

## **Squash and Racketball Finals Day**

For the past few months members have been battling hard for the right to appear at the prestigious Berkhamsted Squash and Racketball Finals day on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2013. And after many epic battles, hard fought victories and painful defeats the scene was set and the big day was upon us.

Encouraged by the promise of some great action, an afternoon of drinking and a free curry, the event was well supported and a big crowd turned out to support the finalists.

Below is the story of the day and a run-down of the results!

### **Racketball 50 +**

First up on court 3 was the Racketball 50+ final featuring “wiley” Jan Cowper and an unseasonably sun-tanned Kevin Spratt. A good start by Jan saw him take the first game but Kev fought back well to take the second to level things up at 1-1. The game hung in the balance going into the third game but Jan showed again why he has been playing at the top level for so long, and although the dogged Mr Spratt fought hard he couldn’t just win the points that mattered (i.e. game point) and Jan went on to win the next two to close out a 3-1 victory.

**Result: Jan Cowper beat Kevin Spratt 3v1**

### **Racketball Handicap**

One of the days most hotly anticipated finals saw Kevin Thorpe (-27) take on Andrew “Braveheart” Bryson (+2) on court 2. For Kev it was the start of a long day as he was aiming to win an unprecedented 3 events in a marathon challenge that would see him playing in all finals on court 2, christened the “Kevin Thorpe Court” for the day. The first game was close with “Braveheart” Bryson sensing *FREEDOMMMMM* with 3 game points at 14-12. But the match ended much like the film; with Braveheart getting a savage beating from a ruthless Englishman whilst screaming out a stream of incoherent swear words in a comical Scottish accent.

**Result: Kevin Thorpe (-27) beat Andrew Bryson (+2) 3v0**

### **Racketball Plate**

An interesting match-up was next on court 3 as tournament organiser Kristian Stentoft took on chairman James Deacon. Kristian brought a big crowd of supporters along and there was a partisan atmosphere on court 3 as the game started, in fact you couldn’t help but feel a little sorry for James as his sumptuous winning shots were met by an almost deafening wall of silence from the Dane-loving gallery. However, James has never been fazed by his lack of popularity and went on to win a tight first game which turned out to be the key to the match; Kristian never recovered and the chairman went on to score a comfortable 3-0 victory.

**Result: James Deacon beat Kristian Stentoft 3v0**

### **Squash Handicap**

The squash handicap saw Kev Thorpe (-30) entering part 2 of his epic challenge. His challenger Richard Bayliss (-10) would surely have fancied his chances with a 20 point head start, however it wasn’t to be; the nerves were clear to

see on tournament novice Richards face, and Kev again showed his ruthless streak to storm to a 3-0 victory. Kev was looking good but surely his efforts in winning both of the handicap events would have become his ultimate handicap when it came to the third and final part of his challenge?

**Result: Kevin Thorpe (-30) beat Richard Bayliss (-10) 3v0**

### **Racketball Open**

The Racketball Final saw racketball novice but many times squash champion Ali Coker take on the more experienced and serial tournament runner up Mark "Half Pint" Shattock. Both players were looking to complete a task that most people thought impossible - Coker was looking to score a racketball & squash double, whilst Shattock was looking to get his hands on a winner's pint glass. After the first two games the score stood at 1-1 and both games were a little nervy and full of unforced errors - Ali seemed to have trouble with the length of his racket (something Mark never has problems with) whilst Shattock seemed to have lost the touch that normally came as natural to a man famed for having the limpest of wrists. The next three games saw a vast improvement in the standard with some tense and thrilling rallies, Shattock took the 3<sup>rd</sup> game and Coker the 4<sup>th</sup>, and in the 5<sup>th</sup> the players were exchanging points like two heavyweight boxers exchanging punches in the final round of a title fight....a monster rally saw Coker draw level at 7-7 and after that Mark never really recovered – Ali went on to mop up what was left of the match to take a 3-2 victory and the title of Club Racketball Open Champion! With just an hour to recover to compete in the Squash Open Final though, had Ali bitten off more than he could chew....?

**Result: Ali Coker beat Mark Shattock 3v2**

### **Squash Vets Open**

Next up on court 1 was the squash vets open final featuring reigning champion and hot favourite Richard Carr taking on past winner Grant Kleiner. Although Grant battled hard and ran faster than he had done for at least 20 years, his infamous winning shots just didn't come off - Richard was too strong and defended his title in style with a 3-0 victory.

**Result: Richard Carr beat Grant Kleiner 3v0**

### **Squash Plate**

The last match on court 2 was to be a battle of the fittest as Kev Thorpe looked to complete a historic treble and Mark Shattock had a final chance to experience a drink from a full pint tankard. Kev had already clocked up an astonishing 231 points in winning the handicap finals, but Mark had lost in the gruelling 5 set Racketball Open Final earlier in the day. A lively start saw Shattock take the opening game to inflict Thorpe's first game loss of the whole day, however Kev didn't allow that to infect his spirit and he kept up with his relentless barrage of pace, retrieval and appalling drop-shots....at 4-4 in the second Shattock "hit the wall" as his earlier effort suddenly caught up with his 40 year old legs; with stars in his eyes he quickly lost the second without further troubling the scorer as his meagre efforts were quickly dismissed by the seemingly fresh Thorpe. One-all it stood. The break after the second game saw Shattock attempt to gain some energy by wolfing down a Mars Bar, a bottle of lucozade and a quick roll-up but it had little effect as the Thorpe brushed him aside to take the 3<sup>rd</sup> in barely five minutes. The 4<sup>th</sup> saw a bit more fight but "Super" Kev was not to be denied and with some accurate hitting & seemingly boundless energy he was simply too good for the man who seems destined to live a life full of half-pints and "what ifs". Kev wrapped the match up in 4 to claim a truly magnificent treble.

## **Result: Kevin Thorpe beat Mark Shattock 3v1**

### **Squash Open**

The final match of the night, and indeed the main event, was the Squash Open Final between reigning champ Josh Ryan and multiple tournament winner Ali Coker (known as the “Federer of Berkhamsted Squash”). The viewing gallery was packed to bursting as the finalists took to court, but before the action got underway tournament organiser Kristian Stentoft asked the spectators and players alike to join him in a minutes applause in remembrance & celebration of Harry Faulkner – the enthusiastic applause proved both an emotional and inspiring moment for all - and with the adrenaline pumping the match began....from the start the pace and standard of the game was impressively high and befitting of a match of this magnitude. Josh won the first and looked like he was going to go two-up, especially as Ali developed some painful leg cramps towards the end of the second game.....however Ali hasn't played at this level for so long without learning how to get out of a difficult situation or two, and somehow he managed to level up at 1-1 with some inspired winning shots. After this game he asked for someone to rub his legs to help with the cramps, and like a kid on Christmas morning Mark Shattock rushed to the front of the queue to volunteer....his limp wrists must have helped as Ali seemed much more comfortable at the start of the 3<sup>rd</sup> game, however Josh's incredible pace around the court proved both spectacular to watch and near on impossible to keep up with as the young man powered through to take the 3<sup>rd</sup>. A frustrated Ali left court looking like he knew full well the grandeur of the mighty task that lay ahead of him, however the standard of the squash went up yet another level in the 4<sup>th</sup> as a determined and focussed Coker played some incredible shots to win the game and take the match into a 5<sup>th</sup> and deciding match – this despite Ali getting more cramps both in his legs and, more worryingly, in his hands too; the hard racketball match earlier in the day was obviously taking its toll. The 5<sup>th</sup> game proved an exciting and extremely tense affair (I don't think marker Gill Trimmer could have paid anyone to swap places with her) and the appreciative crowd were treated to some more sublime action from both players. At first Ali looked like he was going to take it as he quickly went into a 5-1 lead, but in the end (and after nearly 90 minutes) Josh's pace proved too much and he took the 5<sup>th</sup> game 15-11 to become the Squash Open Champion for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year on the trot. What a match!

## **Result: Josh Ryan beat Ali Coker 3v2**

Afterwards all players and spectators met in the bar to drink and discuss the days events, as well as enjoy the fantastic food served up for all. There was then a prize giving ceremony/stand-up comedy routine delivered by James, some words of appreciation from tournament organiser Kristian, and Jan Cowper was also kind enough to thank Kristian, James and Mark for all their hard work. Even ex-member and past champion Scotty Rickard managed to get a few comical words in via an email sent to Kristian, much to the amusement of the increasingly lubricated crowd.

A fantastic day was had by all, and we'd like to thank all those who took part in the competition, those who played on the day, and everyone who came down to watch & support. Also we thank Berkhamsted Sports, Adam Fuller, Tring Brewery & Eat Natural for providing prizes for winners.

Next year we hope finals day will be even bigger so watch out for news on this towards the end of the year!

**PIC 1 – Open Champion Josh Ryan Collects his award from Chairman James Deacon**



**PIC 2 – Racketball Open Champ & Squash Open Runner-Up Ali Coker collects his awards**





**PIC 3 – Kevin Thorpe spent much of the prize giving on the podium!**



**PIC 4 – Tournament Organiser Kristian Stentoft collects his award from Chairman Mark Shattock**





**PIC 5 – Racketball Handicap Runner-Up Andrew Bryson looks proud to have a trophy in each hand**



**PIC 6 – Jan Cowper collects his 50+ Racketball Winners Award.....**





**PIC 7 - ...but a hug and a glass for runner-up Kev Spratt soon put a smile back on his face!**



**PIC 8 – Squash Handicap Runner-Up Richard Bayliss vowed to go one better next year**





**PIC 9 – Squash Vets Champion Richard Carr has rarely been seen happier!**



**PIC 10 – “There is no shame in coming second” – the Chairmen debate Marks suggested new club motto.**

