

Birmingham Closed Preview

By Bob Brown

Ian Ferguson is aiming for a fifth men's singles title at the Birmingham Closed, which takes place on Sunday at the North Solihull Sports Centre. The Curdworth legend, will be playing in his last tournament, having announced his retirement from the sport at the end of the season. "It's me against Kingshurst, their players are all out out to beat me, they probably feel since I stated I was packing up this is a good time to play me," insisted Ferguson. "My recent form in British League has been inconsistent, but if I play like I did in the 'Battle of Brum' against Kingshurst then I will win my Fifth title. "Mike (Browne) and myself seem to have put players off from entering over the past few years as they felt they had no chance, but surprise, surprise, many players feel they can win this time." Browne, Scott Prime, Chris Leach and Jason Essex (all Kingshurst Bribar), Andy Hare (Curdworth) and the Colebridge duo of Edward Lynne and Navinder Mathuru will be the rest of the seeds in the men's competiton, with Kingshurst star youngsters Alan Caffrey and Jack Williamson capable of springing a surprise or two. Helen Turner (Sutton) is seeded No 1 in the womens' singles, but Sarah Riach (Kingshurst) will be aiming for double success, after her recent stunning victory in the Warwickshire Closed. It should be a high quality men's doubles competition, with the pairings including Ferguson/Hare, Prime/Leach, Browne/Essex and Lynne/Caffrey. A two a side team event will be staged for the first time, with Coleridge and Sutton challenging the top two of Curdworth and Kingshurst. Matharu and Williamson are expected to dominate the various events at junior level. There is a healthy entry in both the veteran and over 50 singles, with Browne a strong favourite at veteran level, whilst Neil Wheatley (Colebridge) will take some stopping at over 50. Tournament organiser Jim Whitehead is delighted at an entry which is over 25 per cent up on last season.

"We made a concerted effort to attract competitors and it has paid off," said Whitehead.