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Bretel's season just keeps getting better

by Rob Turville

TABLE TENNIS has a new island men's champion and Peter Bretel's is only the 10th different name on the trophy since 1968.

In a final which few spectators would have predicted but which everyone thoroughly enjoyed, Bretel, 29, held off Phil Hunkin to win the title in six games.

These two players, the third and fourth seeds respectively, had dumped the top two out in the semis: Phil Ogier and Mark Pipet.

In last night's final, Hunkin twice came back to level the game score but Bretel had the extra edge in the fifth and sixth to wrap up a popular victory, to the acclaim of a healthy audience at the Bowl Stadium.

'Phil played very well the other night: he was 1-3 down against Phil Ogier and came back to win, so I knew I had to play positively,' said Bretel.

'When I have played Phil [Hunkin] it has not always been a great game to watch.

'It used to be a case of me trying to control his attacking shots. I wanted to play a different game tonight.

'I have never felt that comfortable against him. Tonight he changed his serve so that I could not attack the serve, I could not get into the rally, I had to play the fifth or sixth attack.

'I was probably the most nervous I have been playing him. I tried not to be, but as soon as I got out there I felt really stiff. I tried to get more spin on the ball. In the second game, though, I was trying to hit the ball too hard.'

Bretel put his success down to a renewed enjoyment of the sport and different attitude.

'The first half of the season was pretty awful for me: I lost in the Channel Islands Top-12 competition in Jersey; it was a

disaster,' he said.

'I realised that I put too much pressure on myself. I knew that I had lost my enjoyment for the game.

'When I came back I had a different attitude. I needed to get more relaxed in the game.

'Since January it has paid off. I won my first open tournament. I have worked at my game, developed a backhand loop. That saves me from running around the table onto my forehand. People are not used to it and I am winning a lot more points.

'Now I am just enjoying playing so much.'

Hunkin was a disappointed but gracious loser.

'I just thought if I could have pinched that sixth game and taken it to a decider it could have been anybody's title,' he said.

All evening at the La Fraternelle Home Insurance-sponsored evening, there was some sparkling play.

Scott Romeril again gave every indication that he will be a senior men's island champion before too long. The talented teenager wrapped up victory in the under-15 singles, under-18 singles and doubles and under-21 singles.

But in years to come he will find others breathing down his neck. Matthew Stubbington and Oliver Langlois produced one of the matches of the evening at under-11 level. Langlois led 2-0, but back came Stubbington. Then it was 3-1 and Stubbington saved match ball in the fifth, won the sixth and then wrapped up the win 14-12 in an absorbing decider.

Both players showed admirable concentration and a willingness to play some cracking attacking shots.

In the girls' section, Alice Loveridge excelled. Just nine years old, she won both the under-15 and the under-18 singles.

Against Carly Tucknott she hit back after losing the first game; but in the under-15 match against Bethany Pipet she was 0-2 down before fighting back superbly and winning the next four.

Guernsey Table Tennis Association president Derek Webb beamed as he looked around at the wealth of talent on display from the youngsters, the deserved result of a fine commitment to spreading the sport among primary schools and the efforts of a network of coaches, headed by the sport's development officer, Rebecca O'Keefe.

'After the results they achieved in the British Primary Schools competition last week, this shows that the sport is booming.'

There were further plaudits from John Greenfield, vice-president of the Sports Commission and guest of honour at the presentation ceremony.

'I have not been involved in table tennis since I was a youngster. But it has been a great privilege to be invited here tonight,' he said.

'To see how you have kitted out this facility, through your own efforts and hard work, you should be very proud.'