#  Division 1 Singles Final 2019 held at Racquets

In a less spacious setting than last year’s Ripley event, Racquets hosted the Division 1 Singles Final this year with a strong field despite the absence of last year’s champion, Richard Whiteley. When the draw was made at 7.00 pm, it was obvious that there was going to be a contrast of styles again this year with the following Quarter final matches:-

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| Filip Wojtkowiak v Tim Simpson |
| Joe Wright v Sammy Kelly |
| Jonathan Wooldridge v David Jackson |
| Deo Jones v Bryan Birkbeck |

## Tim v Filip

The first match was soon under way with Graham Bowland in the Umpire’s chair for the duration of the whole evening.

From the first point, Tim brought his powerful forehand strokes into play and despite early match nerves with uncharacteristic errors from both players; Tim soon had the game under control and took it 11-6. In the second game Filip had more success with his serve to the wide forehand, playing the return with fast deflections to the backhand corner. With his Seemiller grip, Filip’s game started to gain in fluency changing the direction of play with his distinctive early, off-the-bounce returns. Filip also took the third game with Tim forced into errors, playing his stylish but less consistent backhand. The next four games were shared between both players with 11-9 scorelines to give Filip the victory. However, in all of these games each of the players established a good lead only to be chased down to a nail-biting finish. Perhaps this was the match of the evening and would have made a worthy Final.

11-6 9-11 7-11 11-9 9-11 11-9 9-11 to **Filip**

## Joe v Sammy

It can be difficult playing against your teammate, and that seemed to be the case in the first game with both players struggling to receive each other’s service. Joe was quicker to settle though and took the game and his confidence was evident despite continuing to struggle with Sammy’s serve as he took the second game. Sammy took the third game still serving well with a range of different spins. By the fourth game though, Joe was looking to have taken full control and Sammy was never able to assert his game – losing in the fifth game 1-4.

11-8 11-7 9-11 11-6 11-6 to **Joe**

## David v Jonathan

David opened the first game looking assured and comfortable, but Jonathan eventually won a tight game partly through the assistance of some edges. The contrast in styles in this match was very evident with Dave’s stylish loops off both wings and the tall Jonathan playing from the middle of the table mixing topspin and chops. Perhaps for this reason, Dave never settled into his game, finding it difficult to get past the reach on either side that enabled Jonathan to make more successful returns in the rallies. With Dave, missing several relatively easy kills on his forehand the game finished surprisingly quickly.

9-11 6-11 5-11 4-11 to **Jonathan**

## Deo v Bryan

This was a curious match. Bryan immediately went about his business playing great table tennis: dominating the first two games to take a convincing lead. In the next game, Deo seemed to focus on his task more and we began to see greater sureness of shot from him. But Bryan’s dominance was re-asserted in the fourth game as he went into a 3-1 lead. Deo came back winning the fifth game but at four points apiece in the sixth game, it looked like Bryan could see the finishing line. Not to be. He lost the next six points and went down 11-7. It was still all to play for, but Bryan was no longer playing his normal game, losing the final, deciding game 11-2.

4-11 8-11 11-7 6-11 11-8 11-7 11-2 to **Deo**

# Semi Finals

## Joe v Filip

Filip battled through against Tim’s power in the first match, so the question here was whether Joe could unpick Filip’s seemingly infinite resolve and concentration. Maybe Joe’s speed and balance would be a match for the Filip’s wall-like defence. As the first game got under way, it was evident that Joe would use his speed and spin, but having forced some loose returns, his kill shot failed and Filip took an early lead. In the second game, Joe tried to shorten the rallies but found himself 3-7 down. He managed to get back to 8-9 but the game soon went to Filip 11-8. Finding himself two games down, Joe responded well and with speedy footwork and deploying a range of shots he won the third game and managed in like manner to edge out the fourth game to level the match. Had he found the right tactics at the right time? Sadly for him, the answer was no. Despite pulling his way back into the fifth game, with the score level at six apiece, Joe walked to the umpires position and retired with a back injury.

11-6 11-8 9-11 9-11 6-6 Joe retires. Match to **Filip**

## Deo v Jonathan

A flying start for Deo in the first game, but somehow Jonathan turned the game around and ran out with a comfortable 11-8 score. Deo started even more commandingly in the second game forcing a six points to nil score line. This time he saw it through, winning the game with his backhand control. By the third game, Deo was beginning to dominate play finding great angles with both backhand and forehand shots. But Jonathan came back playing wide to outside of Deo’s forehand, winning the fourth game to level the match. Deo responded to take the fifth game with greater focus, but Jonathan wasn’t finished yet. In the sixth game, Jonathan was level at 6-6, when Deo turned to serve unusually with his backhand to take an 8-6 lead. Jonathan, still full of fight forced errors from Deo but eventually went down 11-9 in the sixth.

8-11 11-7 11-6 8-11 11-8 11-9 to **Deo**

# Final

## Filip v Deo

Deo was soon back at the table to contest the Final. The match game scores indicate that the result could have gone either way. That Filip won in the seventh, final game is testimony to his high level of focus and obduracy throughout the evening. In fact there was a worrying moment in the fourth game when Filip winced in pain, but he was soon back at the table not showing any change in his outward demeanour. All the games in this match were closely contested. But the abiding memory of the Final will be the lacerating backhand topspin shots from Deo, first to the middle and then wide to the forehand. And sometimes combinations with his forehand switching the angles of play. And yet.. despite this all-out assault from Deo - a player who is wonderful to watch - there was Filip with his unyielding, hugely skilled, formidable, intimidating blocking and he was the one who ultimately took the 2019 Division 1 Singles Final title.

9-11 11-8 7-11 11-8 9-11 11-7 11-8 to **Filip**