

LEWIS GRAY IS NATIONAL UNDER 14 CHAMPION

14 year old Lewis Gray from Benenden won the under 14 boys' singles at the National Under 11, 12, 13, & 14 Championships held at the University of East Anglia Sports Centre, Norwich, over the weekend.

Angley School, Cranbrook, pupil Lewis, seeded no.3, dropped only one game in lifting the title, in his toughest match in the semi-finals to his old rival and no.1 seed, Ping Ho (Middlesex). Although the penholder Ho was always dangerous with sharp attack, Gray had the slight psychological advantage, having won all their previous clashes, and fought through 11-9, 8-11, 11-7, 13-11.

In the final the Weald Club, Cranbrook member was able to contain the power of Reece Tan (Essex), and pick off key forehand winners of his own for a straight games victory, 11-9, 11-9, 11-5. Lewis in fact lost one of the most spectacular rallies of the championships whilst lob-returning from the barriers a succession of 8 or 9 forehand kills from Tan, who expended a lot of energy for this point in the second game.

In other matches Lewis, who has previously been national under 10 and national 12 boy's singles champion, comfortably won his group and then beat South East Regional Squad colleague Ross Wilson, of the Howard Club, Gillingham, in the first round, and Connor Neenan (Middlesex) in the second round.

A delighted Ken Muhr, Weald Club and South East Regional Coach, said, "Lewis has worked very hard for his recent successes, after a relatively lean period earlier in the season. Strangely, his normal greatest weapon, his big forehand topspin-loop, was not firing at his best against counter-attack at the weekend, but Lewis was able to stay on top through applying constant attacking pressure, deft placements and all-round play."

Weald Club colleague Yolanda King, 13 from Hastings, recovered sufficiently from a fortnight's sickness to reach the semi-finals of the girls' under 14 singles, where she again lost to top seed Emily Bates (Lincolnshire), who went on to win the title. But the two-wing topspin-looping Yolanda was the only girl to take a game off Bates, and had real opportunities of going to a deciding game, before succumbing 7-11, 1-11, 11-9, 12-14. Four weeks ago, Yolanda also lost closely to Bates in the semi-finals of the under 15s singles at the National under 15 & 18 Championships at Reading, the precocious Bates going on to take this and the under 18 titles.

In the quarter-finals at Norwich, Yolanda had beaten Charleigh Kirby (Middlesex), while Bates had beaten Jasmin Ould, of the Byng Hall Club, Tunbridge Wells, both in straight games. Although she had won her group, Yolanda had been severely tested, 12-14, 11-1, 11-4, 8-11, 6-11 by quick hitter Tressa Armitage (Hampshire), who later produced the shock of the Championships by putting out the absolute favourite Emily Bates in the first round of the under 13 singles!

Ross Wilson of the Howard Club, Gillingham reached the quarter-finals of the boys' under 13 singles before being defeated in five games, 8-11, 1-11, 11-6, 11-6, 8-11, by Scott Hollowood (Yorkshire). His younger sister Katie, aged 8, who like Ross also trains with the SE Cadet squad at Angley School, Cranbrook, did well to come second in her under 11 girls' singles group.

The excellent results of Lewis Gray & Yolanda King over the last six weeks are reflected in the latest England ranking list. Lewis moves up from 9 to no.5 in the cadet (under 15) boys (and to no.1 in the under14 boys), and from 41 to no. 30 in the junior (under 18) boys, while Yolanda moves up from 8 to no.7 in the cadet girls, and from 24 to no.15 in the junior girls. They, and Ross Wilson and Helshan Weerasinghe, from Dartford and a member of the Weald TTC, are training at an England Development Squad Camp at Lilleshall National Sports Centre, Shropshire this weekend.