



Clacton & District Closed: Strong entries ready for action

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The Clacton & District League's Closed Championships, once again sponsored by Paul Newbould Planning and Building Design Services, take place this weekend at the Clacton Coastal Academy Sports Hall. Seventy players will be competing for 12 titles over the two days.

For the last eight years, the **Men's Singles** title has been shared between Colin Stallwood, James Denyer, Kevin Gowlett and Greg Green and all four players are in contention this year.

Strong challenges will come from the experienced Gary Young, a winner of this event in 2004 but also four-times runner-up since then, and from 15-year old Sam Hume, last year's losing finalist who came so close to taking the crown.

And if you're looking for dark horses, look no further than Sam's older brother, Paul Hume, and the ever-consistent Gary Cattermole.

With an entry of 41 players, identical to last year, the initial rounds will be played in groups of three or four, with all seeds included.

Greg Green and Colin Stallwood have dominated the **Men's Doubles** for the past two years and are rightly seeded No 1 again this year with Paul Hume and Sam Hume, the 2015 beaten finalists, expected to meet them again in the final.

The established pairing of James Denyer and Felipe Rodriguez have the experience of three finals, which included a victory in 2013, and they will be a threat again this year. But this event could be thrown into confusion by two new pairings, with Gary Young partnering Martin Edwards, and Colin Webber teamed up with Kevin Gowlett.



Gracie Edwards

Fourteen-year old Gracie Edwards sensationally took the **Ladies' Singles** title last year and, in the absence of Gill Locke, starts as favourite to make it two in a row. Sue Welham and Annabelle Rodriguez, both past champions, are the likeliest challengers.

Isabel Barton and Jenny Higgins provided the shock of the 2015 Championships when they took the **Ladies' Doubles** and they will have to be on top form to retain that title against the formidable pairing of Sue Welham and Sandie Isaac. Watch out also for the grandmother/grand-daughter combination of Cris Edwards and Gracie Edwards, who could be the surprise package.

There are three stand-out pairings in the **Mixed Doubles** and it would be a major shock if the winners did not come from one of these. Holders Colin Stallwood and Annabelle Rodriguez, who have won the title twice and been runners-up three times, start as marginal favourites ahead of Greg Green and Sue Welham, and the all-junior pairing of Sam Hume and Gracie Edwards.

And it's Sam Hume and Gracie Edwards who should, as they were last year, be the finalists in the **Junior Singles**. And it would be something of a surprise if the result was not the same, when Sam took the title for the first time. Tom Wilkin and Harry Beezer are the probable semi-finalists.

Sam Hume and Tom Wilkin are the hottest of hot favourites in the **Junior Doubles**, with Harry Beezer and Woody Fitzpatrick their likely final opponents.

Peter Burrows, winner of the **Veterans' Singles** for the past two years, has been out of action all season which leaves the field open for Kevin Gowlett to repeat his success of 2012 and 2013, or for Colin Stallwood to grab his first Veterans' title. But last year's runner-up Gary Young, twice beaten finalist Colin Webber and 2011 champion Alan Burgess are all players capable of causing an upset.

The **Super-Veterans' Singles** could be the most open of all the events and it would be a brave man or woman who would pick a winner from a field that contains reigning champion Derek Willis, past winner Alan Burgess, 2015 runner-up Colin Webber, not to mention two younger Super-Veterans, Martin Edwards and Phil Smith.

Champions-elect Windsor Owls provide the top two seeds in the **Division Two Singles**, with Mark Salter and reigning champion Frank Burbidge predicted to get to the final, ahead of Grant Sharpe and Roger Hance.

Two in-form players are also top seeds in the **Division Three Singles**, where only a shock of volcanic proportions will surely prevent last season's surprise winner Rivhu Khan facing Jason Lloyd in the final.

With 33 entrants, the **Restricted Singles** is the second most popular event of the tournament. The absence of seedings adds to its unpredictability but the winner seems likely to come from one of four players – Gary Cattermole, Martin Edwards, Oli Reynolds or Gavin Price.

Because of the healthy entry, with 269 matches scheduled to be played over the two days, play will start at 9.10am on both Saturday and Sunday. Details of check-in times have been sent to all competitors. Any player who has not received this information should contact Tony Oswick or Peter White without delay.

The finals of the seven minor events are scheduled to take place from approximately 3.30pm onwards on Saturday, with the finals of the five major events taking place at the same time on Sunday.

Admission to the championships is free and spectators are welcome. Light refreshments will be available as usual, plus a fundraising raffle for Junior Coaching.

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