

Week Commencing 12th March 2007

This weekend, Sydenham Sports Centre played host to the Leamington Closed Table Tennis Championships, where players from the League competed in various events to earn the right to play on Finals Night in a fortnight's time.

As is traditional, the Mens Singles was completed up to and including the quarter-final stage and the top four seeds all lived up to expectation. Number one seed, Mark Jackson, overcame Mihai Duhovnicu in his quarter final and will face joint third seed, Gary Webb, (who beat Mike Bishop en route) in the first semi-final on Finals Night. In the bottom half of the draw, second seed Paul Savins eased through his group and beat Bob Harman in the quarter-final. Earl "Kreanga" Sweeney joins him in that second semi-final thanks to a fine performance in putting out the useful Thomas Jacko in his quarter-final match.

In the Wright Hassall Ladies Singles, as expected, top seed Samantha Apostol took her place in the final, holding her nerve to claim her place in five sets at the expense of Marion Dixon. Tracey Fletcher, seeded third in the event, also had a tough five set match to reach the final, but put in a strong fifth set performance to put out Lleryn Brocklehurst in the semi-final.

Tracey will be making a second appearance at this year's Finals Night after joining forces with Kay Nason to defeat Samantha Apostol and Charlotte Spencer. Grace Newman and Marion Dixon caused an upset by putting out second seeds Emma Churchley and Lleryn Brocklehurst to complete the Ladies Doubles final line-up.

Tracey's hat-trick is completed by taking her place in the Fragmere Properties Mixed Doubles with Earl Sweeney, putting paid to number one seeds Navinder Matharu and Samantha Apostol en route. Paul Savins and Kay Nason will be their opponents, having cruised through the group stage of the event.

The Grade 1 final gives another player a third appearance on Finals Night – Paul Savins fought hard to beat Navinder Matharu in his quarter-final, then put paid to Jack Randle in the semi. In the top half of the draw, club mate Pete Dasher looked down and out in his group, but staged a tremendous fifth set recovery to progress and then put in arguably the best performance of Saturday to beat Earl Sweeney in straight sets in the semi-final.

The Grade 2 final will be a contest between Edward Freeman and Thomas Jacko. Edward beat Luke Hobbins in the semi-final, while Thomas eased past club mate Jack Randle.

Luke Hobbins made up for his semi-final disappointment though by beating Jesse Kendrick-Hill to secure a place in the Grade 3 final. His opponent will be Alex Phillips, who had a good win over Tony Williams in the semi.

Jesse topped his group in the Grade 4 event and advanced to the final where he will play Charlotte Spencer who beat brother Luke in the semi-final.

In Grade 5, Luke Spencer defeated Jack Parry to claim a final spot and will have to play Holly Savage who outfought Leo Twigg to make her first finals night appearance in only her first season of League table tennis.

On to the younger events and the Piccolino's Pizzeria Youth Singles. Top seeded Xiaoyang Ma comfortably disposed of his opponents, which included Luke Hobbins at the semi-final stage, to take his expected place in the final. He may not find things as straightforward in the final though, as number two seed Navinder Matharu defeated Jack Randle to claim his spot.

Xiaoyang clocked up his second final by beating Chris Blowey in the semi-final of the Junior Boys Singles and will play Tom Hunt who did well to put out two Division Two players, including Jack Randle in the semi.

Xiaoyang duly completed his journey through the Under 15 Boys Singles field to become the third player who will feature in three finals in two weeks time. His unlucky semi-final opponent this time was Phil Blowey. He will face Jack Randle in the final, who knocked out Leo Twigg and Loz Sweeney along the way.

The Junior Doubles will be a tough final to call, with Alex Phillips and Chris Blowey due to face Jack Randle and Alastair Nicholson. Scott Delday and Luke Spencer and Phil Blowey and Charlotte Spencer were the unlucky semi-final losers.

The Under 15 Girls Singles had only three entries, so a round robin group was played to determine which two players would progress to finals night to battle it out for the trophy. Charlotte Spencer progressed in first place with two wins out of two and will be joined by Holly Savage. Holly Thompson unfortunate to miss out.

Jesse-Kendrick Hill took out Leo Twigg and Jack Parry to reach the final of the Under 13 Singles, which was run as a combined event due to there only being a single entry for the Under 13 Girls. Luke Spencer showed excellent form in his semi-final to beat Scott Delday and progress.

Luke then became yet another player to notch a hat-trick of finals appearances by topping his group in the Under 11 Singles. Elizabeth Hancock and Niall Herbert both making good efforts but just falling short. Jesse Kendrick-Hill also claims a third Finals Night appearance by joining Luke in the final. Jesse put out Leo Twigg and Jeremy Knott in his group. It was great to see a few players who are either new to the League or even non-league having a stab at this event and the League would hope that this might help to encourage a few more of our fledglings to give it a go next year.

The Handicap Singles saw a decent entry this year and is an event which allows players from the lower divisions the chance to compete against some of the better players in the League by receiving a head start in a race up to sixty-one points. It is traditionally tough for the top players to overcome huge deficit and this year proved no exception. The final will be contested between Holly Thompson, who defeated Charlotte Spencer in the semi-final, and Marion Dixon, who defeated James Hodges in her semi.

Simon Griew beat top seeded Gary Webb in the semi-final of the Veteran Singles and will come up against local stalwart Phil Paine in the final. Phil turned back the years in his semi-final and beat Mike Bishop.

The Veteran Ladies Singles was another event with a three-person entry and thus played as a round robin. Marion Dixon and Grace Newman will progress to Finals Night, with Carol Meredith unfortunate to just miss out.

Phil Paine justified his top seeding by powering his way through the group and reaching the Over 50 Singles final. Second seed, Mike Bishop, negotiated his group, but was knocked out by Bob Harman in the semi-finals.

The Parent/Child Doubles continues to be a popular event and saw a few new and very young faces tasting their first piece of tournament action – let's hope at least one or two will continue to play and come through the ranks in future years. As expected, the strong pairing of Ian and Jack Randle made it to the final, at the expense of Tracey and Olivia Fletcher and David and Niall Herbert. Their opponents will be Reg and Rob Warnes who had a tougher battle to put out Carol Meredith and Samantha Apostol in their semi-final.

Two events will not be played at finals night this year. The Junior Girls final was to be contested between Holly Thompson and Charlotte Spencer, but as both girls have been selected to compete in the Regional Finals to be held at the Bristol Academy, it was agreed to play the final this weekend to help avoid scheduling problems. Charlotte took a 2-0 lead in the match but good determination from Holly saw her level and take it to a deciding set. Charlotte, though, managed to stop the comeback and took the deciding set to take the title. The second event that could not be played was the Fragmere Properties Mens Doubles. Number one seeds Mark Jackson and Paul Savins agreed to play the final this weekend as one half of their opposition was not going to be in the country for Finals Night due to unforeseen circumstances. Jackson and Savins faced crowd favourite Damon Fenton and partner Pete Dasher in the semi-final. Fenton and Dasher had been lucky to get through their group earlier in the day, but sharpened up considerably to take the match the full distance before succumbing. The un-seeded pair of Thomas Jacko and Mihai Duhovnicu had a tricky looking semi-final encounter against Nilton Green and Simon Griew – the pair of left handers who performed so well in the Warwickshire Championships back in November – but triumphed to progress. They then took full advantage of the sporting gesture to play the final there and then as they defeated Jackson and Savins to become Mens Doubles Champions for 2006/07.

Finals Night, which is the flagship event of the season, is to be played at the Warwickshire County Council Staff Club on Saturday 24th March 2007. All finals will be played at the courted, single-table venue in front of the watching audience. Play will start at around 15:00 with the younger age groups and culminate late in the evening with the Ladies and Mens Singles finals. In past years, a large attendance has made for an inspirational and exceptional atmosphere and it is hoped that as many league members, friends and family as possible will attend and help recreate that. There is no admission charge for the event, a free light buffet is provided and a very reasonably priced bar is available. Full details of the schedule will be posted to competitors and is available on the web at <http://leamingtontt.tripod.com>