**Table Tennis by Chris Blake**

This week the Sunderland & District table tennis league turned its attention to its two domestic cup competitions.

It was double delight for Barry Cuthbertson when he was crowned the new Single’s Handicap Cup champion after previously helping his 1st Division side St Chads win the Team Handicap Cup.

In the Singles Handicap Cup final Cuthbertson was forced to give his 2nd Division opponent Billy Upton (Durham CA B) an 8 point start in a best of 5 sets match.

Cuthbertson got off to a flying start in the 1st end and soon caught up to his opponent before taking the first 21 – 15. But Upton changed his tactics, preferring a more steady and controlled pushing game limiting his opponent to few attacking opportunities – Cuthbertson had poor starts in the 2nd and 3rd ends and lost them comfortably 21 – 12 and 21 – 13 respectively.

With so much at stake cup finals are so often cagey affairs and the player who gets off to a better start most often goes on to gain confidence and dominate the match and so it proved to be in the 4th when Cuthbertson won 21 – 13 to level the sets 2 – 2 and take the final into the deciding end.

Both players continued the measured play rarely looking to bring in their attacking play which they have both built a reputation for. Cuthbertson got the better start, clawing the 8 point handicap back at 11 – 11 and was certainly favourite at this point to go on and win the match.

However, Upton dug deep and from that point forward the game ebbed and flowed with both players taking a one point lead before the opponent drew level – at 19 – 19 it was anyone’s match – Cuthbertson won both points to win the match 21 – 19 in an excellent yet cagey and tactical final.

In the Team Handicap Cup final 1st Division side St Chads were drawn against 3rd Division St John B – experience vs. the up-and-coming new generation of players currently earning their crust in the lower division.

With the 1st Division side having to give their opponents anything between 8 and 13 points it promised to be a very close match and so it proved to be.

St Chad’s stayed faithful to their semi-final winning side who disposed of 1st Division Champions Thompson Insurance and so were represented by Dave Bissett, Barry Cuthbertson and Jimmy Scope.

St John B were represented by Robert Renton, Jacob Helm and Sean Gleghorn.

The final was the best of 9 sets with the winner being the first to 5.

First up was Bissett vs. Helm (+10) – Helm drew first blood winning 21 – 12 before Bissett drew level 21 – 16. In the deciding end Bissett got off to an excellent start to move within 2 points of his opponent. As with most handicap competitions the most difficult skill is keep the momentum going when you’re winning – but quite often the advantage can quickly turn in the opponents favour who then goes onto to win the match and this proved to be the case with Helm holding out to win the final end 21 – 18 to put the 3rd division side into a 1 – 0 lead.

In the 2nd set Scope narrowly won the 1st end 22 – 20 against Renton (+12) before playing excellently to win the 2nd comfortably 21 – 13 to level the match score 1 – 1.

St Chads moved into a 2 – 1 lead with a hard earned win by Cuthbertson over Gleghorn (+9) narrowly winning the deciding end 21 – 19.

St Johns drew level following an excellent 2 – 0 win by Helm (+12) over experienced Scope 21 – 12, 24 – 22.

Bissett played well to overcome his opponent Gleghorn (+11) with some excellent defending, eventually winning 21 – 15, 21 – 19 to put St Chads into a 3 – 2 lead.

**Next up was the set of the match between Cuthbertson and Renton (+8) – both players played excellent attacking table tennis throughout with Cuthbertson just edging 21 – 19, 21 – 19 and putting his team into a 4 – 2 and requiring just one more set to win the match.**

**Scope had the very difficult task of having to beat his 3rd division opponent despite giving Gleghorn a 13 point start. The match couldn’t have been any closer with both games ending 22 – 20, 22 – 20 in Scope’s favour to win the match and the Cup 5 – 2.**

Congratulations to both teams for a fantastic display of table tennis playing in excellent spirit.

With only a handful of rearranged games remaining the Sunderland & District table tennis is almost complete, watch out next week for the final report which will also publish the final league positions together with the highlights of the 2012-13 season.

**Division 1 Results:**

St Chads 3 vs. Thompson Insurance A 7

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