

TOUGH TIME FOR WEALD'S LEWIS GRAY AT SPANISH YOUTH CHAMPS

16 year old Lewis Gray, a member of Angley School, Cranbrook based Weald TT Club, found it very tough going whilst representing England in the Spanish Youth Championships in Girona last week, being unable to win any singles matches against strong competition.

Playing for England B against Germany B, the Benenden boy and Angley School pupil lost in straight games, 8-11, 6-11, 8-11 to the European no.26 junior (under 18), Arne Holter. With Sean Cullen (Derbyshire) he lost the doubles 7-11, 6-11, 11-13 to Holter and Christoph Schmidt, England going down in the match 3-0.

Then playing Italy B, Gray had great chances when he led Federico Baciocchi, ranked 91 in Europe, 8-6 in the fifth game, before dropping the last 5 points to succumb 8-11, 11-5, 8-11, 12-10, 8-11. Lewis lost his other singles in straight games to Damiano Seretti, and the doubles with Sean Cullen, 11-7, 7-11, 5-11, 9-11, with England losing the match 3-1.

In the boys' singles groups, Gray had chances to take a 2 games to 1 lead against Irish star Paul McCreery, the European no. 66, when he was up 9-8 in the 3rd game, but he then fell 4-11, 11-8, 10-12, 4-11. Lewis lost his other match in straight games to the European no.56, Dorian Nicolle (France).

Lewis experienced his only success in the boys' doubles, when with partner Sean Cullen they easily defeated Russians Lenar Shakirov and Vladislav Streshnev in the first round, before being knocked out in straight games by the Egyptian/Polish combination of Omar Bedair and Artur Bialek.

An unfazed Lewis Gray said, "All of my opponents were higher ranked than me. I could win points when I got into counter-hitting rallies, but their serves and touch returns of serve were better than mine, and I couldn't stop them from attacking first. I need to practice to improve my serves and returns."

Judd School, Tonbridge pupil, Helshan Weerasinghe, who trains at the SE Performance Centre at Angley School, Cranbrook, had a more successful competition. Playing for the England cadet (under 15s) team against Portugal B, he comfortably won his singles and the doubles with Sam Walker (Nottinghamshire) to record a 3-0 win. They then had an excellent 3-0 result over the highly rated Swedes, Helshan overcoming the European no.37 Carl Ahlander in 5 games, 8-11, 11-8, 11-9, 9-11, 11-8 and again taking the doubles with Walker.

However, England were then put out 3-0 by Belgium, though Helshan went close, 8-11, 8-11, 11-13 against Martin Allegro, and with Walker lost a tight doubles, 11-9, 7-11, 6-11, 10-12. In his singles group, Weerasinghe had a 10-12, 11-6, 11-9, 11-0

triumph over the European no. 52, Andreas Levenko (Austria), but was beaten in straight games by Roman Rezetkam (Slovakia), the European no. 28. He was put out in the first round knockout 11-9, 4-11, 13-15, 8-11 by Sweden's Benny Feng.