

Notts reach County Champs Premier

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Kelly Skeggs (picture courtesy of John Upham)

Nottinghamshire Reach Premier Division

County Championships Senior Division 1a

Nottinghamshire gained Premier Division status for next season when they took maximum points in a weekend long battle played at Draycott and completed the season with five straight wins, finishing three points clear of runners-up Norfolk.

It was a thrilling division of six teams who played out their five matches over one weekend and it went down to the last round of matches before the title went the way of Notts.

The first round of fixtures saw Norfolk establish an early lead as they beat Lincolnshire 8-2 with Andrew Hawes, Lauren Charles and Kelly Skeggs all completing maximums while Notts scored a 7-3 win over Cheshire which saw maximum performances by Mark Short and Sophie Neal.

Both counties matched each other in the second round of fixtures as Notts beat Lincolnshire and Norfolk beat Lancashire 8-2 with Sophie Neal for Notts and the Norfolk trio of Hawes, Charles and Skeggs once again remaining unbeaten.

It was in the third round of matches that Notts hit the front as they beat Yorkshire 6-4 with Cheshire putting a dent in the title charge of Norfolk, holding them to a draw.

Notts were made to work hard for their win over Yorkshire and it was Sophie Neal and Mark Short who led the way with two wins each, and with Jason Ramage and Lee Neil both chipping in with one win apiece, both beaten by Yorkshire skipper Simon Nutch, it was Notts who just pinched the narrow win.

In the drawn clash between Norfolk and Cheshire it was the ladies who Norfolk had to thank as both Charles and Skeggs were unbeaten, but they could only rely on one single set from the men as Neil Charles beat Malc McEvoy 11-8 7-11 11-7 8-11 11-9 with the remainder of the men's singles going to Cheshire in the drawn clash.

Sunday morning saw the fourth round of matches and both Nottinghamshire and Norfolk recorded victories once more with Notts beating Lancashire 6-4 and Norfolk easing past Yorkshire 7-3.

It was a solid team effort for Notts in their narrow win against Lancashire with Lee Neil and Mark Short both recording maximum hauls, and they were backed up by Jason Ramage and Sophie Neil who picked up one win apiece to complete victory.

In their 7-3 win against Yorkshire, Norfolk had three players who picked up maximums as Neil Charles joined the two women, Lauren Charles and Kelly Skeggs, in remaining unbeaten with Andrew Hawes picking up the other set.

By sheer luck the top two sides met each other in the last round of matches with Notts leading by a point and just needing a draw to take the title. They achieved this in the seventh set as despite a first set reversal when Charles beat Neal 3-1 (5-11, 11-6, 11-6, 11-9), Notts quickly moved into a 5-2 lead as they then became champions and, despite losing the next two sets to reduce their lead to 5-4 they completed the season with a flourish as in the final set Short beat Tony Zeqiri 3-0 (13-11, 11-8, 11-4) to record a 6-4 victory and complete the season with a 100% record.

This was a splendid all round team effort from Nottinghamshire with Mark Short leading the way with 10 wins from 10, just followed by Sophie Neil who recorded 8 from 10, one ahead of Lee Neil who won seven. With Jason Ramage and Sarah Short on four it was a solid effort which gained Notts promotion to the Premier Division next season.

Barry Snowden,

County Championship Press Officer (December 17, 2013)

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