

LEWIS GRAY NOT OUTSHONE @ SENIOR NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Playing in their first English Senior National Championships at Ponds Forge International Sports Centre last Friday and Saturday, Lewis Gray, 15, and Yolanda King, 14, of the Weald TT Club based at Angley School, Cranbrook, were not outshone by more experienced opponents and picked up some good wins.

Gray, from Benenden and a pupil of Angley School, had a tough under 21 men's singles group. He comfortably beat Craig Feargrieve (Nottinghamshire) 11-8, 11-2, 8-11, 11-4 but then faced England no.4 senior, Tim Yarnell (Northamptonshire). However, the first two games were close and he had chances of picking off some difficult winners in them, before bowing out 9-11, 7-11, 4-11.

In the senior men's singles groups, he had greater luck, beating Zayd Mauthoor (Essex) 11-4, 11-7, 15-13, and then recording an excellent 11-3, 14-12, 11-8 success over the England no.63, Chris Lewis (Surrey) to qualify for the knockout. Gray's England senior ranking of no.521 is artificially low as he has played in few senior open competitions, so his success over Chris Lewis will increase his ranking considerably.

Gray then met former England no.1 junior and top 10 senior, Matt Kenny (Yorkshire), now ranked no.23, in the first round. In the best of 7 games, Gray fell 8-11, 10-12, 3-11, 6-11. However, there were a lot of good rallies, Kenny taking the best one at 9-10 in the second game. Weald TTC coach Martin Chinn commented, "Lewis played very well, but he is not used to getting his best shots back just as hard!"

Yolanda King from Hastings and a pupil of St Bedes School, Hastings, also had a very tough under 21 women's singles group. Ranked no.10 England junior girl, she led the no.9 junior Natalie Slater (Staffordshire) 8-5 in the fifth game, when Slater's coach called a 'time out' and King did not win another point, going down 9-11, 11-8, 14-12, 6-11, 8-11. She then went close to the no.4 seed and England senior no.12 Sarra Wang (Essex), finally succumbing 7-11, 11-4, 9-11, 10-12 after taking the second game.

Yolanda fared better in the senior women's singles groups. After overcoming veteran Val Murdoch (Bedfordshire), 10-12, 11-9, 11-4, 11-5, she kept her nerve in a nail-biting 12-10, 13-15, 14-12, 9-11, 11-8 success over the England no.20 woman Sarah Perks (Nottinghamshire) to qualify for the knockout. Then in the first round she took a 2 games to 1 lead against the England no.13 woman, Joanna Roberts (Yorkshire), before going down 11-5, 3-11, 11-9, 8-11, 7-11, 5-11. Coach Martin Chinn considered that, "Yolanda did relatively well, but with just a bit more consistency could have beaten Slater, Wang and Roberts. She had a real opportunity".

The Weald pair of Gray and King put in their best performance in the mixed doubles. In the first round they had a good 11-4, 11-9, 7-11, 10-12, 11-9 result against Chris

Marlow (Hertfordshire) England no.10 woman Sanya Clements (Dorset). They surpassed themselves when they took the first game over top seeds Paul Drinkhall (Cleveland) and Jo Parker (Surrey), and were 9 all in the third, ultimately going down 11-9, 4-11, 9-11, 7-11. Not only did Drinkhall and Parker go on to take the mixed doubles title, but individually they took the men's and women's singles crowns as well!

Partnered by his father Diccon, Lewis also met the third seeds Gavin Evans (Buckinghamshire) and Liam Pitchford (Derbyshire) in the second round of the men's doubles, going to deuce in both the second and third games before bowing out 5-11, 13-15, 12-14.

Weald head coach Ken Muhr considered that the National Senior Championships was a good experience for the youngsters. "Lewis and Yolanda will have realised that they were not outclassed and that the gap between the best juniors and seniors is bridgeable."