

REPORT FROM KEN MUHR ON THE NATIONAL JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS 3 AND 4 MAY 2008

Yolanda King, 13, and Lewis Gray, 14, of the Weald TTC based at Angley School, Cranbrook, continued their recent excellent form at the English National Junior/Cadet Championships, Rivermead Leisure Complex, Reading over the weekend.

Yolanda King, from Hastings, England ranked no.8 under 15 (cadet), was again outstanding. Having comfortably won her cadet girls' singles group and her first round match, she put out the 4th seed Lucy Davidson (Derbyshire), 14-12, 12-10, 11-6 in the second round. This is the second time within a week that Yola has defeated the England no.4: she overcame her in an excellent match at the National Regional Cadet Squad Championships, Doncaster, the previous Sunday.

King then had to call on all reserves when she was two games to one and 10-7 down in her quarter-final clash with the England no.6, Martha Travis (Cornwell). But Yola kept her cool in saving 3 match points in positive style before winning that game 13-11, and running away with the 5th game to triumph 11-9, 5-11, 10-12, 13-11, 11-3. In the deciding game she produced her most devastating form, in particular winning a spectacular loop-the-loop rally which brought the house down. She had chances in her semi-final with the top seed and eventual title winner, Emily Bates (Lincolnshire), having game points in both the first and third games. Bates saved the game point in the third game with an impossible to return net and edge. However, King was never really settled against Bates's sharp counter-hitting style and lost 13-15, 6-11, 11-13.

In the second round of the junior girls' singles, Yolanda lost in very close games 10-12, 11-13, 9-11 to the England no.3 junior Caroline Hallows (Cheshire), and held several game points in both the first and second games. Playing with Rachel Farquhar (Berkshire), Yola enjoyed considerable girls' doubles success, reaching the semi-finals of both the cadets, where they lost 3-1 to the eventual title winners Natalie Slater (Staffordshire) and Ayonija Sundararajan (Berkshire), and of the juniors, where they lost 3-0 to Emily Bates (Lincolnshire) and Mary Fuller (Yorkshire). In the first round of the junior doubles they had sensationally beaten the second seeds, Sarra Wang & Rachel Jamieson (Essex), 8-11, 6-11, 11-9, 11-6, 11-9.

The Weald TTC partnership of Yolanda King and Lewis Gray saved 10 match points before overcoming the strong Berkshire pairing of Tom Maynard & Ayonija Sundararajan deuce in the 5th game in the first round of the junior mixed doubles. However they were well beaten by eventual event winners Matt Ware (Hampshire) and Karina Lefevre (Cleveland) in the last 16.

Having won his group, Gray, from Benenden and a pupil of Angley School, reached the quarter finals of the cadet boys' singles via South East Performance Centre, Cranbrook

colleague, Harry Lumb (from Rainham, Kent), in the second round, and his old rival Eddie Mitchell (Berkshire) in the third round. He then put up a tremendous fight against the second seed Daniel Lowe (Derbyshire), before succumbing 6-11, 14-16, 10-12 in a match full of long range topspin rallies. With pen-holder partner Ping Ho (Middlesex) he got to the semi-finals of the cadet boys' doubles, where they lost to Liam Pitchford and Danny Lowe (Derbyshire), 9-11, 9-11, 4-11, who went on to win the title.

Lewis won through a tough junior boys' singles group, having 5 game wins over Ping Ho and Scott Lawson (Isle of Wight). In the 1st round he once more beat Eddie Mitchell, but then narrowly lost 6-11, 11-7, 11-8, 8-11, 7-11 to the England no.10 junior, Wing Yung Chan (Surrey). Lewis in fact had an excellent chance to win 3-1, missing two easy smashes in the fourth game, the first because he did not realise that Chan had made a lucky return, the ball veering up onto the table via hitting the net post (that is, Lewis thought he had already won the point)!

South East Region and Weald TTC coach Ken Muhr commented, "It was another great performance from Yola, but with more self belief and experience she could have done even better in the two singles she closely lost. And Lewis also was in serious contention in the only two singles he lost against much higher ranked opposition, so it looks like the two are on the verge of breaking through into a higher level."

Ross Wilson from the Howard Club, Gillingham and a member of the SE Performance Centre at Cranbrook, won his cadet boys' singles group and first round match, but then lost in straight games in the second round to James Ward (Staffordshire). His sister Kirsty won her girls' cadet singles group but then fell to Tin Tin Ho (Middlesex). She also qualified from her junior girls' singles group, but lost 11-7, 10-12, 7-11, 8-11, in the first round of the knockout to the England no.8, Hannah Hicks (Hampshire).