



Clacton & District: Hat-tricks for Edwards, Stallwood

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Gracie Edwards and Colin Stallwood took the starring roles in the Clacton & District League's 2017 Closed Championships held at the Clacton Coastal Academy Sports Hall, with both players chalking up a third successive individual Singles title.

Gracie confirmed her dominance in the **Ladies' Singles** when, for a third year running, she defeated Annabelle Rodriguez in the final, displaying both power and technique in her 3-1 (11-9, 11-7, 6-11, 11-4) victory over her old adversary. It was a well-deserved success for the young Clacton junior against an opponent who played much better than the scoreline might suggest.

At the age of 15, Gracie becomes only the second junior player to take the Ladies' Singles title in three consecutive years, emulating the feat achieved by Edel Ruddy in 1980, 1981 and 1982. And who is to say Gracie can't break that record next year?

As expected, seeded players Isabel Barton and Tricia Salter topped their groups to make it through to the semi-finals. And a special mention should go to Chris Jones who defeated both Caroline North and Kayley Rodriguez to head her group and take a place in the knockout phase of the competition.

Colin Stallwood had to be at his brilliant best to dominate a high-quality field in the **Men's Singles** where, in the final, he warded off the challenge of Ipswich-based Andy Warner. In a highly-competitive encounter, Warner took the early initiative but Stallwood, allying determination to his undoubted talent, worked his way back to take the match, and a third successive title, 3-1 (10-12, 11-9, 13-11, 11-7).

It is only the third time in the tournament's 72-year history that a player has taken the Men's Singles' title three years running, the last being in 1990 when Derek Wood was in his prime, whilst the first player to achieve it was the legendary Ken Gladwell who won the trophy an unprecedented six times in a row in the 1950s.

Stallwood enjoyed a comparatively comfortable journey to the final, beating Andy Vincent, Felipe Rodriguez and James Denyer, all in four sets, his 11-6, 8-11, 11-4, 11-3 semi-final victory over Denyer somewhat more comfortable than he might have expected.



Colin Stallwood (picture by Roger Hance)

Warner had endured a sterner test, having to overcome an on-song Gary Young 17-15 in the fourth in the quarter-finals before becoming embroiled in one of the matches of the Tournament, a semi-final encounter against 16-year old Sam Hume, runner-up in this event for the last two years. The voluble Warner was forced to dredge up every ounce of his experience to save two match points to win a 3-2 (11-8, 4-11, 11-3, 7-11, 13-11) see-saw contest.

Seven of the eight top seeds made it to the quarter-finals with only Kris Stefanov failing to get to the last eight – although he was involved in the tournament's 'champagne moment'. Starved of table tennis action for three months and not fully fit, Stefanov came up against 14-year old Jared Chelski in round one of the knockout stage and the two became enmeshed in match of classic proportions – so much so that, for the last points of the match, players on all the other seven tables stopped to watch the ebb and flow of the end-game. And it was Chelski's uninhibited play which took the 3-2 (11-7, 7-11, 11-9, 8-11, 16-14) victory in a match as exciting as the score suggests.

A special mention should also go to Roger Hance who beat Colin Webber 11-7 in the fifth in round one whilst ranked player Gary Young, before giving Warner a tough fight in the quarters, was given the fright of his life in round one by his 12-year old son, Daniel, Gary surviving by the narrowest of margins of 3-2 (8-11, 11-7, 9-11, 12-10, 11-9).

There was a second title for Gracie Edwards when, with Andy Warner, she took her first **Mixed Doubles** trophy by beating champions for the last two years, Colin Stallwood and Annabelle Rodriguez 3-2 (11-8, 10-12, 11-9, 13-15, 11-7). It proved an entertaining tussle between two evenly-matched pairings – and was revenge of sorts for the winners who had faced Stallwood and Rodriguez in the Colchester Closed Mixed Doubles final just six weeks ago and narrowly lost.

James Denyer and Gill Locke, winners in 2013 and 2014, went down to Warner and Edwards in one semi-final but there were surprise semi-finalists in the other half of the draw, Paul Hume and Caroline North making it through thanks to an 11-7 in the fifth victory over the seeded Martin Edwards and Cris Edwards, and an 11-6 in the fifth win against Felipe Rodriguez and Kayley Rodriguez in the quarters.

Colin Stallwood and Greg Green have been pre-eminent in the **Men's Doubles** for the last three years but their reign came to an end this year, defeated in the quarter-finals by the new pairing of Gavin Price and Kevin Gowlett who exceeded all expectations to beat the three-times champions 11-9 in the decider.

So the honours this year went to the popular pairing of brothers Paul Hume and Sam Hume, losing finalists for the last two years, who both took their first major Clacton Closed silverware. In the final, they defeated 2013 champions James Denyer and Felipe Rodriguez 3-1 (11-1, 11-6, 6-11, 11-3) in a match that rarely caught fire and in which the losing pair showed only glimpses of their true talent and ability. Nevertheless, it was refreshing to see the final played between four young players – their average age was just 22 – all of whom were home-grown talent of the Clacton League.

Perhaps it might have been that Denyer and Rodriguez were suffering from mental exhaustion, having had to face three tough matches to get to the final – defeating Martin Edwards and Oli Reynolds 11-6 in the decider in Round Two, Phil Smith and Gary Cattermole 11-7 in the decider in the quarter-finals, and Gavin Price and Kevin Gowlett 11-8 in the decider in the semi-finals.

By contrast, the Hume brothers had a more sedate path to the final, their major challenge coming in the semi-final where they had to withstand the substantial challenge of Andy Warner and Gary Young but eventually succeeding 11-6 in the fifth.

Two years ago Isabel Barton and Jenny Higgins caused a minor shock in the **Ladies' Doubles** when they took the title against all expectations by beating Gracie Edwards and Sandie Isaac 11-8 in the fifth. As if to prove that was not a one-off fluke, they took the title again this year, winning in style in a see-saw match with an 11-6 in the fifth final victory over Annabelle Rodriguez and Kayley Rodriguez.

But arguably their crucial win had been in the semi-final where Barton and Higgins genuinely upset the form-book by defeating reigning champions Cris Edwards and Gracie Edwards by a nail-biting 12-10 in the decider, a result which denied Gracie the opportunity to take a third major title in the same tournament.

It was an 11th Ladies' Doubles trophy for Jenny, her first being as long ago as 1991, whilst it was a 10th title for Isabel, all her wins coming since 2001.

In the **Junior Singles** Sam Hume, as expected, took a third successive title – although not against his expected opponent, with Daniel Young causing a surprise by beating Walton D team-mate and seeded Jared Chelski 3-0 (11-9, 11-9, 11-9) in the semi-final.

But in the final Hume proved a class apart, winning in three-straight against the gallant Young who showed enough ability to mark him down as a champion of the future. Indeed, Young had played well to top a group that also comprised Woody Fitzpatrick and Scott Campbell, beating both players three-straight.

The two Junior Singles finalists were on opposite sides of the table again in the **Junior Doubles** where Sam Hume and Woody Fitzpatrick were given the severest of tests by Jared Chelski and Daniel Young. And it was the less-fancied pair of Chelski and Young who promised to produce a seismic shock, going two sets to one up before Hume and Fitzpatrick established their superiority to win 3-2 (11-13, 11-6, 14-16, 11-6, 11-5).

It was a second Junior Doubles success for Hume and a first for Fitzpatrick, a losing finalist in this event 12 months ago.

The **Veterans' Singles** proved to be a personal triumph for Gary Young who, having lost in the final two years ago, made amends by taking the title against Kevin Gowlett, a winner in 2012 and 2013. In a no-holds barred contest of aggression, Young took it 3-1 (9-11, 11-8, 11-8, 11-5).

It was a well-merited success for Young who'd caused a major upset in his semi-final by eliminating reigning

title-holder and hot favourite Colin Stallwood 3-2 (11-6, 5-11, 11-5, 11-13, 11-8), this after seemingly frittering three match points in the fourth set.

The event was thrown open by the late withdrawal of No 2 seed Andy Warner which allowed John Pattrick to reach an unexpected semi-final place – although it was richly earned after an 11-9 in the decider victory over Gary Cattermole in round two.

Round two also witnessed one of the closest matches of the championships where, in a titanic struggle, Phil Smith edged out Derek Willis 3-2 (10-12, 11-4, 10-12, 15-13, 14-12). And there was also a notable win for Gavin Price over 2011 winner Alan Burgess in four sets.

Newcomer John Cleasby took the honours in the **Super-Veterans' Singles** with a hard-fought five-set final victory against Colin Webber, a runner-up two years ago. And hard-fought it definitely was, with Cleasby having to come back from two sets down to take it 9-11, 8-11, 11-5, 11-8, 11-6.

It was a second meeting of the two players on the day although, on the previous occasion in round two of the Veterans' Singles, Webber had edged past Cleasby – uncannily after being two sets down – 3-2 (5-11, 8-11, 12-10, 11-5, 11-9).

Both players had been ranked third-equal and each had disposed of a top seed at the semi-final stage, Cleasby beating four-times title holder and reigning champion Alan Burgess while Webber eliminated second seed Phil Smith 11-7 in the decider – after losing the first two sets.

There are no seeds in the **Restricted Singles** but the two most stylish players in the draw, Gavin Price and Oli Reynolds, made it to the final. And Price, who enjoyed an excellent tournament all-round, went one better than last year – when he was runner-up – to take an emphatic title in three-straight.

The losing semi-finalists were Colin Dearman, who was unfortunately forced to scratch from his last-four match because of illness, and Roger Hance who had enjoyed a win in the quarter-finals over Dave Martin.

Honourable mentions go to John Marshall, who only just went down to eventual finalist Reynolds 13-11 in the fifth, and for Lee Allen who had an excellent 11-7 in the decider win over Russell Hillier.

The Division Two Singles produced a first for the Clacton Closed where the final was contested between father and son, Jason Lloyd seeded two and Ethan Lloyd seeded third-equal. But it proved to be a case of youth and enthusiasm trumping experience and ageing legs, 15-year old Ethan deservedly taking the title 3-0 (11-7, 12-10, 11-6) with an impressive, aggressive performance.

The event, as has often happened in the past, was littered with surprise results with No 1 seed Russell Hillier eliminated in round two by his Brotherhood D team-mate Lee Harvey. But then Harvey, in his turn, was defeated in three-straight by 16-year-old Scott Campbell – who had already enjoyed a good win over Rivhu Khan.

John Marshall also had a good run to the semi-finals, disposing of the fancied Grant Sharpe before coming back from two sets down to edge past Daryl Lott 13-11 in the fifth – and then taking Jason Lloyd all the way before losing 11-7 in the fifth in the semi-final.

The Division Three Singles went strictly to form with only Paul Metcalf's 3-2 (8-11, 11-1, 11-8, 7-11, 12-10) defeat of Denise Thompson in Round Two to secure a semi-final place showing the slightest hint of a surprise.

The final was contested by the division's top two players, juniors Jared Chelski and Daniel Young. But Young suffered a third heart-breaking tournament final defeat as Chelski – unbeaten in the League all season – powered his way to victory in three-straight, thus avenging his earlier surprise loss to Young in the Junior Singles.

But there was consolation for Young who, despite having lost in three finals, had shown a deal of talent, promise and endeavour, especially in his progress in the Men's Singles where he had come through the groups and so nearly beaten his Dad Gary. And, for his all-round performance throughout both days of the tournament, Daniel was awarded the Victor Trophy.



Daniel Young (picture by Roger Hance)

Once again the League is indebted to Paul Newbould Planning and Building Design Services, the main sponsors of the Championships for a 24th year. And thanks also go to Phil Smith, Angela Barratt (on behalf of the Skelmersdale Centre Ltd), Jenny Higgins and John Houghton for their sponsorship of the individual events.

2017 CHAMPIONSHIPS RESULTS

Men's Singles (sponsored by Phil Smith): C Stallwood beat A Warner 10-12, 11-9, 13-11, 11-7.

Ladies' Singles (sponsored by the Skelmersdale Centre – Angela Barratt): G Edwards beat A Rodriguez 11-9, 11-7, 6-11, 11-4.

Men's Doubles: P Hume/S Hume beat J Denyer/F Rodriguez 11-1, 11-6, 6-11, 11-3.

Ladies' Doubles: I Barton/J Higgins beat A Rodriguez/K Lamb 11-7, 8-11, 11-8, 8-11, 11-6.

Mixed Doubles: A Warner/G Edwards beat C Stallwood/A Rodriguez 11-8, 12-10, 11-9, 13-15, 11-7.

Veteran's Singles: G Young beat K Gowlett 9-11, 11-8, 11-8, 11-5.

Super-Veterans' Singles: J Cleasby beat C Webber 9-11, 8-11, 11-5, 11-8, 11-6.

Junior Singles (sponsored by Jenny Higgins): S Hume beat D Young 11-2, 11-6, 13-11.

Junior Doubles: S Hume/W Fitzpatrick beat D Chelski/D Young 11-13, 11-6, 14-16, 11-6, 11-5.

Division Two Singles: E Lloyd beat J Lloyd 11-7, 12-10, 11-6.

Division Three Singles (sponsored by John Houghton): J Chelski beat D Young 1-9, 14-12, 11-2.

Restricted Singles: G Price beat O Reynolds 11-3, 11-6, 11-7.

* At the end of the Tournament, there were several raffle prizes unclaimed – ticket numbers green 47, 381, 383 and 399, white 321, 338, and 400, and blue 433. Contact Viv Rodriguez on 01255 830951 to claim your prize.

* In **Division One** of the League, Nomads Panthers' 8-2 victory over Lawford confirms what has seemed inevitable for many weeks, if not months – they are the 2017 champions. Congratulations to the Panthers on a fifth successive Division One title.

Windsor Condors, 9-1 winners against Brotherhood C, must therefore content themselves with the runners-up position.

Lawford's defeat by the Panthers means they, along with Windsor Owls, will definitely finish in the bottom two places – but, as they sit three points ahead of the Owls, they may yet avoid the wooden-spoon position. Lawford's final match is against Windsor Kestrels whilst the Owls face Brotherhood C.

In **Division Two** Brotherhood H defeated Nomads Pumas 10-0 to edge ever-nearer the title. They now need three points from their final match against Windsor Buzzards to confirm top spot.

Brotherhood D, 6-4 winners against the Buzzards, will finish no worse than second but, with their final match against third-placed side Nomads Bobcats, they will almost certainly have to settle for the runners-up position.

Windsor Magpies' 7-3 defeat by Brotherhood E means they are now six points ahead of the Pumas at the bottom but both teams will definitely end the season in the relegation places. The Pumas' final match is against Windsor Harriers whilst the Magpies face Brotherhood I.

In **Division Three** the major issues at the top have already been decided. Walton D, 8-2 winners against Brotherhood G, are champions with Nomads Wildcats as the runners-up. Windsor Penguins have finished in a creditable third position.

* Team Secretaries are reminded that all matches need to be played, and score-cards received by the Press and Records, by Friday 28th April.

* The 2017 Knock-Out Cup Final between Nomads Panthers and Windsor Condors takes place on Tuesday 2nd May at the Brotherhood Hall. Play starts at 7.30pm. All players are encouraged to attend to support the two teams in what promises to be a classic match between the League's top two teams.

* The League will be holding a Quiz Evening on Saturday 6th May, 7pm for 7.30pm, at the Brotherhood Hall. Teams of up to six, £3 per person, bring your own drink and nibbles. For more information or to book a table, contact Viv or Ferdy Rodriguez on 01255 830951.

RESULTS

Division 1

Windsor Condors 9 Brotherhood C 1

Lawford 2 Nomads Panthers 8

Brotherhood B 3 Walton A 7

Windsor Hawks 6 Walton B 4

Division 2

Brotherhood E 7 Windsor Magpies 3

Brotherhood F 7 Windsor Harriers 3

Nomads Pumas 0 Brotherhood H 10

Walton C 5 Nomads Jaguars 5

Windsor Buzzards 4 Brotherhood D 6

Division 3

Nomads Ocelots 2 Windsor Ospreys 8

Brotherhood J 2 Nomads Caracals 8

Windsor Swallows 4 Nomads Lynx 6

Walton D 8 Brotherhood G 2

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