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PRESS RELEASE

Strathclyde take title of UPC Nine-ball Championship in thrilling hill-hill decider

Riley's Wavertree and Grand Central in Liverpool were treated to a spectacle of pool in the recent UPC Nine-ball Pool Championships, as University of Strathclyde overcame Edge Hill University to win their first University team title by the narrowest of margins. Ben Buckley from University of Derby emerged triumphant in the Individual Championship, getting the better of Corey Collins (Edge Hill) in a one-sided final. With around 170 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 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

Last year's champions Edge Hill 1st, with current BUCS-UPC Eight-ball Pool Individual Champion Rhys Williams, made light work of their group to progress to the Championship play-offs. Gloucestershire 1st recovered from a defeat in their first match to join them in the Last 16. York 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 and in particular how they would gel a new look line-up following the graduation of university pool stalwarts Mike Walsh and Luke Fleet. After a winning start in their opening game, York 1st then came unstuck against a spirited Manchester Met 1st, who secured their Championship berth. Although York still had a potential lifeline in reaching the final playoff, Sheffield 1st demonstrated the growing potential at the university by qualifying for the Championship at their expense, with York progressing to the Trophy.

Manchester 1st, seeded number three after showing an established pedigree in this discipline, had little trouble in Group C to progress as Group Winners with Birmingham 1st also qualifying. Local interest University of Liverpool, participating in the team event for the first time with a full complement of three teams, managed to secure a slot in the Trophy with their 3rd team.

Number 4 seed Warwick 1st hit the ground running in booking their Championship play-off spot by emerging from Group D unbeaten. Sheffield 2nd posted early victory over Kent 1st to earmark their Trophy credentials as Kent 1st were tasked with contending the one-loss side. By the time Kent 1st (after two victories on the one-loss side) and Sheffield 2nd met again in the one-loss section final round, the tension was removed from this fixture as their respective Championship and Trophy slots were confirmed, but Kent 1st took the opportunity presented to extract a modicum of revenge!

Nottingham 1st, led by "The Colonel" Chris Hobbis, posted a strong performance in securing their Championship berth without defeat in Group E. Strathclyde 1st got the better of Liverpool 1st to join Nottingham in the Championship, with Liverpool going forward to the Trophy.

In Group F, Edge Hill 2nd revelled in two victories over first teams in the shape of number 6 seed Aston 1st and Leeds 1st, on their way to securing their Trophy place as group winners. Leeds were able to pick up the pieces on the one-loss side, with Aston 1st progressing to the Championship playoff at the expense of Salford.

The luck of the draw brought a Celtic nation flavour to Group G. Cardiff 1st, seeded number 7 in the draw, demonstrated their prowess with two straight victories to progress as the group winners. Ulster 1st got the better of St Andrews in their opening match to put themselves in pole position for qualification to the Championship but, as the group unfolded, these two teams were required to contest the one-loss section final with the winner going through to the Championship and the loser into the Trophy. Although St Andrews were seeking the ultimate revenge, Ulster 1st were not to be denied as they came out on top again in a keenly fought match.

In group H, Essex 1st made light work of their opponents in their qualification for the Championship. Southampton 1st, who have a proud record in the BUCS Snooker event, demonstrated a multi-discipline skill-set as they also made their way through to the Championships with Manchester 2nd impressing en route to the Trophy playoff.

Trophy/Championship Playoffs

Trophy

Although there were three first teams vying for the Trophy at start of play on Sunday morning, it was two second teams who made their way through to the final in the shape of Manchester and debutants Sheffield.

When the first two sets were shared, eyes were drawn to the deciding table. Sheffield 2nd, who had to call upon their reserve following the withdrawal of one of the team due to injury, held their nerve in the deciding set to take the Trophy back to South Yorkshire.

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 Edge Hill 1st averting an early Sunday scare against Aston 1st, but with additional challenges from the likes of Manchester, Nottingham and Ulster amongst others the metaphorical book was far from closed!

Edge Hill secured their second successive final with further victories against Birmingham 1st and a spirited Ulster 1st, with clear aspirations of becoming the first team to retain the Championship title since Warwick in 2005/06.

Meanwhile, in the bottom half, Strathclyde 1st were suddenly starting to believe in their own title hopes as they quietly dispatched Cardiff 1st and Manchester 1st.

In the final, Edge Hill took the early initiative when Rhys Williams got the better of Robert Montgomery. However, Will Jerram, in his final university tournament representing Edge Hill, lost out narrowly to Peter Graham to send all eyes to the final table.

With a format that lends itself to a sudden intensification of pressure as adjacent sets end, this has never been more true than in this final. With the match on a knife edge at 4-4, the winner of this individual rack would take the title.

After an unexpected in-off, Corey Collins found himself with ball in hand. After significant deliberation, his pot down the long cushion was wayward and David Farrell stepped in. With so much at stake, chances passed between the two and as the rack progressed to the business end, David held himself together to take his chance and win the Championship title for Strathclyde University to rapturous applause.

Individual Championship

In the Individual Championship, Manchester's Nick Clayton made the short trip to Liverpool with high hopes of retaining his crown. With around 170 names in the hat at the start of play on Friday, there were a number of contenders who fancied their chances of taking his title, although the route to the final would be unknown due to the random redraw of matches from the last-32 onwards.

Although the defending champion was able to negotiate his opening game, the redraw for the last-32 presented a tough opponent in the shape of number 5 seed, Ifan Williams (Cardiff), who sent the defending champion crashing out.

Ben Buckley (Derby) made impressive strides towards the semi-finals alongside number 6 seed Chris Hobbis (who ended Williams' hopes), seasoned university competitor Ryan Birt (Ulster), and debutant and local interest Corey Collins (Edge Hill).

Buckley faced Birt for a final berth as the Ulsterman sought to become the first Northern Irish player to win the title. With both players having early opportunities to gain a foothold in the match, it was seasoned GB9 player Buckley who gained the edge and ran out a 5-1 winner. In the other semi-final, Hobbis and Collins were embroiled in a tense affair, trading racks on their way to hill-hill. Hobbis had the first opportunity on the table but a missed 7-ball proved costly as Collins held his nerve to take his chance.

In the final, Buckley took the early initiative to lead 3-1, assisted by a golden break and "2-9 combo" as Collins struggled to gain a foothold. As an assured cueist who clearly specialises in this discipline due to his textbook pattern play, Buckley was not in the mood to give an easy opportunity for Collins to establish his rhythm and continued to dominate by winning the next two racks to win the UPC Nine-ball Pool Individual Championship.

10-ball Crash

As a side event, there was a 10-ball crash competition in which competitors were required to accumulate as many points as possible in ten single shots. With at least two participants qualifying from the heats in the two venues on Friday night, there was a play-off on the Saturday night, with the scores from the two performances combined to determine the winner.

Buckley posted an assured 103 in his heat to secure his berth as favourite going into the play-off but with only eight points separating all contenders, his lead was not insurmountable. Tamas Vagvolgyi and Tom Laycock (both Nottingham) applied some pressure to Buckley, but he was not to be denied as he posted a UPC all-time record of 104 in the play-off to take his second title of the weekend.

Next Event

Attention now switches to the BUCS-UPC Eight-Ball Pool Championships, that will be contested on the weekend of 21-24 February 2013 at Vauxhall Holiday Park, Great Yarmouth.

12 December 2012

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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.