

County Championships: Yorkshire lead veterans' premier

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Yorkshire were the standout team in the first weekend of this season's county championship veterans' premier division played at Ashford last weekend.

With all counties playing three matches, it gave everyone an opportunity to feel out the opposition and see who were the likely candidates for success and who were going to struggle for survival when the division is completed at Draycott in February.

The first round of matches saw reigning champions Leicestershire face a tough test in former winners Sussex and in a shock result it was the latter who recorded an impressive 8-2 victory.

Although the result appeared to be a comprehensive win, there were a number of tight five-gamers, the majority of which went the way of Sussex. Richie Venner gave them the lead with a three-game win over Dave Gannon and in the next set Sussex moved into a 2-0 lead as Peter Bartram just beat Maurice Newman 3-2 (12-10, 8-11, 11-4, 7-11, 11-9). This was then increased to a three-set lead as Adrian Moore scored a shock 3-2 (4-11, 11-9, 11-7, 9-11, 11-9) win over Chris Rogers.

Leicestershire finally got on the scoreboard as Rogers and Karen Smith beat Venner and Rose Rainton in a five-game mixed doubles (11-7, 9-11, 5-11, 11-5, 11-6), only to see Sussex restore their three-set advantage when Bartram won his second singles set of the match as he beat Gannon in four (11-7, 11-8, 7-11, 11-8).

Sussex guaranteed themselves at least a share of the spoils as Rainton scored an impressive 3-1 (11-4, 8-11, 11-6, 11-5) win over Smith, and they went for the kill and completed victory as Venner and Bartram beat Newman and Rogers in a four-game men's doubles (11-8, 5-11, 11-8, 11-6) to give Sussex a 6-1 lead.

Sussex we not going to ease off as sets advantage may prove critical in the outcome of the league and moved into a 7-1 lead as Moore beat Newman in five (11-8, 11-8, 8-11, 11-13, 11-7) and in the penultimate set of the match Venner took the clash of the No 1s when, in a thriller, he beat Rogers 3-2 (11-8, 10-12, 2-11, 13-11, 13-11).

Sussex now led 8-1 but the final set saw Leicestershire at last take a close deciding game as Gannon and Smith just beat Nigel Eckersley and Rainton in five (12-10, 12-10, 2-11, 5-11, 14-12).

Leicestershire and Yorkshire have monopolised this division over the past few years and in their first match Yorkshire were made to work really hard before putting aside a determined challenge from newcomers Nottinghamshire 6-4.

Yorkshire had Joanne Roberts to thank for their success as, playing her first county championship match as a veteran, she won all three sets she was involved in and showed what an asset she is going to be for the White Rose county.

The remaining two first-round matches saw former champions Kent return to the premier division with a thumping 8-2 win against Lancashire and in the remaining fixture Hertfordshire and Cheshire fought out a thrilling draw which saw Herts come from 4-1 down to snatch a draw with a final set mixed doubles win as Emma Rose and Gary Morgan beat Sue Collier 3-2 (3-11, 11-9, 11-8, 10-12, 12-10).

The tie that caught the eye in the second round of fixtures was Sussex against Yorkshire and, buoyed by their earlier victory, Sussex started brighter as in the first set Eckersley eased past Chris Clinton 3-0 (11-9, 11-7, 11-7), only for Yorkshire to hit back as Tim Dyson beat Adrian Moore 3-1 from behind (7-11, 11-9, 11-5, 11-7).

But two further victories from Venner over Simon Pugh (11-8, 11-9, 11-6) followed by a 3-1 mixed doubles win (7-11, 11-3, 11-7, 11-6) by Moore and Rainton over Dyson and Roberts saw Sussex establish a 3-1 lead.

The next set proved pivotal in the context of the match as Eckersley opened well against Dyson but, in an often bad tempered encounter, the Yorkshireman seemed to come to terms with his opponent's tactics and ran out 3-2 (4-11, 7-11, 11-7, 11-8, 11-7) victor to bring his county to within a set as Sussex now led 3-2.

Roberts levelled the match with a three-game win over Rainton and in the set of the match it was Yorkshire who came from behind to take the men's doubles as Clinton and Pugh beat Venner and Bartram 3-2 (9-11, 8-11, 11-9, 11-8, 11-8) as Yorkshire now led for the first time in the match at 4-3.

Pugh guaranteed his team at least a share of the spoils as he gave Moore the opening game of their clash before he stormed back to win 3-1 (8-11, 11-6, 11-3, 11-5).

The penultimate set of the match saw Venner beat Clinton in five (9-11, 14-12, 11-4, 10-12, 11-7) as Sussex hit back to within a set but in the final mixed doubles Pugh and Roberts beat Eckersley and Rainton 3-1 (11-9, 11-9, 6-11, 11-6) to complete victory for Yorkshire 6-4.

At the end of the first day only Yorkshire and Kent had a 100 per cent record, with Kent following up their victory against Lancashire with a solid 7-3 win against Cheshire.

Yorkshire recorded a thumping 9-1 win over Hertfordshire on Sunday morning with only a four-game win by Jimmy Walsh over Chris Clinton saving Herts from a whitewash, but any hope of Kent joining Yorkshire on maximum points were quickly ended as Leicestershire overwhelmed them 8-2.

Leicestershire raced into a 6-0 lead before Kent took two sets in succession as Joey Kennedy and Mark Romano beat Rogers and Newman in a men's doubles clash (11-5, 11-4, 11-8), which was followed by a 3-1 win by Phil Cox over Newman (11-9, 2-11, 11-9, 11-4), before Leicestershire took the remaining two sets.

Yorkshire are sitting pretty at the top of the table but with four matches still to play the division is far from over and with a match up against Leicestershire still to come there is still all to play for.

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(NB Report written prior to the results being verified by the administrator)

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