

Middlesex come through to take Senior Premier Division title

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Please accept my apologies for the late reporting of round seven of the County Championships Senior and Junior Premier Division weekend, held two weeks ago – on Sunday afternoon – 03 April 2011.

What an afternoon it turned out to be for Middlesex who beat Cleveland 8-2. With long-time leaders Derbyshire losing 6-4 to Berkshire it is the London side who became Champions. No prizes for guessing who won Cleveland's two games. Three times National Mens Singles Champion Paul Drinkhall didn't drop a game in disposing of Dan Basterfield (11-5, 11-2, 11-6) and Neil Charles (11-8, 11-6, 11-4). Middlesex nevertheless were on a roll and Tin-Tin Ho (England no. 26) and Sarah Horsnell (England no. 39) both scored excellent wins over the considerably higher-ranked Karen Shepherd (England no. 15) whilst Neil Charles and Igor Morais both beat Bryn Drinkhall. Full marks are extended to the Middlesex Management Committee for letting their leading young players – Tin-Tin Ho (Under 13 and Under 15 National no. one) and Igor Morais (Under 15 National no. two as per the latest ETTA list) play for the Senior team instead of their Junior side. It is clearly a decision which has paid dividends.

Sussex also finished like an Express train and turned in a performance even more impressive than one of Ritchie Venner's counter-hits. Craig Bryant, Ritchie Venner, Rose Rainton and Sarah Hilditch were all undefeated as they hammered Yorkshire 9-1. Rose and Sarah both notched up excellent wins over England no. 22 Joanna Roberts whilst Sussex came through all three five-enders. Ritchie Venner fought back from 2-0 down to get the better of Simon Nutch 8-11, 8-11, 11-8, 13-11, 11-4 whilst Craig Bryant saw off Simon Nutch 6-11, 11-4, 11-3, 8-11, 11-9 and Ritchie Venner beat Roman Doryn 11-8, 11-8, 10-12, 9-11, 11-8. Impressive newcomer, the very hard-hitting Roman Doryn was Yorkshire's only winner. He beat new England no. one Under 15 Helshan Weerasinghe 11-6, 10-12, 11-7, 12-10.

It turned out to be a very disappointing afternoon for Derbyshire. They made a terrible start against an informal Berkshire side and trailed 4-0 at one stage. They were clearly in big trouble and although Emma Vickers gave them some hope by beating Maria Tsaptinos 11-8, 8-11, 11-9, 11-6 this was soon dispelled when Dave Barr made the score 5-1 by scoring his second victory, a 11-5, 8-11, 13-11, 11-5 win over David Arrowsmith. Abbie Milwain (who had missed out 12-14, 11-7, 11-9, 11-2) against an inspired Megan Knowles beat Maria Tsaptinos 3-1 but Richard Andrews picked up his second win by beating Shaun Marples in five ends to make the score 6-2 to Berkshire. Derbyshire who had looked to be heading for the title were now only playing for "pride" and although Emma Vickers beat Megan Knowles (3-0) and Sam Perry defeated Hari Gehlot (3-1) they finished third.

Essex who started the weekend in bottom place completed their fixtures with a respectable seven points. They had "too much" for relegated Devon, winning 7-3. Improving England no. 20 Vicki Smith was Devon's top player. She beat both Lucy Wang (11-6, 11-9, 5-11, 11-5) and Sarra Wang (11-4, 9-11, 5-11, 14-12, 11-7) whilst Richard Marshall was Devon's other winner. He beat Ewan Liddle 11-3, 11-3, 11-8. Essex's top player Emran Hussain (now promoted to a career high no. 21 National Ranking) again carried all before him. His two wins, against Mike Hugh (3-0) and Richard Marshall (3-1) gave him a magnificent eight wins out of eight for the weekend.

Sussex, the runaway winners of the Junior Premier Division faced their stiffest test of the Season, and they were pushed to beat Cleveland 6-4. Indeed, they won all three five enders. Da Shuai Zhang needed five ends to get the better of Anthony Phoenix 11-5, 6-11, 12-10, 8-11, 11-3 whilst Mark Scutts was extended to a fifth game by Shannon Walker. He eventually edged home 11-13, 11-7, 14-12, 7-11, 11-8. Da Shuai (better known as "Dash") was also pushed by England no. five Under 15 Paul Smith before he won 8-11, 11-2, 8-11, 11-7, 11-5. Paul Smith was on target for Cleveland and he scored an excellent quick-fire 11-8, 11-3, 11-5 victory over Helshan Weerasinghe whilst England no. two Junior Girl Karina Lefevre won both of her singles. She beat Lois Peake (11-6, 11-2, 11-5) and

Yolanda King (11-8, 11-8, 9-11, 11-9).

Essex, second last year, finished runner-up again. They beat Middlesex 7-3, a victory that would have been even more emphatic had it not been for the excellent form of England no. 30 Junior Ryan Maynard. The Middlesex no. two beat both Jared Patel 18-16, 11-9, 9-11, 9-11, 12-10 and Alex Holland 11-1, 11-5, 3-11, 11-7. Luca Mariano, in his last ever County Junior match held the Essex side together with wins over Ping Ho (13-11, 11-9, 11-8) and England no. 11 Under 15 Tyrone Wells (13-11, 11-5, 11-5). Evie Collier (12 wins out of 14) completed what has been an excellent campaign for her with three straight wins over Samantha Lai and Sushmita Limbu.

It is relegation for Hertfordshire. They lost 6-4 to Hampshire in a very close match which was "nip and tuck" all the way to 4-4. At that point Hampshire scored two crucial wins. Chrissie Slot gave Hampshire a 5-4 lead by defeating Natasha Walsh 6-11, 13-11, 11-6, 11-7 and Josh Green secured his side's victory by defeating Tom Baines 11-9, 11-7, 11-3. Jonathan Evans had given Hampshire a 1-0 lead by beating Luke Walsh 11-8, 11-7, 10-12, 11-9 in a hard-fought opening encounter whilst England no. 17 Junior Boy Bradley Tuttle won twice for Hertfordsire. He beat Josh Green 11-8, 11-7, 12-10 and Jonathan Evans 11-9, 11-9, 11-9.

The match between Kent and Yorkshire finished as a draw. Kent's Jasmine Ould won her two singles – scoring 3-0 wins over Jenny Wood and Nicole Finn and she received support from Emma Tovey, Tom Windram and Luke Savill who all won once. Savill did well to beat James Foster 11-9, 9-11, 14-12, 11-7 in the last game to seal his side's point. England no. 25 Reece Lo – with wins over Luke Savill (3-0) and Andrew Lockwood (3-1) was Yorkshire's best player.

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