

Kent in mood to reclaim title

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Posted On: November 30, 2011



Kent no: 3 Joe Kennedy in action

County Championships

Veterans Premier Division

The first round of this season's action in the County Championships Veterans Premier Division took place at a new venue as the teams all travelled to Keighley Table Tennis Centre in the West Yorkshire town.

With each county playing three matches it was 2009/10 champions Kent who emerged from the weekend at the top of the standings after the first phase of matches as the "Garden of England County" started with a 7-3 victory against Cheshire and followed that with two thumping 9-1 victories against Essex and Lancashire.

Kent actually found themselves behind after their first set of the weekend as Brian Johns just edged out Chris Bartram (3-2) 11-8 8-11 11-8 5-11 12-10, to give Cheshire the lead and the match was nip and tuck for the next five sets as the match score read 3-all.

Joe Kennedy levelled the match by beating Mark Evans (3-1) 11-5 9-11 11-8 11-1, and Kent took the lead in the third set as Sule Olaleye beat Wayne Percival (3-0) 11-6 11-5 13-11, only for Cheshire to hit back as Johns partnered by Sue Collier took a hard fought mixed doubles (3-1) 12-10 9-11 12-10 11-9, over Olaleye and Marianne Jorgensen as the match score reached 2-all.

The next two sets were shared as Bartram recovered from two games down to beat Evans (3-2) 10-12 6-11 12-10 11-4 11-2, and Collier brought Cheshire level once again as she too came from behind to beat Jorgensen (3-1), 4-11 11-9 11-5 11-6.

A five game mens' doubles win by Olaleye and Kennedy over Johns and Percival (3-2) 11-7 11-6 3-11 9-11 11-3, saw Kent establish a 4-3 lead which they were not going to relinquish as Kennedy eased passed Percival (3-0), 11-7 12-10 11-7, to give Kent a two set lead for the first time in the match as they now lead 5-3 which was followed by a (3-0) 11-9 11-9 11-6, victory by Olaleye over Johns, which gave his side a winning 6-3 lead.

Kent took the final mixed doubles as Bartram and Jackie Williams beat Evans and Collier (3-1) 11-6 13-15 11-6 11-4, to complete victory for Kent and their first win under their belt.

Essex proved no match for Kent with only one set going to a deciding game and a solitary win by Lucy Wang over Jorgensen (3-1) 11-8 9-11 11-7 11-5, was the only set Essex were able to get on the board and it was a similar story on Sunday morning as Kent also overwhelmed Lancashire by the same score as only a Brenda Buoey and Paul Hutchings mixed doubles win over Williams and Bartram (3-2) 11-8 9-11 7-11 12-10 12-10, saved Lancashire from a whitewash.

Kent sit proudly at the top the division with six points and with Joe Kennedy playing at number 3 it could perhaps have been expected but with Leicestershire and Sussex just behind them on five points and Yorkshire on four the division is still in the balance and with the majority of the top four teams still to play each other over the second weekend at Ashford in February there is still all to play for.

Barry Snowden

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