

MEN'S O45 REPORT



Squash in the proximity of the Arctic Circle was the prospect for the teams gathering in Aberdeen for the final weekend of the 2015 Masters Home Internationals. In the Wales men's O45 team, there was a debutant, a first time captain and an experienced battle hardened core. But all were of one purpose – to help each other perform their best for Wales.

The opening match was against Scotland, widely tipped to provide the greatest danger to England. Wales were led out at 5<sup>th</sup> string by James Walters in his first international match. Walters overcame game balls against in the first two games and recorded a magnificent 3-0 over John Kynoch. His shot making and low kills were perfectly suited to the 17 inch tin being used for this tie. The giant from Pembrokeshire had set us on our course.

Number 3 Nick Jones then had to contend with a fired up Peter Buchan, with Buchan twice taking the lead in the match. But Jones refused to lose, then refused to give the Scot anything to work with, winning 3-2 and Wales were 2-0 up. This was an early match in the tournament, but significant to the final outcome.

At number 1 Nick Dyer faced a foe familiar to many in Wales, with Frank Ellis lying in wait. Ellis' strength and precision gave him the lead at 1-0 then 2-1, but Dyer wasn't done and swung the momentum completely in the 4<sup>th</sup> and the start of the 5<sup>th</sup>, before Ellis' movement and power returned to ensure a win for Scotland and a foothold back in the tie.

Richard Murphy playing at 4 should be the perfect player to clinch the deal for Wales. However, the Caerphilly veteran confessed to his captain that injury meant he hadn't been on court for 2 weeks. His opponent Mark James is a powerful shot player and forced the pace in the early exchanges. Despite that, and the referee's insistence that Murphy was not quick enough to win lets, the Welshman's sapping boasts meant he came through 3-0 and won the tie for Wales.

Gary Hales then played Malcolm Kerr, Scotland's strong number 2, who had flown in from Hong Kong for the tournament and was in no mood to waste his airfare. Hales still managed to confound Kerr with lobs and drops, but eventually lost the match 3-1.

So a great start, an overturning of the odds, and 18 points to take into Saturday. England however, finished the opening evening with a 20 point victory over Ireland.

Richard Murphy was rested on Saturday morning and that brought Ian Fenner-Evans into the side. Having admirably demonstrated restraint the evening before by not falling into the whisky tasting trap, Fenner-Evans then further showed the way by winning the first game of the opening match against favourites England. Andy Normile then stepped up the court, stepped up the pace and won a closely contested match 3-1.

Nick Jones was twisted and turned like so many before him by David Youngs and couldn't find a way into the match, losing 3-0.

Nick Dyer then took on Andrew Cross, the recent British Open runner-up. This was a tough encounter, although Dyer should have won the second game and did manage to win the third, before losing 3-1. This gave England the tie, and looking good for the trophy.

James Walters couldn't stem the English tide. The muse was not upon him that morning as he lost 3-0 to Jon Lilley, but the 17 inch tin from the previous match might have made it a different story.

Gary Hales fought hard against Steve McLaughlin, but McLaughlin's all round speed and steady squash was too good, and the Englishman sealed a 3-0 victory.

After a quick bit of fresh air to watch a couple of overs of cricket at the adjacent Mannofield ground, home of Aberdeenshire CC, it was back inside to work out the maths before the final tie. Scotland had beaten Ireland in the morning to go into their match against England with 26 points. Wales had 19, meaning a win against Ireland was essential for a 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish, and anything less than 5-0 might not be good enough.



The team's supporters, magnificent throughout the weekend, were gathered again in Welsh colours and flags, expecting a big finish. Ian Fenner-Evans lived up to those expectations, his experience and competitive commitment too much for Tom Crowe. 3-0 to Fenner-Evans, 1-0 for Wales.

Nick Jones then ruthlessly squeezed the life out of the talented Adrian Leeson with another 3-0 victory, and Wales were rampaging.

Then, for over an hour, the match between Nick Dyer and Jon Simpson swung back and forth until Dyer, running on fumes now, sealed the 5<sup>th</sup>, settling the tie and the nerves for Wales.

England were looking good on the adjoining court, but Scotland's strength was still to play, so points were still needed for Wales. Happily Richard Murphy was in no mood to allow any doubt to come into play. Denying pain, he swiftly beat Gerry Callanan 3-0.

The final match was Gary Hales up against the talented Brian Lawlor. Now with the knowledge that Scotland couldn't catch Wales this was truly a dead rubber. And despite Hales losing 3-1, this was an entertaining match, rounding off the excellent squash that had been on view over the weekend.

So, 2<sup>nd</sup> place. A great result. That gutsy 3-2 win back on Friday evening by Nick Jones turned out to be the difference between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. England were well deserved and sporting winners. Their skill and fitness are admirable, but the gap is not as great as perhaps we sometimes assume, and England certainly had to play well to win.

The curtain came down on the squash but was raised on a superb presentation dinner. All players and spectators owe a debt of gratitude to ASRC who were excellent hosts, providing plentiful food and staff who couldn't do enough all weekend. Good speeches from the winning captains reflected the competitive and comradely nature of the event. Congratulations also to the referees and officials who were efficient and friendly.

This Wales team showed superb spirit all weekend. The laughter on Saturday evening embodied the character of the team as perfectly as the support and encouragement for every player in every match. I can't believe captaincy is always this easy, so my thanks to all.



Nick Dyer, Men's O45 Captain