



Bryant brilliance earns Pitchford tie

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There were no major upsets but plenty of high-class matches on Day Two of the PG Mutual National Championships at the Copper Box Arena.

It was the day when the players lower down the rankings battled for the chance to earn a crack at the big guns, and pride of place went to Craig Bryant and Alim Hirji, who played out a cracker for the right to tackle Liam Pitchford in the Men's Singles.

[Click here for more about the event, including all results so far](#)

The Women's Singles, Men's Doubles and Mixed Doubles also got under way, with the likes of Pitchford, Sam Walker, Tin-Tin Ho and Kelly Sibley in action in the latter.

And Sarah Menghistab was the female player of the day, as she came through her group from third place to set up a match against Yolanda King.

Men's Singles

The outstanding match of the day pitted Craig Bryant against Alim Hirji and it seemed as if the seedings would be upset as Hirji took charge of the match, winning the first two sets and leading 10-7 in the third.

Three match points were saved and there followed an old-school game straight out of the old days of 21-up as Hirji earned match point on his serve and Bryant saved it on his.

It went all the way to 22-20 in Bryant's favour, and he levelled by winning the fourth 11-9. Hirji again had chances in the fifth, leading 10-8 but again Bryant was not for buckling. Those were saved and he won the next two points, his four-point salvo earning him a 12-10 scoreline and the right to face Liam Pitchford.

The final reckoning in an extraordinary match was 3-2 (9-11, 6-11, 22-20, 11-9, 12-10) in Bryant's favour – you can watch the third set from 10-10 below:

Asked what he was thinking when he faced so many match points, Bryant said: "Just to try to believe that I had a bit of a chance. I felt if I managed to nick the third, I had a good chance to win the other sets.

"There was a point where we were just laughing at each other, really.

"My goal was to get into his backhand in the fourth and fifth sets and I managed to do that and, under pressure when it was close, he started to make a few errors, which I was grateful for.

"I suppose the thought of playing Liam was in the back of my mind, but you just want to win, really. I lost to Alim last time we played and I just wanted to get some revenge for that."



Alim Hirji played his part in a compelling match (picture by Alan Man)

Most of the other groups went with rankings, though Luke Savill needed countback to advance over James Hobson – who beat him – and Shaquille Webb-Dixon, who he beat but who in turn beat Hobson. Savill will face Chris Doran in the first round.

Ethan Walsh came through from No 3 in Group 5, though top seed Matt Leete's withdrawal with the shoulder injury which forced him out of the Under-21s, meant it was a winner-take-all clash for Walsh against Jack Bennett. The younger player was trailing 2-1 but turned it around to set up a match against David McBeath in the first round.

Elsewhere in the first round, Josh Bennett will face ITTF Team World Cup bronze medallist Sam Walker, while there is a repeat of the under-21 semi-final in which Sam Mabey pushed Tom Jarvis.

The draw is completed by Danny Reed versus Adam Harrison and new under-21 champion Helshan Weerasinghe versus Mike O'Driscoll.

Top seed Paul Drinkhall has a bye to the quarter-finals.

Women's singles



Sarah Menghistab warming up before her group matches (picture by Alan Man)

Star of the group stage was Sarah Menghistab, who came through from third place in Group 3 by virtue of two hard-fought five-setters.

She beat Emma Torkington 11-6 in the decider having seen her opponent battle back from 2-0 down to level, and it was a similar scenario against Kate Hughes, who twice levelled before Menghistab won it 13-11 in the fifth.

That earned Menghistab a last-16 tie against Yolanda King, while Torkington, through as runner-up, will face five times champion Kelly Sibley.

Denise Payet avenged her under-21 group-stage defeat by Megan Gidney to top Group 1 and set up a first-round match against fellow England squad member Charlotte Bardsley, though Payet needed to come from 2-1 down to do so. Gidney went out, also squandering a 2-1 lead against Tiana Dennison, who won in five and next faces Maria Tsaptsinos.



Tiana Dennison (picture by Alan Man)

Evie Collier and Mollie Patterson won their groups with relative ease to go through ahead of Bethany Farnworth and Kate Cheer respectively.

Collier faces Hannah Hicks and Patterson will play Emily Bolton, while Farnworth will take on defending champions and top seed Tin-Tin Ho. Cheer's opponent will be Karina Le Fevre.

Men's Doubles

Having lost the chance to play Liam Pitchford in the singles, Alim Hirji and partner Adam Harrison earned a crack at the England No 2 in the doubles.

It took five sets for the pair to prevail over teenagers Joe Clark & Shayan Siraj, who came from 2-0 down to level before going down 3-2 (10-12, 4-11, 11-7, 11-9, 7-11). Hirji & Harrison take on Pitchford & Sam Walker on Saturday afternoon.

The other match in the top half of the draw saw Luke Savill & Matt Leete – the latter able to play despite pulling out of the singles – beat Shaquille Webb-Dixon & Mitchell Jones in four and they next face Mike O'Driscoll & Craig Bryant.

The only tie in the bottom half saw the Bennett brothers, Josh & Jack overcome Nottingham University pair Gabriel Achampong & Liam McTiernan in three to advance to a clash with Paul Drinkhall & David McBeath.

The other quarter-final was already known – Tom Jarvis & Chris Doran versus James Hobson & Victor Guang Shi.

Mixed Doubles

Liam Pitchford & Tin-Tin Ho – Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games silver medallists and surely among the favourite for gold in Australia next month – entered the fray and made short work of Mike O’Driscoll & Kate Hughes in their first match.

The will next play Tom Jarvis & Maria Tsapsinos, who came through against Chris Doran & Hannah Hicks in four sets.

Jarvis is the only athlete in the semi-finals who is not on the plane to Australia, and the bottom half of the draw contains the other four members of Team England, with Sam Walker & Denise Payet set to take on David McBeath & Kelly Sibley on Saturday.

The former pair earned their place with a four-set defeat of Joe Clark & Mollie Patterson, while McBeath & Sibley were convincing winners over James Hobson & Evie Collier.

In the first round, Craig Bryant had another protracted match but was this time on the wrong end in the deciding set as he and partner Emma Torkington were beaten 3-2 (9-11, 4-11, 11-4, 11-7, 13-15) by Clark & Patterson.

Hobson & Collier beat Matt Leete & Emily Bolton in four, O’Driscoll & Hughes advanced past Ethan Walsh & Megan Gidney, also in four, while Doran & Hicks beat Josh Bennett & Kate Cheer.

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