

# Middlesex lead Senior Premier in County Champs

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## Middlesex lead Senior Premier Division

Middlesex were the outstanding team at the County Championships Senior Premier Division first weekend which was played at BATTs TTC, Harlow recently when they recorded three wins.

They eased past Sussex 8-2 and recorded 7-3 wins over Berkshire and Derbyshire to seal a maximum 6 points, two ahead of Berkshire and Essex who are lying in joint second place.

Middlesex show no signs of giving up the title they won last season by beating all in their way at BATTs – starting with an 8-2 win over Sussex. Po Chen beat Da Shuai Zhang 3-0 (11-6, 11-7, 11-4) in the opening set and when Igor Morais beat Mark Scutts 3-2 (11-9, 12-14, 11-6, 9-11, 11-5) in the second game it was Middlesex who established a 2-0 lead.

Sussex hit back by taking the next two sets as Yolanda King beat Sarah Horsnell 3-0 (11-3, 11-6, 11-8) and Craig Bryant narrowly defeated Daniel Basterfield 3-2 (11-7, 11-8, 5-11, 9-11, 12-10), leaving the sides level at 2-2.

After that, the reigning champions moved up a gear and reeled off six straight sets without reply to take the match 8-2.

The rout started with Tin-Tin Ho beating Rose Rainton in three which was followed by three five-game victories. Firstly, Morais beat Zhang 3-2 (11-5, 11-8, 10-12, 8-11, 11-5) before Horsnell beat Rainton 3-2 (11-9, 9-11, 4-11, 11-6, 11-8) and Chen beat Bryant 3-2 (11-7, 9-11, 8-11, 11-9, 11-6).

With the win already confirmed, Tin-Tin won in three against King 3-0 (11-6, 11-4, 11-6) and finally Basterfield took the final set with a 3-1 (13-11, 11-9, 8-11, 11-8) win over Scutts.

Sunday morning saw Gabriel Achampong replace Basterfield but the scoring power of Middlesex was not reduced by much as they faced Derbyshire and quickly moved into a 4-0 lead. They eventually won 7-3 with only the unfortunate Horsnell missing out in both her sets and Achampong dropping the other to Shaun Marples in five 3-2 (5-11, 8-11, 15-13, 11-7, 3-11).

Middlesex completed their matches with another 7-3 victory as, on this occasion, their opponents were Berkshire and they once again started well with a 3-0 lead. David Barr briefly held them up with a 3-0 (11-9, 11-9, 12-10) win over Morais but Tin-Tin beat Maria Tsaptsinos in three to re-establish her sides three set cushion.

Berkshire made a fight of it by taking the next two sets as firstly Liam McTiernan came from behind to beat Achampong 3-2 (4-11, 6-11, 11-3, 11-8, 11-8) before Tsaptsinos beat Horsnell 3-1 (11-7, 11-8, 7-11, 11-3) to reduce the gap to 4-3.

Chen guaranteed his side at least a share of the spoils when he gave Middlesex a 5-3 lead as he beat Barr 3-1 (11-7, 5-11, 11-7, 11-7) then Tin-Tin beat Megan Knowles in the penultimate set in three to secure the win for Middlesex. That just left Morais to complete a 7-3 victory as he took the last set 3-0 (13-11, 11-6, 11-8) against Martin Adams.

The counties all meet up again at Walsall over the first weekend in February with Middlesex strong favourites to retain their title but a number of other counties will have a big say in proceedings.

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