

REPORT BY ALAN SHEPHERD

### **NORTH MIDDLESEX LEAGUE SECURE THE VICTOR BARNÁ TROPHY**

In 1979 the Middlesex County Table Tennis Association paid honour to the memory of one of the world's greatest players, and one of their most renowned representatives, namely Victor Barna, who passed away in 1972, by establishing the Competition known as the Victor Barna Trophy. Between 1979 and 2009 the Trophy was won 14 times by the North Middlesex League, whose headquarters are in Enfield, while the South and West Middlesex League, based in Ealing and its surrounds gained 6 victories, and the Wembley and Harrow League, whose name speaks for itself, have won on three occasions, two of which have taken place in the last three years. However, the reigning champions were the City based Central League who triumphed in 2009, recording only their second success.

So, at the Ellenborough Club on 13th February 2010 there met to renew the battle for the Trophy all of these Leagues except South and West Middlesex. A great return to the world of top-class competition was made by one of the stars of the past, namely Ellenborough's Graham Sandley, who returned from a long absence to represent North Middlesex League. Graham first sprang to prominence when he won the Boys Singles at the English Junior Championships in 1980. He went on to win the Mixed Doubles title at the English Senior Closed Championships in 1985, with Berkshire's Alison Gordon, and represented England on various occasions. His presence in the team of host league North Middlesex alongside Essex Champion, Matthew Spero and Hertfordshire's Steve Dobbins, obviously made them favourites to win the Trophy, although Wembley and Harrow were sure to offer strong opposition from their team of Koji Hirota, number 63 ranked in England, James Sprackling, ranked number 87 and the highly respected Herts County player, Glen Wilkes.

In the event, the winners of the Trophy for the year 2010 were decided by the very close contest between these two teams. Two wins for Matthew Spero and one each for Graham and Steve appeared to have settled the outcome as these results gave North Middlesex a 4 - 0 lead. However, Wembley and Harrow fought back superbly, with James Sprackling toppling Graham Sandley, Lee Middleton (taking the place of the absent Koji Hirota) beating Dobbins in the deciding game (3 - 2) of a tense contest, Sprackling splendidly ousting Spero, and Wilkes beating Dobbins. So it was 4 - 4! However, the ex-international, Graham Sandley, then stepped in to secure the victory with a 3-0 defeat over Lee Middleton.