

Over-60s County Championship: Essex find the way to win

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Posted On: April 22, 2015

Former winners Essex regained the over-60s County Championship Premier Division after two exciting weekends' play at Milton Keynes saw them complete the season unbeaten – winning six and drawing one of their matches. It meant they finished four points clear of Yorkshire, who were runners-up for the second successive season.

The second weekend began in a three-way tie as Cheshire, Yorkshire and Essex all started on five match points, but due to injury Cheshire arrived with only two men and from the outset they looked to be the county who were going to struggle.

So it proved as whilst Essex were beating Hertfordshire 9-1 and Yorkshire just getting the better of Gloucestershire 6-4, Cheshire were being thumped 8-2 by reigning champions Lancashire.

Cheshire fared a little better in the second round of fixtures with a draw against Hertfordshire but with Essex beating Gloucestershire 7-3 and Yorkshire likewise against Lincolnshire the Sunday morning showdown between Essex and Yorkshire was looming as a vital clash.

Essex took the lead in the opening set as Peter Radford beat Steve Kosmowsky, coming from behind to record a five-game win (6-11, 7-11, 11-9, 11-8, 11-5). Yorkshire hit back as Nicky Davies fought back after a first-game reversal to beat Dave Bowles 3-1 (8-11, 11-9, 11-9, 15-13), only for Essex to take the lead once more as Stuart Gibbs beat Steve Morris in three.

Yorkshire levelled by taking the first mixed doubles as Kosmowsky and Linda Simpson took a five-game win over Gibbs and Marjorie Dawson (11-4, 6-11, 8-11, 11-6, 11-8). Once again, Essex hit the front as Radford beat Davies 3-0 (11-3, 11-6, 11-9), at which point the White Rose county levelled again as Simpson just took the ladies' singles against Dawson 3-2 (13-11, 11-6, 10-12, 6-11, 11-7).

The vital men's doubles was next up and saw Essex retake the lead as Radford and Bowles beat Kosmowsky and Morris in five (11-8, 12-14, 6-11, 11-8, 11-5) and moved two sets ahead for the first time in the match as Bowles then beat Morris 3-1 (11-3, 9-11, 11-3, 11-6) as Essex now lead 5-3.

The penultimate set of the match saw Kosmowsky take the battle of the top players as he beat Gibbs 3-2 (11-9, 7-11, 4-11, 11-7, 11-4) to bring the sides to within a set at 5-4 in favour of Essex. It looked as if Yorkshire were going to snatch a draw as Davies and Simpson took the opening two games of the final mixed against Radford and Dawson, but the Essex pair turned the match around and took the next three sets, winning 3-2 (6-11, 10-12, 11-8, 11-7, 11-6) and with it the match, putting themselves in the driving seat for the title.

The final round of matches proved to be an anti-climax as a resurgent Lancashire thumped Yorkshire 8-2 and with Essex beating Cheshire 6-4 it was Essex who claimed the title with points to spare.

Lincolnshire and Hertfordshire were relegated and will be replaced in next season's Premier Division by Kent, who took the Southern Division One by four points over Hampshire, and Oxfordshire, who finished runners-up to Yorkshire No 2 in the northern second tier, but with Yorkshire being unable to go up it is Oxfordshire who move up.

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