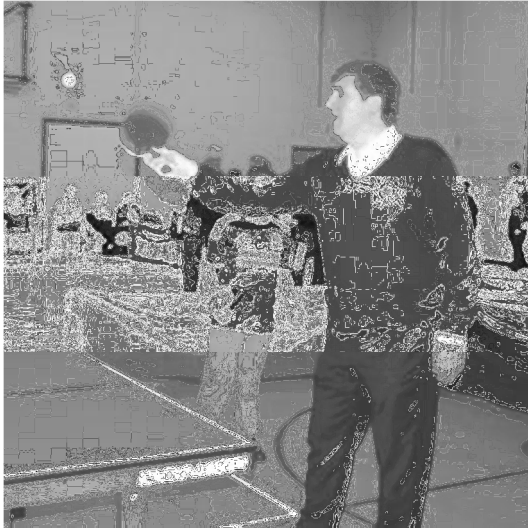


Great Dane goes back to his roots

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Great Dane Jan Molby went back to his roots last week as he helped launch a new table tennis academy in Anfield – the first of its kind in the city.



Joining forces with Everton's Dutch ace John Heitinga and Great Britain table tennis star Darius Knight, the trio showed off their skills with youngsters from schools in the local area. The launch of the table tennis centre at the Anfield Community Centre was tied in with a Premier League backed national campaign to find two up and coming talents to represent Liverpool and Everton in a national Barclays Premier League endorsed table tennis final in December. Steve Park, Premier League sport co-ordinator, said: "In many ways this centre will be the first of its kind and it's fantastic because it is all about junior development. "We have launched the Liverpool and Everton table tennis academy and we are tying it in with a national competition in London and December.

"Liverpool and Everton are very happy to work together and it's great because we can reach the whole city and get the youngsters involved.

"We are working primarily with year seven, eight and nine at local schools.

"It's a great sport to play and quite easy to get the hang of once you've had a couple of games."

Danny Girling-Jones beat Anthony Duffy in the all-Liverpool final while Joel Webb - a Liverpool fan - will represent Everton in the London finals in December.

Molby also grabbed a bat and was ready for action as he went head-to-head with Team GB ace Knight. Molby's pre-game ploy was to tell Knight he hadn't played table tennis before, but the Kop hero certainly held his own as they agreed to a honourable draw.

Molby said: "It's a long time since I last played table tennis but it was an enjoyable experience.

"Going back to our day as footballers we didn't have the facilities to play it, but as a kid growing up I played a lot of table tennis back in Denmark.

"It's nice to see this happening in Liverpool and good to have someone of Darius Knight's quality coming to promote table tennis in this city.

"There's nothing like sport to get any community together. I think this will be successful and a lot of hard work has gone into it."

Great Britain table tennis number two Knight, who will be part of Team GB for the 2012 Olympics, said: "I was impressed with the standard of the kids and they really enjoyed it so it was good fun.

"I enjoyed playing the exhibition game against Jan but I don't believe he has never played before!

"Liverpool is known as a city of football but there's also a lot of table tennis players about, so it's a great sport to get involved in and then hopefully we can bring the next generation through."

Siobhan Atkinson from the Premier League's Community Development department said: "This forms part of our Premier League for Schools programme which is what we deliver, getting out there and working with lots of fantastic people.

"I think the work that's being done with this first table tennis centre in Liverpool sends out a really good message to the community."

Author: Steve Hunter

'Anfield Sports & Community Centre at the end of Clarendon Road, accessible from Townsend Lane, L6,