



# Northumbria County Closed

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20-Jan-08:  
**Two five-game Finals,  
 one new Champion ...**  
*Steve Cubbins reports ...*

County Championships were taking place all over the UK this weekend, with Tynemouth Squash Club hosting the competition for the North-Eastern outpost of Northumbria.

A decent entry saw A, B and C men's event plus a Women's draw, each comprising 16 entries. After three days of competition no-one was surprised by the identity of the four main finalists, but no-one was disappointed by two engrossing finals.



**PHOTO GALLERY**



ISPA  
 PREMIER LEAGUE  
 Super League  
 Squash on TV

Men's Final:	David Barnett bt Paul Lord	5/9, 9/5, 8/10, 9/0, 9/1 (83m)
Women's Final:	Kimberley Hay bt Emma Barnett	10/9, 9/4, 3/9, 3/9, 9/6 (37m)
B Final:	Jon Evans bt Dan Ward	9/3, 9/5, 9/4
C Final:	Sean Millington bt Andy King	7/9, 9/3, 5/9, 10/8, 10/8



### Kim steps up to seniors

National U15 champion two years ago and current national U17 number one, Kimberley Hay was a firm favourite to take her first senior title in the absence of Sarah Bowles, winner of the last four editions who was otherwise occupied with examinations at Leeds University.

Her opponent in the final was Emma Barnett, who enjoyed - if that's the word - many years of close junior competition with Sarah but had never managed to beat her in the senior county event. Last year Kim had beaten Emma in the semis but lost to Sarah in the final.

Kim started the better, held off a determined fightback from Emma to take the first 10/9 and looked in control as she took the second. The match turned though as Emma cruised through the third and fourth games, and at 4/0 in the fifth looked the likely winner.

But another twist saw Kim regain her earlier form to take the game and claim her first senior county title. Few expect it to be her last ...



"After I went 2/0 up she slowed it down in the third and fourth, I had to quicken the pace again and keep her behind me to stop her playing those dropshots

"I've won three county junior titles, to win the senior county title is a great feeling ..."

*Kimberley Hay*

"I was very nervous at the start, I was just hitting it too hard and playing her game.

"I managed to slow it down and get a few drops in, but at 4/0 in the fifth I got nervous again.

"I've played so many finals, I don't want to think about it ..."



*Emma Barnett*



### Another Dynasty up North

Things go in phases in Northumbria - Elliot Procter won many titles, then it was David Burton who was superseded by Bryan Beeson. Beeson, the former world number six and England captain, won 13 of his titles from 1981 to 1997, then collected an almost miraculous 14th in 2003.

From 1997 to 2001 it was the turn of John Dale, whose reign was struck down with a brain tumor. John recovered from that, and started coaching in the USA only to discover last year that the cancer had returned. Now back home, he has just finished a course of treatment and has a scan in a few weeks to see how things are progressing. Happily he was on hand tonight to present the trophies, and everyone up here wishes him well.

The latest dynasty began in 2004 when, after a couple of emotional failures, David Barnett finally claimed the title. Currently ranked 111 in the world Barnett was tonight bidding for his fifth title to equal John's record.

His opponent was former world top 30 player Paul (Mr Sabre Sports) Lord, the many-time Cheshire champion who moved to the North-East a few years ago. That Paul was introduced as the "1992 US Open finalist"



gives you a clue that there was an age difference - Barnett at 26, Lord 38.

The courts at Tynemouth are hot, so not much money was going on Lord to win a lengthy battle, considering that in his heyday he was renowned for dogged determination and retrieving rather than flashy winners. Most favoured Barnett to wear him down, and in the event that's what happened, but that brief description doesn't do the final any justice at all.

Recovering from a poor start, Paul came from 5/1 down to take the first in 20 minutes. 15 minutes later it was 2-all in the second, and after 45 minutes of engrossing play young Barnett levelled the match. Paul was grunting as he reached for ball after ball, but still managed to keep his shots as tight and precise as ever, but when he lost that game many thought that the Sabre man's wheels were about to go awol.

They were right, but they were a game too soon. Paul leapt to a 6/1 lead in the third and amid punishing rally after punishing rally managed to hang on to take a 2/1 lead as David made two unforced errors at 8-all.

But that was it. 70 minutes gone and Paul's wheels were on the A1 back to Cheshire. David assumed total control from the outset of the fourth, allowed Paul just a solitary point in two games, and that fifth title was his after 83 minutes.



"The hot court didn't suit me, so I was just trying to control the rallies and make him work harder than me.

"I was feeling tired in the second, managed to keep it going for another game to win the third, but I had nothing left after that, he was just too strong.

"83 minutes - I've not had one of those for a few years, but I'll be back ..."



*Paul Lord*

"I haven't been as fit as I could be recently, but I knew if I could keep going I could outlast him.

"He played well, but at the end of the third I could tell he'd hit the wall, and even though I lost that I felt pretty comfortable from then on.

"It's nice to equal John's record of five titles - part of me wants to go on to beat Beeson, but in a way I hope there's a junior coming up who can beat me, it's good for the County ..."



*David Barnett*

### A 'ringer' and a newcomer

He only won the senior title once, in 1990 - Beeson was in the way most times - but Jon Evans was a Welsh International and, once back problems stopped his professional squash career, a pretty decent triple-jumper too. To see him back at all was a delight, to see him in the B event raised a few eyebrows, to see him win it raised none.

The C event may have seen the start of a new dynasty. 14-year-old Sean Millington - son of Paul, the former world top-30 player who won this title twice - won two long five-setters today to take the C title.

Good at everything he tries, excellent at anything he really puts his mind to, Millington junior delighted the packed audiences as he overcame two much bigger, older and more experienced players. "I wonder where he gets that determined streak from?" asked one spectator, with a wry look towards the champion's father ...



Five apiece ... John Dale and David Barnett

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