

Stunning comeback sets Yorks on way to title defence

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Yorkshire with their trophies from last season

Reigning champions Yorkshire made a solid start to the defence of their Veterans' Premier title after the first weekend of fixtures in this season's competition at Cippenham TTC.

They lead the pack with 5 points from three matches but, in this most competitive of divisions, they are being chased by three counties who are only one point adrift of the White Rose county with Leicestershire, Sussex and Cheshire hot on their heels.

The first round of fixtures saw Yorkshire thump newcomers Dorset 8-2 while the closest match of the round saw Sussex beat Leicestershire 6-4. Sussex started the brighter by taking the first two sets as Ritchie Venner beat Dave Gannon 3-0 (11-6, 11-4, 11-6) and Peter Bartram beat Maurice Newman 3-0 (11-6, 11-5, 11-6). Leicestershire hit back in the next set as Chris Rogers survived a first game reversal to beat Adrian Moore before they levelled the match as Rogers and his sister Karen Smith took the first mixed doubles of the match against Venner and Rose Rainton 3-2 (6-11, 11-7, 8-11, 11-9, 12-10).

Sussex then took control of the match with three quick wins from Bartram, who beat Gannon, Rainton, who defeated Smith 3-1 (11-7, 11-8, 11-13, 11-8) and finally a doubles win for Venner and Bartram who beat Rogers and Newman 3-2 (11-7, 11-8, 3-11, 11-13, 11-6) to establish a 5-2 lead.

Sussex completed the victory in the next set as Moore beat Newman despite a first game reversal which meant that Leicestershire's following two wins by Rogers over Venner and a doubles win by Gannon and Smith were merely consolation results.

There were two 6-4 victories in the second round of fixtures as Cheshire beat Gloucestershire and Yorkshire beat Sussex by the same score. Although there was a drawn match between Dorset and Lancashire it was the Sussex and Yorkshire clash which had all the players talking overnight.

Sussex sprang into a 4-0 lead as they took the first three men's singles encounters and when Bartram and Rainton beat Ivan Lewis and Janet Adams it seemed Sussex were cruising to an easy victory.

Lewis was the first player to show some Yorkshire grit as he beat Moore in a thriller – 3-2 (9-11, 11-6, 11-8, 5-11, 12-10) which was followed by a shock win as Adams defeated Rainton 3-1 (13-11, 9-11, 11-8, 11-7) which inspired the Yorkshire team as Chris Clinton and Simon Pugh took the mens doubles over Venner and Bartram 3-1 (9-11, 11-7, 11-5, 14-12) before Pugh levelled the scores by beating Bartram 3-0 (11-5, 11-9, 14-12).

Sussex were reeling as Yorkshire took the lead for the first time when Clinton beat Venner in 3-1 (11-8, 11-4, 8-11, 11-4) and their amazing comeback was completed when Clinton and Adams beat Moore and Rainton 3-0 (12-10, 12-10, 11-7) in the final encounter for a 6-4 victory.

Yorkshire were looking good for a maximum points finish but let themselves down in the final round of matches on Sunday as a Jimmy Walsh inspired Hertfordshire put the brakes on the Yorkshire title march with a hard fought draw.

Coupled with Leicestershire's 9-1 win over Gloucestershire and Sussex's comfortable 7-3 win over Dorset, Yorkshire ended the weekend just one point ahead of their nearest rivals.

Cheshire also completed the weekend on four points after wins over Gloucestershire and Lancashire despite only having two men so all is set for a splendid conclusion to the division when it is reconvened at Draycott and Long Eaton TTC in February.

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