**Table tennis by Chris Blake - www.tabletennis365.com/Sunderland**

The Sunderland & District League table tennis tournament took place last weekend. Participants from all over the north east made for an excellent exhibition of the sport, none more so than the Open Singles event which saw Darren McVitie retain his Open Singles title in a quite outstanding final against teammate Andrew Wilkinson.

Both players, who play for Thompson Insurance A, put on a brilliant display of attacking table tennis worthy of any major final in the country let alone the north east.

The first point set the tone for the whole match – a 14 shot rally played at a ferocious pace saw each player looping the ball at each other with no margin of error. It was clear that both players were really fired up and desperately wanted to win the event.

McVitie, who was in excellent form going into the final, set out his stall to attack Wilkinson’s serve bringing into play his forehand loop at every opportunity to dictate the point. With both players formerly representing England at junior level the standard of play was excellent and never let up throughout.

McVitie took first blood by winning the first end 12 – 10 before storming into a 7 – 2 lead in the second end. But Wilkinson known for his grit and determination dug deep to peg McVitie back to eventually draw level the game by taking the 2nd end 11 – 9.

This was a huge blow for McVitie who must have been ruing this lost opportunity to take a 2 – 0 lead. But he stuck at the task in hand and maintained his tactic to dominate Wilkinson’s serve and bring into play his forehand loop and attacking shots at every opportunity to win the 3rd end 11 – 7.

Wilkinson played strongly in the 4th to eventually edge the game 11 – 9 to take the final into the 5th and deciding end.

It was anyone’s game and both players continued to play excellent table tennis – McVitie once again was quick out the block and stormed into a 5 – 1 lead and eventually won the match 11 – 5 to retain his title.

The Ladies Singles was once again an excellent match with some great attacking play by both players – which saw Lynne Herrington narrowly beat Diane Cartmell 3 – 1.

The Open Doubles final was an all Thompson Insurance affair - McVitie partnering Chris Blake and Wilkinson partnering Marc Cotton in another excellent table tennis match.

McVitie and Blake took the first 2 ends 11 – 6 and 11 – 8 before their challengers came back to comfortably win the 3rd 11 – 4. McVitie and Blake then held 2 match points in the 4th before losing out 12 – 10. Wilkinson and Cotton held out to win the 5th 11 – 7 and the title.

In the Mixed Doubles Wilkinson and Diane Cartmell beat Jimmy Scope and Lynne Herrington 3 – 0 in another very entertaining game played in excellent spirit.

McVitie made it a double tournament victory by also taking the Veterans Singles beating Keith Weatherby (St Chads). Weatherby found McVitie in great form following his earlier Open Singles win and despite putting up a great display narrowly lost out 3 – 0.

With Geoff Salter (Durham) narrowly beating John Williamson (Durham) 11 – 9 in the 5th and deciding end of the Over 60’s Singles event the tournament then turned its attention to the junior events and it did not disappoint.

In the Under 11 Singles event brother and Sister Joshua and Charlotte Weatherby (both of St Chads) played an excellent final which Joshua edged.

Joshua then progressed to the Under 13 Singles final where he met Simon Knopf of Sacriston St Bedes. This was a quite brilliant match and bolds well for the future. Knopf edging the match 11 – 9 in the 5th.

Robert Renton of St John beat Aaron Kent of Cramlington in the Cadet Boys event in another thoroughly entertaining final. Renton took a 2 – 0 lead only for Kent to pull one back before Renton eventually running out winner 11 – 9 in the 4th.

Next up saw the final of the Cadet Girls event – Erin Harrison (Sacriston St Bedes) vs. Charlotte Weatherby (St Chads). This was a quite enthralling match which ebbed and flowed throughout. Harrison eventually winning 11 – 9 in the 5th - both players should be really proud of their performance.

In the Junior Boys event Renton narrowly beat Joshua Weatherby 3 – 2 in another entertaining final with both players playing some excellent attacking table tennis. This meant Renton had won both the Cadet and Junior boy events.

Likewise, Erin Harrison (Sacriston St Bedes) successfully achieved the same by beating Charlotte Weatherby (St Chads) in another close encounter narrowly winning her opponent 3 – 1 to record a successful double.

In the Consolations Singles Robert Renton beat Ronnie Douglas (St Gabriels) in a close but entertaining match.

\*Watch out next week for a full report on the Sunderland & District table tennis league as it reaches the final stages of the domestic fixtures with titles and promotions being achieved.\*

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