

County Championships: Three level after thrilling weekend

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Three counties finished level on points as this season's County Championships Premier Division got under way when the first round of the over-60s event was played at Milton Keynes.

All counties played three matches and Cheshire, Essex and Yorkshire all completed the weekend with two win and one draw to finish with five points.

It was Cheshire who had the slight edge with a slightly superior sets advantage over their two adversaries.

Cheshire had 8-2 victories against Lincolnshire and Sussex before a hard-fought draw against reigning champions Yorkshire which proved the match of the weekend, although the white rose county were slightly fortunate as they had to fight hard to earn their draw as they took two of the last three sets in narrow fifth-game victories.

Phil Biggs gave Cheshire the lead with a three-game win over Phil Cawser (11-5, 12-10, 11-9) only for Yorkshire to level the match as Malcolm Corking beat Wayne Percival 3-0 (11-8, 11-5, 11-5). Brian Johns then gave Cheshire the lead once again as he beat Steve Kosmowsky 17-15, 11-7, 11-7 as Cheshire led 2-1 at the end of the first round of men's singles.

The first mixed doubles saw Yorkshire draw level as Cawser and Linda Simpson beat Johns and Doreen Schofield 3-0 (11-7, 11-8, 11-8), at which point Biggs completed a singles maximum when he beat Corking 3-1 (11-7, 5-11, 11-4, 11-6) but once again Yorkshire drew level as Simpson beat Schofield in three (11-5, 11-4, 11-6).

The men's doubles was next up and saw Johns and Percival ease past Kosmowsky and Cawser 3-1 (11-4, 11-6, 5-11, 11-2) to give Cheshire a 4-3 lead but yet again Yorkshire hit back as Kosmowsky just beat Percival in a five-game thriller (22-20, 5-11, 10-12, 11-5, 11-8, as the sides now were level after eight rubbers.

The penultimate set of the match saw Cawser start stronger against Johns and race to a two-game lead but was eventually hauled back by the Cheshire player who recorded a 3-2 (11-13, 9-11, 11-9, 11-3, 11-2) win to guarantee his side at least a draw as Cheshire now led 5-4. But in the deciding set it was Yorkshire who gave their opponents a two-game lead before storming to victory as Simpson and Corking beat Schofield and Biggs 3-2 (8-11, 2-11, 11-8, 18-16, 12-10) to earn their side a hard-fought draw.

Yorkshire completed the weekend four sets adrift of Cheshire as they also won two matches over the weekend but were only able to pick up 6-4 victories against Hertfordshire and Sussex.

Essex currently lie one set ahead of Yorkshire by virtue of a 7-3 win over newcomers Lincolnshire as well as a 6-4 victory against Lancashire, but they also drew with Sussex.

The drawn clash was a fine county championship fixture with most of the players contributing to the match score as Peter Radford for Essex and Barry Gilbert for Sussex were unbeaten in singles play. Although Essex led the match by two sets on two occasions – 2-0 and 4-2 – they found themselves 4-5 down prior to the final mixed doubles. But a 3-1 mixed doubles win from behind by Marjorie Dawson and Radford against Robin Stace and Sheila King (9-11, 14-12, 12-10, 11-7) earned Essex the draw.

The second weekend in March should prove to be an exciting climax and may once again require the destination of the championships being determined by superior sets – Milton Keynes over the last weekend in March will be an exciting place to be.

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