

# **REPORT FROM KEN MUHR ON THE NATIONAL REGIONAL CADET SQUAD CHAMPIONSHIPS 27 APRIL 2008**

Despite a gallant effort, the South East squad, which trains at Angley School, Cranbrook, only just failed to retain its champion's title at the National Regional Cadet (under 15) Squad Championships at The Dome, Doncaster on Sunday.

The squad, comprising: U15 boys - Lewis Gray (Kent), Harry Lumb (Kent); U15 girls – Yolanda King (Sussex), Kirsty Wilson (Kent); Ross Wilson (Kent), Carl Haines (Sussex); U13 girls – Daniella Gray (Kent), Claire Harvey (Kent); U11 boys – Helshan Weerasinghe (Sussex/Kent), Jack Bennett (Sussex); U11 girls – Katie Wilson (Kent), Holly Andrews (Kent), beat the North East 10-2, London Region 9-3, and the South 10-2, and drew with the South West 6-6, to qualify for the final for the second year running.

However, they then went down 7-5 to the East Midlands in a very close battle. Had Carl Haines (Brighton) beaten Dale Coverley (Lincolnshire) – he held a match point before losing 3-11, 12-10, 13-11, 7-11, 11-13 – then the decision would have gone to a count back on the games and points, though East Midlands would still have squeaked it.

Yolanda King from Hastings and a member of the Weald Club, Cranbrook, was undoubtedly the star for the South East, winning all her 5 under 15 girl singles sets. Having won the national schools' under 13 girls' singles title the previous day, Yolanda, the England no.8 cadet, was undefeated over the weekend. On paper her best result was in overcoming the England no.2 cadet from the North East, Karina Lefevre (Cleveland), 10-12, 11-9, 11-8, 11-7. In reality through most of the match Yolanda overwhelmed Lefevre with her strong topspin loops, but had difficulty finishing games, losing the first from 10-4 up and only just taking the second 11-9 despite being again 10-4 up.

King's best performance was against the England no.4 cadet, Lucy Davidson (Derbyshire) in the final clash against the East Midlands, Yolanda getting the close 11-8, 9-11, 11-9, 11-9 verdict in a pulsating match, finished by a massive smash ending a long topspin drive to lob rally. Earlier against the South West, Yolanda demonstrated mental toughness in beating fast counter-hitter Rachel Trevorrow (Cornwall) 9-11, 12-14, 11-6, 11-6, 11-5, after dropping the first two nervy games.

Dartford's Helshan Weerasinghe, also a member of the Weald Club, like Yolanda King finished the weekend unbeaten – he had won the national schools' under 11 boys' singles on the Saturday – with 5 under 11 boys singles wins in the team event without dropping a game. The South East's no.2 under 11 boy, Jack Bennett (Polegate, Sussex) also did very well to win all his 4 matches, and particularly in beating the higher ranked Miles Chan (Northamptonshire), 9-11, 11-7, 12-10, 12-10 in the final.

The Weald Club's Lewis Gray, 13 from Benenden, did well to win 3 out of 5 sets in the tough under 15 no.1 boy position, including 11-6, 11-2, 11-7 over the England no. 5 Ping Ho (Middlesex) in the London match. Lewis, England ranked no.9, who in the schools championships the previous day had comfortably beaten the England no.6 Graeme Barella (Durham), lost only to Alistair Smith (Cornwall), the England no.8 representing the South West, and, in possibly his best form to date, 10-12, 8-11, 9-11 to Liam Pitchford (Derbyshire), the England no.2 and European no.11, in the final. Gray matched Pitchford stroke for stroke in some long-range loop-to-loop rallies. With 4 wins Harry Lumb from the Howard Club, Gillingham, the SE under 15 no.2., also had a good day, losing only to Sean Cullen (Derbyshire), the England no.3, in the final against the East Midlands.

Another excellent performer for the SE was Ross Wilson from the Howard Club, who also won 4 out of his 5 under 13 boy's singles sets, going down only to the England no.2 Sam Walker (Derbyshire) of the East Midlands, 1-11, 10-12, 10-12 in the final. His older sister Kirsty won 3 out of 5 of her under 15 girls' singles sets, and had good chances in both the sets she lost, going down in 5 games to both Kelly Reed (Cornwell)(South West) and to Martha Travis (East Midlands), despite not playing at her best.

And the Wilsons' younger sister Katie won 3 out of her 5 under 11 girls' singles sets in stylish form. Also in the under 11 girls' singles, the very inexperienced left-hander Holly Andrews from the Weald Club, Cranbrook, had an unexpected 1-6, 1-5, 11-13, 11-8 win against London's Samantha Lai, and got close in one of her further three sets. In the under 13 girls' singles, Lewis Gray's sister Daniella had 2 out of 5 wins, but poor Claire Harvey (Meopham) was unable to win any of the 3 sets she played. Carl Haines (Sussex) took 2 out of 5 of his under 13 boys' singles sets.

South East Regional Coach Ken Muhr commented, "Although we didn't win this year we had chances and it was another great effort with tremendous team spirit. However I think that overall the East Midlands were just a fraction stronger and deserved their success".