

REPORT ON THE MEDWAY CHAMPIONSHIPS 2007 by Peter Stokes

Cliffe Woods' Paul Cronin is the 2007 open singles champion following the Medway Table Tennis League's Annual Championships that were held over the weekend at the Howard Table Tennis Centre. Amazingly the ladies singles title also went to a player from outside of the top clubs in the form of Tina Stewart from Boxley. This was Cronin's fifth title win from seven final appearances over the past ten years whilst Stewart managed to successfully defend the title she won for the first time last year. Stewart made it a hat trick of wins over the weekend by successfully adding the ladies and mixed doubles titles as well.

Of the top four seeds in the open singles only top seed Cronin and Sturdee's 4th seed Martin Hewett made it to their allotted places in the semi finals. Second seed Ian Gordon (Howard) lost out to 7th seeded clubmate Chris Martin 8-11 11-6 12-10 8-11 12-10 in a thrilling quarter final that allowed the lower ranked player a shot at Hewett in the semis. He took his chances well to secure a place in the final against Cronin with another excellent 4-11 11-9 2-11 11-7 11-7 win. Fourth seed and defending champion John Harley (Howard) really struggled all day. He lost his opening group match against Jeff Norman from Anchorians in the first division and only progressed on legs difference because of his better win over the 3rd player in the group, clubmate Richard Farthing. Again, he was on the verge of elimination in the second round against Cronin's teammate Chris Drury before taking his place in the quarter finals via a hard fought 11-9 11-6 8-11 6-11 11-5 win. That was the end of Harley's defence of his title though as he met 5th seed Scott Friday (Sturdee) for a place in the last four and lost out 11-13 11-5 11-8 11-7. Fortunately for the crowd, though, that set Friday up for a semi final against Cronin and a rematch of the 1998 final that provided Cronin with his first title. The match turned out to be the best of the competition. Cronin won through 11-7 11-9 8-11 11-8 in a thrilling encounter containing the best of modern attacking play from two players at the top of their form. This was Friday's first appearance after almost ten years out of league table tennis and his standard of play must make him a serious contender next season. The final itself provided another spectacle of attacking play between two players who don't really know the word defend and it turned out to be another thriller. Cronin started the better and took the first leg 11-7, then struggled in the second before winning through 14-12. Martin hit back in the 3rd leg with a 16-14 win but Cronin's class really shone through in the 4th leg as he won 11-6 to secure that fifth title.

Earlier in the competition some of the top 16 seeds were dumped out of the competition by lower ranked players. 14th and 15th seeds Steve Bannister (Sturdee) and Dennis McConkey (Sturdee) didn't get past the opening group stage where they were respectively dumped out of the competition by Co-op's Martin Ball and Boxley's Barry Roles. The Howard's 9th seed Steve Waud was beaten 2-11 12-10 11-8 11-5 by Chatham's Delyph Davies in round 1 as was Sturdee's 16th seed Wayne Youngs 11-8 12-14 11-3 11-8 by the Howard's Vinnie McAneney. Biggest surprise though was the failure of 12th seed Graham French (Sturdee) to make it through round one as he was

beaten by one of the Howard's up and coming youngster Steve Lelean. He earned his place in round 2 with an excellent display of fearless table tennis and a 10-12 11-7 15-13 7-11 15-13 scoreline. For his display against French, Lelean was presented with the giant killers trophy by tournament organisers.

Despite being the defending champion, Stewart was seeded at 2 to retain her title behind top seed Delyth Davies who won the title in 2004. The two met in the final and it was the defending champion Stewart who started the better winning the first two legs 11-9 11-6 before Davies got into her stride to level the match at two all with 11-5 and 11-3 wins respectively in legs three and four. Stewart really buckled down to the task though in the decider and cruised to a 11-6 win and a second successive title. Stewart also got the better of Davies in the final of the mixed doubles when she partnered Sturdee's Neil Le Milliere to a 5-11 11-8 12-10 11-9 win over Davies and her clubmate Dave McAulay. The ladies doubles was played on a round robin basis with Stewart and the Howard's Amy Parkes getting the better of runners up Kirsty Wilson and Rosie Waud (Howard).

Gordon and French made up for their failings in the open singles by taking the open doubles title for the first time as a partnership with a 11-7 11-5 11-7 final win over 4th seeds Waud and Harley. With teammate Drury, Cronin was seeded at 3 in this event which he has only won once before with partner Ray Hope in 2002. He will have to wait a little longer for a second title as the pair went out in the semis to the second seeded eventual winners Gordon and French 11-4 9-11 11-5 7-11 12-10. Top seeds Hewett and Friday didn't make their place in the final having lost fairly comfortably and surprisingly to Waud and Harley 11-5 11-8 11-9 in the semis. French added three further titles over the weekend by taking the Veterans Singles and, with Gordon, Doubles titles as well as the singles at over 50. French lost two further finals. In the over 50s Doubles he and Le Milliere lost 11-8 3-11 11-8 11-6 to Bob Cox (Riverside) and McConkey and in the over 60s Doubles he and McConkey lost 11-9 11-2 7-11 11-9 to Barry Skates (Riverside) and Peter Baker (Rainham 83). In the Veterans Singles final French overcame top seed Gordon 5-11 13-11 7-11 11-8 11-7 to prevent the Howard player successfully defending his title. Incredibly, this was French's 7th winning of this event with the last title coming some 14 years ago in 1993. And, he nearly didn't make it past the first round as he survived four match points against McConkey before winning 5-11 5-11 12-10 11-7 11-5. French and Gordon secured the Veterans Doubles title with a 11-2 11-5 11-6 final defeat of Alan Longhurst (Rainham 83) and Waud. Securing his 4th title of the weekend was a tad more difficult as French was made to fight all the way in the Over 50s Singles final by Cox before winning through 11-4 11-4 10-12 9-11 11-7. As well as the over 60s Doubles, Skates took the over 60s Singles title as well, beating McConkey 11-6 11-8 11-5.

The Division One events were dominated by players from the side that has dominated the league race, Howard 3. McAneney winning the singles from teammate Paul Arthur 11-7 12-10 10-12 11-7 and Arthur and Farthing winning the doubles 11-6 11-0 11-5 from Baker and Norman. Chatham C took the Division Two honours with Tom Burford beating Skates 7-11 11-8 14-12 11-8 in the singles and then teaming up with teammate Martin Birley to take the

doubles 11-4 11-9 8-11 11-3 from clubmates Jun Guarin and Jacqueline Niffikeer-Robbins. Like the ladies events, Stewart made it to both Division Three finals where she lost 11-6 11-6 6-11 11-7 to Sturdee's Scott Whale in the singles and, with partner Roles, won the doubles from Richard Harding (Sturdee) and Whale. The finals of the Division Four events were all Chatham affairs. Stuart Fritter beating Roger Chipperfield 11-3 11-7 11-3 in the singles and Malcolm Kay and Takanashi Nagashima beating Kay Pat Gates and Fritter in the doubles. The Division Five events had a junior feel about them as the Howard club took the honours and provided all of the finalists. Jim Moore took the singles from Paul Welsh 6-11 11-8 11-7 11-7 and Welsh teamed up with Sam Driver to get his revenge over Moore by beating him and partner Rosie Waud 11-8 11-5 7-11 11-13 11-5 in the doubles. The Consolation Singles was won by the Howard's Farthing who beat Ball in the final.

The Junior events were dominated by Howard players or those with no club affiliation. Harry Lumb took the Under 18 Singles title with a close fought 8-11 11-5 6-11 18-16 11-8 final win over Phil Thomas. Both had earlier put out the top seeds to earn their place in the final. Lumb beating top seed Andrew Head in the semis and Thomas beating 2nd seed Jack Waud in the quarter finals. Also in the quarter finals Kirsty Wilson, fresh from a recent England training camp, disposed of brother and 3rd seed Ross. Top seeds Waud and Lelean took the Under 18 Doubles title from 2nd seeds Lumb and Ross Wilson. In the only age category where separate girls events were staged, Kirsty Wilson took the Under 18 Girls Singles from Amy Parkes 11-4 11-4 11-4 but, with partner Lauren Beaumont, lost the Under 18 Girls Doubles final to Emma Tovey and Parkes. Kirsty did add a second title and repeat her performance in the Girls event by winning the Under 15 Singles but losing the Under 15 Doubles final. The final of the Singles was a repeat of her quarter final in the Under 18 Singles as she defeated brother Ross 11-8 11-7 6-11 6-11 11-4. Partnering Tovey, she lost the Doubles to her brother and Lumb 11-6 12-10 8-11 11-7. The winning pair also took the Under 13 Doubles title from Sam Beaumont and Rosie Waud 11-7 11-9 14-12 and then contested the Singles final. Lumb winning 11-9 13-11 11-6. Having lost the final of the Under 18 Girls Doubles with Kirsty Wilson, Lauren Beaumont added to titles of her own in the Under 11 category. Winning the singles from Adam Palmer (in his very first competitive match) 11-6 11-2 11-1 and, with Katie Wilson, the doubles from Palmer and Ben Green 11-7 11-5 13-11.