

Winchester Fives National Doubles Championships, 13th March 2005
(Malvern College)

1st Round: J Sinton & C Thomas bt R Cothay & A Scholz 15-9 15-2; I de Weymarn & J Fabes bt M Cowie & E Ronan 15-6 15-2; J Hughes & A Rew bt M Arnott & N Arnott 15-2 15-2; G McGairl & H Mohammed bt C Butler & B Kirk 15-2 15-3; T Lewis & S Maskell bt T Kiggell & A Landon 15-10 15-5; H Buchanan & S Roberts bt P Gray & M King 15-4 15-7. *Quarter-Finals:* D Fox & D Hebden bt T Squires & S Stagg 15-2 15-4; de Weymarn & Fabes bt Sinton & Thomas 15-11 15-9; Hughes & Rew bt McGairl & Mohammed 16-14 15-13; Buchanan & Roberts bt Lewis & Maskell 15-5 15-5. *Semi-Finals:* Fox & Hebden bt de Weymarn & Fabes 15-4 15-6; Buchanan & Roberts bt Hughes & Rew 15-9 15-9.

Final: Fox & Hebden bt Buchanan & Roberts 12-15 16-14 15-9.

Plate: McGairl & Mohammed.

A smaller field than usual contested the 24th 'Barnes Bridge' – the sixth time the competition has been held at Malvern College. The weather was cold but dry, and once the players had settled down to the unique demands of the Malvern courts, plenty of good fives was on view.

The first round matches were all two-gamers, the most enjoyable to watch being the one in which Tim Lewis and Old Malvernian Simon Maskell defeated Tom Kiggell and Andy Landon.

While the first and second seeds sailed through the quarter-finals with relative ease, the other two matches produced four cracking games. Iain de Weymarn and Jez Fabes had to play near their best to beat Jez Sinton and Chris Thomas, while Jim Hughes and Alex Rew found the Wykehamist pair of George McGairl and Hal Mohammed a real handful, only scraping home by the odd couple of points in each game.

Hughes and Rew went on to test second seeds Hamish Buchanan and Sam Roberts in their semi-final but just lacked the accuracy onto the buttress to take a game off the London pair. In the other semi, holders Dave Fox and Dave Hebden defeated de Weymarn and Fabes fairly comfortably.

The final – the only three-game match of the whole tournament – was extremely close. The fives may not have been of quite the same breathtaking standard as the final at Sedbergh in November 2004 involving three of the same players (plus a different Roberts), but it was just as exciting. Buchanan and Roberts won the first game narrowly and took a commanding lead in the second, finally standing at 14-7 up. Fox had been struggling with a damaged muscle and had to receive medical attention, and this broke the pattern of the game, with Fox and Hebden saving a match point and then playing unbeatable fives in a series of superb rallies to take it 16-14.

With Fox's injury and Hebden's energies beginning to waver, there was always the possibility that they might not have been able to sustain their form into the third game. But somehow they managed to do so despite continuous pressure from their opponents, eventually winning the game to 9. Congratulations to all of them for a fine show of fives on the aptly-named 'Masters' court – surely the only four-walled fives court in Britain without a door.

The plate – a lengthy affair involving ten pairs – was deservedly won by McGairl and Mohammed, who beat Sinton and Thomas comfortably in the final. Many thanks to Peter Gray for his help with the tournament and to Malvern College for their hospitality. The four-year cycle starts again next year at Bradfield.

David Barnes