

Dai bags crucial win as Yorkshire retain Cadet County Championship title

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The victorious Yorkshire team of Ruby Chan, Shayan Siraj, Harry Dai, Will Ibbitson and Gauri Duhan

Yorkshire retained the County Championship Cadets' Premier Division title at Westfield TTC, Wellingborough.

After a two-day battle between the reigning champions and newly promoted Hampshire it came down to a straight shootout between the two counties as they faced each other in the last round of fixtures, with both teams going into the match on similar records, having dropped just one point.

The first round of matches saw Hampshire take a solid 8-2 victory over Middlesex while the White Rose county drew their opening clash with Kent. This was a repeat of how Yorkshire started last year when they drew their opening match with Lincolnshire then won the remainder of their fixtures.

The Hampshire quintet of Artur Veeck Caltabiano, Mathew Daish, Yaj Vashee, Amy Blagbrough and Katie Holt saw off former champions Middlesex in fine style and quickly moved into a 5-0 lead before Theo Achampong stopped the rot with a win over Vashee. But this only delayed the inevitable as Hampshire then eased to victory to set a marker for the weekend.

The Yorkshire team of Harry Dai, Shayan Siraj, Will Ibbitson, Gauri Duhan and Ruby Chan were made to work really hard in their opening clash by another promoted team as the boys from Kent tore into Yorkshire. Only Siraj made headway as he took both his singles but Guhan won two and Chan (on her 11th birthday) picked up one crucial set as the reigning champions snatched a draw despite a sluggish start.

The second round of matches saw Hampshire record a comprehensive 8-2 win over Staffordshire as Charlotte Bardsley picked up both wins for Staffs. Yorkshire picked up their first win with a 7-3 victory over last year's runners-up Surrey, while in the third round both Hampshire and Yorkshire recorded 7-3 wins against Lancashire and Middlesex respectively.

Sussex led the points table overnight on six points from three wins and were joined by Hampshire also on six, with Yorkshire one point behind.

Sunday morning first up saw Yorkshire beat Staffs 8-2, with Bardsley once again picking up the two wins for her team, while the clash of the current top two saw Hampshire come out on top with a 6-4 win over Sussex.

In the fifth round of matches Yorkshire thumped their "roses rivals" Lancashire 9-1 and Hampshire went one better as they whitewashed Surrey. However, with Sussex drawing their match with Kent things were opening up for a last round showdown between Hampshire and the improving Yorkshire.

The penultimate round of matches saw Yorkshire beat Sussex 7-3 and in a thrilling encounter. The weekend draw specialists Kent held leaders Hampshire, which was only decided in the final set as Hampshire came from 5-3 down to take the final two sets, with Blagbrough beating Ruth Mardsen 3-0 (11-3, 11-4, 11-5) and Daish overcoming Reiss Vydellingum also in three (11-9, 11-5, 11-7).



The Hampshire squad: Katie Holt, Amy Blagbrough, Matthew Daish, Artur Veeck Caltabiano and Yaj Vashee

Hampshire held a slight advantage as their match-up with Yorkshire commenced as although both counties were now on 11 match points, the south coast team had a superior sets advantage by just one set – meaning a draw would be enough for Hampshire, while Yorkshire needed a win.

Yorkshire gained the upper hand early and the first tight game went their way as Ibbitson beat Vashee 3-2 (11-4, 9-11, 11-3, 9-11, 11-7) and Yorkshire built on that until the match score stood 4-1 in their favour. Once again newcomer Ibbitson was involved in a pivotal set as in his second set of the match he beat Daish 3-2 (12-10, 4-11, 11-8, 4-11, 13-11) as Yorkshire guaranteed themselves at least a draw as they now led 5-1.

Holt beat Chan in the next set to bring the match score to 5-2 but Yorkshire No 1 Dai was not going to let his county down as he got the better of Caltabiano 3-0 (11-9, 11-7, 11-8) to pick up the all important 6th set and with it victory and retention of the title.

Two former champion sides Surrey and Middlesex contemplate life in Division One next season and are joined by Staffordshire, who are also relegated.

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