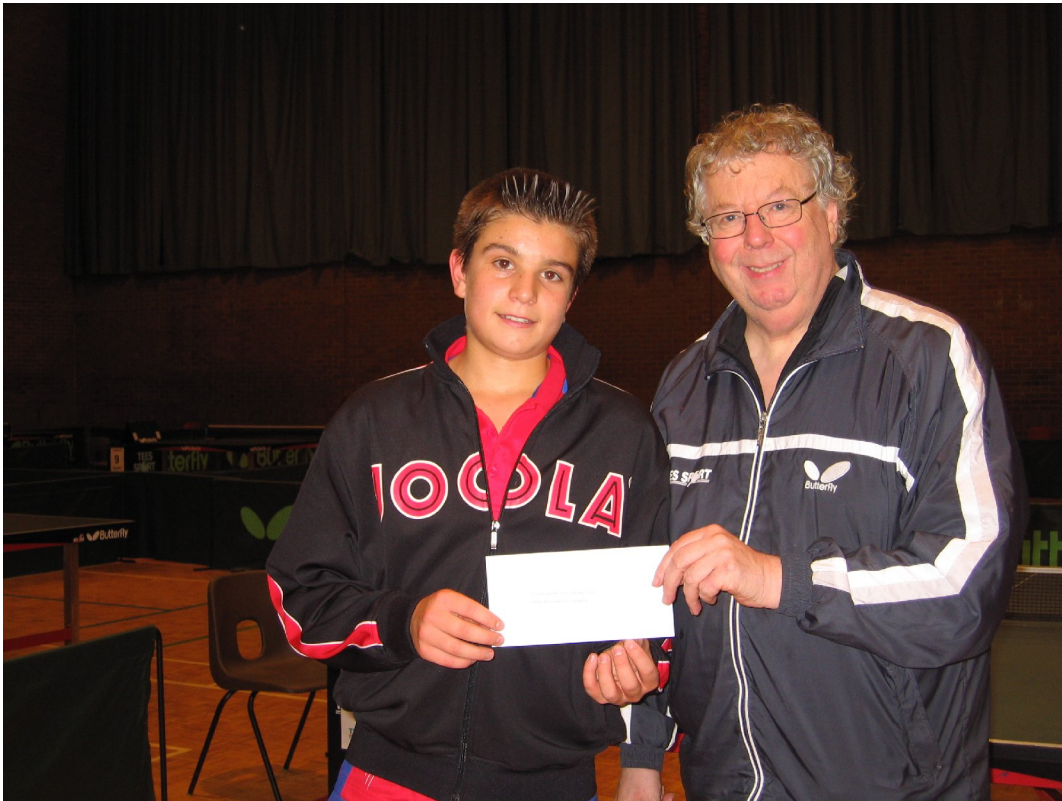


LEWIS GRAY LIFTS TITLES FOR ENGLAND AT STOCKTON JUNIOR OPEN CHAMPIONSHIPS



14 year olds Lewis Gray and Yolanda King, of the Weald TT Club, Angley School, Cranbrook, won 3 titles between them (2 for Gray and 1 for King) while representing England at the Stockton on Tees Junior 4 Star Championships at Thornaby Pavilion over the weekend.

Playing for England 'A' with the new England no.1 Zak Zilesnick (Middlesex), Angley School pupil Lewis Gray from Benenden, now England no.2, was unbeaten in winning the cadet (under 15s) boys' team event, with comfortable 3-0 results over Ireland (2nd round), Eastpoint (quarter-finals), The Weald (semi-finals), and Redlands Bats (final), who fielded the England nos. 4 and 5, Ping Ho (Middlesex) and Sam Walker (Nottinghamshire) respectively. The Weald Club, represented by Helshan Weerasinghe (Dartford) and Ross Wilson (Isle of Sheppey), who both train with the South East Regional Squad at Angley School, had good 3-0 wins over Team Peniel and Greenhouse 1 to reach the semi-finals.

However, in the perfect response to having recently dropped to no.2 in the England rankings, Gray took a second title in lifting the cadet boys' singles, turning on strong two-wing topspin attack to closely defeat Sam Walker for a second time, 9-11, 11-8,

11-9, 13-11 in the semi-finals, and then Ping Ho (conqueror of Zak Zilesnick) 7-11, 11-3, 11-5. 11-7 in the final.

Having put out Sean Doherty (Scotland) over 5 games in the junior (under 18) boys' singles 3rd round, Gray then lost closely 9-11, 10-12, 11-6, 8-11 to the England junior no.11, Sean Cullen (Derbyshire) in the quarter-finals, but the result might have been different if he had not let go a 10-6 lead in the second game. About Gray's overall performance in Stockton, Weald Club coach Ken Muhr said, "Lewis has the great competitive ability to keep on overcoming relative disappointments and come back even stronger."

Yolanda King from Hastings, and a pupil of St Bedes School near Hailsham, played with Lucy Davidson (Derbyshire) to win the Cadet girls' team event for England, with a 3-0 final victory over Wales, represented by Megan and Angharad Phillips. Their hardest match was in the semi-finals against local Cleveland side Ormesby, who they beat 3-1 with the loss of the doubles. However both England girls were severely tested by Chloe Whyte. King easily won the first two games against the Cleveland girl, but then dropped the next two and come back from behind to win 11-9 in the fifth game.

King, England ranked 3, also reached the final of the cadet girls' singles where she lost in five games, 2-11, 11-4, 11-7, 6-11, 6-11, to her team-mate the England no.2, Lucy Davidson. In the semi-finals she was given a scare by the fierce-hitting diminutive pen-holder Tin Tin Ho (Middlesex), before pulling through 6-11, 11-9, 8-11, 11-7, 11-9.

Yolanda King had great chances of putting out the England no.9, Natalie Slater (Staffordshire) in the last 16 of the junior girls singles. At one game all, King led the 3rd game 10-9 when Slater's coach called 'Time Out'. When the players went back to play, King netted a serve short to her forehand and eventually lost that game 12-14. However, she comfortably won the fourth game and led 4-2 in the fifth. Then she lost her concentration and Slater took 8 consecutive points. However, King was not finished at 4-10, and saved 4 match points with aggressive attacking play before finally succumbing 6-11, 11-7, 12-14, 11-4, 8-11.

Her father Steve King commented; "After suffering back problems a week ago, I think Yolanda did quite well in winning one event and getting to the final of another."

Dartford's Helshan Weerasinghe claimed the mini cadet (under 13) boys' singles trophy with a nerve-wracking 11-8, 7-11, 11-9, 4-11, 11-9 triumph over the top seed Jared Patel (Essex).

Weald TT Club player George Cox, a pupil of Cranbrook School, makes his debut for Kent 2 Cadet team in county championship matches against Sussex 3, Sussex 2, Surrey 2 and Northamptonshire at Chichester this weekend.