

Published 5/5/2003

Romeril's handful of titles

by Rob Batiste

THE best men's singles final in years was overshadowed by the performance of a 13-year-old schoolboy at table tennis' annual championship night at the Rohais Hall.

Scott Romeril featured in five age-group finals ranging from under-13 to under-21 and won the lot.

If there was ever testament to the sterling work of the island's new table tennis officer, Becky O'Keefe and the sport's intense development programme, it was Romeril's performance.

There have been wonderkids before. Craig Tyrrell was one and, go back a quarter of a century, Mark Bacon was another. Nobody in the GTTA can recall any youngster emulating Romeril's 2003 performance, though.

His hardest task came, quite naturally, in the under-21s.

Giving a good few years away to James Lesbirel, the Les Beaucamps schoolboy came into the final seeded to lose.

For Romeril that read no more than lose the opening set.

Thereafter he was the dominant force and, despite dropping the fourth, wrapped up the title in six sets to the delight of his family and on-the-spot adviser Jez Powell.

But for sheer drama the men's singles clash left every other final - and there were 18 all told - way behind.

The script should have seen defending champion Phil Ogier romping to a fifth straight title.

Mark Pipet, champion 13 times between 1976 and 1998, had quite different ideas and the result was a six-set classic in which the Whistlers stalwart and island coach used all his skill and tactical nous to put the undisputed island number one under pressure.

The match had spectators on the edge of their seats, mouths agape with the development of a handful of rallies.

On one occasion Pipet, smashing the ball as if he was hammering in a nail, had Ogier crashing into the side barriers in a desperate attempt to retrieve, which most of the time he

succeeded in doing.

In a late rally, Ogier was forced yards away from the table and on to the back barrier, only to unleash a breathtaking winner. For the record, Ogier triumphed 9-11, 9-6, 9-7, 10-12, 13-11, 12-10 and he was happy to acknowledge he'd been in a scrap. 'It was an excellent game - probably the best final I've been in. It was probably the best he has played for a few years and his tactics were excellent,' said a relieved Ogier.

Pipet said Ogier had wanted it more, but given the disappointment etched into his face, that was difficult to understand.

'I beat him six or seven weeks ago in the Whistlers [event], but I wanted it more than him then. I was desperate to win.

'He wanted it more than me tonight.

'His application and tactics were superb - he was never fazed and stuck to his tactics well.

'He is so good at analysing and evaluating as he's going along and adapts to what he needs to do,' added the runner-up, who did not have a bad evening himself.

Pipet, who in a coaching role has done so much to lift the level of the island's top men and women, won the veterans singles from Richard Veale, the veteran open doubles with Graham Lesbirel and the mixed doubles with Dawn Morgan.

He could also look on proudly as son and daughter - Jordan and Bethany - contested four finals.

In the women's singles Dawn Morgan landed the title for the 17th time from the only woman to challenge her dominance for almost 30 years, Kay Chivers.

Two years ago when the two met on the same occasion the result was a drab, push-push affair.

This time the two dominant forces in the women's game were happy to attack and Morgan was taken to six sets.

Chivers could rightly argue she could have forced the match into a deciding seventh.

Before her mid-match comeback - she won the third and fourth to square the final - she had led 10-8 and had game-point in the second.

Morgan was to win four points on the bounce at that crucial moment, but it did not faze Chivers who has lost to the island number one in the last three finals.

Chivers took the third and fourth for a total of 13 points, only to lose the fifth for seven and the sixth for six.

Morgan, who first won the championship as a 14-year-old, says her winning habit does not stop the nerves.

Indeed, she put her mid-match blip partly down to an attack of them.

She praised Pipet for his role in lifting the game of all the top players.

'The coaching and regular trips away has helped us improve our standard. He has improved our tactics and anticipation.'

One of the finest sights on the night was Ian Fitchet and Peter

Powell doing battle in the over-60s final.

Hopping around like 21-year-olds, the two GTTA stalwarts thoroughly entertained one half of the hall with rallies straight out of an exhibition.

Age has not impinged on the twos enthusiasm and love for the game and, in a cracking encounter, Fitchet deprived the number seed on a third age-group title in six sets.

The two have dominated the class since its inception in the late 1990s.

Fitchet, who lost in the semis in 2002, has not won the shield three times to Powell's two, but don't rule out many more re-matches.

Their reaction to victory and defeat was a lesson to all.

Powell also acknowledged that his game suited Fitchet down to the ground, while Fitchet reckoned he would have had his chips if Powell had forced a deciding seventh

But there will be no more Rohais Hall classics.

After 38 years of staging their annual finals week at badminton's headquarters, the relationship now ends.

From 2004 the finals will be held in the GTTA's own arena at the Guernsey Bowls Stadium.