

Zak attack – and Spink in the pink!

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Lauren Spink

Zak Zilesnick and Lauren Spink were simply the best by winning their respective band one events on the first day of a new Grand Prix season for 2010/2011 held at the Wavertree Tennis Centre, home of the Tees Sport Liverpool Grand Prix on Saturday the 21st of August.

First year junior Zak Zilesnick who trains at the Harefield Academy in Middlesex was unseeded in the event but came through his group matches against Steve Cowley and Lee Neil then round by round showed his class against opponents Stig Owe Karlsson, although was made to pull out all the stops in the qtr final and then enjoyed a straight sets victory over semi finalist Gavin Maguire to await his final opponent. That turned out to be Richard Andrews who made steady progress after beating his group opponents to make it to the final with a 3-1 win against Adam Nutland at the last eight stage and followed up with another 3-1 sets win, this time over Lee Neil to set up his final with Zak. This last match attracted a good crowd and was played at a fast and furious pace. Zak took the first leg, then Richard fought back to level at 1-1, but the younger left handed Zilesnick always looked in command and had too much firepower in his armoury of shot making skills and took the next two sets to be crowned the Liverpool Grand Prix Men's Band 1 Champion.

It's always a pleasure to witness the skills, energy and enthusiasm that Lauren Spink brings to the table with her speed, agility, attack and counter attack that she utilises with power and precision to brush aside all her opponents and win yet another Women's band 1 title. Mind you she had to be at her very sharpest against gallant finalist Tressa Armitage, who fought tooth and nail going down in four close sets that were all played at breakneck speed. It was a brilliant effort for the young and ever improving Hampshire junior to reach her first ever band 1 final and she played well above her ranking in the seniors. After losing to Corrina Whittaker in the group stage but progressing through as runner up, Tressa had to do it the hard way by battling through against higher ranked and more experienced Gillian Edwards in a five sets preliminary round. She then defeated both Yolanda King in the last eight stage (who she had lost to earlier in the morning's band 2 event) and semi finalist Liz May both in straight sets to set up her final with the more experienced Lauren Spink in the last match. Lauren's pathway to the final was gained by moving effortlessly through the gears to accelerate past the Welsh duo of Angharad Phillips in the quarter final and Charlotte Carey in the semi final to meet Tressa in the final.

The band 2 competition started proceedings off for the Women in the morning on this first Grand Prix of a hectic playing calendar with Yolanda King the 16 year old Sussex player duly justifying her top seeding. However her inter city express train ride to the title was almost de-railed at the first round by England Junior International Tressa Armitage who took Yolanda to a thrilling photo finish going down 13-15 in the fifth end with Yolanda needing her 6th match point to take her place in the semi final. Gosia Muda put up some resistance to Miss King in the last four taking the first set but from there on in it was all Yolanda as she eased through the next three sets to make the final. In the lower half of the draw 2nd seeded Perth lass Gillian Edwards also had a titanic struggle in her first round match coming back from a 1-2 deficit in games against the ever improving Isobel Ashley from Derby to fill her place in the last four. Gillian got the better of Jurate Brazaityte in four sets to set up her final match with Yolanda, but had no answers to the King attack going down in straight sets.

Rounding off the Women's events for the day saw the dynamic Derbyshire cadet Isobel Ashley win the band 3 competition with stunning performances throughout including a 3-0 final victory over Janay Gibson. Isobel was stretched the full distance in her thrilling semi final encounter with Filton Academy player Emily Standing coming back from a 1-2 deficit in games, after beating Val Murdoch in the first round 3-1. Losing finalist Janay also competed very well to power through Sarah Timlin and her semi final adversary Jessica Birbeck but really had no answers against the effervescent Isobel Ashley.

The first of the Men's events to finish saw Calum Main from Scotland take the band 2 singles title defeating Filton academy player Dean Cundy in the final. Both players were in top form to reach their first ever band 2 final,

having recently returned from the Ostend Open where they enjoyed several good results, none more so than winner Calum Main who took the scalps of both Matt Ware and Damien Nicholls in the Belgium team event. Calum's route to the title was looking decidedly dodgy at the first hurdle coming back from the dead against top seeded Ashley Robinson after being 0-2 down and looking in trouble turned it around to come through in the fifth set. He then outpointed Daniel O'Connell in the semi's following up with a straight sets final result over Cundy. Dean's passage to the last match was tough to say the least being taken the full distance by both Scott Barton and semi finalist Shaun Hall (great to see you back at a Grand Prix, Shaun) with Dean winning that semi 11-9 in the fifth.

After nearly 4 hours of intensive and highly competitive play the pocket rocket dragon and highly vocal cadet Lee Morgan from Swansea took the Men's band 3 event in an explosive display against valiant finalist Stephen Green. Morgan is a very likeable yet highly competitive young man who has a brilliant future ahead of him in table tennis. He continues to amaze with incredible and at times outrageous shots, (one in particular, a backhand winner back from the table that went around the net aka Ryan Jenkins!) and always attracts a huge following- absolutely brilliant! What was even more incredible about his title win was that he had just returned from an intensive one week's training camp in Budapest after arriving home very late and getting just 4 hours sleep the night before Liverpool, yet was still HUNGARY for competition. Lee punished players of the calibre of Calum Main, Pavel Orzechowski and semi finalist Shaun Hall to reach the final and eventual title.....well done Lee, sheer Welsh poetry in motion! Losing finalist Stephen Green also had a super day gaining several tough results against Niell Powell, Gary Watson and semi finalist Hamish Yeung.

Dublin's own Ryan Flood washed away all his adversaries leaving them high and dry in the Men's Band 4 competition drowning finalist Robert Gavin 3-0. Floody's quarter final opponent Simon Oylar almost halted the Irish tidal wave taking a two sets to love lead but from there on in Ryan's deluge of shots saw him prove the stronger taking that match in the fifth end. Ryan continued in his rich vein of form to outpoint semi finalist Graham Coupe, whilst losing finalist Robert Gavin had to fight off Tomasz Halucha, David Walton, Josh Jenkins and semi finalist Gary Young to fill his final place.

Another Welsh superstar in the making (well done Ryan) to come off the conveyor belt of TTAW Wales is Connor Edwards from Tonypany, in the valleys. He duly obliged by winning the fiercely competitive sixty player entry of Men's band 5. Connor's last opponent Colin Dalgleish took a set off the champion but that was as good as it got for the Scottish player.

Buckinghamshire star Jarred Knowles played superbly throughout and did not drop a set in the knockout rounds to complete his whitewash of successes in Men's band 6. Brave finalist Colin Dalgleish once again had to play second fiddle in his second losing final, but nevertheless enjoyed several top class results in his long run to the final. Brian Fowler and Tony Whelan were the losing semi finalists.

Results on Day one at Liverpool as follows;

Men's Band 1.

Zak Zilesnick (Mi) beat Richard Andrews (Bk) 11-8, 8-11, 11-7, 11-5.

Women's Band 1.

Lauren Spink(Nk) beat Tressa Armitage (Ha) 11-7, 8-11, 11-6, 12-10.

Men's Band 2.

Calum Main (SCO) beat Dean Cundy (WAL) 11-7, 11-8, 11-5.

Women's Band 2.

Yolanda King (Sx) beat Gillian Edwards (SCO) 11-9, 11-1, 11-9.

Men's Band 3.

Lee Morgan (WAL) beat Stephen Green (Ch) 12-10, 16-14, 11-8.

Women's Band 3.

Isobel Ashley (Dy) beat Janay Gibson (Ch) 11-6, 11-6, 11-5.

Men's Band 4.

Ryan Flood (IRL) beat Robert Gavin (IRL) 11-4, 12-10, 11-7.

Men's Band 5.

Connor Edwards (WAL) beat Colin Dalgleish (SCO) 11-9, 4-11, 11-5, 11-6.

Men's Band 6.

Jarred Knowles (Bk) beat Colin Dalglish (SCO) 11-6, 11-9, 11-8.

By Geoff Ware.

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