

Week Commencing 26th March 2007

Last Saturday saw the Warwickshire County Council Staff Club play host to the highlight of the Leamington and District Table Tennis Association's calendar – Finals Night. Play started at 14:00 with the Under 11 Singles and ended just after 23:00 with the completion of the Mens Singles final.

Earlier in the evening, the semi-finals of the Mens Singles were played, with Earl Sweeney playing some quite outstanding table tennis in the opening leg against Paul Savins. Paul however, after losing the first leg, managed to impose his game and took the next three sets to progress. In the second semi, Mark Jackson was pushed all the way in a match where both players struggled to find any real rhythm and had to mount a comeback from 4-8 down in the deciding set to take the match 12-10.

Mark's late spurt was carried through to the start of the Mens final against Paul Savins and, with some aggressive play, raced into a 2-0 lead. Savins kept his composure and recovered well, putting pressure on Jackson and becoming the aggressor in the match to force a deciding set, which he took to complete the match 5-11, 6-11, 11-3, 11-8, 11-7 and become Mens Singles Champion at his first attempt.

The Wright Hassall Ladies Singles final was contested between the number one and three seeds, Samantha Apostol and Tracey Fletcher. Tracey got off to a good start, building a decent lead, but Samantha rallied and with some powerfully hit forehands came back to take the first set 11-8. Tracey collected herself though and from that moment on produced some tremendous counter hitting, her sharp backhand going on to be the deciding factor in three more close sets as she won 8-11, 11-8, 11-7, 12-10 to become Ladies Singles Champion for the second time.

The night, though, belonged to Paul Savins and the former team mate of one time England number one, Matthew Syed, dominated the evening as he collected another two titles to remain unbeaten on the night. In the Bombay Tandoori Grade 1 Singles, Paul faced club mate Pete Dasher. A good fight from Dasher was enough to take a set of Savins, but not enough to stop the match slipping away 11-8, 12-14, 11-6, 13-11 in favour of Savins.

Paul's hat-trick of titles was completed when he partnered Kay Nason in the Mixed Doubles, seeing off Earl Sweeney and Tracey Fletcher in a relatively comfortable 11-6, 11-5, 11-6 victory.

Tracey and Kay combined to lift the Loveitts Ladies Doubles title at the expense of Grace Newman and Marion Dixon. The ladies from Rugby fought well, but Tracey and Kay proved to strong and won 11-5, 11-8, 11-9.

In the Veteran events, the two losing doubles finalists, Grace Newman and Marion Dixon, faced each other for the Veteran Ladies title. Marion got off to a flying start by taking a comfortable first and, despite the next two sets being closer, the momentum carried her through 11-4, 11-8, 13-11. Simon Griew claimed the Veteran Mens crown with an impressive display against Phil Paine, beating the Leamington stalwart three straight – 11-6, 11-7, 11-9. Phil was not to be denied a title though – he had a three straight victory of his own to celebrate, as he beat Bob Harman 13-11, 11-7, 12-10 to collect the Veteran Over 50 Singles trophy. The Veteran Over 60's final was not contested on the night, but was played earlier in the week and County Council team mates Reg Warnes and Derek Harwood competed, with Derek emerging victorious. Reg did make a finals night appearance earlier in the evening, as he

joined son Rob in the Parent/Child Doubles. Unfortunately for them, they couldn't find an answer to some excellent play from defending champions Ian and Jack Randle, who won 11-7, 11-3, 11-3.

In the remaining Graded events, the Grade 3 Singles was taken by Alex Phillips, who beat Luke Hobbins in a five set match which swung from one side to the other. 11-5, 4-11, 11-4, 9-11, 11-6 the scores. Jesse Kendrick-Hill had a four set 11-4, 11-9, 7-11, 16-14 win over Charlotte Spencer in the Grade 4 Singles. His steady, containing play and excellent counter hitting just too consistent for his opponent. The Grade 5 Singles was won by Luke Spencer as he beat Holly Savage 11-8, 11-7, 13-11 to take his first Leamington title. The Grade 2 Singles was won by Edward Freeman. Edward was unfortunately unable to play his match as his opponent failed to arrive and was thus deemed to have conceded.

In the Handicap Singles, Free Church's Holly Thompson made full use of her 35-8 head start to beat Rugby's Marion Dixon 61-35.

In the Junior events, Jesse Kendrick-Hill won the Under 11 Singles with an 11-5, 11-5, 11-1 victory against Luke Spencer. Jesse's excellent recent progression helping him reverse the result from the Warwickshire championships between the same two players. In the Under 13 Singles, the same two players were involved and, despite a more positive performance from Luke, Jesse picked up the winners trophy for that one too with an 11-9, 11-7, 11-9 win. That made three titles for Jesse. A very good evening's work from a player with a very bright future.

The Under 15 Boys singles was taken by Xiaoyang Ma, beating Jack Randle 11-6, 11-5, 11-5. In the Girls event for under fifteens, Charlotte Spencer beat Holly Savage 11-4, 11-5, 10-12, 11-8. Xiaoyang Ma was also involved in both the Junior Boys and the Youth singles finals, winning both to claim a hat-trick of titles. He beat Tom Hunt 11-6, 11-4, 11-6 in the Juniors and Navinder Matharu 11-7, 11-4, 5-11, 11-8 in the Youths to show his dominance of the local junior scene at just thirteen years of age. The Ford Motors Junior Doubles crown was taken by Jack Randle and Alastair Nicholson with an 8-11, 11-5, 11-8, 10-12, 11-8 win over Alex Phillips and Chris Blowey.

A presentation of trophies was made on the night, with the perpetual trophies due to be engraved in time to be presented on Presentation Evening, to be held at St Patricks Club on Friday 18th May 2007. Details are available on the web at <http://leamingtontt.tripod.com> and can be obtained from Sue Clarke.

We unfortunately end on a more sombre note. The Leamington League was saddened to hear of the death of one of its former members, Maurice Billington, who passed away recently. The Billington family were well known and long serving members of the League and Maurice, who won the Mens Singles title in the 1962/63 season, was the first player in the town's history to reach number one in the England Junior Boys ranking list. Our thoughts and condolences are with his family.