



Chelmsford & District: Top four into semi-finals

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The M&G Investments Chelmsford & District Table Tennis League Championships weekend is concluded and six players have dominated proceedings.

Leading protagonists Trevor Lloyd, Sam Hume, Duncan Taylor, Dawn Baldry, Gracie Edwards and Daniel Young all had weekends they will remember. However, the abiding memory for many people was the marvellous entry of 48 players in the Junior events – the largest Junior entry for many years.

It goes without saying that huge thanks are extended to the coaching personnel who give of their time with such great enthusiasm and dedication.

It was a good weekend for the top four seeds in the Men's Singles. All four qualified for the semi-finals. The top seed Trevor Lloyd came under the most pressure and at 8-10 in the fifth end in his last-16 match against Reece Seddon he looked to be a "goner".

With the sports hall taking on an eerie silence, Lloyd somehow survived, calling on all his experience to fight back and edge it 5-11, 11-8, 7-11, 11-8, 12-10.

Lloyd made no mistake in his quarter-final clash against Paul Davison – the player who had taken away his 100% record in the League. Lloyd powered through 3-0 (11-7, 11-8, 11-5) and will face last year's Veterans' champion Wale Bada in the semi-finals. The hard-hitting Bada came up against the Young family as he progressed to the last four. He beat Daniel Young 3-0 (11-5, 11-6, 11-5) and then Dad Gary 3-1 (9-11, 11-7, 11-9, 11-6).

Second seed 17-year-old Sam Hume and leading Veteran defender Duncan Taylor dominated the bottom half of the draw. Hume raced past David Gatherall (11-6, 11-4, 11-2) and Lee McHugh (11-5, 11-5, 11-3) whilst Duncan Taylor looked very much on top of his game as he disposed of Babul McLeod (11-9, 11-5, 11-2) and Ryan Gooday (11-6, 11-7, 11-5).

Results that caught the eye in the group stages included wins for Keith Martin over Daniel Berry 3-1 (11-8, 8-11,

11-7, 11-8) for Ian Whiteside against Robert Shrimpton 3-0 (11-8, 11-9, 11-6) and for Lee McHugh 3-1 (11-9, 13-11, 10-12, 11-8) against Reece Seddon.

The Ladies' Singles final will be between Dawn Baldry, Chelmsford Champion in 2016 and 2017, and newcomer 16-year-old Gracie Edwards, the Essex No 2 Junior and England ranked No 34 in that age category.

These two players met in the group stages and it was Gracie who came out on top in four ends (11-3, 11-7, 10-12, 11-2) but with two players to progress to the semi-final Dawn was still very much in the picture.

In the other half of the draw 22-times Chelmsford champion Julie Johnson had to use all her experience to see off Jan Fuller 3-2 (11-8, 8-11, 8-11, 11-8, 12-10).

The semi-finals were compelling as well. Baldry produced a sparkling display to beat Johnson 3-0 (11-6, 12-10, 11-9) – which she had done at the same stage last year – whilst Edwards – kept her composure incredibly well to beat Jan Fuller 3-2 (15-17, 11-7, 11-8, 9-11, 11-9). Edwards and Baldry met in last year's Colchester League Ladies' Singles final and Dawn shaded a marvellous match 12-10 in the decider. A potentially very exciting clash awaits us on Finals Night.

The Men's Doubles is traditionally the most open of events. There have been six different sets of winners in the last six years. This year's event produced a major shock. Lee McHugh / Peter Mynard ousted the holders Wale Bada / Reece Seddon 3-2 (13-11, 6-11, 10-12, 11-4, 13-11) but they fell to former runners-up Charles Sweeny / Duncan Taylor 3-0 (8-11, 6-11, 6-11) in the semi-finals.

In the other half of the draw scratch pairing Trevor Lloyd / Neil Freeman came so close to making the final. Freeman had replaced Gary Cattermole as Lloyd's partner and they led second seeds Paul Davison / Gary Young 9-6 in the fifth end, in what was a truly spell-binding encounter. It really was the "last throw of the dice" for Davison / Young and they kept their nerve superbly in the most high-pressure of situations to triumph 3-2 (12-10, 7-11, 5-11, 11-4, 13-11).

Julie Johnson / Jan Fuller retained their Ladies' Doubles title beating Dawn Baldry / Shirley Carroll 3-1 (7-11, 11-7, 11-7, 11-7) and Jacqui Smith / Gracie Edwards 3-1 (10-12, 11-9, 11-6, 11-6). The big shock here was the superb win for scratch pairing Jacqui / Gracie who beat Dawn / Shirley 3-0 (12-10, 12-10, 11-9). A marvellously well contested trio of matches and a well deserved first medal for Jacqui from these Championships.

The holders – Aunt and Nephew combination Julie Johnson and Ryan Gooday – are through to the Mixed Doubles final. They beat Robert Shrimpton / Jacqui Smith 3-0 (11-4, 11-7, 11-2) in the penultimate round. The other semi-final was an absolute corker. Jan Fuller / Paul Davison, who had defeated Lee McHugh / Shirley Carroll 3-1 (11-2, 8-11, 11-5, 11-7), ousted second seeds Sam Hume / Gracie Edwards 3-2 (6-11, 11-9, 12-10, 7-11, 11-9) after some stunning rallies.

The Under-21 Singles final will be between Sam Hume – the winner in 2016 and 2017 – and 13-year-old Daniel Young. It was Young who made his mark here. He beat Peter Windley (11-6, 11-6, 11-6) and second seed Ryan Gooday (11-7, 11-6, 11-6) in the group stages to qualify as group winner.

An even bigger shock occurred in group No 1 and the seeded Daniel Berry failed to qualify. He lost to both Toby Kelly (11-4, 11-13, 4-11, 11-7, 3-11) and to Matthew Elliott (7-11, 13-15, 7-11).

Young's hot form didn't desert him as he beat Connor Payne 3-1 (11-8, 11-7, 8-11, 12-10) and Sam Lowman 3-1 (5-11, 13-11, 11-9, 11-6) to clinch his Finals Night appearance. He will face Hume who beat Ben Jackson 3-0 (11-2, 11-7, 11-3) and Ryan Gooday 3-0 (11-3, 11-7, 11-8).

Daniel Young and father Gary have also repeated a feat which has not been achieved since the early 1970s. They have become the first father and son combination to reach Finals Night in the same year. Older players will remember Geoff and David Newman, the last players to achieve this.

The Veterans' final will be between Duncan Taylor and Trevor Lloyd. The holder Wale Bada fell at the semi-final stage in five ends to Duncan Taylor 3-2 (4-11, 5-11, 11-9, 11-9, 7-11) whilst Taylor had also impressed by beating Colin Stallwood 3-0 (12-10, 11-6, 11-9).

In the other half of the draw Gary Young beat Paul Davison 3-1 (11-5, 15-13, 11-13, 11-9) but Young met his match against an in-form Trevor Lloyd. Playing with confidence and with the booming forehand at its very best Lloyd won 3-1 (9-11, 11-6, 11-6, 11-7).

There was a first Chelmsford title for Trevor Lloyd / Colin Stallwood in the Veterans' Doubles. They took the title with a 3-0 (11-6, 12-10, 16-14) final win over the top seeds Paul Davison / Gary Young.

There was a fourth win for the evergreen Ian Whiteside in the Over-60s' Singles. Whiteside required four ends to beat Shirley Carroll (11-5, 12-10, 10-12, 11-9) and he sneaked home 3-2 (6-11, 11-4, 9-11, 11-5, 12-10) in a tense final against Mike Johnston.

Babul McLeod is now a three-time winner of the Over-50s' Singles. He retained his title after a cliff-hanger of a final against Julie Johnson, who had beaten Keith Martin 3-2 (11-6, 8-11, 4-11, 11-5, 13-11) to reach that stage. Martin had ousted Dawn Baldry 3-2 (9-11, 8-11, 11-5, 11-6, 11-8) a round earlier.

Johnson looked to be heading for victory in the final and at 8-4 in the fourth end she must have thought she had done enough. It wasn't to be – Babul's super spinny forehand (sidespin and topspin combined) didn't let him down in his moment of real crisis and he pulled through to win 3-2 (4-11, 11-6, 4-11, 11-8, 11-8).

The Junior Handicap Singles final which was held over from the previous Friday when the earlier rounds were held saw two players with huge potential contest the final. There was only one point difference on the Handicap rating and Aidan Noguchi came through to win 3-1 against Matthew Elliott.

There was no surprise in the Junior Girls' Singles. Gracie Edwards took the title beating Annabel Sweeney in the final 3-0 (11-7, 11-1, 11-3). Annabel had come through a close match 3-1 (11-5, 11-8, 5-11, 14-12) against Melina Abraham Victor in her semi-final.

It would have been a major shock if Sam Hume hadn't retained his Junior Boys' Singles title. He didn't drop an end beating Jason Yeh (11-5, 11-2, 11-7), Connor Payne (11-6, 11-4, 11-7) and Daniel Young (11-3, 12-10, 11-2) in the final. Young, the busiest player of the weekend by some distance, beat Matthew Elliott 3-1 (9-11, 11-5, 11-3, 11-3) in his semi-final.

Sam Hume / Connor Payne scored their third successive win in the Junior Doubles. They beat Gracie Edwards / Daniel Young in a well contested final 3-1 (11-2, 8-11, 11-4, 12-10). Edwards / Young had to come back after losing the first end in their semi-final to get the better of Toby Kelly / Jason Yeh 3-1 (9-11, 11-4, 11-8, 11-5).

Daniel Young, at 13 years of age, but already one of the leading Division Two players in the League was a massive favourite for the Under-14 Singles title. He didn't disappoint. He beat Callum Caldwell (11-2, 11-2, 11-2), Ben Porter (11-5, 11-4, 11-5), Charlie Craig (11-6, 11-5, 11-1) and Harry Buckle (11-7, 15-13, 11-2) in the final. Full commendation here to Buckle for pushing such a high-ranked opponent so close.

Gracie Edwards made League history by becoming the first girl to win the Under-16 Singles. The event was reformatted in 2005 following a change in the age groups at National level and older players will remember Julie Dowsett, Joanne Cook, Kate Gower, Alison Gower and Hannah Cook who all won the Under-15 Singles. But it is Gracie who takes the honours of becoming the first girl to win the Chelmsford Under-16 title.

Her final – and you will probably guess – against Daniel Young was a rollercoaster ride of attacking table tennis and Gracie fought back from 2-0 down to win 3-2 (7-11, 10-12, 11-9, 11-8, 11-7). Harry Buckle and Toby Kelly – two more players to watch out for in the future – lost in the semi-finals.

Sunday's play was dominated by the Divisional Singles. Lee McHugh, so impressive on the Saturday was the obvious favourite for the Division two Singles and he duly obliged. He beat Richard Storey (3-0), Peter Windley (3-1), Michael Johnston (3-2) and in the final he came through in four action-packed ends against Ian Whiteside (12-10, 12-14, 11-6, 11-7). Whiteside, playing as well as ever, had beaten Neil Freeman (3-0), Victor Chan (3-1) and Robert Shrimpton (3-0).

The seedings went to plan in the Division three Singles. Ciaran Whelan, the favourite took the title with a four-game win in the final over David Gatheral (11-8, 11-2, 5-11, 13-11). Neil Freeman and Rod MacLennan were the

losing semi-finalists. MacLennan made his mark by ousting Dawn Baldry 3-2 (12-14, 11-7, 12-14, 13-11, 11-5).

The favourite also came out on top in the Division four Singles. Mervyn Perriman came through in five ends to capture the title against Malcolm Storey (8-11, 8-11, 11-3, 11-2, 11-8). Mark Glenister and Alan Steel both lost at the semi-final stage.

There is a new name on the Division five Singles trophy. Richard Gardner proved to be the man to beat with wins over Mark Glenister (3-0), Jamie Dowsett (3-0) and in the Final – Ben Jackson 3-1 (9-11, 11-9, 11-7, 11-5).

The Handicap Singles is still a popular event, although not quite as popular as in its heyday. Connor Payne (playing off a handicap of 55) came through to take the title leaving Mark Glenister, Daniel Anderson, Mervyn Perriman and Colin Barham trailing in his wake. His final victim was Ciaran Whelan and he won decisively 21-6, 21-16. Whelan had powered his way past Daniel Berry. Lee McHugh, Dave Carter and Gary Young to battle his way into the final.

The weekend was concluded with the Handicap Doubles and the title went to Dawn Baldry / Dave Carter who beat Richard Gardner / Daniel Young 11-8, 14-21, 21-18 in the final. The losing semi-finalists were Jamie Dowsett / Trevor Collin and Peter Windley / Daniel Berry.

The M&G Investments Chelmsford League Finals Night takes place on Monday 12 February at Old Chelmsfordians Association, Lawford Lane, Roxwell Road, Chelmsford at 7.30pm. It should be very interesting this year with a new name certain to capture the Men's Singles crown. Admission is free.

Obituary – Vic Keeble

Colchester, Newcastle and West Ham football legend Vic Keeble died last week, aged 87. An FA Cup winner with Newcastle United in 1955 – 3-1 against Manchester City – he is best known as a footballer but he was also a table tennis player of considerable talent.

He was Chelmsford Men's Doubles Champion in 1966 and 1967 as well as a Colchester League Men's Singles champion.

Chelmsford League Vice Chairman Brian Cook remembers Keeble as one of the "most stylish players of that era" whilst Alan Clancy – twice a runner-up in the Men's Singles in the Chelmsford tournament – goes even further. In the days long before the "switching hands" shots of superstars such as Timo Boll were commonplace he remembers Keeble switching hands to return a shot seemingly far out of his reach.

Mick Buckley, the Colchester League President and winner of those two Chelmsford Men's Doubles titles with Keeble, said that "not only was Keeble a superb table tennis player but he also became a qualified and well respected table tennis coach".

Keeble continued to go to watch his first football club Colchester United where he had also been an ambassador – well into his 80s. He is survived by three sons and three daughters. A minute's silence was held at the recent Colchester United match against Newport and it was observed impeccably. A genuine local sporting legend.

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