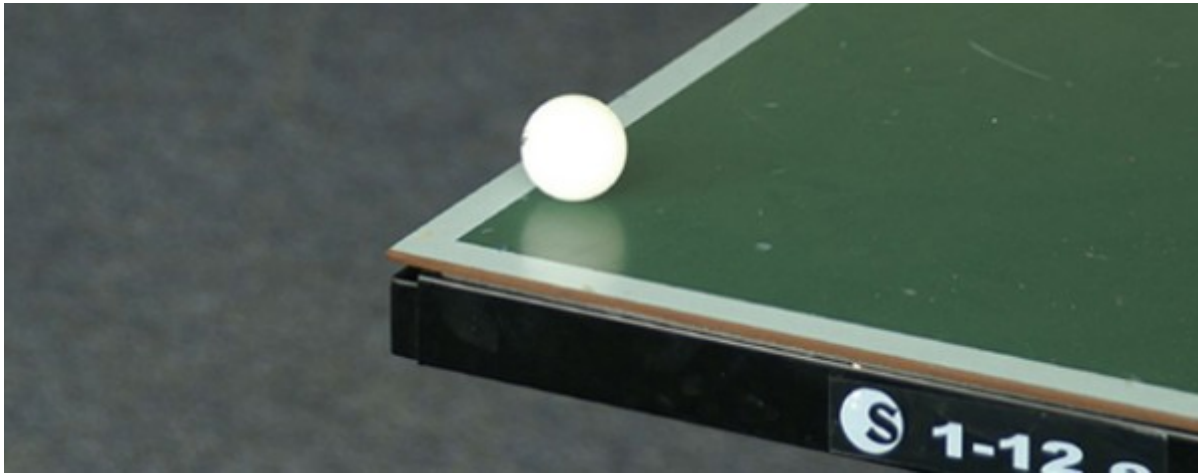


# Bryant stars as Sussex claim title

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What a difference a year can make as Sussex senior were victorious in the County Championship Premier Division only 12 months after maintaining their status by virtue of a slightly superior sets advantage over relegated Yorkshire.

One year on and Sussex came back stronger and with a mixture of youth and experience blew away all before them as they ran off seven straight wins to complete their campaign on 14 points, three clear of runners-up Derbyshire.

The final weekend of the season was played at Wood Green Academy and saw Sussex and Middlesex go into the weekend on maximum points but with each other to play in the second round of matches, something was going to give.

The first round of matches on Saturday afternoon saw both leaders maintain their unbeaten status as Sussex beat Berkshire 8-2 whilst Middlesex were made to fight harder before putting aside a spirited effort from Glamorgan 6-4, although the scoreline may have flattered the Welsh team as they rallied to take the last three sets to bring an air of respectability to the scoreline.

Second round on Saturday saw the match up of the two teams on maximum points and it was Sussex who got the better start as Craig Bryant eased to an opening 3-0 victory over Sherwin Remata (11-5, 11-6, 11-5) which was followed by a five-game victory by Mark Scutts over Jojo Senorin (12-10, 11-5, 8-11, 11-13, 11-2), doubling Sussex's lead to 2-0.

Rose Rainton had too much for Hiba Feredj as she took a four-game win (12-10, 11-4, 8-11, 11-9) and when Helshan Weerasinghe followed suit with a four-game win over Gabriel Achampong (11-6, 11-3, 7-11, 11-5), Sussex had established a commanding 4-0 lead.

Denise Payet put Middlesex on the scoreboard with a three-game win over Yolanda King (11-8, 11-6, 11-6) but this only stemmed the Sussex tide as in the next set they returned to winning ways as Scutts took his second win with a 3-0 (11-6, 11-9, 11-5) win over Remata as Sussex now held an unbeatable 5-1 lead.

Victory for Sussex was delayed as Payet took the set of the match with a thrilling five-game win over Rainton (13-15, 12-10, 9-11, 11-8, 16-14). Sussex then ran off the final three sets in a row as Bryant beat Achampong 3-1 (12-10, 12-10, 10-12, 11-4), King who beat Feredt 3-0 (18-16, 11-7, 12-10) and Weerasinghe completed an overall 8-2 win when he comfortably saw off Senorin 3-0 (11-8, 11-6, 11-2).

The next round of matches saw Sussex crowned as champions as they beat a spirited Essex 6-4. Essex recovered from 5-1 down to allow the champions elect just one more set but it was vital set as in the eighth

rubber Sussex No 1 Bryant beat Essex veteran Clive Carthy 3-1 (11-7, 10-12, 11-7, 11-5) to take the match and the title as on an adjoining table, closest rivals Middlesex were being demolished by improving Derbyshire who, after the opening two sets were shared ran off eight straight wins to give themselves a chance of the runners-up spot.

And they duly clinched it by beating Essex 8-2 in their final match while Middlesex could only draw with Berkshire.

Essex and Leicestershire were relegated. Despite a fine 6-4 win over Glamorgan, Leicestershire faced Sussex in the final match and were overwhelmed 10-0, which saw them return to Division One next term, while Essex could consider themselves a tad unlucky as they drew with Dorset and beat Leicestershire to finish on three match points. They were only beaten 6-4 in two of their other matches against Sussex and Glamorgan, and it was their defeat to the Welsh team that proved vital as Glamorgan maintained their premier status on sets difference as Essex suffered the drop.

by Barry Snowden (14th April, 2014)

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