

World Title for Birmingham Squash Duo

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Two University of Birmingham sports scholars have returned from the recent World University Squash Championships with three medals between them, including a world championship title.

Jonathan Harford and Joel Hinds were part of the successful GB team of three male and two female players that won team gold, plus three individual medals.

Team GB was the outstanding team of the championships, held in Szeged in Hungary last week. Although seeded 1 in the team event, the players exceeded expectations in terms of the ease with which they beat South Africa in the semi-finals and France in the final, to become world university champions.

The draw for the individual championship was far from kind to the Brits, with all three British players in the same half, the two Birmingham players drawn in the same quarter, and Joel drawn to play the number 2 seed, Czech Jan Koukal in the 2nd round. Unfazed by the challenge, Joel produced the biggest upset of the event, beating Koukal 3-0 in a 70-minute match that was the best performance in Joel's squash playing career, played with maturity well beyond his 19 years of age.

Jonathan and Joel then had the misfortune to meet each other in an all-Birmingham quarter-final, which resulted in Joel progressing to the semi-final where he faced GB's top-ranked male player, Chris Ryder (Loughborough graduate) who eventually went on to win the individual world championship title, but secured Joel a well-deserved bronze medal.

As former England junior national players, Jonathan and Joel have each played a crucial part in the University of Birmingham securing the British Universities Sports Association's team squash title for the last three consecutive years. Jonathan was a University sports scholar and a recipient of the government's Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) until his graduation in Business & Commerce. He is now a professional squash player, heading for a top 100-world ranking. Joel is a TASS scholar and just completed his first year studying Business.

The GB Team Coach was Keir Worth, until recently Head Squash Coach for University Sport Birmingham until his recent move to England Squash as a National Performance Coach. Keir's part in the team's success was crucial.

University of Birmingham Director of Sport, Zena Wooldrige, was in Hungary to witness the team's success:

"When the GB team beat France so emphatically in the final I thought that had to be the highlight of the week. But Joel's performance in the individual championship far exceeded anything anyone could have expected of him. He has taken his game to a whole new level.

"Team GB dominated this championship and I am proud of the part the two University of Birmingham players and our former coach played in that success. It reflects the effectiveness of the performance environment we have for squash at Birmingham. Congratulations Jonny, Joel and Keir".

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