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**Table tennis notes by Chris Blake**

As the Sunderland & District Table Tennis league draws to a close we turn our attention on the semi-final of the Team Handicap Cup.

The first semi-final saw 3rd division leaders St Johns B pitched against 3rd placed Sacriston St Bedes C.

St Johns were forced to reshuffle their team following the late withdrawal of Dave Pringle (back injury) and were represented by Alex Smith, Tony Watson and Gary Anderson.

Sacriston were represented by young Chris Grant, Ian McPherson and Lee Maher.

Alex Smith ensured St Johns had an excellent start with a fine 21 – 16, 21 – 17 win over Ian McPherson despite giving his opponent a 5 point start.

Sacriston were quick to respond and levelled the score by taking the second set when Chris Grant (+7) beat Gary Anderson who found the handicap allocated to his opponent too much to overcome.

Lee Maher (+3) had a comfortable win over Tony Watson to put Sacriston into a 2 – 1 lead. However, the lead was short lived when St Johns Gary Anderson (+3) beat Ian McPherson in a very tight game to make the score-line 2 – 2.

The fifth set between Alex Smith and Lee Maher (+9) was an excellent match with both players playing some great table tennis. Maher won the 1st comfortably before Smith rallied to claw-back the 9 point lead allocated to his opponent to take the 2nd end 21 – 18 to force the game into the 3rd and final end. In the 3rd end Smith played very well to get within 2 points and looked most likely to win the set but Maher dug deep and just edged the match to win the set and put his team into a 3 – 2 lead.

Sacriston won the next 2 sets to put the match out of St Johns reach and win the match 5 – 2 and book the place in the final.

The 2nd semi-final saw second division rivals Mortimer CA drawn against Silksworth IM B – currently in 2nd and 4th position respectively.

Mortimer CA were represented by Dave Cutler, Matty Hampton and Ray Purves whilst Silksworth were represented by George Carlyon, Alan Bickle and Howard Brown.

The first set saw Cutler (+2) pitched against Alan Bickle and what a match it proved to be. Cutler took the 1st end 21 – 18 only to see his opponent edge the 2nd 23 – 21 to take the set into the deciding end which Cutler edge to draw first blood for Mortimer.

Carlyon’s (+6) 21 – 10, 21 – 18 win over Ray Purves levelled the score before Brown overcame his opponents 4 point lead against Hampton to edge a very tight encounter to put Silksworth into a 2 – 1 lead.

Despite performing extremely well this proved to be Silksworth’s last set with Mortimer winning the next 4 sets to win the match 5 – 2.

Firstly, Purves beat Bickle before Cutler performed heroics to beat Brown (+3) – 21 – 15 in the 3rd. Hampton (Scratch) then edged the match against Carlyon 24 – 22, 21 – 15 before Purves beat Brown (+3) to put the match out of reach and book Mortimer’s place against Sacriston St Bedes A in the final.

This was an excellent match with very close sets throughout where fine margins ultimately deciding the final outcome of the match. Both sets of players can be very proud of their performance in what was a very entertaining semi-final.

**Team Handicap Cup Semi-final Results:**

St Johns B 2 vs. Sacriston St Bedes C 5

Mortimer CA 5 vs. Silksworth IM B 2

In division 1 of the Sunderland & District league current leaders Thompson Insurance dropped a valuable point following their 6 – 4 victory over St Chads.

If Silksworth IM A win their matches in hand Thompson’s will only be 2 points ahead of their rivals. With the 2 teams due to play each other in the final match of the season it promises to be a very exciting finish to the season.

St Chads had an excellent 10 – 0 win over Thompson Insurance B to conclude their seasons fixtures – the win sees them move temporarily into 2nd place.

**Results:**

Thompson Insurance A 6 vs. St Chads 4

Thompson Insurance B 0 vs. St Chads 10

Sacriston St Bedes A are guaranteed promotion to the top flight following 2 comfortable 9 – 1 victories over West CA B and Silksworth IM B respectively.

2nd placed Mortimer CA require 1 more win to guarantee promotion but still have the league title in sight if they finish the season undefeated in their final 3 matches.

Sacriston St Bedes B will finish the season in 3rd place following their 7 – 3 win over Redby CA.

**Results:**

Redby CA 1 vs. St Gabriels 4 (teams only had 2 players)

Redby CA 3 vs. Sacriston St Bedes B 7

Redby CA B 1 vs. St Gabriels B 9

Sacriston St Bedes A 9 vs. West CA B 1

Sacriston St Bedes A 9 vs. Silksworth IM B 1

St Johns B overcame their Team Handicap Cup semi-final disappointment by beating Sacriston St Bedes D (7 – 3) and Lanchester CC (9 – 1) to be crowned 3rd Division champions.

St Johns A finished off their season with an excellent 6 – 4 win over their B side (and newly crowned champions).

**Results:**

Lanchester CC 6 vs. Redby CA C 4

Lanchester CC 4 vs. Sacriston St Bedes 6

Sacriston St Bedes C 7 vs. Redby CA C 3

St Johns A 6 vs. St Johns B 4

St Johns B 7 vs. Sacriston St Bedes D 3

St Johns B 9 vs. Lanchester CC 1

St Johns C 1 vs. St Gabriels C 9

The season is almost finished with only outstanding games yet to be played.

The final of the Team Handicap Cup together with the semi-final and final of the Singles Handicap Cup will be concluded this week.