

Sandy Bay, the team that were taken to the wire by Brixington Mews in the semi-final, could be excused for any pre match nerves in the final. Their older opponents, Byron Way, having a less arduous trip, were maybe more relaxed. A small crowd held their breath.

This was the ultimate match from the thirty that had been played by the contesting sixteen teams. The EX8 table tennis division organised by the Exe Premier Table Tennis Club had been won by Exeter Road on both occasions in the past two years.

This report could simply end now by stating that Sandy Bay won 3-0. No need for the full five sets. However, such brevity on the keyboard, would neither do justice to the quality of table tennis of those sets, nor to the guile and tenacity of the players.

Sam Smith first took on Byron's Henry Wood. His 11-5, 11-6, success was the warning of what was to come. Sam attacked at every opening that he could force from rallies that were often lengthy.

Josh Phillips must have felt that his partner's performance against Henry was a hard act to follow. His faced Merrick Gigg, who at 15, is three years his senior. Josh's philosophy is not to retreat to defensive positions and to consistently get around to his backhand court to forehand attack. It paid off and he kept ahead to take the first game 11-7. In the second game Merrick blocked and short chopped closer to the table, and as he closed down the speed of the incoming blitz, he was able to counter-hit into the yawning gap of the opposite forehand court. 11-4 to the Byron Way player.

There was a maturity creeping into this table tennis. Both players wanting to win points and neither prepared to make unforced errors in the attempt. The final set was tied at 5-5. The pattern had been established from the outset. The attack from the younger player continued, the pace had slowed and the topspin shots had no sting, but they were precise, and inevitably to Merricks backhand court. Openings exposed in the previous game were closed! At 8-8 the ball crossed the net 23 times, 9-8 to Josh. Merrick, at 10-9 down, misjudged a slight change in pace from Josh, and missed the opposite side by less than 3 inches. This made the match score 2-0 to Sandy Bay and looking good. Interestingly, Merrick had scored 27 points in the set, one more than Josh.

Sam Smith versus Merrick Gigg. A fierce set, Sam taking the initiative and his top spin attack, together with ability to flat hit any loose high ball completely overwhelmed Merrick 11-3 in the first game. Then a reversal, perhaps sensing "game set and match" in his sights, Sam hurried his shots, chose the wrong balls, whilst steady Merrick gathered the harvest and won 11-6. Lesson learnt and

Sam went for winners when winners were on offer and punished the ball often and accurately to take the final game 11-6.

Richard Thompson, the Head of PE at Exmouth College, presented the prizes. The relationship between the club and the College remains as solid as it has always been and members applauded Mr Thompson.