

God works in mysterious ways!

By Geoff Ware.

It was a most unusual Indian Summer October Saturday morning as I pulled into Portchester School's car park set in the northern area of beautiful Bournemouth. Stepping out of the car carrying with me the mobile podium I had built for use at tournaments, my attention was drawn to a bright shining light that was glowing in the clear blue sky above the sports hall. How strange I thought, was this "a sign" of how the day might unfold?

Please take a pew and read on.

As I entered the magnificent newly built "Roy Moore" Sports hall I feasted my eyes on 12 brand new butterfly table tennis tables with a multitude of joola court surrounds that had been set up for the Dorset Closed and Ranking Tournament, which looked so impressive. There were in the region of eighty disciples of ping pong of all ages and playing standards that had made the effort to follow the star from all areas of the county to enjoy a competitive day's play. I bumped into Lee Devaney a local table tennis Ambassador of the sport for many years who commented "Morning Geoff – What a fantastic venue, I think I have just entered Table Tennis heaven".....and these wise words form the thread of the day's heavenly play!

After a warm up and some table time we were all assembled around the control desk to be greeted by sermons from the three wise men (Ralph Weeks – Entries Manager, Mike Smith – Tournament Organiser and John Fox - Referee for the day) who welcomed us all to Portchester School's newly built centre and the first ever table tennis event to take place in this amazing building, plus they individually explained the day's format so that we were all singing from the same hymn sheet.

The morning's competitions soon got underway with the Mixed Juniors, Ladies Singles and Men's Veteran events taking to the tables. Following their completion at 1.30 pm the main Open (any age) tournament, Cadet Girls and Cadet Boys events concluded the day.

Reports to follow later as I want to concentrate on the afternoon's main event first.

To allow all the players plenty of match experience the Open event was played in groups of four with the top two going through to the main tournament with the 3rd and 4th placed competitors entering into a consolation event.

Top seed for the Open was England ranked at number 2 Lady Veteran Sanja Clements, who was playing superbly throughout. She eased through her group not dropping a game to enter the knock-out rounds. In her quarter final match against this scribe she

lost her first game but her brilliant pen-hold style of play quickly asserted to take a 3-1 game score into the semi final. There she faced the third seed Hugo "Wham" Pang (who had earlier disposed of Gerard Redman and Zoltan Karip). Hugo is already an established 12 year old Cadet England International and rated at 3 in the country at under 13 years. Off the table this meek, mild and almost angelic diminutive figure of Young Mr Pang, seems to instantly transform into a raging pit bull terrier as he enters the court snarling and throwing bombs and bullets at all who dare to cross his path. Doctor Sanya Clements was his next adversary as she soon fell under the Pang Bang Wham cosh in the top half semi final. But as we all know Doctors have plenty of patients and this was evident as she controlled the onslaught of Hugo's terrifying speed of shots. Her superb blocking skills with returned acute angled attacking play calmed the Pang storm and was a joy to witness. Sanja took control of the match to take a 3-1 game score to put her into the final.

Meanwhile somewhat of a miracle was unfolding in the lower half of the draw.

Stephen Foster (2nd seeded) a local lad who is the son of a vicar is making his name now in the coaching side but remains a huge force in local league. He had just returned from playing in a morning's football match and had unfortunately had to borrow a bat to play with so his preparation was far from satisfactory. Stephen made easy progress to the k/o rounds by ousting Sai Maganti and John Sweet to then face Patrick Hurley at the last four stage. This almost proved to be the graveyard game. Maybe this next result for Stephen was possibly "divine intervention" as he came back from the dead at 0-2 down in games to resurrect himself taking the next three games to reach the final. Once again the Lord must have been watching over him as in his final appointment with the doctor (Sanja Clements, umpired by yours truly) another chapter unfolded. In my humble opinion Stephen looked down and out trailing 1-2 in games to the dynamic Doctor but Young Mr Foster must have received again from "somewhere within" the necessary will and testament to stage a huge comeback to take the Dorset Closed Singles Championship title by 3-2 in games and carve his name on the trophy. Truly an inspired performance.

Whilst all this drama was unfolding the consolation event was drawing to a close. I am absolutely delighted to report that my good friend and a real nice guy who lives for the sport, Richard Barrett, reached his first ever final (I think?). By virtue of a walkover in the quarter final Richard then gained a fantastic five game win against his last four opponent Hannah McErlane (a brilliant young player with a very bright future who had earlier endured a 5 game marathon against Ben Tricksey) to take his place on the podium as runner up as in his final with eventual winner Michael Hebdige he must have simply run out of steam. Michael's route to consolation glory was gained by overcoming young Becky Kuzu (who had just recorded an unbelievable result against Division 1 player Phil "the BDTTA webmaster" Hadley) and then gained a 3-1 result against Ray Harwood to set up his final with Richard Barrett.

Earlier results in the day came in the Mixed Cadets competition where Finn Morgan Bayliss took a well deserved gold title victory with Jamie Trevillion taking silver and Oliver Crossley earning the bronze medal. It is particularly pleasing to see so many young players coming through the ranks that are benefitting from the High Performance coaching at Portchester.

The Ladies and Junior Girls event was played as a two group 6 player round robin with the top two going through to the main event and the remaining four players in both groups entering into a consolation tournament. Dorset's hard working secretary Miranda Edwardes won the main event taking a 3-0 win over Jo Kuzu in the final. Becky Kuzu (who had narrowly lost a 5 game epic against her mother, Jo) and also with Maggie Wilson playing very well made up the top four positions.

Hannah McErlane was triumphant in the corresponding consolation event taking the trophy "the hard way" coming back from a 0-2 deficit in games final against Nel Faulkner. Jane Foster (mother of Stephen) together with Tanya Coulter, Val Martin and Miriam Mather completed the consolation line up.

Top seed for the Junior Boys, Hugo Pang took control of this event winning all his round robin matches to take the top spot on the podium, Finn Morgan Bayliss took silver whilst Jamie Trevillion took bronze.

The Golden Oldies in the shape of the Men's Veteran event were last but by no means least to report on. Eighteen battle hardened soldiers of table tennis took their chance in this highly competitive competition. It was soon evident that the main man would be top seed Mark Wicker. After destroying yours truly in the quarters he marched on relentlessly to outgunn semi finalist Andy Hartnell followed by a fairly comfortable 3-1 result against our own England Super Vet International Brian Bickell in the final.

Lee Devaney won the Vett's consolation with a 3-1 final score against Phil Hadley.

The day was hugely supported and managed by James Lewis (Bournemouth's Coaching Officer) who took on the role of Match Co-Ordinator. Dorset representatives Dave Beverley and Miranda Edwardes added their support to a very successful day that will long live in the memory as a milestone in Dorset Counties progression with it's wonderful new venue, plus of course some involvement from the Good Lord above.