



England impress at Senior Schools event

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England earned a clutch of medals, including three individual golds, at the British Senior Schools International.

Fort Regent in Jersey was the venue as teams from England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man battled it out on the Friday and Saturday followed by an individual competition on the Sunday.

On the Saturday, such was the intensity of the competition that the event overran by two-and-a-half hours and players didn't finish until after 10.30pm as medals were won and lost. From England's point of view it was a very successful event as every two-player team out of England's 12 teams earned a medal.

In the under-14 boys' event, after two England versus Scotland semi-finals, the final became a battle between England A and Scotland B. Here the doubles prove crucial as Scotland just clinched the match 3-2 with England B winning the bronze medal match.

The under-14 girls' event was equally thrilling as an England B final against Wales A was poised at two matches all and into a deciding set. Mari Baldwin managed to hold her nerve to win 11-8 in the fifth end. England A won the bronze medal match.

In the under-16 boys' event a strong Scotland A team managed to reach the final to play England A but England proved too strong and although each game was tough England won 3-0 with the B team beating Scotland B for the bronze after a close 3-2 win.

The U16 girls played on a round-robin format and when England B lost 3-2 to the Irish A team they had secured a bronze medal meaning the final match of England A and Ireland A was for gold and silver. Despite the awkward styles of the Irish team England managed a 3-1 victory.

The under-18 girls also had a round-robin format with England B winning some close games to secure bronze. In the gold and silver match the Ireland A team were too strong for the England A team and England had to be happy with a silver medal.



Freddie Osenton-Brown and Ben Hee in action (picture by Chris Rayner)

The most intense event of the competition was the under-18 boys as even the smaller nations fielded some excellent players. Two close semi-finals were won by England A and Ireland A. This meant the bronze medal match was another England versus Scotland game and again England were strong enough to win the medal.

The final was electric as England went 1-0 down Josh Bennett pulled the score back to 1-1. The middle doubles match was a classic with supporters shouting and cheering every point as England won a five-set thriller. This meant England went into the clash of the No 1 players up 2-1 and Bennett's second win sealed the gold medal.

Due to the late time, many of the players had not had their tea and the journey back to the hotel was via the only open chip shop – although at least food was eaten with medals around every neck.

Sunday was an equally successful day. In the six events England won three gold, three silver, seven bronze plus a gold in a consolation event.

The first gold medallist was Josh Bennett who beat team-mate James Hobson in the final. Hobson had beaten Scotland's top player Callum Morrison in a wonderful semi-final but lost 3-2 to Bennett who was unbeaten the whole weekend. George Hazell also won bronze in this event.

The second gold was for Sam Kwan who also remained unbeaten in the boys' U16 and also defeated a Scottish opponent. Joseph Hee won a bronze in this event.

The third gold was won by Josh Weatherby in the boys U14s as he defeated Ben Hee in an all-English final. Thomas Rayner won a bronze.

In the girls' under-18 Megan Dillon was a gold medallist in the consolation event, with Sophie Barlow winning bronze as the final was an all-Irish affair.

The under-16 girls was very close and tense with England's Gauri Duhan winning bronze, losing a tense semi-final to Tessa Yau of Scotland. The final was close but Bhavika Mistry of England ended up as the silver medallist despite beating Yau earlier in the group stages.

The last medals were in the girls' under-14 event. Both losing semi-finalists were from England – Gemma Kerr and Emily Haskell – and won bronze medals. In the final, Mari Baldwin of England lost a hard-fought match to Silke Heinen of Ireland to add individual silver to team gold.

The England team was coached by David Pilkington, Michael Moir, Stev Lyons, Shirley Pickering, Helen Lower and Cherith Graham. Equally hard-working were umpires Chloe Ireland and Shawn Haskell. Everybody agreed the team spirit was excellent and the team returned tired but contented.

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