

Oh Danny Boy!

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Posted On: October 11, 2010

A breath of fresh air descended upon the Bushfield Sports Centre in Peterborough as diminutive Danny Lawrence at just 13 years of age was just magnificent in winning probably the toughest event Men's Band 5 (with 53 competitors) on day one of the Briar Peterborough Grand Prix on Saturday the 9th of October. With a mountain to climb in terms of age, experience and height concession he showed great maturity to win this title. The victory was made all the more difficult as the final had to be carried over to Sunday due to shortage of time as the playing hall had to be vacated by 8pm, and that was due to the fact we were given 3 hours earlier notice by the Sports Centre Management.



Despite losing to top seed Ed Slot in the group stage in a close five setter Danny went through as runner up as he had got the better of Owen Turner and Stephen Ward, the other two group players. From there on in it was all guns blazing for the exciting cadet player as he steamrolled his way to the final accounting for Jarred Knowles (another exciting young player) Alex O'Connell, Lee Barnes semi finalist Max Tupper (who had travelled all the way from Jersey) and then faced finalist Richard Carden. The delayed final staged at 11am on Sunday was a superb match. Danny was disappointed after his exit in the Men's Open group and had to lift his spirits to play the delayed final. Richard started the match in great form winning the first game 11-5, however to Danny's huge credit he fought back to take the next two close games to edge ahead 2-1. In the fourth game it was nip and tuck until Danny forged clear 10-7 up. Going for gold he squandered three title points to find himself at 10-10. Would the match slip out of his fingers! He took the next point to go 11-10 up and then followed the point of the day with an exchange of at least 20 back from the table shots of sheer brilliance, with the young cadet player coming out on top to claim the title. Richard Carden played his part in a memorable final and he too deserves huge credit for reaching the last stage.

This wonderful success story so far of the effervescent Danny Lawrence, the Cranbrook in Kent star who attends the Weald Club has been hugely due to his incredible supportive grandparents John and Mary Standing. They have literally given up a major chunk of their lives in the support of their grandson in terms of time, money and often driving up to 1000 miles a week travelling to training and competition venues. Danny's dream is to play for England and that fact I am sure is not too far away.

Lauren Spink from Norfolk was once again in a class of her own making it six Women's Band 1 titles out of her last seven events played since her comeback following several years away from Table Tennis. She continues to improve and will be a tough nut to crack in tomorrow's Women's Open event and must surely be considered by the England selectors to make her long awaited senior debut! Throughout the competition just one competitor managed to take a game off her and that was by pen-hold player Sanja Clements in the quarter final. Lauren went on to plough through last four opponent Joy Whitehorn and finalist Sue Collier in a devastating performance of sheer power, combined with heavy spin on both wings with an air of endeavour and determination that shines through.

Good to see Kelly Skeggs making a return to Grand Prix action by winning the Women's Band two event after 2 years sidelined due to her studies as a trainee solicitor. Sponsored by Leathes Solicitors and trained by her step father former Dutch Junior National coach Aad Kwakkelstein, 22 year old Kelly had to do it the hard way. Losing in her group to eventual finalist Sue Collier, she had to fight tooth and nail to see off Megan Knowles, Tin Tin Ho (after being 0-2 down in games) then master semi finalist Jurate Brazaityte. She gained revenge on that earlier defeat by Sue Collier to win the day with an 8-11, 11-5, 22-20, 11-9 final result! Notable performances in this event was the superb display of dynamic table tennis from Isobel Ashley who outpointed Tressa Armitage (who later retired due to ill health) and group players Megan Knowles and Hannah Winfield. Isobel brushed aside Emily Roys in the last eight stage but then her glory run came to an abrupt end at the hands of the more experienced losing finalist Sue Collier at the semi final stage. Sue had an outstanding day reaching two Women's finals!

The last of the Women's events Band 3 final had to be carried over to Sunday with Jas Ould proving yet again a force to be reckoned with in this event. Jas had to tough it out with Isobel Ashley in the semi final winning 3-1 and followed up with a good final performance against Emily Standing to take another Band 3 title. Emily played very well to reach the last match gaining victories over Charlotte Binley and losing last four player Naomi Jackson.

The same applied to the carried over Men's Band 1 final between Richard Andrews and Omkar Targalkar. Richard seeded at two for the event had to be at his best to get past Tom Maynard in the quarter final followed up by three very close games with Sam Perry to reach the last stage. Meanwhile in the top half of the draw top seed Niall Cameron was displaced by Omkar Targalkar in the groups with both players progressing through as winner and runner up respectively. The dynamic Indian player (once ranked at 9 in his home country) was doing extensive damage to oust John Dennison and semi finalist Daniel Basterfield to reach his final encounter with Andrews. Omkar is a London Metropolitan University student studying sports and is a very accomplished player (he plays in British league and has beaten Gareth Herbert and taken Gavin Rumgay to five sets). The end result was as expected with a win for Omkar taking the title in three straight but very close sets.

Lewis Gray was simply unstoppable in winning another Men's Band 2 title beating Ian Musk in the last match. Lewis seeded at three for the event made his way to the final enjoying victories against Ping Ho, Dan O'Connell and last four opponent Helshan Weerasinghe. Helshan displaced top seed Chris Lewis in the groups whilst 2nd seed Jerome Jonah went out in the last 16 stage to James Ward. Losing finalist Ian Musk had a brilliant event by removing Wayne Mason, John Dennison and semi finalist Owe Karlsson, but could not contain the electric title winner Lewis Gray.

Men's Band 3 was shared between finalists James Ward and William Morais due to insufficient time to play the final as both players were not involved on Sunday.

Eighteen year old Brentwood "A" level student Matt Mulley who plays his club table tennis at Hatfield Peveral in Essex took the Men's Band 4 glassware winner's trophy home after defeating gallant finalist Laurence Sweeney (son of Earl) in a 4 game final.

Last of the banded events completed on Saturday went to Kit Lo (originally from Hong Kong) who had to work his socks off in a top class five game final after coming back from a 1-2 deficit in games against Richard Carden. Nineteen year old Lo, a first year University of East Anglia student who is studying accounting and finance had to tough it through seven matches following a loss in his group to John Malone. He battled past Fermi Hon, Owen Turner, Dom Sussex, semi finalist Julian Tee and then endures that epic over Richard Carden in the last match to take the title.

Results from day one at Peterborough as follows;

Men's Band 1. Omkar Targalkar (IND) beat Richard Andrews (Bk) 11-7, 11-9, 11-9.

Women's Band 1. Lauren Spink (Nk) beat Sue Collier (Ch) 11-3, 11-7, 11-1.

Men's Band 2. Lewis Gray (K) beat Ian Musk (Bu) 11-7, 8-11, 11-4, 11-6.

Women's Band 2. Kelly Skeggs (E) beat Sue Collier (Ch) 8-11, 11-5, 22-20, 11-9.

Men's Band 3. Event shared between finalists William Morais (Mi) and James Ward (St)

Women's Band 3. Jas Ould (K) beat Emily Standing (Cu) 11-8, 13-11, 11-6.

Men's Band 4. Matt Mulley (E) beat Laurence Sweeney (Wa) 7-11, 11-5, 11-9, 11-7.

Men's Band 5. Danny Lawrence (K) beat Richard Carden (K) 5-11, 11-9, 11-9, 12-10.

Men's Band 6. Kit Lo (HKG) beat Richard Carden (K) 10-12, 11-8, 4-11, 11-9, 11-9.

By Geoff Ware.

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