

BRITISH INTER COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP PREMIER DIVISION CHESHIRE VS ESSEX

Essex made the trip north looking to maintain their position towards the top of the Premier Division. December's snowed off match against Yorkshire had given Lancashire the opportunity to go to the top of the table with Essex still tucked in behind in second place.

Braintree's Jenny Powell came back from two legs down to take the first set in the **Ladies 'B'** fixture and when Clacton's Sheila Busby took the second Essex started to look comfortable. However Cheshire replied in kind with the next two sets before Chelmsford's Sue Baker put in a lady of the match performance pushing Essex 3-2 ahead. The final set saw Chelmsford's Nicky Mynard miss out in the deciding leg to leave the final score 3-3.

Essex **Mens 'B'** team have been a revelation this season and this weekend was to prove no different. Six maximums together with four ten plus finishes ensured they smashed their way to an 11-1 victory. The early sparring suggested it would be a much tighter match. Thurrock's Mick McCombe (26.28) took the first set in the deciding leg before Colchester's Lee Woods (21.09) lost out 3-1 to Lee Holden (25.56) despite hitting a maximum. Shaun Walsh (27.33) of Hockley was in scintillating form in overcoming former England International Ian White (25.24) 3-0. Southend's Paul Marsh (23.11) eased through 3-1 despite some missed doubles before Hockley's Steve Smith (26.16) firmly put Essex in charge checking out on 142 in the first leg and then hitting a maximum in the fourth on the way to a 3-1 win. Smith's Hockley team mate Gary Phipps (22.43) was another 3-1 winner as the confidence started to flow through the Essex team. Springfield's Wayne Gleed (26.55), Basildon's Phil Halls (26.61) and Galleywood's Andy Kateley (24.55) kept the momentum rolling. Springfield's Phil Brewster (25.47) was another maximum man whilst Thameside's Martin Compton (23.06) came from two behind to win 3-2. Once again however the best was left to last as Rainham's Richie Howson (28.90) checked out on 101 in the first leg and hit a maximum in the third in a comfortable 3-0 win.

With a 14-4 overnight lead Essex **Ladies 'A'** were in determined mood to finish the job off before the men had started and they nearly did just that. Southend's Donna Russell (22.71) went down fighting to an in form Jane Stubbs (25.63) in the first set. From there on Essex started to dominate Southend's Sue Condon (20.68) edged home in the second set before the Braintree pair of Carol Pinfold (18.79) and Amanda Dodd (19.78) both picked up 3-0 wins. The match of the day was a clash between two current England Internationals; Clacton's Viv Dundon (22.86) hit a maximum in a losing leg but ultimately ended up winning 3-2 against the ever improving Lorraine Farlam (23.92). Braintree's Lucy Ward-Geddes (18.07) was another to hit a maximum but it was in a losing cause as Sherrie Yeomans (19.52) proved too strong on the day. Despite this, Essex had picked up a 4-2 win, leaving the **Mens 'A'** team to pick up just one point for the overall victory.

Missing several regulars, Cheshire were still able to boast three players in their team from the previous weeks World Professional Championships, as well as two current Internationals and two former youth Internationals. The advent of seven legs has slightly lowered the overall averages within the division, but it certainly hasn't lowered the intensity and competitiveness of the darts. Colchester's Jamie Robinson (26.76) and Springfield's Essex Captain Darren Peetoom (28.51) both hit maximums but also lost 4-1. With just one point needed for the victory Riverside's Mr Essex Barry Adlam (26.58) duly obliged with a final leg victory over Stephen Bunting (24.82). Colchester's Coen Wicamp (25.25) lost out in the deciding leg against Stuart Kellett (28.24) before Harwich's Alan Collins (25.02) missed out to Tony O'Shea (31.41). Brentwood's Steve Johnson (27.05) picked up another deciding leg Essex win and a man of the match award in overcoming Dave Pallett (26.15). Southend's Mick Peel (24.48) and Hockley's John McFall (25.03) both followed Johnson's lead in winning and in doing so pulling the scoreline back to 4-4. However the next three sets all went the way of Cheshire as Southend's Paul Barham (25.13), Harwich's Scott Lawrie (26.16) and Colchester's Eddie Gosling (25.38) all missed vital doubles. The final set however went the way of Essex as Harwich's Kevin Edwards (25.35) rounded off the weekend in style with a 106 checkout to give Essex an overall 23-13 victory which still keeps them in the title hunt in the lead up to their Valentine's weekend clash against table topping Lancashire.