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PRESS RELEASE

TITLE: Edge Hill University become local heroes at UPC Nine-ball Championship

Riley's Wavertree and Grand Central in Liverpool were treated to a spectacle of pool in the recent UPC Nine-ball Pool Championships, as local representatives Edge Hill University overcame University of York to win their first university team title. University of Manchester dominated the Individual Championships with an unprecedented three out of four semi-finalists, with the eventual champion Nick Clayton defeating his Manchester team-mate John Fryer in the final. With around 150 students participating, this event continues to boast the title of the biggest annual nine-ball event in the UK.

The team event used a format where the two highest placed 1st teams in each of the six groups progressed to the Championship play-offs with the best placed team not qualifying for the Championship going forward to the Trophy play-offs. Retaining the twist of the existing double-elimination formula in the groups, there was all to play for from the moment the first ball was potted!

Championship/Trophy Groups

Last year's Champions Manchester 1st, with two changes in personnel from their title-winning team, made light work of their group to progress to the Championship play-offs with Cardiff 1st. Nottingham 2nd made an assured start within their group in booking their Trophy play-off slot.

In Group B, attention was drawn to last year's silver medallists York 1st who staked a claim as pre-tournament favourites. They successfully passed their first examinations by emerging as group winners. Essex 1st got the better of Imperial 1st in a crucial bout to effectively secure their Championship berth. Although Imperial still had a potential lifeline in reaching the Trophy playoff, Manchester 2nd demonstrated the current strength in depth at the university by qualifying for the Trophy at their expense.

Warwick 1st, seeded number three after showing an established pedigree in this discipline, had little trouble in Group C to progress as group winners with Leeds 1st also qualifying. York 2nd outlined their Trophy credentials in getting the better of Kent 1st on a comfortable route to the knockout phase.

Number 4 seeds Nottingham 1st hit the ground running with an early victory but York 3rd upset the applecart by sending them to the losers section. Reading 1st secured their Championship play-off spot by emerging from Group D unbeaten. By the time Nottingham 1st and York 3rd met again in the loser's section final round, the tension was removed from this fixture as their respective Championship and Trophy slots were confirmed but Nottingham 1st took the opportunity to extract a modicum of revenge!

Local favourites Edge Hill 1st posted a strong performance in securing their Championship berth without defeat in Group E. LSE 1st got the better of Gloucestershire 1st to join Edge Hill in the Championship with Warwick 2nd bouncing back from an early group defeat to reach the Trophy.

In Group F, Cardiff 2nd revelled in a victory over number 6 seeds Aston 1st, on their way to securing their Trophy place as group winners. Aston were able to pick up the pieces against Abertay 1st, ending Scottish hopes, to reach the Championship alongside a spirited Bristol 1st.

Trophy/Championship Playoffs

Trophy

It is testament to the strength of York University in this discipline that they had two teams competing for the Trophy when play commenced on Sunday but neither the 2nd or 3rd team were content for their journey to end. Separated by the draw, York 2nd progressed through to the final but Nottingham 2nd ended the hopes of York 3rd of securing a repeat of last year's Trophy final.

When the first two sets were shared, eyes were drawn to the deciding table. Mungo Pay (York) was the hero as he slotted in the winning nine-ball to ensure the Trophy remains in the University of York display cabinet.

Championship

As we reached the business end of the Championship play-offs, it was still hard to predict a winner. Attention was instantly drawn to the seeds, with defending champions Manchester 1st averting an early Sunday scare against Essex 1st, but with additional challenges from the likes of York, Edge Hill and Warwick amongst others the bookmaker's book was far from closed!

York 1st, brimming with confidence after last year's final slot, stepped up to the plate to dispatch Nottingham 1st and Warwick 1st to secure another final slot with the gold medals in their sights.

Meanwhile, Edge Hill 1st demonstrated their growing competitive edge in this discipline by making short work of Reading 1st to secure a semi-final against Manchester. With a format that lends itself to a sudden intensification of pressure as adjacent sets end, a place in the final was suddenly in the hands of Rhys Williams (Edge Hill) and Mike Dixon (Manchester). With Dixon holding ball in hand after extracting two consecutive fouls, the writing appeared on the wall for Edge Hill but Williams was allowed back to the table with visibility of the object ball and he took full advantage to send the defending champions crashing.

York 1st, in their third consecutive Championship final, took the early initiative when Luke Fleet got the better of Edge Hill talisman Will Jerram. However, Edge Hill university legend-in-the-making Williams, buoyed by the prior round heroics, made short work of York captain Mike Walsh to keep local hopes alive.

In the final match-up, Sam Wass (York) and Edge Hill captain Andy Barlow were tied at 3-3. With the match on a knife edge, Wass held ball in hand with an inviting 3-9 combination beckoning. After significant deliberation, the plant was wayward and Barlow took full advantage to reach the hill. With so much at stake, the balls quickly fell awkward

but as the rack progressed to the business end, Barlow held himself together to take his chance and win the Championship title for Edge Hill University to rapturous applause.

Individual Championship

The UPC Individual Championship had a wide-open field of competitors eager to take the crown of Manchester's Bernd Gentner. As Bernd was not eligible to participate this year, after the completion of his international study programme drew a curtain on his highly successful albeit brief university pool career, the engravers were on standby, anticipating a new name to add to the trophy.

With a strong field of entrants attempting to reach the final through the uncertain route that random redraws present, the semi-finals were dominated by the Manchester University 1st team with university pool stalwart and Number 1 seed Mike Walsh (York) making up the quartet.

Walsh, after disposing of a number of his York team-mates en route to the semi-finals, faced Nick Clayton for a final berth as the two seeds were drawn together. With the match finely poised at 4-4, both players had chances to cross the line but Clayton held his nerve to ensure Manchester would not be disappointed. In the other semi-final, facing a different type of pressure in the challenge of playing their respective team-mate, John Fryer got the better of Mike Dixon to reach the final, and face that same pressure all over again!

In the final, the early exchanges were shared as the match was tied at 3-3. In a pivotal seventh frame, Clayton took the initiative with a 9 ball 'combo' to reach the hill. When he went in-off with victory in sight, Fryer showed tremendous bottle to take the match into a decider and keep his dream alive. As expected, nerves played a big part in the ultimate rack of this year's Individual Championship, but it was Nick Clayton who seized the moment and sunk the nine-ball to win the title!

Next Event

Attention now switches to the BUCS-UPC Eight-ball Pool Championships that will be contested on the weekend of 23-26 February 2012 at Vauxhall Holiday Park, Great Yarmouth.

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For further information:

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Notes to editors:

The Universities Pool Council (UPC) is the governing body for pool at higher education level in the United Kingdom. It is recognized by the British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS), Scottish University Sport (SUS) and the English Pool Association (EPA).

The UPC organizes national nine-ball, eight-ball and women's eight-ball championships for teams and individuals. The UPC also organizes the Student Home Internationals representative event.