

## FOURTH PLACE FINISH FOR WELSH OVER35 TEAM TOP OF THE POPS IN THE BAR

Words by Paul Barrell 9.6.2012

The Welsh Master team for Nottingham 2012 had been through an exciting and somewhat challenging time even before the team of Paul Johnson, Adam Evans, Eddie Evans, Darren Lee, Matt Lloyd Lewis and Paul Barrell even managed to get to the venue!

Unfortunately several key members of the squad had withdrawn for one reason or another leaving some very hasty phone calls last minute and a gigantic effort from Matty Lloyd moving what must have seemed like Heaven and Earth to be able to attend. He actually managed to convince his wife that her birthday was not this weekend at all and the party would have to be moved to next week because she obviously had forgotten when it actually was!



So the team members set off for Nottingham to arrive at various stages of the day. Eddie was the first to arrive by 10am sharp. He spent the whole day stretching, growling and practising his death stare ready for action that evening. Paul Barrell and team supporter, bag carrier and sometime physio Paul Aubrey were

the next to arrive and found Eddie in the car park running lengths and chanting 'Kill, Kill, Kill' for some reason.

Darren arrived next to join the growing party of Welsh Masters.

Almost the last arrivals were Adam and Matty. Adam quickly set about re arranging the order of play for the entire weekend and when it was pointed out that it had been set in stone for weeks and couldn't be changed he consoled himself by altering the entire rankings of the Welsh team and the composition of every team for every match.

Last to arrive was obviously Paul Johnson (remember last year?) who finally turned up as the cleaners were sweeping the courts. But he doesn't really count because I don't think he's Welsh anyway.

So, play commenced. First up was Wales vs the Jocks!

Barrell was first on against Neil Morris and crowd opinion quickly decided that Barrell had been abducted and an alien who had obviously watched a bit of squash and could at least identify what a nick was had been substituted for him. He still liked the back wall boast though. An almost unheard of 3-0 win was secured by the captain.

Eddie, literally chomping at the bit by now, was next on and in a short time had secured the first game. His opponent, Owen Haddon, actually played at Number 1 last year and it may have been that or the unbearably warm court or the fact he had not practised his death stare enough, Eddie went down fighting (literally) 3-1.

Johnson finally arrived and was next up. Simon Boughton (who was to beat Mike Gregory of England on Saturday) proved a bit too strong and Paul went down 3-0 having seen what must have seemed like the 23 corners of the court several times.

The next match on was Darren against Alan Thompson, the Scottish legend, who has played in two other Masters events this year for Scotland. Darren took the first then lost the second and third and frankly, after smelling Barrell's aftershave and almost heaving, it looked like he'd had his chips. With a renewed vigour Darren heroically pulled one game back but ultimately was to lose the fifth to go down 3-2.

The dead rubber was contested by Adam and Mark Ford. Adam stuck some characteristic crowd pleasers into the nick and sold his opponent a few taxis but it was not enough to overcome the Scottish onslaught and he lost 3-0.

Final score of the first match: Wales 1, Scotland 4.

I would then like to say the Welsh team retired to the bar for a swift orange juice and then went back to the hotel for the night. But that would be a lie.

A few medicinal beverages were imbibed at the splendid squash club bar and then a few more at the hotel. Thinking it would be rude not to venture into the town centre in order to boost Nottingham's economy a little (as the town has been doing rather badly of late and even had to stop the fountains) several team members danced the night away at a rather sweaty 80s night club following trying hard but finding nothing better. It is rumoured that Adam found his soul mate at a class venue called Wetherspoons and for the full story (and photo) you'll just have to

ask him. The best chat up line of the night goes to a nameless team member and it went something like this: 'You must be a mechanic' 'Why is that' 'Every time I see you my nuts do a turn' which none of us understood but just as well we had Jo Dark to explain it later.

Once more play commenced. This time against the Shamrock eaters.

Play was billed to start at 9.45am. Not understanding if this hour existed on a Saturday was a problem for some team players and we graced the court at about ten (ish).

First on court was Matty Lloyd against Neil Brannigan. Matt promptly lost the first two pretty easily but little did we know he was just warming up. In a cruel and calculated coup Matt clawed the third back from 6-0 down (that's 6-0 down in this game and 2-0 down overall) to snatch it 9-7. The next two games were a study in grit and determination and Matt pulled every ounce of energy from every pore of his body to make it a win 3-2.

Surely we had just witnessed the match of the tournament- or had we?

Next on court was Eddie and Ceiran McCoy. Eddie started badly, narrowly losing the first two, both 10-8, within a whisker each time. As the crowd packed up thinking a swift final defeat was on the cards a small voice cried out 'Don't go yet, he's got his death stare back' and just like that the big man was back with a renewed determination taking the third game 9-0! The fourth was a tough one and could have gone either way. Eddie hung on, fought, battled and used his death stare a lot to claim it 10-8. In between games the words of wisdom flowed towards Eddie, 'You gotta hurt him' 'YEAH' 'You gotta hurt him' 'YEAH' and just like that the fifth game fell to Eddie to claim the win 3-2.

I can only describe what had just been seen over the last two matches as nothing short of heroic. If you ever wanted to see two players who in wearing the Welsh shirt embodied the true spirit of grit, determination and what it means to be a sportsman simply playing their heart out in the sport they love, readers, you should have seen these guys that day. I was proud to be there and be the captain of such a band of competitors. Once Eddie and I had finished crying and hugging we got on with the match.

Number one string was up next as Johnson played Neil Murphy. Going down 2-0 the Welsh spectators had a sense of déjà vu again (is that déjà déjà vu or déjà vu vu?) as Johnson pulled a blinder to take the third 9-6. Surely the stage was not to be set for another 3-2 battle? As determined as our surrogate Welshman was he could not pull off the impossible and lost the fourth to lose overall 3-1.

Following his well fought match last night Darren stepped on court next against Donal Carrol. Unfortunately Darren never really attained his stride and lost the match 3-0.

Finally the last string played out as Adam vs David Ayerst. Adam lost the first two games to then come back and suddenly in a flurry of what can only be described as reckless kamikaze no hope reverse percentage shots he snatched the third and once more the Welsh spectators had a sense of déjà vu again again (is that déjà déjà déjà vu or déjà vu vu vu?). However the euphoria was not to last and in a tight fourth with flashes of brilliance from both players (just one or two more flashes from David) Adam lost 9-7 having performed admirably to lose 3-1.

Final score of the second match: Wales 2, Ireland 3.

The match against England commenced in the afternoon and to make matters short and concise we all lost, Johnson to Mike Gregory, Adam to Jamie Goodrich, Eddie to Mat Lowry, Matty to Ben Hutton and Barrell to Ian Cox all 3-0.

I would then like to say the Welsh team retired to the bar for a swift orange juice and then went back to the hotel for the night. But that would be another lie. The team assembled once more in the splendid club bar to lick our respective wounds and then headed back to the hotel for the evening's provender. The speeches were thankfully short and in fact the heroic efforts of the Welsh team were actually never mentioned but little did it matter as we know that in our hearts if spirit was the fuel we were rockets. Yeah baby. And we were going to prove it later. The Welsh teams were the first on the dance floor and busted several grooves, throwing shapes and making curves until it was time to traverse the short distance to the few ailing bars in town to bolster their economy rather than for our enjoyment.

The evening consisted of finding the toilets in the bookcases, relaxing on the Tantra mattresses, asking for ridiculous cocktails and fighting off the Triads.

Even the closing of the club could not deter the Welsh as we retired to the hotel bar to thoroughly trounce the Scottish and Irish teams at singing and performing until someone noticed the sun coming up at which point we called it a night (although it was morning).

In short the captain would like to extend his thanks to all the players, especially Eddie for kindly sponsoring the team kit. And staring. A lot.

I was pleased and proud to be a captain for you all this weekend. If the sum total of our combined efforts was fourth place, so be it, because if it was spirit, heart and friendship we were competing for we'd have won hands down baby!

Words From *Paul Barrell* Wordsmith, Squash Player, teacher, Biker and Over35 Welsh Captain