



Clacton & District: Eagles hit heights in cup final

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Windsor Eagles are the 2016 winners of the Clacton & District League's Handicap Knock-Out Cup.

In an entertaining final – one of the best and closest for many seasons – the Eagles added the Cup to their trophy cupboard with a hard-fought 5-4 win over fellow Division One side Nomads Lions.

Producing an accomplished, all-round team performance, the Windsor trio of Gary Cattermole, Mark Smith and Phil Smith won all three doubles matches – which ultimately proved crucial.

But they were made to fight all the way by a determined Lions' side who, in the absence of Paul Hume, Adam Cuthbert and Matthew Horrocks, called on the experience of Brian Parish and John Hockley to supplement the youthful talent of skipper Adam Wilkin.

The opening match saw father and son, Phil and Mark Smith (-6), take on Lions' left-handers, Parish and Hockley (+1), in what turned out to be an engaging contest with neither pair showing visible signs of nerves.

The Smiths came from behind in the opening two sets, 6-9 down in the first, and then 0-8 down in the second before winning 11 consecutive points to take it 11-8. The Lions' pair battled well in the third from 6-6 to win 11-7 but the Windsor duo were not to be denied, their extra class the difference in the fourth set, winning 11-8 to secure the first point of the match.

The Lions hit back immediately as the much-improved Wilkin (+1) made full use of his handicap advantage to beat the Windsor number one Cattermole (-5) with a straightforward 3-0 (11-5, 11-5, 11-2) victory, Wilkin combining solid defence with consistent attacking to blunt Cattermole's ambitious aggression.

Mark Smith (-8) restored the Eagles' advantage with a 3-0 (11-8, 11-8, 11-7) win over Hockley (+1), taking the initiative from the start and, with the help of cunning services, he never looked in danger of defeat.

Then came match four between Phil Smith (-6) and Parish (+1) which produced the most exciting individual contest of the final.

Smith started the first set in good form, getting back to 0-4, only to see Parish run away with seven of the next eight points and with it the set 11-1. But this was just a precursor to an encounter in which all four remaining sets went to the wire.

In set two, Smith levelled the handicap at 4-4 but Parish matched him thereafter and it was only a last-gasp effort which saw Smith take it 13-11. Parish bounced back to take the third set 11-9 and had two points to take the match in set four when he led 10-8 – only to see Smith to rescue the situation 12-10.

And so to the tension-filled fifth set where Smith led 9-6 but, showing unexpected signs nerves near the winning line, allowed Parish to utilise all his 60-plus years of table tennis experience to win the next five points and come out on top by a nail-biting 11-9.

So, as the players went to the interval, the match score stood at 2-2.



Runners-up from Nomads Lions (from left): Brian Parish, Adam Wilkin, John Hockley

But the Eagles returned to confirm the pattern of the Final and establish a lead for the third time by taking match five, Cattermole and Phil Smith (-6) edging past Wilkin and Hockley (+1) 3-2 (13-11, 0-11, 12-10, 9-11, 11-9) in a match which exemplified the entire contest – competitive and with no quarter-given but played in the most sporting and good-humoured manner.

Once again, the Lions might have sneaked the match, leading 11-10 in the first set before losing 13-11, being 10-9 up in the third before going down 12-10 and then level at 7-7 in the fifth.

In retrospect, it was the pivotal match of the final.

Could the Eagles now finish things off? The answer was a definite 'no' as the indomitable Lions produced two fine wins to give them the lead in the final for the first and only time.

The two youngest players, Wilkin (+1) and Mark Smith (-5), were on show in match six but Smith was unable to get sufficiently good starts to bite into Wilkin's handicap advantage and, in a near-carbon copy of his first singles' match, Wilkin recorded a 3-0 (11-3, 11-5, 11-1) victory which was as comfortable as the scoreline suggests.

But if the win for Wilkin, the current Handicap Singles title-holder, was predictable, the victory for Parish (+1) over Cattermole (-6) in match seven was completely unforeseen – especially when the Eagles' player won the first

set 11-7 after levelling at 6-6.

However, from then on Parish proved the steadier and more composed player, winning the next two sets 11-6 and 11-4 before a nip-and-tuck fourth set which Cattermole edged 11-9, thanks to some deep defending against ferocious Parish attacking.

But Parish is a player who can never be under-estimated and, in a turn-around fifth set, Cattermole lost five points in succession before he could get back to parity which allowed Parish to establish an 8-0 lead, eventually winning 11-2 to put the Lions on the brink of an unlikely victory.

Phil Smith (-6) had the job of saving the match for the Eagles against Hockley (+1) which he did with a calm and calculated response in three-straight, his looping attacks too much for the ring-rusty Hockley in only his fourth match of an illness-ravaged season.

And so the players prepared for the deciding doubles of match nine in which Cattermole and Mark Smith (-5) adopted a more considered, measured approach against Wilkin and the tiring Parish (+1). It was a strategy which induced enough errors from the Lions' pair to give the Eagles a 3-0 (11-6, 11-6, 11-5) win – and with it the cup for 2016.

The evening capped a fine season for Windsor Eagles, just seven days after becoming Division One runners-up by a single point in their last match of the League season – which, coincidentally, was against Nomads Lions.

And the Windsor Club maintained their superb recent cup record which has seen eight of their teams reach the final in the last 15 years – and win every one of them.

It was a second cup success for Phil Smith and a third for Cattermole but, astonishingly, it was a fourth success for their youngest player Mark Smith who has now notched up four cup winners' trophies in the last nine seasons, all at the tender age of 23!

An honourable mention should go to John Hobson, the Eagles' captain who's had an on-and-off season because of injury but who has been a loyal Windsor servant for many years. John was an original member of the first-ever Windsor Eagles' team 26 years ago, an ever-present player since then, and a winner in the Eagles' two previous cup successes in 1991 and 2003.

Tony Hooper and Graham Parkes officiated as the umpires in the final with their usual quiet authority whilst no report would be complete without noting the role of the select, but enthusiastic, band of spectators whose lively support added to the atmosphere of an excellent finale to the League's 2015/16 season.

Cup final results (*Windsor Eagles named first*): M Smith/P Smith (-6) beat B Parish/J Hockley (+1) 11-9, 11-8, 8-11, 11-8; G Cattermole (-5) lost to A Wilkin (+1) 5-11, 5-11, 2-11; M Smith (-8) beat Hockley (+1) 11-8, 11-8, 11-7; P Smith (-5) lost to Parish (+1) 1-11, 13-11, 9-11, 12-10, 9-11; Cattermole/P Smith (-6) beat Wilkin/Hockley (+1) 13-11, 0-11, 12-10, 9-11, 11-9; M Smith (-5) lost to Wilkin (+1) 3-11, 5-11, 1-11; Cattermole (-6) lost to Parish (+1) 11-7, 6-11, 4-11, 11-9, 2-11; P Smith (-6) beat Hockley (+1) 11-5, 11-5, 11-6; Cattermole/M Smith (-5) beat A Wilkin/Parish (+1) 11-6, 11-6, 11-5.

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