

Richard Eaton & John Woodford report from Kettering

The **BEST & MOST** *English*

IT WAS THE FIRST TOURNAMENT IN THE SPORT'S FIRST PRO-TOUR CIRCUIT. IT WAS ARGUABLY THE BEST AND MOST IMPORTANT ENGLISH OPEN IN ITS 61-YEAR HISTORY. AND IT WAS PACKED WITH SO MANY SURPRISES THAT YOU WONDERED WHICH TOP PLAYER WOULD NEXT BITE THE DUST.

Out went the second-seeded former world number one Geng Lijuan, beaten by a dynamic 17 year-old Wang Hui, another in the seemingly endless conveyor belt of Chinese stars. And out went the Seoul Olympic gold medallist Chen Jing, beaten in the final 21-14, 11-21, 21-16, 21-18 by Yang Ying, an 18 year-old Chinese high riser.

Note this name of philosophical opposites - she creates a fusion of attacking skills, a hypnotic high toss serve and a killing quick flat follow-up, which should carry her to even bigger titles than this.

Then out went the world number one Jean-Michel Saive, completely outplayed in his first tournament since regaining the top spot. The muscularly aggressive Belgian was shrugged aside 21-13, 21-13, 21-12 by Wang Tao, the left-hander built like a Mackeson barrel.

Saive, often strangely subdued had nearly lost the day before to Lu Lin, the man with whom Wang Tao won the men's doubles gold medal in the Barcelona Olympics. It hardly seemed possible that these two should then lose the men's doubles final to the Austrians, Werner Schlager and Karl Jindrak.

Schlager however is a greatly

**China's
Kong Linghui.
Mens Singles
winner.**



**China's
Yang Ying.
Womens
Singles winner.**



improved player and Jindrak supported him well in a 21-17, 22-20 triumph that overwhelmed the underdogs with delight. It provided Europe with its only success.

After this it looked for a while as though the women's doubles, in which Yang Ying gained her second title, in partnership with Wang Hui, would provide the only top seed to win an English Open title. They won it by beating their Chinese compatriots Li Ju and Wu Na, but had to save a match point to do it

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TABLE TENNIS NEWS**



Executive Vice President of the ITTF George Segun from Nigeria (centre), presents Bronze medals for the under 21 Singles to England's Nicola Deaton (left) & Alex Perry.

before squeezing through 16-21, 22-20, 24-22.

The exit door was very nearly shown to the world men's singles champion Kong Linghui as well. King Kong, who had been such a star in China's tour of England the previous winter, twice found himself two games down on his return to this country.

First he recovered to beat the hard-hitting Petr Korbel or the Czech Republic 15-21, 18-21, 21-17, 21-12, 21-13 in the quarter-finals, and then in the final against Wang Tao he looked uncommitted and ineffectual as a big deficit again piled up.

But the world number three inexplicably went off the boil, missing with his ambitious hits when previously he had been forcing Kong back, and slipping fatalistically

IMPORTANT Open

away to a 12-21, 14-21, 21-14, 21-14, 21-14 defeat.

It was appropriate that the young world champion should win the inaugural tournament of the new world circuit. But it was not a convincing win, any more than the match provided convincing entertainment for the spectators. Both the all-Chinese singles were disappointing fare to serve up when there should have been a feast of great table tennis on such a momentous occasion.

SECURE FORTRESS

Combining the 1996 English Open with the opening round of the ITTF Professional Tour is a massive move forward and will surely make the ITTF a more secure fortress.

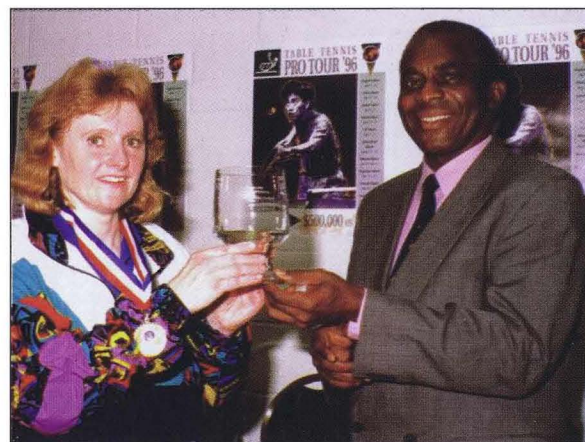
Credit is due to the ETTA management and the professional staff for putting the tournament together at the Kettering Arena in a record eight weeks.

I doubt if anyone in the sport has been busier in the sport than the Events Manager Mike Johns; not forgetting the other professionals at Hastings led by chief executive Richard Yule.

Although China dominated the last world championships in Tianjin, they are still not so secure (apart from women) when playing away. This is mainly because happily, three men in Europe have the capability of mounting high-octane performances to beat them - Jean-Michel Saive, Jan-Ove Waldner and Jean-Philippe Gatien. Other players are making progress towards beating the Asians - Vladimir Samsonov (Belarus), Petr Korbel (Czech Republic) and Werner Schlager (Austria). All are capable of beating the top Chinese during this

ITTF PRO-TOUR POINTS 1996

MEN'S SINGLES		44 ERLANDSEN G A NOR		10 42 BUSIN Sandra ENG		10 13 BROE Alison/DEATON N ENG		40		
Player Name	Ass	Points	45 NAKATA Norihide JPN	10	43 TAKAKUSA Yuki JPN	10	14 TU Yong/BUSIN Sandra SUI	40		
1 KONG Linghui	CHN	220	46 VISVERBERG Ronald NED	10	44 ANDERSSON Kajsa SWE	10	15 MUTLU N/TEMIZKALP B TUR	40		
2 WANG Tao	CHN	180	WOMEN'S SINGLES		45 RADFORD Linda ENG	10	16 HANGSTMAN E/MULLER M NED	40		
3 Saive Jean-Michel	BEL	110	1 YANG Ying CHN	220	MEN'S DOUBLES		17 OZER C/HUBERT M BEL	20		
4 ROSSKOPF Jorg	GER	110	2 CHEN Jing TPE	160	1 SCHLAGER Werner/		18 DOTI M/KOSAKA L BRA	20		
5 MA Wenge	CHN	70	3 CHAI Po Wa HKG	110	JINDRAK Karl	AUT	220	19 DELLE N/WOLF N GER	20	
6 LU Lin	CHN	70	4 TIMINA Elena RUS	110	2 WANG Tao/LU Lin CHN	160	20 SAKATA Ai/TAKAKUSA Yuki JPN	20		
7 SCHLAGER Werner	AUT	70	5 LI Ju CHN	70	3 KONG L /MA Wenge CHN	110	21 GAJIC J/AUGUSTSSON V SWE	20		
8 KORBEL Petr	CZE	70	6 VRIESKOOP Bettine NED	70	4 SAIVE J M / SAIVE P BEL	110	22 WEIKERT S/HOFMANN T GER	20		
9 YANG Min	ITA	40	7 WU Na CHN	70	5 ROSSKOPF J /FETZNER S GER	70	23 NORDENBERG Linda/ANDERSSON Kajsa	20		
10 SAIVE Philippe	BEL	40	8 WANG Hui CHN	70	6 KORBEL P /PLACHY J CZE	70		SWE 20		
11 PREAN Carl	ENG	40	9 GENG Lijuan CAN	40	7 YANG M/PIACENTINE V ITA	70	ITTF PRO-TOUR FINALS			
12 DING Yi	AUT	40	10 JING Jun Hong SIN	40	8 NOSKOV S/FADEEV E RUS	70	Qualification and Point System			
13 FETZNER Steffen	GER	40	11 NI Xia Lian LUX	40	9 DING Yi/QIAN Qianli AUT	40	The top 16 men and 16 women who have			
14 CHIANG Peng-Lung	TPE	40	12 TU Yong SUI	40	10 TASAKI T / YUZAWA R JPN	40	accumulated the largest number of points in ITTF			
15 TASAKI Toshio	JPN	40	13 XU Ling TPE	40	11 SMREKAR R/LENGEROV K SLO/AUT	40	Pro-Tour events qualify for the ITTF Pro-Tour			
16 HOYAMA Hugo	BRA	40	14 PALINA Irina RUS	40	12 BENTSEN A / MONRAD M DEN	40	Finals, included must be a player from the host			
17 QIAN Qianli	AUT	20	15 ARISSI Alessia ITA	40	13 STENBERG M /MOLIN M SWE	40	association.			
18 COOKE Alan	ENG	20	16 BACHTINA Svetlana RUS	40	14 ERLANDSEN G/WINTHER S NOR	40	The top 8 men's pairs and 8 women's pairs who			
19 KADIRI Kayode	SWE	20	17 MELNIK Galina RUS	20	15 HE Zhi Wen/CASARES R ESP	40	have accumulated the largest number of points in			
20 BENTSEN Allan	DEN	20	18 HOLT Andrea ENG	20	16 FEJER-KONNERTH Z/BOLL T GER	40	ITTF Pro-Tour events qualify for the ITTF Pro-Tour			
21 PLACHY Josef	CZE	20	19 NOOR Emily NED	20	17 KADIRI K/HAKANSSON F SWE	20	Finals, included must be a pair from the host			
22 HAKANSSON Fredrik	SWE	20	20 OKAZAKI Keiko JPN	20	18 COOKE Alan/EDEN Andrew ENG	20	association.			
23 SHYMREV Maxim	RUS	20	21 MATSUOKA Rika JPN	20	19 MONDELLO M/NANNONI L ITA	20	The position of players with the same number of			
24 SMREKAR Robert	SLO	20	22 CHEN Chiu-Tan TPE	20	20 YALDIZ Gurhan/ERAN Ilhan TUR	20	points is determined by their place on the Epson			
25 LENGEROV Kostadin	AUT	20	23 PRUSIENE Jolanta LTU	20	21 CAENARO S/LUNDQVIST J LUX/SWE	20	World Ranking List current at the time.			
26 YUZAWA Ryo	JPN	20	24 CHIU Barbara CAN	20	22 OLDFIELD Chris/PERRY Alex ENG	20	Players will accumulate points according to the			
27 MILLER Thierry	SUI	20	25 GARKAUSKAITE Ruta LTU	20	23 VAN VANLUCKENROYE Davy/OE BRUIN	20	following table.			
28 STENBERG Mattias	SWE	20	26 SAKATA Ai JPN	20	Meryn	BEL/NED	20	The points gained by each player or pair will be		
29 MASSART Sebastien	BEL	20	27 WOLF Nina GER	20	24 TACHIFUJI S/MINAGAWA K JPN	20	increased according to the number of Continents			
30 PERRY Alex	ENG	20	28 DEATON Nicola ENG	20	WOMEN'S DOUBLES		in which they have participated as follows:			
31 HE Zhi Wen	ESP	20	29 LOWER Helen ENG	20	1 YANG Ying/WANG Hui CHN	220	Prize Fund Distribution			
32 BOLL Timo	GER	20	30 AUGUSTSSON V SWE	20	2 LI Ju/WU Na CHN	160	Pro-Tour Finals			
33 YALDIZ Gurhan	TUR	10	31 MULLER Melisa NED	20	3 CHEN Jing/CHEN Chiu-Tan TPE	110	Women's Singles			
34 MONDELLO M	ITA	10	32 BROE Alison ENG	10	4 OKAZAKI K/MATSUOKA R JPN	110	1	\$34,000	\$24,000	
35 EDEN Andrew	ENG	10	33 OZER Cecile BEL	10	5 JING Jun Hong/XU Jing SIN/TPE	70	2	\$17,000	\$12,000	
36 SCHROEDER Thomas	GER	10	34 DOTI Monica BRA	10	6 TIMINA Elena/PALINA Irina RUS	70	3-4	\$8,000 each (2)	\$6,000 each (2)	
37 JINDRAK Karl	AUT	10	35 HUBERT Martine BEL	10	7 BACHTINA S/MELNIK G RUS	70	5-8	\$4,000 each (4)	\$3,000 each (4)	
38 TORRES Daniel	ESP	10	36 KOSAKA Lymanne BRA	10	8 NI Xia Lian/REGENWETTER PLUX	70	9-16	\$2,000 each (8)	\$1,500 each (8)	
39 KEINATH Thomas	GER	10	37 EDEL Ekaterina RUS	10	9 VRIESEKOOP B/NOOR E NED	40	Men's Doubles			
40 BILLINGTON Bradley	ENG	10	38 REGENWETTER Peggy LUX	10	10 GENG Lijuan/CHIU Barbara CAN	40	Doubles			
41 GONZALES Raymond	NOR	10	39 DELLE Nicole GER	10	11 ARISSI Alessia/HOLT Andrea ITA/ENG	40	1	\$8,000 per pair	\$6,000 per pair	
42 WARD Stephen	WAL	10	40 GAJIC Jelena SWE	10	12 PRUSIENE Jolanta/GARKAUSKAITE	2	2	\$4,000 per pair	\$3,000 per pair	
43 PIACENTINI Valentino	ITA	10	41 HOEMANN Tanja GER	10	Ruta	LTU	40	3-4	\$2,000 each pair (2)	\$1,500 each pair



England's Penny Perry receives the veteran women's singles trophy from ITTF Executive Vice President George Segun.



Runa Nishikawa from Butterfly Japan meets Tees Sport's John Miller.

tour and even more important to England, helping to stop any Chinese stronghold in Manchester next April - they have the monopoly of the Chinese take-aways in Manchester, but we do not want them making off with ITTF World Trophies!

Schlager's scorching cross-court drives especially helped the Austrians win the Kettering men's doubles. His victims (with Karl Jindrak) included the former world champions Roskopf and Fetzner 18, 21, Kong/Ma Wenge -19, 15, 19 in the semi-finals and in the final 17, 20 against Wang Tao and Lu Lin - without doubt an almost incredible show in which much credit must go to Jindrak as he took amazing half-share in three victories over possibly, the best three men's doubles pairs on earth.

Leaving aside a few "withdrawals" around 270 players appeared at Kettering - 160 in the 30 national teams and over a hundred English Association players.

Sweden, Germany and England are three European nations who have the same major problem - ageing

star players. Sweden sent eight young or youngish men and four young women to Kettering - none advanced beyond the second round of the singles.

WOMEN'S SINGLES

The Chinese did not of course, send their two top world rankers Deng Yaping and Quio Hong. Instead, we saw Yang Ying (no 7), Li Ju (no 8), Wu Na (20) and Wang Hui (22). Three of them reached the quarter finals - Wu, Li and Wang. But also prominent at that point were top seed Chen Jing (Taipei), Chai Po Wa (HongKong), the evergreen Bettine Vreisekoop (of Playboy fame) from Holland and Elena Timina formerly with the Grove club. Elena, newly signed for a French club next season (money up front) had a great tournament that included a classic 80-minute duel with Andrea Holt played mainly under expedite rules, 17, -21, -12, 11, 15.

Andrea has a good record against Elena - fans who ventured to Thornaby fifteen months ago at the

last English Open will recall that our Lancashire all-rounder was the victor there over Timina going on to the final.

DISAPPOINTING INJURIES

The absence through injury of both of England's top defenders Matthew Syed and Lisa Lomas was most disappointing for English fans and might have caused some to stay away.

Lisa Lomas's shoulder injuries have been caused by years of toil. The best we can hope for is that she will be fit enough to put up a world-class show both in Bratislava and Atlanta. Nicola Deaton and Linda Radford both seem to be making progress toward regular places in the England squad.

For the first time, Linda Radford's name appeared in a Daily Telegraph headline as she and Nicola reached the third stage. Peter Radford's comment was "About time".

Inevitably in such elite company, both girls fell by the wayside - Nicky to Wu Na 14, 17, 11 and Linda to Germany's Nina Wolf but, only after a titanic battle that nearly reached five games - Wolf went through -14, 18, 18, 20.

The shocks at Kettering included the defeat of the world no 1 Jean-Michel Saive who incredibly seemed to run out of ideas losing by an astonishing -13, -13, -12 to the 29-years cube-shaped Wang Tao in the quarter.

I cannot recall Jean-Michel losing so comprehensively by those sort of scores.

Europe's other hope Jorg

Roskopf seemed to be on a winning roll as he upset Ma Wenge 16, 20. In the semi-finals however, the German ace found the world champion Kong too silky, going under 15, 16, 11.

MAGIC?

One of the outstanding features of the tournament as I saw it, was the uncanny ability of Kong Linghui to recover from the most threatening deficits - does this man possess a magic ingredient? In the quarters Kong was not only two games down when playing Petr Korbel but also 8-1 down in the third, before recovering to win 13. The final against Wang Tao saw Kong, playing mainly conventional top-spin backhand but again losing the first games -12, -14. And then almost to his coach's order bouncing back to win 14, 14, 14. Dope controllers whipped the champion away immediately after the final leaving journalists trying hard to get a quote from the loser who said "Playing against your team-mate in a big final is very hard, because you know each other's game so well. But he is nine years younger than me - I feel I am playing fairly well at the age of 29"

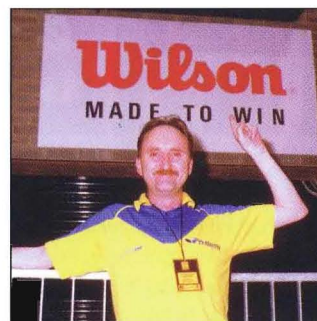
THE 1997 VENUE?

The odds are 6-4 on that the 1997 English Open which will be in January, will be staged again at the Kettering Arena? The hall is excellent, Kettering is central and the centre staff were very helpful.

Given more time the hotel situation could be improved with better transport between the hotels and the venue.



Belgium's Martine Hubert.



Keith Wilson always a winner as the Venue Director.

U21 BRONZE FOR PERRY AND DEATON

Two English stars of the future, Alex Perry and Nicola Deaton, stirred the hearts of the English supporters when they both won a bronze medal each in the Under 21 competition.

In the Men's Under 21 Singles semi-finals Perry lost to Sweden's Fredrik Hakansson, in a tight match, 21, -13, -16, whilst Deaton went down to Ruta Garkauskaite from Lithuania 7, 13.

Perry had a very good win over Sweden's Jens Lundqvist in the Quarter-finals, 15, 21 and Deaton

also had an impressive win beating Japan's Yuki Takakusa 5, 19.

The Men's Under 21 Singles final was an exciting affair, with Japan's Ryo Yuazawa taking the opening game comfortably 14. But with sheer speed and talent Sweden's Hakansson fought back magnificently to take the second 13, and led 10-7 in the decider, before Yuzawa clawed his way back into the match and as his confidence grew he attacked his way to victory, winning 21-15.

The Women's Under 21 Singles final was won by Japan's Keiko Okazaki, when she beat Garkauskaite in two. But the girl from Lithuania did make a fight of it in the first leg, before losing 19-21, then she drifted out of the battle before losing the second 12-21.

VETERAN GOLD FOR HILTON & PERRY

John Hilton and Penny Perry made history by winning the very first English Open Veteran Gold Medals at the first ITTF Pro Tour Event.

Hilton won a noisy, bad tempered final against his old rival Nigel Eckersley.

Hilton won the first 22-20 then Eckersley bounced back to take the second 21-12. The third and deciding leg degenerated into verbal abuse, which resulted in Eckersley conceding the English Open title to Hilton.

The bad behaviour in this Men's Veterans final did a disservice to the good name of the English Open. Thankfully, the Veteran Women's final was a much more gentele affair, which saw Devon's Penny Perry win a marathon pushing battle against Cheshire's Doreen Schofield 17, -10, 22.

The real drama came in the third leg where Perry took what looked like a winning 20-15 lead, but Schofield was far from finished as she dug in and pushed her way back to deuce.

It then swung each way until 23-22 in favour of Perry, then with both women too scared to attack they patiently pushed the ball back to one another for what seemed like an eternity, something like ten minutes, before Perry won Gold 24-22. And

immediately Doreen shook Penny's hand with a big smile on her face.

The most interesting Veteran's match was in the Men's Veteran Singles, between Switzerland's Herbert Neubauer and Derek Wood from Essex, which saw the Swiss man win in two 11 and 18 with his combination bat, Yung long pimples OX and Toni Hold antispin, which confused the man from Essex. But Lancashire's Phil Bowen stopped Neubauer's march to the final by narrowly beating him in a quarter-final marathon -19, 15, 19.



England's John Hilton Veteran Men's Singles winner.

61st ENGLISH OPEN RESULTS

MEN'S SINGLES
Final: KONG Linghui (CHN) bt WANG Tao (CHN) -12, -14, 14, 14
Semi Final: Kong bt Roskopf (GER) 15, 16, 11; Wang bt Saive JM (BEL) 13, 13, 12

WOMEN'S SINGLES
Final: YANG Ying (CHN) bt CHEN Jing (TPE) 14, -11, 16, 18
Semi Final: Yang bt Chai (HKG) 19, 12, -19, 19; Chen bt Timina (RUS) 18, 15, 19

MEN'S DOUBLES
Final: SCHLAGER Werner/JINDRAK (AUT) bt WANG Tao/LU Lin (CHN) 17, 20
Semi Final: Schlager/Jindrak bt Kong/Ma (CHN) -19, 15, 19; Wang/Lu bt Saive JM/Saive P (BEL) 16, 12

WOMEN'S DOUBLES
Final: YANG Ying/ANG Hui (CHN) bt LI Ju/WU Na (CHN) -16, 20, 22
Semi-Final: Yang/Wang bt Okazaki/Matsuoka (JPN) 9, 12; Li/Wu bt Chen J/Chen C T (TPE) 11, 12

MEN'S U21 SINGLES
Final: YUZAWA RYO (JPN) bt HAKANSSON (SWE) 14, -13, 15
Semi Final: Yuzawa bt Monrad (DEN) -18, 17, 13; Hakansson bt Perry (ENG) -21, 13, 16

WOMEN'S U21 SINGLES
Final: OKAZAKI Keiko (JPN) bt GARKAUSKITE Ruta (LTU) 19, 12
Semi Final: Okazaki bt Augustsson (SWE) 3, 16; Garkauskite bt Deaton (ENG) 7, 13

MEN'S VETERAN SINGLES
Final: HILTON John (ENG) bt ECKERSLEY Nigel (ENG) 20, -12 conceded
Semi Final: Hilton bt Welsman (ENG) -18, 15, 19; Eckersley bt Bowen (ENG) 15, 12

WOMEN'S VETERAN SINGLES
Final: PERRY Penelope (ENG) bt Doreen Schofield (ENG) 17, -10, 22
Semi Final: Perry bt Maltby (ENG) 12, -17, 19; Schofield bt Thomas (ENG) 8, 20



Austria's Karl Jindrak & Werner Schlager.