

## **Tecnifibre British Junior Open, Sheffield, 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> January 2012**

### **Ashley Davies Walks Like An Egyptian.**

It was January again and time for the world's best junior squash players to descend on Sheffield en masse. 410 registered players from 43 Countries, as far away as Trinidad and Tobago, United States, Canary Islands, Egypt, New Zealand, and Malta. All with one aim; to win the biggest and most prestigious junior tournament of them all, the British Junior Open.

With 7 of the top seeds coming from Egypt, it was more like the Egyptian Junior Open, than the British. Over the last 3 years alone they have taken 20, out of a possible 24 age group titles back home to Egypt.

This year there were 13 out of 16 Egyptians in the finals. There were all Egyptian finals in the Girls under 13, 15, 17, and 19 age groups, in the Boy's the under 13 and 15's finals were Egypt v Pakistan, the under 19's was an all Egyptian affair, but for the first time since Joe Lee in 2006, there was an English player, Ashley Davies, in the under 17 Boys final And what a final it turned out be. The last English player to win the BJO was no other than current World Men's No 1 James Willstrop back in the year 2000! So no pressure then!

Ashley, the current European No 1, England No 2, and British Champion, had been seeded 5/8 behind 3 Egyptians, and a Jordanian. Which meant if it all went to seeding, which it did, he would play the Egyptian No 1 seed Osama Khali Khalifa, in the quarter finals.

Ashley beat the Egyptian, 3-1, 7/11, 11/7, 11/8, 13/11.

In the semi final he then had to meet another Egyptian, Karim El Hammamy. In one hell of a match, lasting 109 minutes, Ashley booked his first ever British Junior Open appearance with a stunning 3-2 win, 11/7, 13/15, 11/3, 3/11, 14/12.

If that wasn't enough he would meet yet another Egyptian, this time Shehab Essam, who had beaten the Jordanian 3/4 seed Ahmad Alsaraj, in the other semi final, 3-2, in a match lasting 106 minutes.

On a packed Abbeydale show court, there was hardly enough space for the players to walk on to the court, a club official estimated up to 350 people had managed to cram in to see the final.

Ashley had been in fantastic form since the summer, reaching the final of the Dutch, losing 3-2, to, yes you guessed it, an Egyptian, Self Abou El Einen, he won the Nordic, 3-1 against Martin Svec, the British Championships, against England No 1 Richie Fallows, 3-2, from 0-2 and two match balls down. Then took the Belgian Open, beating Yousef Saleh, from Kuwait, 3-2.

The final saw a fantastic 5 set match, befitting a BJO final, lasting over an hour with the support of an electrifying crowd behind both players. Each player took turns to win games, at 2 games all it was impossible to see who the victor would be. Ashley took an early 4-2 lead, only to make three unforced errors in a row on the top of the tin allowing Shehab a way back in. Shehab, a quality player then eased away with a few superb shots, typical of what the Egyptians always seem to be able to pull out of the bag, and that was it, 7-11 to Essam in the 5<sup>th</sup>.

A great performance by Ashley from 5/8, a great final, a great end to an under 17 career, and a fantastic crowd the likes we might not see again, till next time!