

Charity Cup Final Report

This year's final brought together the top two teams from St John Fisher, both of whom had successful league campaigns with each achieving runners up spot in their respective divisions.

As a slight twist it brought Sammy Kelly (SJF A) and Matthew Lynch (SJF B) back to the final but this year on opposing sides. In 2015/16 they were part of the successful St John Fisher C team that defeated Grammar C. So who would be receiving a second winner's medal?

In front of an expectant crowd of players, parents, past and present players the match commenced and the first two players, Sammy Kelly for SJF A and Tom Hudson for SJF B, were called into action.

Game 1: Sammy Kelly v Tom Hudson

It was a superb opening game and it appeared to the players watching that Sammy was a little hesitant in his play – a slight nervousness or was it the pressure of that 166 handicap start they had to claw back? In the early stages we didn't see the usual serve and unreserved attack from Sammy; indeed it was Tom who dominated play with his excellent attacking forehand. There were some superb rallies and over the course of the first set Sammy managed to produce some excellent loops and backhand drives and took the set 21-15. Of course with Tom taking a 10 point handicap start into each set, it was really a victory for him. The second set followed a similar pattern, great rallies and clever angles by Tom to win points on his forehand, Sammy's variations in serve caused Tom problems and when the serve was returned, Sammy was there with his loop. The set raced by and Sammy ran out winner 21-13. So overall a 42-28 victory – 14 points clawed back, but the handicap was 20 and so a moral victory for Tom and SJF B.

Running score: 42 -194

Game 2: Dale Gibson against Matthew Lynch

Now this was a real battle of styles, Dale an energetic player, he's never heard of a lost cause in rallies! With his chop defence and clever side spin serves against the much improved left handed Matthew, with his consistent loop and incredible angles. In the initial stages the game was tactical, lots of errors on returns of serve, Dale trying for all he was worth to impart as much sidespin as possible to unsettle Matthews returns which often missed the playing surface. The problem for Dale was Matthew began to return better and when the rallies did start his left hand loop was too strong and effective. The angles achieved by Matthew saw Dale scampering and retrieving from way back from the table and Matthew in most cases retained composure to finish the points with an unplayable hit. The first set went to the more aggressive player and so to Matthew 21-17, a great win and so added to their substantial handicap advantage. Set 2, Dale regrouped and with controlled spin serves and rock solid defensive chops and clever spins managed to stem the attacking shots from Matthew, who lost some of his initial consistency. Dale finally ran out 21-14 winner and so ensured some damage limitation, keeping SJF A in the match.

Running score: 80 – 229

Game 3: George Gibson v George Asbury

The battle of the Georges! This was a really tough hard fought match. George G also appeared to be tight; a touch nervous, maybe the score line was weighing heavy on him, even at this early stage. The first set was a tough hard fought one, defence dominated over attack and there were several missed opportunities to win points with unforced attacking errors. The set finally being won by George G 21-19. With a 10 point handicap start per set this was really a victory for George A, who played and battled for every point. Set 2, what had George G to offer, well he started remarkably well racing to 5-0 lead and we all thought at this point that he would go on to a comfortable win. George A was having none of it, back he came with an ever stronger defence, mixed with excellent serves and attacking shots, the deficit was quickly wiped out and soon it was cut and thrust with very point vital to each player. George A remained the more consistent player and managed to take the set 21-19.

An overall tie then, 40 points apiece, but with a handicap of 20 to make back it was a key victory for George Asbury and SJF B.

Running score: 120 – 269

Game 4: Sammy Kelly v Matthew Lynch

So to the match between last year's teammates! Sammy had it all to do, 149 points still behind with only 14 sets to play. The first set was very different to the last match, a more open attacking game with excellent counter hitting by both players. A key element to the first set was Sammy's ability to block Matthew's awkward loop – a key weapon in Matthew's game. With clever serving that caused Matthew to give away several cheap points, Sammy closed out the set 21-6, finally making inroads into that large deficit. Set 2, a great deal closer, there was some good attacking and defensive play by both players, but Sammy proved too strong an opponent running out winner by 21-15. A great recovery by Matthew and with the Charity Cup, every point counts and that overall losing margin of 21 was so much better than it could have been.

Running score: 162 – 290

Game 5: George Gibson v Tom Hudson

The pressure was on George, could he also continue to bring down the deficit to a manageable level for the final few games. Tom buoyed by his result against Sammy had other ideas! It was another great game of table tennis, Tom with his attacking forehand against George's backhand drive. George took the first set 21-15 as a result of more consistent hitting coupled with some good defensive rallies when needed. In the second set, George played more like the George we expected, far greater attacking shots and stronger at the table in the rallies. Tom battled hard and took valuable points where he could. George ran out the winner 21-11. A further 16 points clawed back, but games were running out.

Running score: 204-316

Game 6: Dale Gibson v George Asbury

This was the game of two defences. Both players battled hard in the first set, lots of points ground out with defensive chops and angled shots. When George did manage to attack with his forehand, Dale was more often than not able to counter with a good block. George was extremely consistent with his defensive play and this allowed him to keep pace with Dale and never allowed him to run away with the set. Dale eventually winning it, 21-17. In the second set Dale really needed to win by a large margin. He certainly played better than in the first set and George lost a little of his consistency. Dale's awkward side spin serves also coming to his rescue on several occasions. This time George couldn't stop the run of points against him and with newly found confidence Dale took the second set 21-8. A tremendous effort by Dale and just about keeping SJF A in the match.

Running score: 246 -341

With only 6 sets to go and a lead of 95, SJF B had one hand on the Cup. They only had to gain just over 5 points on average a set to win the final. With the way they had played the first 6 games, it was theirs to lose.

Game 7: George Gibson v Matthew Lynch

A tremendous match between two players giving it their all. George realising the difficult task in hand went for his shots and Matthew with his left hand forehand loop presenting such a problem for his opponent. The first set produced some excellent rallies and attack and defence, both players going for winning hits. It was good to see both players battling hard and playing at times excellent counter hitting rallies. George with his greater experience took the first set 21-18, but the Charity Cup victory was now nearly over for him and SJF A. The second set, similar to the first a great spectacle and this time it was Matthew that managed to take it by the slimmest of margins 21-20 (in the Charity Cup we don't have to win sets by two points).

Running score: 287 -380

So the Cup was won by SJF B an unassailable lead. 93 ahead with only 4 sets to play.

Game 8: Sammy Kelly v George Asbury

Free from the pressures of the handicap, Sammy showed the audience his real game. Tremendous serving, attacking shots, backhand and forehand – a complete performance that George could only watch in admiration from the other side of the net. The first set was over in the blink of an eye, 21-2.

Fair play to George, he really dug deep in the second set and matched Sammy early on, never allowing him to race away as he did in the first. With Sammy continuing to go for his shots and this time missing a few and George tightening up his defensive play, the set was far more closely fought. Sammy winning through, 21-12. A good night's work from George though as Sammy is an exceptional player when he's at his best.

Running score: 329-394

So to the final game of the night. One theme running the games was the amazing score in the coin toss – 8-0 to SJF B! Could they make it a clean sweep or would Dale finally win one for SJF A!

Everyone waited with baited breath, Dale called the toss was made – he called it right! Finally SJF A had something to cheer!!

Game 9: Dale Gibson v Tom Hudson

A game played in good spirit, both players still trying as hard as ever to win the rallies. Tom, who had played incredibly well against Sammy in that first game that really set the tone for the evening, was at it again. His attacking forehand was just too strong for Dale's chop defence and despite all those side spin serves and returns Tom came through with a superb 21-16 victory. So to the final set of the night, Dale set out for revenge and dug deep into his reserves, grinding out point after point with Tom missing some forehands that he made in previous sets. Dale winning the set comfortably in the end, 21-10.

Running score: 366 -425

Winners: ST JOHN FISHER B

A great win for SJF B and division 4 and the night really was a credit to the juniors themselves and an ever youthful Dale for putting on an excellent match played in great spirit and good sportsmanship.

Photographs were taken, speeches made and a good night had by all.

I personally have to thank everyone who attended, Dale for helping with the scoring, parents for restrained encouragement and of course our own Max Mills for always being there, supporting, coaching and motivating his St John Fisher teams. What a star he is.

Looking forward to next seasons Charity Cup and let's see if St John Fisher will make it three wins in a row.

Graham Bowland

April 28th

