference at this level."

Men's Doubles



Liam Pitchford & Paul Drinkhall celebrate their victory (picture by Alan Man)

Paul Drinkhall & Liam Pitchford made it four in a row with a blistering display against Chris Doran & Mike O'Driscoll, described by Doran as "scary".

The scoreline of 4, 4, 7 tells its story as the champions underlined their superiority.

And Liam confirmed: "We were expected to win, but to do it that emphatically in the final was good. It feels good to get another National title and to get four in a row."

Doran said: "Me and Mike are a good pair but Paul and Liam were scary in the final. If they play like that, they can beat anyone in the world.

"I think they would admit they hadn't played that well in the doubles and you think you've got a sniff but then they come out like a freight train."

O'Driscoll added: "I've never played against something of that force before, off both wings, no weaknesses.

"Usually you get a few chances to feel your way into a match, but it was relentless.

"We're pleased with silver but I don't think we can compete at that level. It's top 10 in the world level."

The Swaythling Fair Play Award, as chosen by the umpires, was presented to Mike O'Driscoll.



Mike O'Driscoll with the fair play award (picture by Alan Man)

Results

Men's Singles

Semi-finals

Paul Drinkhall bt Tom Jarvis 4-1 (11-8, 11-4, 6-11, 11-6, 11-5)

Sam Walker bt Liam Pitchford 4-3 (11-8, 6-11, 11-8, 9-11, 8-11, 11-6, 11-5)

Final

Drinkhall bt Walker 4-2 (9-11, 11-4, 11-7, 3-11, 11-5, 11-8)

Women's Singles

Semi-finals

Kelly Sibley bt Hannah Hicks 4-0 (11-3, 11-2, 11-7, 11-6)

Tin-Tin Ho bt Maria Tsaptsinos 4-1 (7-11, 11-6, 11-6, 11-9, 11-4)

Final

Ho bt Sibley 4-2 (5-11, 11-9, 3-11, 11-9, 11-9, 11-6)

Men's Doubles

Final

Paul Drinkhall & Liam Pitchford bt Chris Doran & Mike O'Driscoll 3-0 (11-4, 11-4, 11-7)

Women's Doubles

Final

Tin-Tin Ho & Maria Tsaptsinos bt Karina Le Fevre & Emma Vickers 3-1 (11-2, 16-14, 8-11, 11-7)

Mixed Doubles

Semi-finals

David McBeath & Emma Vickers bt Tom Jarvis & Maria Tsaptsinos 3-2 (11-8, 7-11, 15-13, 8-11, 12-10)

Sam Walker & Tin-Tin Ho bt Chris Doran & Hannah Hicks 3-2 (11-5, 10-12, 11-7, 10-12, 12-10)

Final

Walker & Ho bt McBeath & Vickers 3-0 (11-8, 11-6, 11-8)

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