

LEWIS GRAY DISAPPOINTED WITH LOSING FINALIST POSITIONS AT GRANTHAM JUNIOR 4 STAR

Such is their normal performance and expectation, that Weald TT Club, Cranbrook duo, Lewis Gray and Yolanda King were disappointed with achieving only losing singles finalist and losing singles semi-finalist places at the Briar East Midlands Junior 4 Star Open Championships at Grantham Meres Leisure Centre over the weekend.

Benenden's Lewis Gray, 15, a pupil at Angley School, Cranbrook, did reach the final of the cadet (under 15) boy's singles via his old rival and doubles partner, Ping Ho (Middlesex), 11-4, 11-6, 11-5 in the semi-finals. However, seeded no.2, he then lost to the left-handed England no.1, Zak Nilesnick (Middlesex), 9-11, 14-12, 9-11, 5-11, after losing 6 consecutive points when leading 9-5 in the first game.

Lewis had a 'good' draw in the junior (under 18) boys' singles, but suffered an unexpected 6-11, 11-5, 11-9, 5-11, 10-12 defeat by his on-form Kent colleague Ross Wilson, from the Howard Club, Gillingham. Wilson was sharper, keeping Gray out with excellent 'touch' play and applying pressure with his faster backhand. However, a nervy Gray still managed to save 3 match points from 7-10 down in the fifth game before Wilson ultimately triumphed. Ross's success was short lived though, as he then fell in straight games to Ping Ho.

Weald coach Ken Muhr commented: "Ross played superbly well, but I thought Lewis played into his strengths, and had I cornered him – I kept neutral – I would have advised different tactics."

England girl cadet no.3, Yolanda King, 14, who lives in Hastings and is a pupil of St Bedes School, Hailsham, looked slow in her last 16 cadet singles clash against the speedy Middlesex lefthander Charleigh Kirby, England ranked 14, and was vanquished 11-7, 8-11, 11-6, 6-11, 11-2.

However, Yolanda showed better form in the junior girls' singles, reaching the semi-finals with a straight games win over Sophie Neal (Nottinghamshire) in the last 16, and a 7-11, 11-3, 10-12, 11-2, 11-9 success over the Welsh combination bat player Megan Phillips in the quarter-finals. Throughout most of the match against Phillips, King looked in a different class, picking off winners almost at random, and the Welsh girl only got close when King made a series of errors. Unfortunately King's topspin attack got more inconsistent and erratic against the diminutive penholder Tin-Tin Ho (Middlesex), aged 10, in the semi-finals, and she fell 13-11, 9-11, 8-11, 6-11.

Coach Ken Muhr commented: "This really was disappointing as Tin-Tin's push and hit game should have been made for Yolanda, and she really should have won and had a chance in the final."

