

REPORT FROM KEN MUHR ON THE ENGLISH NATIONAL TRIALS HELD ON 12 AND 13 APRIL 2008

Fourteen year old Lewis Gray, from Benenden, won the cadet (under 15) boys' singles event of the English National Trials held at the Moorways Leisure Centre, Allenton, Derby over the weekend of 12 and 13 April.

Lewis, a pupil at Angley School, Cranbrook and a member of the Weald Table Tennis Club based at the school, had to fight very hard for his success. Although he came top of his round-robin group, winning 5 of his 6 matches, he was beaten 11-7, 12-14, 11-7, 11-8 by Jonathan Evans (Hampshire), missing a few big forehands at key stages against his strong two-wing attacking opponent.

In the knockout stage, Lewis then had a comfortable 7-11, 13-11, 11-7, 11-2 quarter-final win over the left-handed Jack Coleman (Northamptonshire), improving as the match went on to finish in devastating attacking style. Faced by the heavy topspin and flair of Joshua Boulton (Cheshire) in the semi-finals, Gray managed to play tight and position the ball well to hang in for his (hardest) 7-11, 11-8, 11-4, 8-11, 11-8 victory. Then in the final he avenged his earlier defeat by Jonathan Evans, with a close 11-7, 11-9, 11-9 win.

Weald and South East Regional Coach Ken Muhr said, "Lewis showed great strength of character, a cool mature head and good tactical ability, to fight back to win the event after suffering a loss so early in the competition. Although a few of England's top under 15s were not present, Lewis was tough enough to put his reputation on the line to come out on top under severe pressure."

Lewis's sister Daniella Gray also had a good weekend, coming second in her under 13s girls' group with 5 out of 6 wins, losing only to Bethany March (Essex), and qualifying for the knockout stage. In the quarter-finals she went down 7-11, 6-11, 5-11 to Charleigh Kirby (Middlesex). Lauren Beaumont from the Howard Club, Gillingham, who, alongside the Grays, is also a member the South East Region Cadet Squad which trains at Angley School, Cranbrook, played in the same group as Gray, losing only to her and Bethany March to come third.

In another girls' under 13 group, Claire Harvey from Meopham and also a member of the SE Regional Cadet Squad, came second, losing only to Jessica Dawson (Cleveland), and recording a close 12-10, 11-13, 14-12, 10-12, 11-8 success over Rose Kelly (Cornwell), who is England ranked slightly above her. Claire then lost 11-13, 17-15, 0-11, 3-11 to Tressa Armitage (Hampshire).

Howard Club and SE Regional Squad member Ross Wilson put in an outstanding performance to reach the under 13 boys' singles final. Having won his group, Ross, England under 13 ranked no.8 boy, then beat the no.6, Connor Neenan (Middlesex) 13-11, 11-7, 11-9 in the quarter-finals, followed by the no.3 Azarel Adebajo (Essex) 11-1, 6-11, 11-3, 6-11, 12-10 in a tight well-fought semi-final match which was finished with two fantastic rallies: a strong backhand topspin off the bounce ended the first rally, and after a long counter looping exchange another big backhand concluded the final rally. However, after taking the first game, Ross was never quite in contention in the final against England no.5 Jared Patel (Essex), going down 12-10, 6-11, 6-11, 7-11. Wilson's sister Katie came third in her girls' under 11 group.