

## **LEWIS GRAY UNDAUNTED AGAINST TOP EURO OPPOSITION IN BRATISLAVA**

Fielded by England against the best in Europe, Benenden's Lewis Gray put up a good fight without very many big results to show for it at the Slovakian Cadet (under 15) Open Championships in Bratislava last (long) weekend.

The Angley School, Cranbrook pupil and Weald Table Tennis Club member gave his best performance in cadet boys' doubles, when partnered by lefthander Zack Zilesnick (Middlesex) they reached the third round. After a comfortable 11-8, 10-12, 11-4, 11-7 first round win over Slovakian pair Emmanuel Horvat and Peter Turcek, they had a sensational 7-11, 12-10, 11-5, 10-12, 14-12 victory against Luka Fucec and Nikola Hovat (Croatia), seeded in the top 4, taking the fifth game from 3-9 down. Fucec was the top seed in cadet boys' singles. However, the English boys then lost closely, 4-11, 11-6, 8-11, 8-11 to the Danish duo Sebastian Haack and Nicky Marx in the third round.

Representing England 'A' against Belgium 'A' in the team event, Gray, 14, started strongly against Emilien Van Rossomme, who was seeded in the top 4 in the singles and was to reach the quarter-finals. Lewis stormed away to take the first game 11-3 and to lead 7-2 in the second. Unfortunately he then played too safely and Van Rossomme won 9 consecutive points to take the game 11-7. Lewis then lost a bit of confidence to go down 11-3, 7-11, 7-11, 6-11. With Lewis and Zak Nilesnick losing the doubles, and Zilesnick dropping both his singles, England lost the match 3-1.

Opposed by Czech Republic 'B', England won 3-1, Lewis contributing to the doubles success, but losing his one singles. Then England played Germany 'B', Lewis performing well to beat Dang Qiu 11-8, 9-11, 11-6, 11-7 and with Zak Nilesnick winning the doubles over Qiu and Florian Schreiner. However, Zilesnick lost to both Qiu and Schreiner in his singles, leaving Lewis to face Schreiner with the match score at 2-2. Despite fighting hard Lewis went down 6-11, 11-13, 8-11, and after this 3-2 match result the German second team went on winning to reach the team event final!

Probably Lewis's biggest disappointment was in the boy's singles group where he lost in straight games to Nicky Marx (Denmark) and Koen Hageracts (Netherlands), both strong players. He recorded a walkover against the absent Katis of Serbia.

England captain Paul Whiting was never-the-less upbeat: "Lewis played exceptionally well in the doubles. In his other matches he put up good fighting performances against highly rated European cadets and did not disgrace himself. He was not overawed. England should have beaten Germany 'B' in the team event and gone further, and it was not Lewis's fault that they did not."

Meanwhile less experienced Weald TT Club, Cranbrook, members put up a good showing in National Junior and Cadet League matches at the Byng Hall Club, St John's CE Primary School, Tunbridge Wells, finishing the weekend second in both leagues.

The Weald junior (under 18) side won 2 matches, drew 1, and lost 2, to finish behind Londoners Globe Academy. Lefthanders George Cox and Joe Watson, both now at Cranbrook School but who began playing table tennis while pupils at Angley School where the club is based, won respectively 7 out of 10 (70%) and 4 out of 10 (40%) of their matches, while Lewis Gray's sister Daniella, currently a pupil at Angley, also won 4 out of 10.

Although unbeaten in the National Cadet League with 3 wins, the Weald Club finished behind Battle 'A', who they beat 5-4, owing to an inferior games average. Dan Lawrence from Tonbridge was their star, recording an unbeaten 9 out of 9 100% average. Angley School pupil Aaron Serfaty won 6 out of 9, and Jamie Pryor, also from Angley School, won 3 out of 9.

Weald Club head coach Ken Muhr commented: "It is very pleasing that we now have a cohort of mainly local youngsters who, with good parental support, are starting to do well. Although England players Lewis Gray and Yolanda King have been excellent role models, in recent years there have been only isolated local kids who have played seriously and they largely have not stuck it. Now with a group coming on together, I am confident that they will carry on developing together. Much credit for this must go to Angley School coach Martin Jezisek."