

KP HARD BAT

On May 16th, the hard bat competition was resurrected this year after at least five years of not being held. It was again included in the program of competitions in the annual Knighton Park Club Championships. The weapon of choice was the sandpaper variant of the hard bat—basically, just a wood bat with some sand embedded into it!

This type of bat brings a unique challenge to players solely used to rubber bats. Firstly, as players arrived for the event, the sound of shots was commented on—a unique and very wooden sound: plink plink plink plink! Players were instantly confused when warming up, and never was a warm-up so needed! Normally technically decent-looking shots were going into the net or long, and floating and shimmering in unusual ways. Normal spins were not happening, especially on the forehand topspin and for those with normally devilish spin serves. Backhand drives and pushes seemed to behave a little more normally. This left the players having to reassess their usual strengths and approaches as the competition started.

There are some variants to note in the match play for sandpaper matches. It is first to 15 points, and if the score is 14-14, the next point wins. Best of 3 games. There is also the double point orange ball which can be taken when a player is serving, once a game, and if that server wins that point, they get 2 points. Additionally, at the end of each game of 15, the players lay down their bat and leave it at that end for their opponent to use next.

With nine players entering the competition, two groups were formed: one of five and one of four.

The group of five was a very tough draw, with previous winners of the hard bat competitions, Shirley and Karen, along with Dave, Simon, and Robert. This group proved to be very tight, with Shirley, Dave, and Karen all beating each other and coming out with three wins and one loss each. Having also won and lost 2-0 in all their matches, they had identical games won and lost records. So, this went to points difference, and the three-way tie was separated by this, with Karen +47, Dave +31, and Shirley +23. Shirley was unfortunate not to qualify, having recorded a great win against Karen. Simon picked up a win in the group against Robert, including a 15-14 game.

The group of four consisted of both Chrises, Mike, and Rod. Chris PS managed to score a straight-games win over league teammate Chris H—something unusual with normal bats! Rod and Mike had a real ding-dong match, with Rod finally winning in three. After that, both Chrises won their remaining matches in straight games to get through to the semifinals.

In the semifinals, group winner Karen played Chris H, and group winner Chris PS played league teammate Dave. Karen seemed to have increasingly found her form and got past Chris 2-0. Chris PS came back from a game down to defeat Dave in three.

Enjoying the format, Dave and Chris H played an unplanned third-place playoff, which Dave took 2-0.

So, the final of Karen against Chris PS. Most of the first game was close, with Chris winning his double point ball to stay in touch, but Karen took it 15-11. By now, Karen's play was starting to reflect some of her normal bat TT play: very consistent, great placement, and strong winning hits on either wing on any fractionally loose ball. She took the second game 15-9 and the trophy!

Thanks to the competitors on the evening: Shirley Pickering, Karen Smith, Robert Geary, Simon Aldis, Mike Smith, Rod Pickering, Dave Mountain, Chris Hatton, Chris Parmar-Saville (also tournament organizer).

Shirley presented the hard bat trophy to Karen, keeping up the ladies' great track record in this competition.

Overall, for the players, it was positively received, an interesting challenge, and fun. We hope to hold it again next year and get some more members along!

Chris Parmar-Saville