



## WALES MEN'S OVER 50

HOME INTERNATIONALS 21 & 22 April 2017

### CARDIFF

The Wales Men's Over 50 squad consisted of **Jon Evans (1), Richard Murphy (2), Gary Hales, captain (3), Steve Evans (4), Ian Fenner-Evans (5) & James Walters (6)**

#### Wales v Scotland

The opening match on the Friday evening was against Scotland. James Walters made a blistering start and his fast pace, mixed with accuracy and winning shots blew Martin Sanchez away in the first game. James maintained the intensity in the next two games and a quick and impressive 3-0 win (11/6, 11/5, 11/6) at number 5 string gave Wales a great start. Team Captain Gary Hales carried on in the same vein, though Gary employed his lifting game to good effect against Chris Holt, at number 3 string. A fairly comfortable 3-0 win resulted for Gary (11/6, 11/7, 11/6) putting Wales 2-0 up. At number 1 string Jon Evans was almost error free in his opening game taking it 11/2 against Brian Robertson. However, the second game was far from easy and Jon just sneaked it 13/11. That was a wake-up call for Jon returned to his error-free ways winning the third game 11/1 and so the match 3-0. So, Wales had a 3-0 lead when Ian Fenner-Evans, playing at number 4 string, went on against Jimmy Wells whom he had lost to last year in Aberdeen. The first game was very tight and could have gone either way but Ian stayed strong and took it 14/12. That proved decisive and gave him the impetus to win the next two games 11/7 and 11/5, respectively and so the match 3-0. Richard Murphy played in his usual solid way and was always in control against Ronnie Carter at number string. A 3-0 win (11/6, 11/7, 11/6) gave Wales a 5-0 win and a complete whitewash (20-0) against Scotland with no Welsh player dropping a single game.

#### Wales v Ireland

Matches on Saturday morning started early at 9.30am and we were against Ireland. Ian started things off at number 5 string and though having to work hard he took a relatively comfortable 2-0 lead by taking the opening games 11/6 and 11/2, respectively. A 3-0 win was looking most probable. However, his opponent, Karam Singh had other ideas and a real battle then ensued with Ian losing the third game 7/11. However, Ian battled back and won the fourth game 11/7 and so the match 3-1. Gary was on next at number 3 string against Sean McKee. Sean had just lost 3-2 against the England number 3 yesterday evening, after being 2-1 up and so this could potentially be a tricky match for Gary! Right from the start of the match Sean was constantly talking and joking after virtually every point! This made for a friendly start to the game but between comments Sean was hitting winners all over the court and Gary was 0/6 down in no-time in that first game and struggling to concentrate and get any shots deep! Everything from Gary was going mid-court which Sean would hit extremely hard either for a winner or elicit a weak reply. Gary somehow dug-in and worked extremely hard to pull back the deficit and managed to save a couple of game balls and get to 10-all.

However, a couple of loose shots by Gary set up Sean to hit a couple of winners and the game was lost 10/12. A good start was needed in the second game but at 0/4 down Gary was looking at a similar situation as happened in the first. However, once again Gary stayed in the game with some good retrieving and was grateful for a few unforced errors which were now starting to creep into Sean's game. Gary took that game 11/6 and the subsequent games 11/4 and 11/5, respectively but had to work extremely hard to achieve the 3-1 win. This gave Wales a 2-0 lead and Jon Evans then went on at number 1 string against Mike McKee. Jon seemed in control of most of the rallies but Mike had the ability to hit some great winning shots when not expected and when under severe pressure. So, though Jon won 3-0 (11/6, 11/5, 11/7), which looks quite straight-forward on paper, it was much closer than that and Jon had to work hard for the 3-0 win. Steve Evans, playing his first International match for several years, was playing Tommy Horgan at number 4 string. Steve started confidently but each game was extremely tough and close. Steve had not been playing very much competitive squash in the last 4 years and he had to dig-deep to just stay ahead of Tommy, who is a very useful player. A few "fist-pumps" from Steve showed how fired-up and determined he was to do well. The 3-0 win (11/7, 11/6, 11/8) for Steve was a hard-fought for victory and he also found time to explain "when a boast is not a boast" to the referee! At number 2 string Richard was against Gerry Callanan, a regular in the Ireland team. Gerry's style of hitting the ball hard, going for winners and liking a fast pace was known to us all and Richard was able to slow the game down to his pace with good length and boasting at the right time so moving Gerry to all 4 corners of the court. Richard played a patient game and won 3-0 (11/7, 11/4, 11/6). So, a 5-0 victory over Ireland (20-2) meant that we were almost certainly assured of at least 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the competition, with just England to play.

### **Wales v England**

The afternoon matches started at 2.30pm and we were back again on a glass-backed court at Sophia Gardens. England had also beaten Ireland and Scotland in their first matches and so our match against England would decide 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place. James was on first at number 5 string against Steve Martin, who was making his England debut this weekend. Steve made some unforced errors in the opening game but James could not capitalise, making errors of his own. The 1<sup>st</sup> game was going to be an important one to win and the English player just sneaked it 11/9. James had chances in the next two games but they were lost 11/6 and 11/7, respectively and so the match 3-0. Gary, playing at number 3 string was against Duane Harrison, a very hard hitter of the ball. At the start of the first game Gary was not getting the ball deep enough and Duane was punishing these shots with low short cross-court kills. However, several unforced errors from Duane kept Gary in touch until at about 5-all Gary stretched to retrieve yet another hard-low cross-court drive and felt a strain in his right ham-string! With restricted movement Gary continued but the game was lost 11/8. A combination of better length from Gary and continued unforced errors from Duane meant that the second and third games looked close on paper but Gary was unable to cover the court as he wanted to and the match was lost 3-0 (11/8, 11/7, 11/8). At number 1 string Jon was against the new British Closed Champion, Steve McLoughlin. Jon did not make his usual confident start, perhaps showing too much respect to his opponent he did not play his usual game and lost the opening game 11/6. In the second game Jon relaxed and began to play the

way we know he can which resulted in a much closer game. After some long rallies, Jon just lost that game 11/8. However, Jon was now playing well and pushing the National Champion all the way. Both players were working extremely hard but Jon had the edge in this third game, getting to game ball at 10/7, with a great opportunity to get a game back. However, fortune was not on Jon's side! When Steve lifted a lob to the back of the court Jon jumped to play a volley smash and his calf cramped up and he miss-hit the shot into the tin. Jon took a few seconds to try to shake off the cramp but he quickly lost the next two game points as he was restricted in his movement. Jon valiantly tried to move about the court but was restricted in his movement but Steve kept his concentration well, as it can be difficult playing an opponent with an injury, and went on to take the next two points and so the game 12/10 and the match 3-0. At number 4 string Steve Evans was against Peter Lonsdale. The first game was very competitive and Steve was bringing out the "fist-pumps" again to fire himself up, while Peter was staying calm but getting slightly red-faced as the length of the rallies increased. Peter took the first game 11/7 but Steve hit back winning the second 11/6. Peter looked to be blowing the harder at this stage but his lobs to the back of the court were working well to give himself time and also put Steve under lots of pressure. Steve lost a very close third game 11/8 and gave everything in the fourth but lost that 11/4 and so the match 3-1. Last on court was Richard against the England number 2 and captain, Eamon Price and what followed was a "classic"! Richard started superbly, playing confidently and moving well, he took the opening game 11/5. The second game Eamon fought back and it was close until the end when Eamon sneaked it 11/9. Eamon took the third game 11/5 but Richard was not giving up and played another tremendous game to take the fourth game 11/7. In the 5<sup>th</sup> game they were both giving it everything, typified by Richard mid-way through the game diving to retrieve the ball and cutting his hand in the process. After a short break to stop the bleeding Richard was back on court and he reached 10/8 match ball! His first was lost and then the second also lost, as he tried to take the ball short a little too earlier than he had been doing before! However, Richard fought back to gain two more match balls at 11/10 and 12/11, respectively. Unfortunately, in front of a large Welsh crowd Richard was unable to convert either of these chances. Richard saved one match ball himself at 12/13 but he eventually succumbed 15/13 and so lost the match 3-2. So close! Wales lost to England 5-0 (20-3).

So, Wales finished 2<sup>nd</sup> behind winners England. Scotland beat Ireland to finish third in the final placings.

Gary Hales

Wales Over 50's Men's Team Captain 2017

