

Battling defeats for Baggaley and Rumgay

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Thursday afternoon saw the pace heat up considerably as the Mens and Ladies Singles reached the Final Qualification rounds.

British players were involved in two of the most dramatic clashes of the day. The great-showman Gavin Rumgay (Scotland) had to face Emmanuel Lebesson (France) who with a global ranking of 111 was 145 places above Gavin. In a game of considerable guile, great excitement and with the Scottish fans cheering their hero with the fervour usually retained for a Celtic versus Rangers clash a pumped-up Gavin gave it his all before succumbing 11-9, 2-11, 7-11, 8-11, 14-12, 7-11.

There was defeat as well for Andrew Baggaley who missed out over seven sets of pulsating high-octane table tennis against Johan Axelqvist (Sweden) (157). Those expecting to see an evenly matched game would not have been disappointed, the match had everything, but, sadly for Andrew it was Axelqvist who proved to be the stronger in the seventh set. Axelqvist triumphed 4-11, 11-9, 11-8, 8-11, 12-14, 11-6, 11-8. This produced a three way tie in his groups, but thanks to point difference Baggaley progressed through to qualifying knock out stage, this unfortunately would be as far as he got.

Liu Na (Ireland) will be familiar to many English players with her accomplished performances in the Womens British League and in Grand Prix Tournaments. Here, she had to step up a grade against the fast-improving Sara Ramirez (Spain) (109) but as hard as Liu Na tried points were at a "premium". Ramirez won 11-7, 11-6, 11-5, 11-4.

Wales' Naomi Owen's reward for winning her group was the chance to take on Zhang Rui (Hong Kong), now ranked no. 62 globally, but with a wealth of experience behind her. Naomi suffered defeat by an identical set of scores to Liu Na 11-7, 11-6, 11-5, 11-4.

Naomi Owen and Liu Na were paired together in the Ladies Doubles and they came up against Japanese stars Sayaka Hirano and Reiko Hiura in the Final Qualifying round. The Japanese girls may have considered themselves unlucky not to be seeded bearing in mind that Sayaka is ranked no. 22 globally and Reiko is ranked no. 47. Sayaka remains one of the highest ranked non-Chinese born players in the Ladies game. The Japanese girls won 11-5, 12-10, 11-4.

Image: Gavin Rumgay, courtesy tabletennisphotos.com

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