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PRESS RELEASE

Ulster take UPC Nine-ball Championship in scintillating deciding set

The 19th-21st November saw the UPC Nine-ball Pool Championships return to the Park Inn by Radisson, Telford, with the vast field making for one of the largest Nine-ball events in the country. This year saw a very strong Ulster University side take the Team Championship having faced tough opposition from the University of Southampton in the final. This is the first time Ulster, who have excellent pedigree at Eight-ball, have won the UPC Nine-ball team Championship, their victory in this event making them the first institution to hold both titles at the same time.

The University of Exeter produced their first title winner, as Edward Poultney came through the field to take the Individual Championship, overcoming last year's runner-up David Farrell of the University of Strathclyde in the final.

The team event used a format where the two highest placed 1st teams in each group 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 of the first lag for break!

Championship/Trophy Groups

Group A contained the reigning champions Cardiff 1st, boasting no fewer than two former BUCS-UPC Eight-ball Pool Individual Champions in the form of Alex Thomson and Ifan Williams. Despite their strong line up, the defending champions didn't have it their own way in the group, coming unstuck against a rock-solid Ulster side in the winners bracket second round. However, the demise of Warwick 1st in the second round of the one-loss bracket at the hands of York 2nd ensured that Cardiff joined Ulster in the Championship knockouts, with Exeter 2nd overcoming York 2nd to book their place in the Trophy play-offs.

Containing four strong first teams, Group B looked like a tough one to call right from the off. Second seeds Edge Hill 1st were beaten by debutants Exeter 1st, who went on to qualify for the Championship without a loss. An experienced Leeds 1st side overcame Edge Hill to set up a meeting with Imperial 1st in the final match of the group, where it was Imperial, including third seed Markus Frembs, who booked their place in the Championship.

A look at the results in Group C suggested that the seeds were not going to have it all their own way this year, with the ever-present Manchester 1st bowing out after defeats by Southampton 1st, who return after a few season's absence, and Kane Needham's burgeoning Stirling 1st. Southampton

qualified top of the group with a triumph over individual second seed Adam Sykes' Manchester Met 1st. It was Manchester Met who took the second Championship place with Stirling qualifying for the Trophy.

The fourth seeds York 1st went through Group D unbeaten, having to hold their nerve to win the deciding set in two of their three matches. The contest to decide who took the second Championship place and who would progress to the Trophy was between Keele 1st and Sheffield 1st, with Sheffield showing steely determination to win in the deciding set.

Group E saw the 2012-13 Champions Strathclyde progress to the Championship unbeaten. With all three of their players seeded for this year's individuals, two of whom veterans of their title winning season: Strathclyde promised to be a tough nut to crack. Team Trophy holders Nottingham Trent 1st booked their first appearance in the Championship with a tight victory over Birmingham 1st to conclude the group.

Sixth seeds and Champions from the 2013-14 season Liverpool 1st lost out to Nottingham 1st in the battle to claim the first Championship spot in Group F. However, Liverpool were not to be denied a Championship place, and Essex 1st had to settle for a place in the Trophy when the two faced off in the final match in Group F.

Championship/Trophy Playoffs

Trophy

Progressing through the groups to the Trophy playoffs were five first teams and a solitary second team. Nevertheless, this fact obviously didn't discourage the lone second team as after both semi-finals were decided in the final set it was Exeter 2nd and Leeds 1st who made it through to the final.

A commanding performance from Michael McDermott gave Leeds 1st the set lead and after exchanging of frames in the other two sets the match ended up finely poised when both the other tables reached 4-4. In the end it was James Parish who held his nerve to win his deciding frame and give Leeds 1st victory in the team trophy.

Championship

As we reached the business end of the Championship play-offs, it was still hard to predict a winner. With two seeds already ousted at the group stage, it was clear that nobody was safe. Indeed, this was proved when the reigning Champions Cardiff's defence ended at the hands of Nottingham in the preliminary quarter finals. Three other former Championship winning sides met their demise in the quarter-finals: Ulster overcoming Liverpool, Strathclyde defeating York and Southampton triumphing over Nottingham.

In the first semi-final, the reigning BUCS-UPC Eight-ball Pool Champions Ulster booked their place in the final with a deciding set victory over a vastly experienced Strathclyde. The exit of Strathclyde guaranteeing that this year would see a new name etched on the Championship trophy.

The second semi-final saw Nine-ball debutants Exeter take on Southampton in an all southern England affair. The high-tempo aggressive play of Southampton drove them to a two sets to nil victory over their former BUCS-UPC Eight-ball Pool Champion opponents to set up an intriguing final.

Despite all three tables starting at the same time, the final was quickly down to a deciding set with a dominant 5-0 victory for Southampton's Micky Olding over Ben Allen of Ulster almost immediately followed by Adam McMackin's 5-1 win for Ulster over Kurtis Haberstraw.

As the match went to one set each, what had just become the deciding set was poised at 2-2, and nobody in the room knew which way the match would swing. With both players aware that the weight of their institution was on their shoulders, Southampton took the lead following a missed nine ball from each. The match went back to level following a nine ball cued solidly into the centre of the pocket from under the side rail in the next frame. Following an extended safety battle on the five ball, a missed snooker escape by Southampton's Simon Alderton gave Matt Sellers ball in hand and Ulster found themselves on the hill following an assured clearance. The five ball again proved key in the following frame and it was Matt Sellers who completed a solid clearance under pressure to win the Championship for Ulster to rapturous applause.

Individual Championship

In the Individual Championship, the absence of 2014-15 season champion Phil Burford opened saw many of the roughly 160 names in the draw fancying their chances of taking the title. However, none of those vying for the championship could plan their route to the final owing to the random redraw of matches from the last-32 onwards.

Number 1 seed and last season's runner up David Farrell (Strathclyde) was still in the tournament at the semi-final stage, having to overcome a very difficult draw in the quarter final in the form of number 3 seed Markus Frembs (Imperial).

Former BUCS-UPC Eight-ball Pool Individual Champion Alex Thomson (Cardiff) reached the semis, having not been taken to a deciding leg in the tournament. Edward Poultney (Exeter) having only learned this discipline recently also booked his place in the semi-finals having played no nerve-jangling deciders. Completing the semi-final line up was Jo Brennan (Manchester Metropolitan) who had survived hill-hill matches in both the first round and again when he overcame number 5 seed Chris Gibson in the quarter final.

The random semi-final draw pitted nine-ball debutant Ed Poultney Jo Brennan. Trading of the early frames left the match poised at 2 racks a piece, but it was Ed who managed to keep hold of his nerves to book his place in the final with a 5-2 victory. In the other semi-final, both men had shots on the nine in the first and an in-off on the nine from Farrell left Thomson the 2-0 leader. Trading of the next two frames left Thomson facing a long nine ball to take a 4-1 lead, but a narrow miss allowed Farrell to pinch the frame. This appeared to be a turning point in the match, and Farrell took a 5-3 win to face Poultney in the final.

The final was thus a contest between last season's runner up David Farrell of Strathclyde and nine-ball debutant Ed Poultney of Exeter. In the first rack a solid snooker on the eight ball drew the foul from Ed and allowed David to take the lead. A snooker escape from Poultney yielded a surprise combination on the nine so the match was quickly squared. In the next, a stunning jump shot from Poultney on the six ball drew the crowd's applause and he took the lead for the first time. Poultney also took the next two to make it to the hill first. The next frame proved to be the last when a very

tight snooker on the five gave Poultney the first real chance of the frame and he held his nerve to take the UPC Nine-ball Pool Championship.

10-ball Crash

As a side event, there was a 10-ball crash competition in which competitors score points equal to the total of the numbers on the balls potted in ten single shots. Following the heats on Friday night, there was a play-off for the players with the top five scores on the Saturday night, with the scores from the two performances combined to determine the winner.

The highest score posted in the heats was an impressive 110 and came from UPC veteran Alex Thomson. David Farrell was second with 106 and his fellow Strathclyde player Rob Montgomery was third with a 103. Chris Gibson and Adam Sykes were completed the final line-up with 100 points each. Despite Thomson's impressive opening gambit, it was David Farrell who finished top of the pile with a final total of 202, with Rob Montgomery taking second place with a round 200 after the best score of the final.

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Notes to editors:

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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.