



## ISA – National Table Tennis Review

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The inaugural ISA Table Tennis competition took place on 1 February at Sherfield School in Sherfield on Loddon.

Fourteen schools entered the competition, which featured over one hundred pupils.

The morning saw singles competitions being played across 5 different age groups with smashes, spin serves and aggressive backhand drives a plenty. All competitions were well contested and there was some magnificent table tennis being played.

The girls' tournament featured the Welsh U13 no.1 player and British U15 no.1. Watching these girls compete was a zealous encounter watched by many. It is without doubt that both these girls will go on to compete again in grander arenas with a raucous crowd behind each of them as they continue to achieve in the sport.

The day progressed with a doubles tournament in the second half of the festival. Tactics were changed as players aimed to move the opposition around the table, desperately attempting to wrong foot the receiving player. The level of competition caused nerves to rise in some, causing them to fall foul of the doubles service line rule. Nevertheless, some of these calls were so close, Hawk-Eye would have been put to good use.

Especially impressive was the U11 doubles competition, as for many of them this was their first competitive doubles tournament; they were no longer in the playground at break-time where double bounces are allowed and no score is kept.

The determination of these children – who, for many, adopted the attitude of waiting for the opponent to make a mistake rather than to take a risk to play a winning shot – resulted in some lengthy rallies, with peers, parents and coaches not daring to release their breath for fear of distracting the competitors until the point had been won.

A surprising amount of the games throughout the day went to the 'extra time' of table tennis. One player must win by two clear points after 10 – 10. As players lost points in this crucial stage of the competition, tactics were discussed, hands covered eyes in anguish and friends offered encouragement to school mates.

Regardless of the end results, all players were offered a chance to improve their game and to learn something new about the game, but also perhaps about themselves and the mental aspect of competition. But, most importantly the players were sportspeople to be proud of as they dutifully congratulated each other at the end of each game with a firm handshake.

Jack Cotton, Kew House – U15 National Boys Champion

*'I thoroughly enjoyed competing in the ISA National table tennis competition and felt that it was really well organised. It was great to play against other schools who also enjoy playing the sport. It was difficult playing against my school friend in the final but I am glad we both won medals. I will look forward to playing again next year.'*

Noah Berger, Kew House – U13 National Boys Champion

*'I believe that the ISA National table tennis tournament was a delight to play in. Even though I was entered for the year above competition, the players were really well matched. I enjoyed the tense moments of the semi-final and final and I really had to concentrate on my game and style of play to win my matches. Overall, I had a fantastic experience and wish all the other players good luck for the future in this sport.'*

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