

Yorkshire win Vets Premier County Champs

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YORKSHIRE TAKE VETERANS PREMIER IN THRILLER



Winners Yorkshire with County Championships Chairman Les Smith

Leading the County Championship Veterans' Premier Division going into the second weekend, the White Rose County of Yorkshire once again proved their strength at veterans level by taking the title, but they only just made it as they were joined on 11 points by Leicestershire and Sussex. It was only a slightly superior sets advantage that swayed it for Yorkshire.

With Cleveland being unable to make the first weekend the organisers were rocked by the late withdrawal of Kent, and it was Kent who Yorkshire had to play in their first round of matches when the remaining counties met up again at Draycott and Long Eaton TTC.

Yorkshire would obviously keep their top spot after the first round as they were awarded a 10-nil win over Kent but there were three outstanding matches played during this first round as Sussex beat Cleveland 7-3 and Cheshire moved up the table with a 6-4 win over Gloucestershire, but the tie of the round was a drawn clash between Leicestershire and Lancashire.

No-one knew how important this result was going to be in the end but it was Lancashire who soon established a 3-0 lead as Keith Williams beat Dave Gannon in four 3-1 (11-6, 11-9, 7-11, 11-3) followed by a 3-0 (14-12, 11-8, 11-9) win by Dave Griffiths over Maurice Newman, and the shock result next was an 3-0 (11-9, 11-6, 11-6) win by Barry Elliott over Chris Rogers.

Leicestershire have not been veterans champions several times for nothing and eased into the match as Rogers and his sister Karen Smith beat Williams and Brenda Buoey 3-0 (11-8, 11-5, 14-12) in the first mixed doubles which was followed by Gannon beating Griffiths in three, and the sides were soon level when Smith comfortably beat Buoey 3-0 (11-8, 11-7, 11-3).

Newman and Rogers gave Leicestershire the lead for the first time in the match as they took the men's doubles against Williams and Elliott 3-1 (11-5, 5-11, 11-8, 11-6) but it was Lancashire who hit back in the next set as Elliott took his second singles victory, which proved to be the highlight of this most enthralling of matches. He just beat Newman 3-2 (8-11, 11-9, 7-11, 11-7, 13-11) to level proceedings at 4-4.

Williams took the clash of the two number ones with a hard fought 3-0 (11-7, 14-12, 11-7) victory over Rogers to give Lancashire an unbeatable 5-4 lead, but in the final set it was Leicestershire who took their second doubles of the match as Gannon and Smith beat Griffiths and Buoey 3-1 (11-6, 11-7, 9-11, 11-7) to make the match honours even.

The second round of matches saw Yorkshire lose the lead as they were beaten by Sussex, and with wins from Cheshire, 7-3 over Cleveland, and a rout by Leicestershire over Gloucestershire, it was Cheshire who led the way by one point from Yorkshire, Leicestershire and Sussex.

Sussex are often a bogey team for Yorkshire and so it proved again as Sussex established a 2-0 lead with Ritchie Venner beating Richard Lightowler 3-0 (11-8, 12-10, 14-12) followed by a four game win by Adrian Moore over Simon Pugh 3-1 (11-8, 5-11, 11-2, 11-6).

Chris Clinton put Yorkshire on the board with a hard fought win over Nigel Eckersley 3-1 (12-10, 8-11, 11-5, 11-8) but a mixed doubles win by Rose Rainton and Peter Bartram over Pugh and Janet Adams 3-1 (12-10, 6-11, 11-9, 11-6) re-established a two set lead for Sussex.

Yorkshire hit back as Lightowler had too much in store for Moore, winning 3-0 (11-7, 11-8, 11-4) as he brought the teams to within a set but in a thrilling ladies singles, Sussex pulled two sets clear as Rainton beat Adams 3-2 (11-5, 10-12, 11-7, 6-11, 11-9).

Once again Yorkshire hit back as Clinton and Pugh easily beat Venner and Bartram 3-0 (11-2, 11-7, 11-9) in the men's doubles and when Pugh eased past Eckersley 3-0 (11-4, 11-7, 11-7) the sides were level at four sets all.

In the battle of the two top men it was Venner who beat Clinton 3-0 (11-9, 11-7, 12-10) to give Sussex a one set lead before Rainton and Venner sealed a narrow 6-4 win in the final match against Adams and Lightowler 3-1 (11-9, 11-2, 7-11, 11-8).

Yorkshire got off to the best possible start on Sunday as they whitewashed Cleveland 10-0 and there was also another comprehensive win from improving Sussex who thumped Lancashire 9-1. However, Cheshire's brief reign at the top of the table ended as they were beaten 7-3 by Leicestershire.

Cheshire never recovered from a first set reversal as Leicestershire's Dave Gannon gave Brian Johns a two game start before storming back to win 3-2 (9-11, 8-11, 11-5, 11-7, 11-7).

This lead quickly became 4-0 as wins from Newman over Phil Biggs, Rogers over Mark Evans and a Rogers and Smith mixed win over Evans and Sue Collier saw Leicestershire take control.

Cheshire hit back by taking the next two sets as Biggs came from behind to beat Gannon 3-2 (8-11, 6-11, 11-8, 16-14, 11-7) which was followed by a three game win by Collier over Smith 3-0 (14-12, 11-4, 11-8) with Leicestershire leading 4-2.

Leicestershire then quickly closed out the match as they took the next three sets which saw Rogers and Newman take the men's doubles over Johns and Biggs 3-1 (11-5, 11-4, 9-11, 11-5), quickly followed by a singles win from Newman 3-0 over Biggs, and when Rogers took the battle of the number ones against Johns 3-0 (11-7, 12-10, 11-5) Leicestershire had established a 7-2 lead.

The final mixed doubles was won by Cheshire as Johns and Collier won a three game tussle with Gannon and Smith 3-0 (12-10, 13-11, 11-7) to complete the match in a 7-3 victory for Leicestershire.

With Cheshire then leaving the event with a 10-0 win over the missing Kent they briefly led the table by a point from the three big hitters in Yorkshire, Leicestershire and Sussex who all had winnable matches, so Cheshire's lead was likely to be short lived.

Of the big three it was Yorkshire who had the advantage as they led Leicestershire and Sussex by four sets but with a last session match up with old enemy Lancashire who did not want to be the team to hand the title to Yorkshire.

Leicestershire and Sussex could do no more than win their respective matches which they did with ease as Leicestershire beat Cleveland 10-0 and Sussex followed suit – dropping just one set in a 9-1 win over Gloucestershire – as David Harvey beat Nigel Eckersley 3-1 (11-4, 11-9, 6-11, 11-8), it meant that Leicestershire were guaranteed at least runners-up spot.

With Yorkshire's four set lead going into the last round of matches the maths were that they needed seven sets

from their clash with Lancashire or six and the organiser would have to start counting games up from this and the previous weekend to establish the positions.

This scenario was averted as Yorkshire beat their roses opponents 8-2 although they had a couple of scares on the way as Adams and Clinton took the first mixed doubles 3-2 (8-11, 11-7, 6-11, 16-14, 14-12), and when Elliott eased past 3-1 (11-8, 8-11, 11-7, 11-2) the score stood at 4-1 to Yorkshire but could so easily have been 3-2 and all to play for.

Yorkshire reached their target in the eighth set with a win from Lightowler over Griffiths 3-0 (11-6, 11-6, 11-3) before finishing 8-2 victors.

This was Yorkshire's third title in seven years and no one could doubt them worthy champions, although one could feel some sympathy for Leicestershire and Sussex who played all their seven matches and were not given ten sets by virtue of missing opponents.



Runners-up Leicestershire are presented with their awards by Les Smith

Yorkshire themselves could argue that not having played on Saturday morning at Draycott left them cold when they faced Sussex and may not have lost this match had they played in the morning.

There is no doubt that Cleveland not being able to field a team in the first weekend and Kent likewise in the second weekend had an effect on the division, and it is something that the County Championship committee will have to address before next season.

One final note is that once again Brian Savage and his team at Draycott gave us a venue that was worthy of a premier division with the playing conditions, refreshments and hospitality being of the highest order

Barry Snowden

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