



Champions eyeing repeat School Games glory

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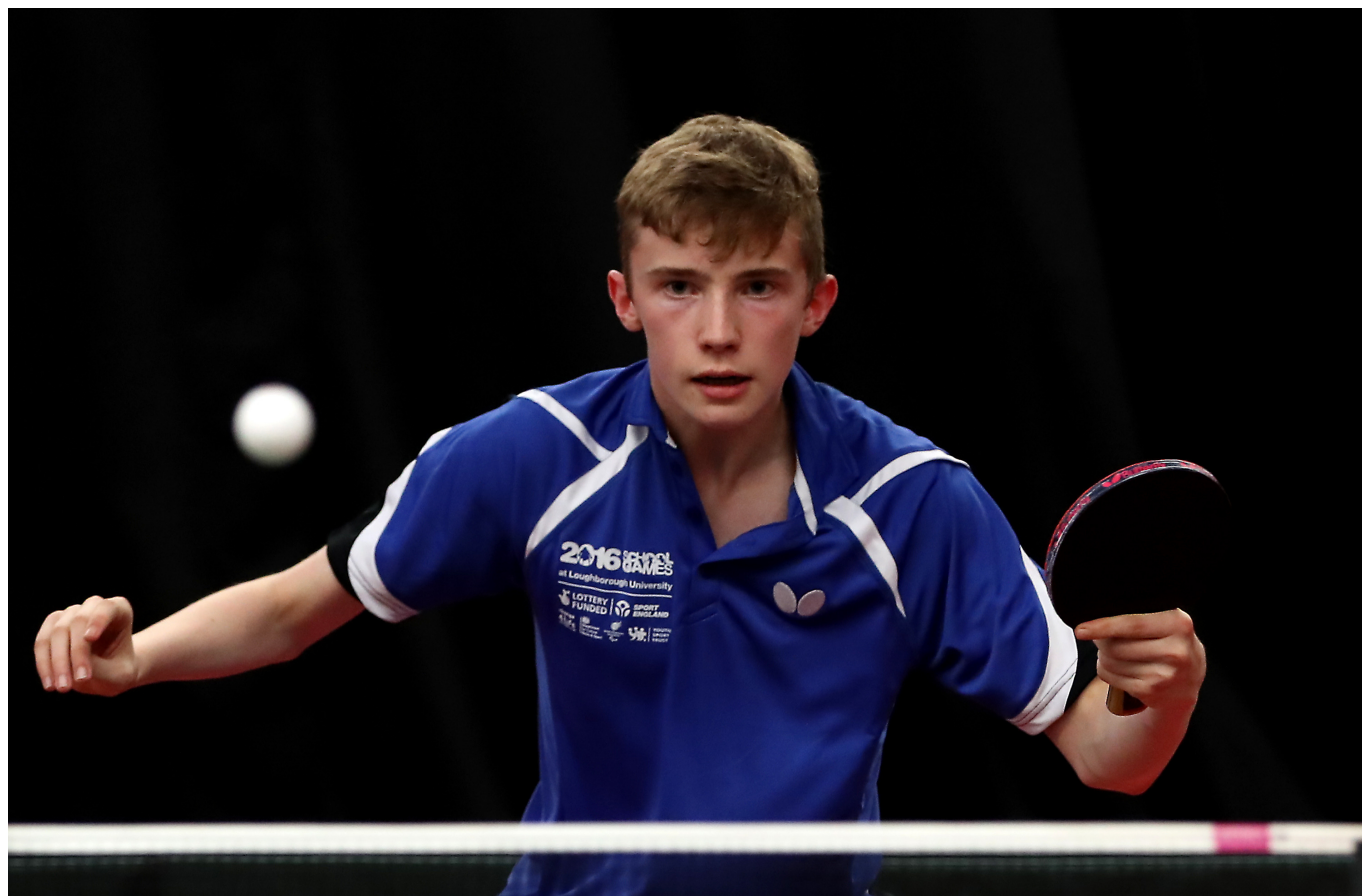
Defending champions Midlands boys and South East girls are well placed to hold on to their titles after day one of the 2016 School Games at Loughborough University.

Both topped their groups to advance to Saturday's semi-finals and the chance to get on the podium.

In the disability competition, played in a round-robin format throughout, South West and South East remain unbeaten after the first day's play.

[Click here to see full results from day one](#)

Boys



Scotland's Calum Morrison during the team table tennis on day two of the 2016 School Games.

Midlands began with a 5-2 victory over Scotland in which they were never behind, Alex Ramsden and Matt Leete winning both their singles matches and combining for the doubles. Dylan Curry and Keir Morton won one apiece for Scotland – the latter coming from 2-1 down to beat Timmy Cooper in five.

South West saw off Wales 5-2 after the first four matches were shared. The two Welsh victories were in five as Josh Stacey beat Ben Cawston 11-4, 11-4, 2-11, 8-11, 11-5 and combined with Marc Castro to defeat Cawston & Hugo Pang 11-9, 11-3, 6-11, 9-11, 11-5.

The pattern was the same as South East overcame North West 5-2 by winning the last three matches. Harry Watson (NW) won the only match to go to five, shading Ben Foster 3-2 (12-10, 3-11, 2-11, 12-10, 12-10).

North East were 6-1 victors against Northern Ireland, who actually took the lead when Owen Cathcart beat James Hobson. Thereafter, it was all North East, though Alec Ward had to be at his best to shake off Cathcart 3-2 (8-11, 16-14, 11-5, 6-11, 11-7) in a match which saw both players yellow-carded.

The second round saw a 3hr 40min epic between Scotland and Wales, sealed 4-3 by the former, having been pegged back three times from 1-0, 2-1 and 3-2 up.

Stacey and Cade Short both won in five for Wales – Short 15-13 in the decider against Ethan Chapman – while Calum Morrison saw off Stacey 12-10 in the fifth. It was left to Morton to get Scotland over the line in four games against Benedict Watson.

Midlands stepped up the power as they defeated South West 6-1. The second match between Leete and Pang swung one way then the other before the Midlands player won it 3-2 (11-2, 14-12, 5-11, 14-16, 11-3).

The third match was another to be decided in five, Cawston notching the South West point with a fine comeback against Nathan Butler (3-11, 9-11, 11-3, 11-5, 11-7). Butler was on the right end of a 3-2 scoreline later against Olly Tyndall (12-10, 11-9, 9-11, 9-11, 11-9).

In group B, the Irish boys got off and running with a 6-1 scoreline against North West, for whom Zac Cantor

scored the point. The doubles went to five, with Cathcart & Zac Earley defeating Cantor & James Chappell 3-2 (11-8, 10-12, 7-11, 11-8, 11-5).

There were no fewer than four five-set matches as North East beat South East 5-2, with the other three matches being decided in four. Five-set victors were James Hobson against James Smith, Smith & Josh Bennett (versus Hobson & Ward), Ward (from 2-0 down against Smith, though Ward picked up another yellow on the way) and Omar Khassal (against Hobson).

Midlands wrapped up Group A courtesy of a 5-2 scoreline over Wales, which they set up by winning the first three singles. Wales won the doubles but Ramsden's four-game defeat of Stacey ensured Midlands could not be beaten. Short took the other Welsh point.

The match to decide who would advance behind Midlands went to the wire as Scotland and South West battled out to the final match.

Ultimately, a four-game victory for Keir Morton over Carl Baldry put the Scots through.

North East topped Group B with three from three, ending with a 6-1 victory over North West. It was the doubles which stopped the rot as Cantor & James Chappell sunk Hobson & Ward 3-2 (11-9, 13-11, 6-11, 4-11, 14-12).

They were joined in the semi-finals by South East, who went through at Northern Ireland's expense by beating their rivals 5-2. It was in the balance at 3-2, but Bennett won 3-1 against Thomas Earley to clinch the result, and Smith put a gloss on it with a 3-2 (11-4, 11-13, 10-12, 11-3, 11-5) triumph against Conor Nugent.

Tomorrow's matches

Semi-finals

England Midlands v England South East

England North East v Scotland

Places 5-8

England South West v England North West

Northern Ireland v Wales

Girls



England – North East's Sophie Barlow

South East started the defence of their title in fine style with a 7-0 whitewash of Northern Ireland.

Five of the matches were done and dusted in three straight but the doubles went the distance before Kate Cheer & Denise Payet saw off Sophie Earley & Rebecca Finn.

And there was a measure of revenge for Payet in the singles match against Finn – a repeat of last year's individual final, which Finn won in five. This time, however, it was 3-0 (11-9, 14-12, 11-4) to the English girl.

North West avoided a whitewash against North East when Megan Dillon beat Holly Williams in four in the final match. Sophie Barlow and Gauri Duhan both won two singles for the victors.

It was also 6-1 to Midlands against South West in the other group. The closest match saw Chloe Lingard taken to five by Katie Holt before prevailing 10-12, 13-11, 11-7, 7-11, 11-7. Charlotte Bardsley and Mollie Patterson were in top form for the victors, while Gemma Kerr took the solitary point for South West.

Scotland were always in control of their 5-2 victory over Wales, though Lydia John won both her matches for the beaten team, including a five-setter (9-11, 11-6, 11-8, 5-11, 11-9) against Alisa Khalid in match six. The final match also went to a decider, with Tessa Yau wrapping up Scotland's victory by beating Lara Whitton 11-8, 12-10, 7-11, 4-11, 11-9.

Wales shaded a thriller against South West to notch their first win of the tournament in round two.

The English team led 1-0 and 2-1, but Wales levelled again when John & Whitton took the doubles 3-2 (5-11, 12-14, 11-4, 11-8, 11-6) and then moved ahead.

Nina Kadir got South West back on terms in five against Beth Richards, winning it 11-6, 6-11, 11-3, 9-11, 11-7), but John sealed victory for the Principality in four against Kerr.

Also in the same group, Midlands' 4-3 win over Scotland included five-setters aplenty and a stirring Scottish comeback from 3-0 down.

Lingard won the first for Midlands, defeating Rebecca Plaistow 3-2 (6-11, 11-6, 5-11, 11-8, 11-8), and Patterson and

Charlotte Boston made it 3-0 – the latter shading Jennie Yang 13-11, 12-14, 13-11, 13-11).

Scotland's comeback started in the doubles and the last three matches all went to five, Plaistow beating Patterson and Yang defeating Lingard to tie up the match at 3-3, before Boston chalked up the vital point against Khalid (11-6, 12-14, 11-7, 8-11, 11-4) to win it for a relieved Midlands.

Back in the other group, South East were also mighty relieved to hold off North East. It was the proverbial rollercoaster as SE were 1-0 up, 2-1 down, 3-2 up and then level at 3-3. Along the way, Duhan came from 2-0 down to defeat Kate Cheer, while Payet & Cheer took the doubles in five against Barlow & Williams.

The decider pitted Cheer against Jasmin Wong and it went the way of the older South East girls, who this time fought back from 2-0 down – the final score 11-13, 9-11, 11-9, 12-10, 11-9.

Northern Ireland's 6-1 win over North West contained some close finishes. Finn saw off Alice Dillon 15-13 in the fifth in the first match, while the doubles saw North West pick up their point 12-10 in the decider through Megan Dillon & Rachel Scott.

No such dramas for South East in the third and final Group C match as they saw off North West 6-1, Alice Dillon picking up North West's point against Isabelle Joubely.

Northern Ireland also went through thanks to a 4-3 win over North East, never being headed, with Finn clinching the decisive fourth win in the sixth match, against Barlow.

In Group D, Midlands topped the chart after a 7-0 whitewash of Wales, though it was not all one-sided as Patterson needed five to beat Anna Hursey and Boston also triumphed over Whitton in a decider.

Joining them in the last four are Scotland, who overcame South West 4-3. They won four of the first five matches, all in deciding games – Plaistow beating Holt and Khalid defeating Amy Blagbrough before the two Scots teamed up to win the doubles against the same pair and Plaistow then beat Blagbrough.

Tomorrow's matches

Semi-finals

England SE v Scotland

England Midlands v Northern Ireland

Places 5-8

England North East v England South West

Wales v England North West

Disability

South East put down an early marker by defeating champions North East 2-1 in the first round of matches, despite not having a wheelchair player in their ranks.

Shae Thakker overcame Alex Bland in four in the standing disability match and Hamish Friell set up an unbeatable 2-0 lead in a cracker against Ben Robinson in the learning disability tie, eventually taking it 3-2 (12-10, 11-7, 4-11, 14-16, 14-12).

There was an early 2-0 win for South West against North West, with Billy Shilton (standing) and Alfie Armstrong (learning) in dominant form. Neither side had wheelchair representation.

Daniel Bullen clinched a 2-1 win for Midlands over Scotland – Thomas Spicer had earlier won the standing tie, with Scotland taking a walkover in the learning class.

Northern Ireland had only one team member, Kenny Cloke, who is normally a standing disability player but was playing in the wheelchair class as he has recently broken a leg. Therefore, the Irish scores were all recorded as 3-0 defeats, though Cloke did notch victories over Andrew Berry (Scotland) and Andrew Green (North East).

South East and South West won their second matches against Wales and Midlands respectively – though Shilton's win over Thomas Spicer was the only match not decided by walkover in the latter.

Scotland took their first victory by defeating North West 3-0 thanks to Declan Tobin, David Morrison and a walkover.

South West and South East met in round three and both remained unbeaten – it was a 1-1 draw as Shilton beat Thakker 3-0 (12-10, 11-8, 11-8) in the standing class and Friell beat Armstrong 3-0 (5, 6, 7) in the learning category, with no wheelchair competitors.

Wales defeated North West 3-0, Tam Eastwood and Sid Mohnaty winning the two matches played in short order.

And North East saw off Midlands 2-1, Alex Bland beating Thomas Spicer before a walkover ensured Daniel Bullen's wheelchair victory over Andrew Green could not change the result.

Round four saw North East victorious again, 3-0 over North West thanks to Bland and Ben Robinson plus a walkover. South East defeated Scotland 2-1, Friell adding to Thakker's earlier victory with a tight 3-1 (11-9, 14-16, 12-10, 11-7) scoreline against Morrison. Wales beat Midlands 2-1, with Bullen's victory over Cellan Hall in the wheelchair match again academic to the result.

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