

BRITISH INTER COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP

PREMIER DIVISION

CAMBRIDGESHIRE VS ESSEX

Essex travelled the short distance to Cambridgeshire for their final match in the Inter County Championship season. The weekend invariably has one of the counties vying for a title or two and this season it was to be the turn of Essex. The visitors had an outside chance of the overall and both 'B' team titles, whilst the Ladies 'A' title was very much within their grasp.

Essex Ladies 'B' team did all they could by overcoming their Cambridgeshire counterparts by 4 sets to 2, with wins for Southend's Lady of the Match Nicky Bradley (18.33) and the Braintree trio of Jenny Powell (15.65), Lucy Ward-Geddes (14.80) and a deciding set victory for Lynn Kelly (17.85). However Lancashire managed to match the Essex scoreline against Yorkshire which gave them the title.

Essex Mens 'B' team needed to win two more sets than Yorkshire to take the title but again despite a 9-3 victory Yorkshire managed the same result leaving Essex as runners up. Essex couldn't have wanted for a better start picking up six of the first seven sets. Hockley's Gary Phipps (30.06) picked up the first set and this was quickly followed by Colchester's Eddie Gosling (25.47) Southend's Man of the Match Paul Marsh (30.67), and Springfield's Wayne Gleed (26.61) all of whom had hit maximums. Harwich's Alan Collins (27.03) was not to be outdone as he hit two maximums, whilst Mick McCombe (25.98) ensured Essex couldn't lose. Galleywood's Andy Kateley (24.61) had lost out 3-1 to Pete Dyos (25.32) and Colchester's Coen Wiekamp (24.13) missed out by the same scoreline to Martin Purell (24.52). The best match of the day saw Hockley's Shaun Walsh (29.83) go head to head with Simon Cassidy (30.07), Walsh hit two maximums but missed out in the final leg in a match worthy of a higher stage. Essex then wrapped proceedings up in style winning the last three sets without dropping a leg. Cressings Tim Franklin (22.43), the maximum hitting Martin Compton (27.83) (Riverside), and Springfield's Mick Peel (26.37) the victors.

The Sunday started with Essex needing to win eight points more than Yorkshire on the day to win the overall title and Essex Ladies 'A' knowing a win would almost certainly have them retaining their title. Cambridgeshire themselves had been in the hunt up until a disastrous defeat in their previous match so they were not going to be a pushover and with five of the six sets going to a deciding leg tension was to be the order of the day. Clacton's maximum hitting Viv Dundon (20.03) was unbeaten going into the final day but Betty Berry (21.58) held her nerve to put the home County ahead. Southend's Sue Condon (21.73) just edged out Barbara Greatbatch (20.16) before Braintree's Amanda Dodd (19.73) lost out to Sandra Greatbatch (20.79). When Chelmsford's Sue Baker (18.18) missed out against former Essex player Juliet Findlay (19.85) Essex's title hopes had all but diminished. However Southend's Donna Russell (20.55) with a 109 checkout and Braintree's Carol Pinfold (18.75) both won to leave Essex waiting for other results. When the results came in Essex had finished level top on points but third overall on count back with Lancashire taking the title from Cheshire.

The Mens 'A' team match started with Essex looking like they had a bus to catch. Springfield's Phil Brewster (24.88) with a maximum in the deciding leg just edged out Bill Richards (25.28) before Colchester's Jamie Robinson (29.77) and Southend's Paul Barham (28.33) who was both double maximum men eased home 4-1. The next set saw Colchester's Kevin Edwards (31.32) hit a maximum and leave just 11 after 9 darts in the first leg but saw Lakeside Champion Martin Adams (33.40) hold his throw in 12 darts and from that point despite pressure from Edwards in each leg Adams not only took the set 4-0 but also picked up the £750 for the months top Premier Division average. Springfield's Darren Peetoom (26.70) was another to fall in the last leg this time it was former England International Ian Brand (27.37) who delivered the blow. Riverside's Mr Essex Barry Adlam (30.36) made short work of former Lakeside qualifier Steve Roberts (28.70). Hockley's Steve Smith (29.36) had to dig deep in overcoming Eddie Martin (29.42) in another last leg decider. By this stage Essex were really enjoying the occasion Harwich's Scott Lawrie (29.08) and Hockley's John McFall (23.16) who were both maximum men and winners. Set number ten saw Rainham's Richard Howson (27.35) looking to make it nine wins from nine in his debut season, after going 2-0 adrift a maximum at the start of the third kick started the owl who won the next four legs without reply. Brentwood's Steve Johnson (27.45) picked of set number eleven before Basildon's Phil Halls (27.01) lost out in the final set a result which still gave Essex a 9-3 Mens 'A' win and an overall 28-11 victory leaving them taking the runners up spot in the overall table 25 points ahead of Lancashire but just 4 behind Yorkshire.

In conclusion this season has seen Essex make significant strides and can feel proud but somewhat disappointed at finishing runners up. With both mens teams finishing second in their respective divisions together with the Ladies 'B' team, as well as this with the Ladies 'A' team finishing on the same number of points as the winners another season would have seen Essex take the title. However next season sees everyone start with a blank canvas again and maybe just maybe Essex might take those extra four points.