

Middlesex retain Senior County crown

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Middlesex narrowly retain senior title

In a thrilling second weekend of the County Championship Premier Division, reigning champions Middlesex just about hung on to their title, but were made to fight all the way after being put under all sorts of pressure by team of the weekend, Berkshire.

Middlesex began the weekend on maximum points from three matches with Berkshire and Sussex two points adrift and it was Middlesex who maintained their lead with a hard fought 6-4 win over Essex while Berkshire beat Sussex by the same score.

Middlesex had Igor Morais and Tin-Tin Ho to thank for their hard-fought victory against Essex as both players recorded two wins with Daniel Basterfield and Tony Wilkinson each chipping in with one win apiece to confirm victory.

Berkshire had top two David Barr and Liam McTiernan to thank for their exciting victory over Sussex who they shared second place with after both players won twice while both Bradley King and Maria Tsaptsinos chipped in with a win.

Saturday afternoon saw the division blown wide open as Middlesex were beaten 6-4 by Nottingham while second place Berkshire drew with Derbyshire, leaving Middlesex leading by just one point and their confidence and perceived invincibility now under threat.

Middlesex began brightly enough in their clash with Notts as Daniel Basterfield beat Jason Ramage 3-2 (11-9, 11-5, 13-15, 13-11) to give his side a 1-0 lead but two quick wins by Notts changed the game.

The reigning champions drew level in the next set as Morais beat Lee Neil 3-1 (11-2, 11-9, 6-11, 11-9) and then moved into the lead once more as Tin-Tin beat Sarah Short 3-1 (11-9, 7-11, 14-12, 11-7) but Notts hit back once again and drew level as Ramage beat Wilkinson in straight games 3-0 (11-6, 11-4, 11-6).

Next up was the most thrilling set of the match which saw Short just get the better of Horsnell in a five game thriller 3-2 (5-11, 11-6, 8-11, 13-11, 11-7) as Notts took the lead once more. They then moved into an unbeatable 5-3 lead in another five-gamer when Neil beat Basterfield 3-2 (11-7, 13-11, 5-11, 6-11, 11-8).

Tin-Tin brought the sides to within a set as she eased past Neal 3-0 (11-4, 11-4, 11-5) but in the final set it was Short who produced a thrilling performance to just get the better of Morais 3-2 (11-8, 6-11, 11-8, 7-11, 11-9) giving Notts a shock 6-4 victory.

In another match which went against the current form book, Berkshire were held to a 5-5 draw by Derbyshire and it could have been so much better as they lead 5-3 at one stage but in the end had to settle for a draw.

Barr and McTiernan once again led the way with two wins apiece but with Tsaptsinos being their only team mate to pick up a set Berkshire had to settle for a draw.

Sunday morning saw the division become even more exciting as Berkshire eased past Yorkshire 7-3 but they then drew level with Middlesex who were held by the rapidly improving Glamorgan to a draw.

With Yorkshire losing Michael O'Driscoll to the Doncaster Grand Prix, Yorkshire called up Richard Smith. Despite winning the opening two sets after Simon Nutch beat McTiernan 3-1 (8-11, 11-4, 11-5, 11-9) and Smith beat King 3-1 (9-11, 11-4, 11-8, 11-6) the White Rose county had to wait until the final set before they won another game as Berkshire eased to a 7-3 win.

The match which really put the cat amongst the pigeons was the draw between Middlesex and Glamorgan which once again saw Morais and Tin-Tin unbeaten but with Basterfield being the only other Middlesex player to chip in as he beat Connor Edwards in three the top two teams now were due to play their final matches on level points.

With both sides on nine points and Middlesex leading by two sets, 37 to 35, the last two matches would prove crucial as Middlesex met Yorkshire who were struggling to avoid the drop and Berkshire were due to face one of the form teams of the weekend in Essex.

In the end Middlesex had too much in their locker for Yorkshire and ran out 7-3 winners with Morais and Tin-Tin being joined by Basterfield on a maximum while Horsnell chipped in with one win, these seven sets proved enough to hand the title to Middlesex.

The clash between Berkshire and Essex proved more of a match as Berkshire ran out 6-4 victors and on this occasion it was McTiernan and Tsaptsinos who lead the way.

Despite Barr losing his first set of the weekend in five to Martin Kubert 3-2 (6-11, 12-10, 6-11, 11-6, 11-8) wins from Tsaptsinos and McTiernan in the last two sets converted a 4-4 scoreline to a 6-4 victory.

The 7-3 victory by Middlesex over Berkshire during the first weekend proved vital in the end but yet again this division proved a thrilling climax as sadly we say goodbye to Yorkshire who drop out after just one season in the top flight and also to Nottinghamshire who have plummeted from runners-up last season to rock bottom this time in the most competitive of divisions.

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