



Clacton & District Closed: Grand Slam for Stallwood

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For the second year running, Colin Stallwood was the star of the Clacton & District League's Closed Championships, winning the Men's Singles, Mens Double's, Mixed Doubles and Veterans' Singles titles.

In the tournament, held last weekend at the Clacton Coastal Academy Sports Hall, Stallwood produced a peerless performance to become only the third player in the League's history to win four major titles in the same year, a feat achieved previously only by Dennis Arr in 1964 and Derek Wood in 1996.

But if it was a champagne tournament for Stallwood, spare a thought for 15-year old Sam Hume, a losing finalist in three main finals and suffering a heartbreak defeat to Stallwood for a second year running in the Men's Singles.

As last year, the final was a top-quality affair between two talented players, Stallwood and Hume putting on a first-class show for the spectators in a match that see-sawed throughout. But Stallwood showed all his experience in the fifth set to establish an early lead and, with high-class counter-hitting, kept a firm grip on the match to deflate his young opponent whose disappointment at the end was only too palpable. The final score was 3-2 (12-10, 5-11, 11-9, 6-11, 11-5).

In a match high on drama, the encounter contained one particularly memorable rally which saw Hume attacking and Stallwood defending as if it were an exhibition match. But, as if to illustrate the theme of the match, Stallwood eventually won the point as Hume's final attempted winner could only find the net.

The event went to form with the top eight seeds reaching the quarter-finals. In the semi-finals, James Denyer lost to Stallwood, and Kevin Gowlett went down to Hume. Paul Hume, Gary Young, Gary Cattermole and Greg Green were the losing quarter-finalists.

There were few surprises in the early stages but honourable mentions go to Daryl Lott, Jason Lloyd and Barry

Allen who all unexpectedly made it through from their Groups to the knockout stage.



Greg Green and Colin Stallwood

There was also a sense of déjà vu in the Men's Doubles, which saw a repeat of the 2015 final with Stallwood & Greg Green facing the Hume brothers, Paul and Sam. Once again the result was the same, with reigning champions Stallwood & Green exerting their control from the start, their younger opponents only briefly getting into gear in the final set. The 3-0 (11-3, 11-5, 11-6) victory was as comfortable as the scoreline suggests.

It was a third successive Men's Doubles title for Stallwood & Green, who have established themselves as the dominant pairing in this event. It was an eighth title for Stallwood and a sixth for Green – whose six victories have all come in the last seven years.

Once again the top four seeds reached the semi-finals, the new pairing of Martin Edwards & Gary Young going down to the eventual winners whilst the Hume brothers had a close 3-2 (11-7, 8-11, 11-8, 7-11, 11-8) semi-final win over 2013 champions James Denyer & Felipe Rodriguez.

Colin Stallwood & Annabelle Rodriguez had been involved in five of the last seven Mixed Doubles finals, having won it in 2009 and 2015. They were determined to retain their title against second seeds Sam Hume & Gracie Edwards who, with a combined age of 29 years, were equally determined to become the youngest-ever holders of this trophy. But experience again prevailed over youth, Stallwood & Rodriguez exerting their authority from the first, and only briefly giving way in the third set, eventually winning 3-1 (11-8, 11-6, 8-11, 12-10).

Stallwood capped his quartet of wins with success in the Veterans' Singles against Gary Cattermole in a contest between two of the league's younger veterans. Cattermole had crucial points to take the first set but was unable to convert them, leaving the classy Stallwood to run out a 3-0 (13-11, 11-7, 11-3 winner).

Gavin Price enjoyed a good run in this event, eliminating second seed Kevin Gowlett before giving Cattermole a scare in the semi-final, just losing 12-10.

It was a first-ever success in the Veterans' Singles for Stallwood but it was his third Men's Singles title, his eighth

Men's Doubles and his third Mixed Doubles title, all of which moves him to fourth place in the League's Roll of Honour behind Clacton legends Ken Gladwell, Derek Wood and David Binns.

For the second year running, Stallwood also received the Victor Trophy as the Outstanding Player of the Championships.



Gracie Edwards

With Sue Welham a late withdrawal from the Ladies' Singles, it was no surprise that the final saw a repeat of last season with Gracie Edwards, who had sensationally taken the title as a 13-year old in 2015, facing former champion Annabelle Rodriguez. And, as last season, despite a more resilient performance from Annabelle, it was Gracie's power-hitting that came out on top 3-2 (11-5, 6-11, 5-11, 11-5, 11-5). That's two wins in two years for Gracie – and who knows how many more Ladies Singles' titles she will be able to accumulate! But for Annabelle, a winner back in 2006 and 2007, it continues a sequence seven final defeats in the last nine seasons. Isabel Barton and a delighted Debra Found were the losing semi-finalists.

A minor piece of League history was made in the Ladies' Doubles when Gracie Edwards and Cris Edwards became the first granddaughter/grandmother combination to win the trophy, taking that honour by defeating Annabelle Rodriguez & Kayley Lamb 3-0 (12-10, 11-6, 11-9) in an entertaining final.

And Kayley, the first Division Three player to appear in this final for six years, more than showed her mettle with some unexpected quality returns, as she'd also shown in the semi-final when Annabelle and Kayley had shocked reigning champions Isabel Barton & Jenny Higgins with a 3-2 (11-7, 5-11, 11-4, 9-11, 11-4) victory.

It was a first Ladies' Doubles title for Gracie but a fifth for Cris Edwards who'd won it four times between 1997 and 2001, three times with Jenny Higgins and once with Isabel Barton.



Sam Hume

Gracie Edwards also featured in the final of the Junior Singles where she met holder Sam Hume who retained his title 3-1 (11-8, 7-11, 11-5, 11-8), albeit scant consolation for his defeats in the three Senior events. But it was a far from easy win for Sam – as it had been in 2015 – with Gracie causing the eventual winner more than a few alarms with her aggressive play before Sam was able to clinch it.

The losing semi-finalists were Tom Wilkin and Ethan Lloyd, who'd defeated another first-timer in this event, Scott Campbell, in the quarter-final. But Campbell had enjoyed his own piece of glory in the Group stage with a 3-0 (13-11, 14-12, 12-10) success against Wilkin.

Harry Beezer & Woody Fitzpatrick combined in the final of the Junior Doubles but they were always second favourites against Sam Hume & Tom Wilkin. Despite a spirited performance from the underdogs, Hume & Wilkin were not to be denied and came out 3-0 (11-7, 11-6, 11-5) winners. It was a second Junior Doubles title for Hume but a first for Wilkin in his last year as a junior.



Alan Burgess

There was a repeat result of the 2014 final in the Super-Veterans' Singles with Alan Burgess taking the title from Derek Willis, Burgess' patient aggression eventually paying dividends 3-1 (11-4, 4-11, 11-4, 11-4). It was also something of a revenge for last year when Willis, on his way to the title, had beaten Burgess 13-11 in the fifth at the semi-final stage. It was a fourth Super-Veterans' title for Burgess, thus equalling the record of Brian Thiel who won the trophy four times between 2001 and 2006.

But it was no easy passage for Burgess who had to fight hard in his semi-final before edging out second seed Colin Webber 3-2 (6-11, 11-3, 11-9, 9-11, 11-9) in a top-quality match. It was a second tough tie for Webber, having edged out Phil Smith in five (11-7, 7-11, 11-3, 5-11, 12-10) in the quarter-finals.

There are no seeds in the Restricted Singles but Gary Cattermole looked the best player in the field and he duly took the title with a 3-1 (6-11, 11-2, 11-7, 11-7) victory over Gavin Price in a high-class encounter between two

talented players.

But there was little else predictable about this event with Duncan Dunne and John Barton unexpectedly reaching the semi-finals. Dunne struggled before overcoming Lynette Sparks 3-2 (6-11, 11-5, 11-9, 17-19, 13-11) but went on to record surprise victories over John Marshall and Barry Allen, whilst Barton enjoyed success against two fellow-Division One players, Adam Wilkin and then 16-14 in the decider over the fancied Martin Edwards.

There was a shock in the Division Two Singles where the 2015 winner Frank Burbidge was eliminated in the opening Round by Graham Parkes who excelled to take the match in three (11-6, 11-9, 11-9).

But Parkes then fell victim to a surprise of his own, losing to Tony Beezer, and this series of results opened the way for Roger Hance to reach the final with comparative ease. His good fortune continued in the final where he benefitted from a series of nets and edges against top seed Mark Salter – including an outrageous net on championship point that sealed a 3-0 (14-12, 11-8, 11-9) victory. Despite his good fortune, it was a worthy win for Hance, his first Clacton League title.

There was an even greater shock in the Division Three Singles where top seed and defending champion Rivhu Khan – unbeaten in the League all season – crashed out 3-0 (11-9, 11-7, 11-9) at the semi-final stage to an inspired performance from 15-year old Woody Fitzpatrick.

Alas for Fitzpatrick, he was not able to sustain his true form in the final against second seed Jason Lloyd who took the honours with a 3-1 (9-11, 11-1, 11-6, 11-5) win. It was a deserved success for Lloyd in his first season back in local table tennis after an absence of nearly 30 years – his win will have brought back memories of his last Championships success in 1988 when he won the Division Five Singles title as a junior, the last time this trophy was ever contested.

But Lloyd had so nearly gone out in his semi-final where he'd faced the toughest of tough battles against doughty campaigner John Long, a player good enough to have won the Mens Singles' title 43 years ago and still scrapping as eagerly for every point now as he did all those years ago. It was only Lloyd's persistence that got him through, winning in five (11-9, 11-9, 9-11, 6-11, 14-12) in a tension-filled match.

Once again the League is indebted to Paul Newbould Planning and Building Design Services who were the main sponsors of the Championships for a 23rd year. And thanks also go to Phil Smith and Margery's Day Nursery (Mens Singles), Angela Barratt and the Skelmersdale Centre Ltd (Ladies Singles), and Martin Edwards and Clacton Gas (Junior Singles) for their sponsorship of the individual events.

2016 CHAMPIONSHIPS RESULTS

Men's Singles (sponsored by Margery's Day Nursery): C Stallwood beat S Hume 3-2 (12-10, 5-11, 11-9, 6-11, 11-5).

Ladies' Singles (sponsored by the Skelmersdale Centre): G Edwards beat A Rodriguez 3-2 (11-5, 6-11, 5-11, 11-5, 11-5).

Men's Doubles: G Green/C Stallwood beat P Hume/S Hume 3-0 (11-3, 11-5, 11-6).

Ladies' Doubles: G Edwards/C Edwards beat A Rodriguez/K Lamb 3-0 (12-10, 11-6, 11-9).

Mixed Doubles: C Stallwood/A Rodriguez beat S Hume/G Edwards 3-1 (11-8, 11-6, 8-11, 12-10).

Veterans' Singles: C Stallwood beat G Cattermole 3-0 (13-11, 11-7, 11-3).

Super-Veterans' Singles: A Burgess beat D Willis 3-1 (11-4, 4-11, 11-4, 11-4).

Junior Singles (sponsored by Clacton Gas): S Hume beat G Edwards 3-1 (11-7, 8-11, 11-5, 11-8).

Junior Doubles: S Hume/T Wilkin beat H Beezer/W Fitzpatrick 3-0 (11-7, 11-6, 11-5).

Division Two Singles: R Hance beat M Salter 3-0 (14-12, 11-8, 11-9).

Division Three Singles: J Lloyd beat W Fitzpatrick 3-1 (9-11, 11-1, 11-6, 11-5).

Restricted Singles: G Cattermole beat G Price 3-1 (6-11, 11-2, 11-7, 11-7).

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