

## **Guildford Closed (2019)**

The first part of the 84th Guildford Closed Table Tennis Competition took place at Christ's College on Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> February. Before proceedings started we remembered four table tennis players who have sadly passed away in the last year. Carole Ingram, Mike Willimott, Colin Henderson and Ron Stracey.

The day's competition consisted of the Divisional Singles and Doubles, the Veterans Singles and Doubles and the Masters competition.

The Divisional Championships are always keenly contested and this time we had entries from the Premier and Divisions 1, 2 and 4.

In the semi-finals of the Premier section Rory Scott beat Phil Harrison three straight and Phil Snelson beat Richard Seymour also three straight. In the final Scott went one up with a 13-11 win but Snelson came back strongly winning 11-6, 11-6 and 11-7 to become champion. In the doubles Phil Snelson and Julie Lawrence had a fine win in five over Simon Vine and Rory Scott before playing Vijay Bhaskar and Richard Seymour in the final. This they won 5-11, 14-12, 11-5, 11-8 to complete an excellent double for Snelson who is in the form of his life.

The First Division saw Chris Pullinger and Stuart Vincent move strongly to the final with wins over Peter Palmer and Steve Collins. The final was an 'up and down' affair with Pullinger winning the first two matches 11-3, 11-6 but then Vincent upped his game and won 11-2. Well, what was going on? Pullinger who is in fine form buckled down and took the fourth set 11-5. That man Chris Pullinger with his scratch partner Adrian Cretu reached the doubles final when they had to play Stuart Vincent and Adrian Sharp. This proved to be a very tense encounter with Vincent and Sharp winning 21-19, 7-11, 11-4, 2-11, 11-8.

The Second Division competition was played in two groups of five. Brian Mitchell was undefeated in Group A and Ansh Richharia was unbeaten in Group B. This anticipated final looked to be plain sailing for Mitchell as he took a two set lead, 11-2 and 11-7 but Richharia was made of firmer stuff and battled back by winning 11-9 and 11-8. Anyone's game you would have thought but Mitchell, playing very consistently, took the fifth set 11-2 as Richharia's challenge faded. Another tense doubles final took place between Mike Caudrey & Paul Tanton and Carsten Horne and Ansh Richharia. Horne is somewhat of a doubles specialist and he together with his partner won 6-11, 11-5, 6-11, 11-9, 11-9.

The Fourth Division competition was played in two groups and the young guns Owain Osmond-Gillam and Vince Quiambao came through to the final. This proved to be a tight encounter with Quiambao emerging as the winner 11-8, 4-11, 11-8, 11-8. Veteran umpire Jim Faulkner reported that this was an excellent match played by two young players in a fine spirit. The doubles final saw the youngsters playing, let's say, experience and it was the youngsters who emerged victorious. Vincent Quiambao & Owain Osmond-Gillam beating Richard Abbey & Rich Clement 11-7, 11-4, 5-11, 11-5.

The Masters event for over 60s was played on a straight knock-out basis. Simon Vine beat defending champion, Phil Harrison 11-5, 11-5, 11-5. This was a reversal of last year's result and a delighted Vine was happy to announce that this was his first Guildford Championship since he won the open singles as a young lad in 1976.

The Veterans Championship for over 40s is always a hard-fought contest and the standard gets higher every year. There were two stand out quarter final matches. Simon Vine beat the fancied Richard Tanner 9-11, 11-8, 11-6, 11-6 and Julie Lawrence put up a terrific display against a rattled John Robinson before running out of steam and losing 11-8, 11-9, 8-11, 5-11, 3-11. The semi-final

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was a classic between Phil Snelson and the mercurial Rory Scott. Scott won a nail-biting first game 15-13. It was then up and down before Scott came through by winning 4-11, 12-10, 7-11, 11-9. The other semi-final saw Simon Vine nearly taking a two-set lead against John Robinson but Robinson is a fighter and he won 8-11, 16-14, 11-6, 11-1.

The final between Robinson and Scott was another dramatic affair with the supporters on the edge of their seats. Scott was dominant in the first game winning 11-8 but Robinson snatched the second 11-9. The third game was vital and often when it gets tight Scott's variation of serves, pendulum, tomahawk etc. gets him out of trouble (as it had in the semi-final). Robinson had to control these and also keep the ball off Scott's terrific backhand smash which is a lethal weapon. He kept his nerve and concentration and nicked the game 12-10. The fourth game could have gone either way but Robinson maintained control and his composure and won 11-7 to become a worthy winner.

The final event, the Veterans Doubles, saw some more high class matches. John Robinson & Richard Tanner played Simon Vine & Rory Scott in the final. Robinson and Tanner had not dropped a game in getting to the finals and this pattern continued as they won 11-5, 11-7 and 11-4.

In total 136 matches were played over the day.

The following Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> February, we staged the Open Singles, Open Doubles, Junior and Ladies events.

The day was a triumph for the popular Adam Laws. He won the open singles, open doubles and mixed doubles championships. This was his eighth open singles victory equalling the number previously set by the late, great Terry Haley. Only Jack Harrington with nine wins remains above him.

The open singles were played in groups and the eight seeds proceeded fairly serenely to the quarter finals. There were a few exceptions. Adam Laws had a scare in his groups against Julie Lawrence 12-10, 9-11, 12-10, 11-3. Young Charlie Cunningham took Rory Scott to five as did Sarah Horsnell and Richard Seymour had a close match against Brian Mitchell.

The quarter finals saw some epic matches. Simon Vine losing two deuces to Adam Laws, Richard Seymour losing three straight to Federico Viterbo, Phil Snelson beating Rory Scott in four and Rob Pountney just overcoming John Robinson in five with the third leg going to 20-18! Both semi-finals went to four with Federico Viterbo and Adam Laws securing victories against Rob Pountney and Phil Snelson.



This set up an intriguing final between reigning champion and number one seed Viterbo and number two seed Laws (left). The first game was a cut and thrust affair with both players making unaccustomed errors. Laws crept in 12-10. There was suddenly a steely determination about Laws's demeanour and having taken the first leg he was determined not to let the match slip. He has very strong serves with a powerful follow up and he used these strengths to great advantage to take the next two sets 11-7 and 11-4. It was in 1996 that the

writer lost in the final in three sets to an up and coming youngster called Adam Laws – 23 years later he recorded his eighth success.

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As in the singles the doubles saw the four top seeds getting through and competing in the semi-finals. Pountney & Laws beat Robinson & Seymour 5-11, 11-7, 11-8, 11-7. The other semi-final was a



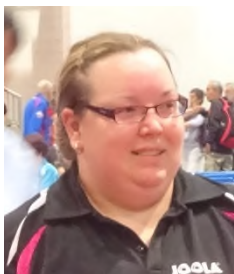
humdinger. Number one seed Federico Viterbo and Simon Vine played Phil Snelson and Julie Lawrence (left). The left hand/right hand combination is always helpful but coupled with Snelson's booming forehand and confusing back hand block with pimples and Lawrence's devastating back hand hit straight off the bounce they make a very effective pairing. This match was of high quality and Lawrence and Snelson won 11-4, 12-14, 11-9, 8-11, 11-5. Maybe this was a step too far, or did the semi-final drain their energy? because their final against Laws & Pountney ended up a one-

sided affair as they lost 7-11, 11-8, 11-2, 11-4.



A singles consolation event was held for those who didn't qualify from their groups. The semi-finals found young Max Flint, only in his second season of table tennis, playing against Ramesh Bhalla who is in his ninth decade! This was a great experience for Flint as Bhalla is the current European over 80s champion and has won the Guildford closed on six occasions. It is testament to Bhalla's enthusiasm and dedication that he won 6-11, 14-12, 11-3, 11-5. In the other semi Chris Pullinger (left) beat Rob Chatwin 11-3, 11-1, 13-11.

In the final, Pullinger who had been playing well all day, beat Bhalla 11-2, 11-4, 11-9.



The Ladies Singles was played on a group basis with Sarah Horsnell (left), Fei Fei Pei, Maria Hilsdon and Ruochen Liang reaching the semi-finals. Liang lost to the more experienced Pei 9-11, 8-11, 11-13. Nine times winner and reigning champion Hilsdon lost to number one seed, the powerful hitter, Horsnell 15-17, 4-11, 6-11. In the final Sarah was just too powerful for Fei Fei and won 11-6, 11-3, 11-9.

The Ladies Doubles was played on a round-robin basis and Fei Fei Pei and Sarah Horsnell beat Julie Lawrence and young Katie Snelson 11-6, 11-3, 11-8 in the decider.

In the Ladies Veterans competition Sarah Horsnell powered her way through to pick up her third title. A good days work Sarah!



The Mixed Doubles was of the highest standard in living memory. The semi-finals saw four high quality pairs pitched against each other. John Robinson and Maria Hilsdon succumbed to the highly fancied Julie Lawrence and Phil Snelson 11-6, 11-6, 11-6. At least it was consistent! Ruochen Liang and Adam Laws playing together for the first time beat number one seeds Fei Fei Pei and Federico Viterbo 8-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-9. In a fantastic final Laws & Liang (left) just beat Lawrence & Snelson 7-11, 11-5, 8-11, 11-8, 11-7. Phew!

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An innovation was to include the junior events on the same day as the senior competition. This also allowed the young players to participate in the open singles which was a great experience for them. In their own category, competitions were held at under 13, under 15 and under 18 levels.

The under 13s played in a giant group of six players. They all played each other – a total of fifteen matches. Two players emerged to play a final in which Jamie Orton beat Dan Godsill 16-14, 11-6, 11-4. Orton was unbeaten. In the doubles Dan Godsill and Jack Hongjuan had a good win over Ashley Minoo & Jamie Orton 11-7, 11-9, 6-11, 11-5.

The under 15s singles was played in two large groups with Max Flint, Vincent Quiambao, Katie Snelson and Jamie Orton reaching the semi-finals. Flint beat Snelson 11-5, 11-5, 11-2 and Quiambao beat Orton 11-5, 12-10, 11-9 in what turned out to be a nail-biter. Flint beat Quiambao 11-4, 11-4, 9-11, 11-6 in the final. This match was filmed by Vincent's father. The final of the under 15 doubles saw Max Flint & Tom Gartner beat Vincent Quiambao & Jamie Orton 11-4, 11-8, 6-11, 11-6. But what about this result in the semi-final? Flint & Gartner played Katie Snelson and Vlad Cretu. Flint and Gartner won 11-0, 11-5, then took their feet off the pedal and lost 9-11, 11-13 to finally scrape through 11-7. There's a lesson to all young players!

The under 18s was played in two groups. Charlie Cunningham and Gabriela Lee overcame their opponents and played each other in the final. Gabriela had previously only dropped one set to Max Flint but found Cunningham just too strong and lost 11-6, 11-9, 11-7. In the doubles semi-finals Gabriela and Katie had a good win over under 15 champions Flint & Gartner 11-1, 11-13, 11-6, 5-11, 11-8 and James Scott and Charlie Cunningham beat Ryan Bowdler and Henry Evans 11-8, 11-5, 11-7. The final was tough and the strong pair of Cunningham and Scott beat Lee and Snelson 11-4, 11-4, 14-16, 11-8.

There were 153 matches played on the day and add that to the 136 played on the previous Sunday it makes a total of 289 matches.

This doesn't happen without a lot of help. Thanks to Adam Laws and Trevor Free for running the junior events, John Robinson for aiding on the results table and looking after the finances, David Lush and Steve Day for scoring above and beyond the call of duty. Tony and Shula Laws for organising the venue and all the players for putting up and taking down the equipment and umpiring without a single quibble.

John Callcut

