

## **KIRSTY WILSON JUST MISSES TEAM BRONZE @ UK SCHOOL GAMES**

Yolanda King of the Weald Table Tennis Club, based at Angley School, Cranbrook, and Kirsty Wilson of the Howard Table Tennis Club, Howard School, Gillingham, were unlucky not to obtain a bronze medal while representing the South East girls in the United Kingdom Schools Games at Bath University from 29<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> August. Last year Kirsty was a member of the gold medal winning South East team, but this year the squad was weakened by the non availability of junior international Rachel Jamieson (Essex), who reputedly has given up following her non-selection for the European Youth Championships.

The South East began their campaign in the groups, with a comfortable 6-1 victory over Northern Ireland, Yolanda winning her two singles and Kirsty contributing to a doubles success. Unfortunately they then went down 4-3 to the North East. In possibly the key clash, Yolanda, ranked England no.12 junior girl, had an excellent chance against the England no.2, Karina Le Fevre (Cleveland), who she has beaten before, leading by 2 games to 1 before fading, 5-11, 11-8, 11-6, 7-11, 2-11. She and Sarra Wang (Essex) lost a close doubles, but Yolanda finished by beating Chloe Whyte (Cleveland) in 3 tight games, 11-9, 12-10, 12-10.

Then the South East beat Scotland 5-2 to qualify for the semi-finals, Yolanda contributing two singles. After nervously losing her first singles match of the competition to Natasha Milliken, Kirsty then played much better to overcome Roxanna Milne 11-9, 11-6, 9-11, 11-6.

In the semi-finals the South East met the very powerful East Midlands side, who went on to take the gold medal. However, although beaten 4-1, the South East girls played very well. In an exciting encounter, full of long rallies, Yolanda had the audience on the edge of their seats when leading the England junior no.1, Emma Vickers (Derbyshire) by 2 games to 1, and 6-6 in the 4<sup>th</sup> game, before Vickers pulled through 11-4, 8-11, 9-11, 11-7, 11-7. Kirsty, ranked no. 17 in England, found top form in defeating the no.9, Natalie Slater (Staffordshire), 11-6, 12-10, 6-11, 8-11, 11-8 to record her side's only win, the chanting of the opposition only serving to fire her up!

The South East then faced the North East for a second time, in the play-offs for the bronze medal, but sadly lost for a second time 4-3. Yolanda went into top gear, beginning by avenging her earlier defeat from Karina Le Fevre, with a 11-4, 11-9, 8-11, 11-9 success, the difference being that she served tighter, made fewer unforced errors, and top-spun stronger so that Le Fevre could not control her heavy spin. (This was the only loss that Le Fevre suffered in the UK Schools Games – she was later to win the gold medal in the girls' singles). And despite losing concentration in the 3<sup>rd</sup> game, Yolanda overwhelmed Chloe Whyte 11-1, 11-8, 5-11, 11-6. Unfortunately Yolanda and Sarra Wang again lost the doubles, and Hayley Potts (Hertfordshire),

who replaced the on-form Kirsty Wilson, lost both her singles, including unexpectedly to Whyte, and Sarra Wang won one singles only.

Kirsty commented, "It was very tense, there was very good team spirit, and we all supported each other while we tried to win."

Yolanda, the English under 14 schools champion who has just left Claremont School, St Leonards, came second in her girls' singles group to qualify for the knockout, having a good win over Jordyn Layfield (Cheshire) but being well beaten by Emma Vickers, who pinned her on her backhand with mixed length blocking.

However Yolanda had a great opportunity of beating the England no. 7, the defensive Melissa Wright (Yorkshire), in the first round. She dominated throughout most of an excellent match and led in all 5 games, but when Yolanda was 2 games to 1, and 7-4 up, Wright called 'time-out' and won the next 7 points! And in the deciding game Yolanda was 8-6 up but lost the last 5 points, to go down 11-5, 12-14, 11-8, 7-11, 8-11.

Kirsty had mixed fortune in her group. She had a really good match with the England no. 8, Hannah Hicks (Hampshire), before narrowly losing 9-11, 9-11, 8-11, and edged home 11-6, 8-11, 11-5, 11-13, 12-10 against Chloe Whyte. However, she was disappointed to lose in close games to Fiona Dennett (Cheshire), who is nevertheless highly rated, being the England no. 12 junior last season and now out of junior age.

Yolanda King and her Weald Table Tennis Club colleague, Lewis Gray from Benenden and a pupil of Angley School, Cranbrook, have both been selected for England Youth Development Squad training at Lilleshall National Sports Centre on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> September. Helshan Weerasinghe from Dartford has also been selected for this camp.