



Choong and Bardsley among stars at Cippenham

Author: Paul Stimpson

Posted On: October 02, 2017

The new table tennis season has got under way with another hugely successful Cippenham Junior 4-Star Open.

More than 150 players, including several ranked at the top of national lists, kept the tables busy for two days during which 375 individual matches were staged and the winners emerged from all corners of the country and beyond.

Saturday saw the staging of the cadet (under-15) events while the juniors (under-18) took to the tables on Sunday.

This tournament has a habit of bringing to attention players recently arrived in the country and this year was no exception. Wah Yu Choong, a new arrival in Lancashire from Hong Kong, tore through the Cadet Boys' event dropping just one game, that to Louie Evans, on his way to the final.

Having won his preliminary round group, Choong then went to work on Jarvis Lee, Ben Poulter and seventh seed Evans before mesmerising second seed David Gofton in his semi-final.

Waiting for Choong in the final was top seed and pre-tournament favourite Louis Price. Price did not have such an easy ride as Choong to the final and first dropped a game in the group stage to Pranav Gudipati, the Cippenham player who later went on to win the plate event.



Louis Price and Wah Yu Choong

Joe Newman was then eliminated by Price 3-0, Nathaniel Saunders 3-1 and Charlie Graham-Adams 3-0 before a titanic struggle with Ben Hee, winner over third seed Max Stevens one round earlier, in the semi-final. The first three games of the semi all went to deuce and Hee took a 2-1 lead but the dynamic Price, ranked third in England, fought back to win the fourth and fifth games 11-9, 11-7. In the final, Choong was just too strong although Price did extend the match to four games.

The best local performance came from Shae Thakker as the Cippenham player won his group and then eliminated Joshua Bruce and Felix Thomis before eventually falling to Gofton in the quarter-final but not before he scared the second seed from the Ormesby club in Middlesbrough by taking the first game.

It seemed for a while that the Choong family might have a double celebration but the counterpart Cadet Girls' Singles proved one step too far for Hang Ying Choong. The top position in the draw kept changing hands. Defending champion and top seed Gemma Kerr, ranked second in England, was beaten 3-2 in the second round by Millie Rogove and then Rogove was beaten in the semi-final by Choong in a topsy-turvy match which swung one way then the other and ended with the unlikely scoreline of 3-2 (13-11, 8-11, 0-11, 11-2, 11-5).

Meanwhile, the bottom of the draw was proceeding in a more orderly fashion as second seed Darcie Proud beat off the challenges of Lara Whitton and Raquel Sao Pedro although Proud did have to recover from losing the first two games in her semi-final against Pedro. By the time the final came along, Proud was in full flow and, despite dropping the third game, made short work of Choong.



Hang Yi Choong and Darcie Proud

Joseph Hee made his name a year ago when, recently arrived from Singapore, he won the Cadet Boys' Singles at the second running of Cippenham Junior 4-Star Open. This year Hee was only in the older age category but again tore the field to pieces although he did drop games to Branislav Zivkovic in round two and George Hazell in the quarter-final,

Six of the top eight seeds duly found their way into their allotted positions in the quarter-finals. Cippenham's Shae Thakker was responsible for one of the casualties when he defeated eighth seed Sam Chesterman in round two but his run was ultimately ended by Cacharel Mirjah-Mercer in the last 16 but even then Thakker went into a 2-1 lead before Mirjah-Mercer moved into another gear.

The carnage in the second quarter of the draw was all down to Jamie Nordin. Despite only finishing second in his group, Nordin went on the rampage, defeating Rowan Jones, fourth seed Artur Caltabiano and cadet runner-up Louis Price before seventh seed Reece Chamdal proved too strong in the quarters. Chandal then became Hee's victim in their semi-final.

Third seed Ethan Walsh ended Mirjah-Mercer's run in the quarters and then beat defending champion and second seed James Smith in the semi-final, coming back from 2-0 down while doing so. One round earlier Smith had beaten Israel Owolaja in what was a repeat of the final from the previous tournament in April. The impressive defending of Hee then easily overcame the more attacking style of Walsh in the final.



Joseph Hee and Ethan Walsh

England number two Charlotte Bardsley, fresh from playing in the European Youth Top10 the previous weekend, was in a class of her own in the Junior Girls' Singles, winning the event without being extended past seven points in any game. After winning her group, Bardsley put paid to the challenges of Mya Sultan, Darcie Proud and third seed Beth Richards to reach the final.

In the bottom half of the draw, fourth seed Tiana Dennison was fighting her way through to the final. A straightforward win over Nikka Zareh was followed by a trickier 3-1 result against Gemma Kerr. This put Dennison into the semi-final where she must have been surprised to meet Raquel Sao Pedro. This match was a classic, eventually won 12-10 in the fifth by Dennison. Sao Pedro's route to the semi-final started with defeat against Nina Kadir in the preliminary round group. However, she then embarked upon a run that saw her beat Mari-Grace Baldwin 3-2, coming from 2-0 down, Anaya Patel and then second seed and England number six Kate Cheer 3-2.

The final itself was Bardsley's easiest match of the day as she beat Dennison emphatically 11-4, 11-4, 11-3.



Tiana Dennison and Charlotte Bardsley

Cippenham Table Tennis Club is very grateful to the army of volunteers who made the tournament run so successfully. Referee Steve Smith kept to his schedule while Mike Atkinson and Ken Phillips were helped by Cippenham's usual group of tireless workers. Special thanks are also due to the fantastic group of umpires without whom the event could not be staged.

Results:

	Winner:	Runner-up:
Junior Boys' Singles	Joseph Hee (Essex)	Ethan Walsh (Herts)
Junior Girls' Singles	Charlotte Bardsley (Staffs)	Tiana Dennison (Essex)
Cadet Boys' Singles	Wah Yu Choong (Lancs)	Louis Price (Avon)
Cadet Girls' Singles	Darcie Proud (Lincs)	Hang Ying Choong (Lancs)
Junior Boys' Plate	Fraser Kent (Sussex)	Damien Gray (Surrey)
Junior Girls' Plate	Jamie-Lee Harley (Wales)	Emily Haskell (Devon)
Cadet Boys' Plate	Pranav Gudipati (Bucks)	Todd Stanmore (Oxon)
Cadet Girls' Plate	Ilyssa Lacorte (Herts)	Isabelle Lacorte (Herts)

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