

WEALD'S LEWIS GRAY LIVERPOOL CADET CHAMPION

14 year old Lewis Gray, from Benenden, the England cadet no.1 boy, and 13 year old Yolanda King, Hastings, the no.3 girl, both members of the Weald Table Tennis Club based at Angley School, Cranbrook, won their respective cadet (under 15) singles events against most of England's best, plus players from the home countries, at the City of Liverpool Junior 4 star Open Championships over the weekend.

Attacking well against return of serve, Lewis, a pupil of Angley, comfortably won the boys' cadet singles, dropping only one game in the event. He reached the final via Declan O'Brien (Ireland) 11-5, 11-4, 11-4 in the quarter finals, and then England no.2 Ping Ho (Middlesex) 11-7, 11-2, 11-1 in the semis, and then had a slightly tougher 11-9, 11-7, 11-8 over England no.10 Joshua Boulton (Cheshire) to lift the title. However, Lewis lost 7-11, 9-11, 11-9, 7-11 to the powerful England no.6, Reece Tan (Essex) in the semi-final of the band 1 cadet singles (in which all the top players completed), a critical factor being losing the second game from 8-4 up.

Lewis also played quite well to reach the last 16 of the junior (under 18) boy's singles, but then had a slightly disappointing 11-9, 7-11, 4-11, 7-11 loss to Emran Hussain (Essex), who at no.20 junior boy is England ranked 2 places below Lewis. Likewise in the quarter-finals of the band 1 junior singles, Lewis lost very narrowly 7-11, 11-7, 9-11, 11-9, 12-14 to the England no. 34, Daniel Basterfield (Middlesex), after both saving 2 match points and holding 2 match points.

Yolanda, who has won a scholarship to St Bedes School, Hailsham, had her toughest cadet girl's singles match in the quarter-finals, when she overcame Welsh international Angharad Phillips, 11-5, 10-12, 11-6, 8-11, 11-8. In the semis she bettered Tressa Armitage (Hampshire), 11-7, 11-9, 12-10, and had some good rallies while defeating Chloe Whyte (Cleveland), 10-12, 12-10, 11-5, 11-9 to take the trophy.

Yolanda (who in the latest England junior ranking list moves up to just outside of the top 10 at no.11 for the first time) added a second title to her weekend haul, in the band 1 junior girls, repeating her earlier success over Chloe Whyte in the quarter-finals, before recording a comfortable 11-8, 11-7, 11-6 result over the England cadet no.2 and junior no.10, Lucy Davidson (Derbyshire). Her final 10-12, 12-10, 11-5, 11-9 victory was over the England junior no. 16, Rachel Baker (Lancashire), who had a close 11-8 in the fifth game semi-final triumph against Kirsty Wilson, of the Howard Club, Gillingham, Kent.

Unfortunately, after being unbeaten in her open junior girls' singles group, a tiring Yolanda lost 12-10 in the fifth game to the England no. 10 cadet and no.27 junior, Evangeline Collier (Essex), who she had beaten in straight games in the banded singles. The Weald TTC girl saved 4 match points at 6-10 down, but made unforced errors on the last 2 points to lose.

Of the Liverpool results, Ken Muhr, the Weald and South East regional coach said:
“Lewis and Yolanda have consolidated their position as top England cadets, and it is not easy winning when you are expected to. However, a few bad results at Liverpool might mean that they drop a little in the England junior rankings, whereas if they are going to further their international careers I think they should be aiming to get into the England junior top 10 while they are still cadets.”

Lewis and Yolanda will be attending England Junior Development Squad training at Lilleshall National Sports Centre, Shropshire this weekend. Meanwhile, there will be South East Region Cadet Squad training at Angley School, Cranbrook on Saturday.