

LEE ALL SMILES AFTER WELSH SUCCESS



New Welsh Open champion Stephen Lee had plenty to smile about after winning his first title for nearly four years.

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The Trowbridge potter defeated world champion Shaun Murphy 9-4 at the Newport Centre tonight (Sunday) to take his first ranking crown since the 2002 Scottish Open.

"I'm over the moon to win this title," said the 31-year-old, who did not win a match in the first three ranking events of the campaign. "Lady Luck has been with me this week.

"To win anything these days is a great achievement because it's so tough. The standard is so high. That's the best I've hit the ball for a while.

"There's a lot of us struggling to get ranking points nowadays, so this win is very special.

"I lost a lot of confidence when I was working hard on the practice table then turning up to matches and losing. You've just got to grin and bare it. There's no magic button you can press to turn it around. You just have to take it on the chin.

"I was missing a bit of belief and struggled to hold my concentration, but I kept on believing and held myself together.

"I've not been at my best this week, but if I can win a tournament with just glimpses of my form, then I can't wait for the rest of the season. I'm looking forward to the China Open and then Sheffield."

Beaten finalist Murphy was understandably downbeat after defeat and admitted: "I just wasn't good enough on the day. It's sickening to lose, but it's been my first appearance at the Welsh Open and I've done well to get to the final.

"It's a shame I just couldn't finish the job off but I could have been beaten by Jamie Cope in the last 16 and ended up going home earlier, so I was glad to get through to the final. But the final is all on the day and I didn't play my best."

The turning point of the match came in the eighth frame when Murphy had a black to level at 4-4 but missed it and trailed 5-3 after the first session.

"I tried to drop the black in, but it didn't go in," said Murphy. "That's the nature of our game. Sometimes they go in and sometimes they don't.

"I still fancied the job at 5-3 as I thought the afternoon session was as bad as it was going to get. It wasn't to be but only a year ago I was watching this event at home and wondering why I wasn't here."