

## **Ireland fall to Finland**

In the first 9 – 12 playoff Ireland came up against Finland in what was always going to be a tough encounter. Arthur Gaskin played Ollie Toumimen who is currently ranked in the top twenty in the world and kept with him in the first until the Fin broke away at 7/7 to take the last four points with blinding pace. Gaskin fell in the second, but took the third and looked like he could take the tiring Fin in five as he played with confidence in what would have been a career best, however, this was not to be and Ireland were 1 – 0 down

Meanwhile on court 2 Niall Rooney got off to a strong start taking the first game against Hamed Ahmed 11/7 as he kept the pressure on throughout. After losing the second Rooney raced to a 7/1 lead in the third and was determined to close out the match in 4, and was true to his word taking the final game 11/9 in a nail biting finish.

Derek Ryan faced Henrik Mustonen (Leinster Open runner up), and found the man half his age more than a handful. Still recovering from his 3 previous five set matches Ryan pushed hard but never quite showed the domination his previous opponents were subjected to.

Steve Richardson went on against Mathias Tuomi and had the almost impossible task of having to take the match without dropping more than 10 points after the numbers were crunched in what was becoming a desperate effort from the team to keep the match alive. Unfortunately the Fin took the first game 14/12 and the overall match on games won

## **Ireland finish with a win**

11 – 12 playoff. Only 2 hours after their close encounter with Finland Ireland faced their Scandinavian neighbours and took Sweden down on games after the count back.

Arthur Gaskin played Rasmus Hult and put in another fine performance and just fell short losing 11/7 in the fifth. The pace of the double handed backhand player was a bridge too far for the Carlow man to cross as he chased multiple high paced strokes up and down the court.

Meanwhile next door on court 8 Steve Richardson took the first in a fiercely fought 14/12 and the second 11/8 and Ireland were feeling confident as a win was becoming a real possibility. Having lost the third Richardson bounced back and took the fourth 11/6 and the match stood at one a piece.

Niall Rooney was feeling the pace from the last few days, starting slow, dropping the first 11-8. He eventually found his form and his opponent Sebastian Viktor found it difficult to stick with him. Rooney pulled away in both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup>, establishing a good lead in both games. Viktor struggled in the 4<sup>th</sup> and Rooney eventually closed out the tie 11-4.

Derek Ryan went out against a long term rival Christian Drakenberg. The pace was high from the outset, Ryan dropping the first 11-5, however he showed his class in the middle of second, with a string of winners and forcing errors from the Swede, Ryan took the second 11-8. This game going to Ireland made the rest of the match was a dead rubber as there was no way back for the Swedes at this stage.

## Round up

Although Ireland finished 11<sup>th</sup> out of 27 teams (having started at 7<sup>th</sup> seed) this was probably a fair reflection of how they stood in the overall competition factoring in the loss of 3 players – Liam Kenny (1), John Rooney (2), and Rory Byrne (5). Having narrowly lost to Wales in a count back which would have put the team into the semi finals Ireland beat Scotland and Sweden and fought hard in a close loss against The Czech Republic and Finland. The players fought hard in every match and were a credit to their country showing a great competitive spirit and pride with every performance.

Arthur Gaskin stepped up to the number one spot against the best our neighbours had to offer and troubled a number of them including Ollie Toumimen who is a top twenty world class player, Gaskin had trained hard recently and this showed as the Carlow man played some of the best squash of his career.

Derek Ryan who at 40 was rested for only one match (against France) and won in tough five set encounters against Wales and Scotland. With the ability to change and control the pace on very hot courts Ryan pushed hard and proved to his younger opponents that it is in fact possible to put a young head on old shoulders (and may say tired legs!).

Steve Richardson played at number three on the team and gave 110% in every match chasing down every shot and responded with guts and determination to the end. The experienced Ballymena man took to the competition relishing every encounter and showed that he is still as hungry to win now as when he first slipped on the Irish shirt in the early 90's.

At 4 Niall Rooney came up against a variety of opponents from the experienced Alex Gough to the incredibly fast Mathieu Castagnet. Rooney definitely gained from the experience, gave a good account of himself and will without a doubt continue to be a credit to his country.

Neil Martin gained his first senior cap in a 'Baptism of Fire' against Gregoire Marche and learned a lot from the trip spending time with the players and coach. Neil will be back in the future and will certainly rally up a number of caps over the next few years should he continue to work at his game like he has over the past 18 months.

The team (under coach Simon Parke) will continue to train as a squad and travel to the UK where they have set up camp in Heaton and regularly compete against the top players in the world in simulated international practice matches. The cohesion gained from this format throughout the year definitely stood to the team and was very evident on and off the court.

In a nutshell the campaign was a success given the loss of some players and all five members of the team can stand tall knowing that they performed to their best and were a credit to their coach, manager and country.

Ed Dunne