

LEWIS GRAY BOUNCES BACK TO LIFT NATIONAL SCHOOLS TITLE

16 year old Angley School, Cranbrook pupil Lewis Gray, a member of the Weald TT Club based at the school, swept aside recent disappointments to comfortably win the under 16 boys' singles at the English Schools TT Association's National Individual Championships at The Dome, Doncaster on Saturday.

It contrast to his edginess at The English National Junior Masters the previous weekend, it was a confident and composed performance by the Benenden boy. In the quarter-finals he beat the difficult Jarred Knowles (Berkshire) in straight games 11-9, 11-9, 11-7, and followed up with a semi-final 11-5, 9-11, 11-5, 11-4 win over another Berkshire boy, Liam McTiernan, in which he dropped his only game of the whole competition.

However, Lewis saved his best form for the final when he totally dominated his long standing rival Zak Zilesnick (Middlesex) with tight serves and returns and controlled power play, to come out a 11-7, 11-5, 11-5 victor. To be fair to Zilesnick, he had been stranded abroad owing to volcanic ash and had not been able to properly prepare for the event, but that did not detract from the class of Gray's triumph.

Gray's delighted father, Diccon said, "A great thing about Lewis is that he is always able to bounce back strong from the biggest disappointments. Now that his confidence is flying, I hope that he can get some good results in the Spanish Youth Open in Girona next week."

Gray's colleague at the SE Performance Centre, Cranbrook, Helshan Weerasinghe, a pupil of the Judd School, Tonbridge, won the under 13 boys' singles with a convincing 11-6, 11-7, 11-5 final success over Tyrone Wells (Middlesex). His semi-final match against Miles Chan (Northamptonshire) had been tougher, Helshan coming through 8-11, 11-9, 12-10, 11-8. Performance Centre members Jack and Josh Bennett, from Polegate, East Sussex, reached the quarter-finals of the under 13 and under 11 boys' singles respectively.

Lewis Gray's sister Daniella, also a pupil of Angley School, got to the last 16 of the under 16 girls, before falling in straight games to Jessica Dawson (Cleveland). Unfortunately another Weald Club member, Yolanda King, had to withdraw owing to her thigh injury.

In recent years one of the strongest sides, the South East Regional Cadet (under 15) Squad, which trains at Angley School, Cranbrook, came 7th in the **National Regional Squad championships at The Dome, Doncaster** on Sunday. The main difference is that although the boys did well, the SE were relatively weak in the girls' section

which was once a regional strength. Although the region could have put out a stronger team, they stuck to the policy of selecting only players who had attended squad training.

The SE started proceedings with a slightly disappointing 7-5 loss to the North West, Daniel Barna (Sussex) suffering a crucial unexpected to Matthew McCormick (Cheshire) in the under 15 boys. However, Barna picked himself up and the squad performed at least to expectations in drawing 6-6 with the Eastern and Yorkshire regions and going down 8-4 to defending champions East Midlands. Then playing for places 7 and 8, the SE drew 6-6 with the North East, but got the verdict on games average.

Helshan Weerasinghe (Dartford), Weald Club member Daniel Lawrence from Tonbridge and Luke Savill, from the Larkfield Club, Aylesford were the stars for the SE, all being unbeaten with 5 wins. Helshan, playing no.1 in the under 15 boys, had a fine 12-10, 10-12, 11-5, 11-6 win over Jared Patel (Essex), who at England no.5 cadet is ranked one place below him, in the match against the East. Playing at no.2 in the under 11 boys, Luke never looked seriously threatened.

Dan Lawrence, the SE no.2 under 13 boy, won all his 5 sets, including an excellent straight games success over the England no.3 under 13, Miles Chan (Northamptonshire), representing East Midlands. In the same category the SE no.1 Jack Bennett (Sussex) was unsurprisingly beaten by the England no.2 Sam Mabey (Northamptonshire), but being very unlucky to suffer his only other loss to John Bousefield (Cleveland) of the North East, after leading 10-6 in the fifth game. His brother Josh, the SE no.1 in the under 11 boys had 4 good wins, losing in 5 games only to Tom Jarvis (Lincolnshire) of the East Midlands. And after losing his first 2 clashes, Daniel Barna had 3 good wins as SE no.2 under 15 boy.

Daniella Gray gave a good account of herself against higher ranked under 15 girl opponents, including doing much better against Jessica Dawson than the previous day, without winning a match. However, the SE no.2, Clare Harvey from the Meophan Club, Gravesend won the only two girls' singles for the squad which were crucial in the 6-6 draws with Eastern Region and the North East, the draw with Yorkshire being entirely down to the boys.

Mention should also be made of Joelle Bennett, at 6 years old making her competitive debut for the under 11 girls, and the Polegate based Bennett family making up a quarter of the SE squad! The other girls representing the SE, were Kate Cheer (under 11 girls) and Holly Holder, both from Sussex and Evie Foster (under 13 girls) from the Chatham Club, Kent.