

Thrilling climax to Senior County Championships, Division 1B

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It's Gray's day as Kent clinch promotion by narrowest margin



Lewis Gray held his nerve to clinch the vital victory as Kent pipped Warwickshire to the Division 1B title in thrilling fashion.

The teams were locked together on points and game difference from rounds two to five, having achieved identical results in rounds three, four and five.

In round six, Kent defeated Worcestershire 9-1, giving them a game difference of 46-14, while Warwickshire scored an 8-2 victory over Hertfordshire – which made their game difference 45-15.

So the two counties met in the final round with the title and promotion to the Premier Division at stake and Warwickshire needing to win, while a draw was sufficient for Kent.

Warwickshire bravely dropped their No 1 player Laurence Sweeney, and this proved to be a masterstroke when Amann Ubhi (England No 76) stunned the watching crowd with a sensational 3-0 victory over Kent No 1 and England No 15 Gray. In what was surely the win of his career, Ubhi blitzed his opponent with a succession of powerful attacking strokes which proved too much for Gray to handle. Ubhi came through 12-10, 16-14, 11-8.

Warwickshire edged ahead thanks to their men, as a win each for James Ward, Matthew Outhwaite and Ubhi (completing his double) put Warwickshire 4-2 up. However it was Kent's women, the outstanding Nivedita Sunil and Jasmin Ould, who saved their team with two wins each.

Ould was especially impressive with convincing victories over Rachel Pilgrim (11-3, 11-8, 11-3), and Kate Hughes (11-7, 11-7, 11-7). Kent's success was undoubtedly built on these two ladies' exceptional performances, and they will be relied upon to keep their county in the Premier Division next season.

It was left to Gray to make up for his earlier unexpected defeat, and he made no mistake this time, as he secured the draw – and promotion – for Kent by defeating James Ward 3-0.

The bottom of the table was no less dramatic, with three teams hoping to avoid dropping into Division Two with the already doomed Surrey II. Going into round seven, Worcestershire were on four points and Middlesex II and Hertfordshire on three.

Middlesex II leapfrogged Worcestershire by defeating Surrey II 6-4, and Worcestershire went down 9-1 to Surrey I. These results meant that Hertfordshire could send Worcestershire down if they drew with Devon, and they duly

managed this when Jimmy Walsh scored a comprehensive 3-0 victory over Devon No 3 Rory Harries to earn his side a crucial point. Hertfordshire stayed up thanks to a superior game difference (28-42) compared with Worcestershire (26-44).

As exciting as all the table tennis was, it was not even close to being the story of the weekend. In what was a special moment, Hertfordshire fielded five members from the same family in one match. It was a memorable occasion for the Walsh family, as dad Jimmy, mum Nicola, brothers Luke and Ethan, and sister Natasha lined up against Warwickshire.

[Click here for averages, results and final table](#)

By Adam Laws (April 8, 2014)

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