

BRITISH INTER COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP

PREMIER DIVISION

CORNWALL VS ESSEX

Essex made the long trip west to face Cornwall and came away with an impressive 25-14 victory, which sets up what looks likely to be a title decider against Yorkshire over the weekend of 26th and 27th of March at Chelmsford Social Club.

Essex started the weekend unbeaten in the Ladies 'B' League and remained so as they fought out a 3-3 draw. Braintree's Jenny Powell kept her good form going with a second set 3-1 win. Essex however had to fight back from 3-1 adrift as first Braintree's Lady of the Match Lynn Kelly and then Southend's Nicky Bradley both won 3-0 to secure the draw.

Essex all season long has maintained a high level of performance in the Mens 'B' league and this weekend was to prove no different. Essex picked up the first three sets without reply. Hockley's Shaun Walsh (23.48), Southend's Paul Marsh (23.12) and Harwich's Alan Collins (21.78) the victors. Basildon's Phil Halls (27.31) was pushed all the way as he checked out on 102 in the deciding leg and this was quickly followed by Riverside's Martin Compton (21.90) who was also taken to a deciding leg. It was left to Colchester's Paul Walker (23.67) to become the unfortunate first Essex loser going down 3-1. This was only to be a blip on the score sheet as Springfield's Mark Landers (23.68) held his nerve to win 3-1 and start another Essex charge. Thurrock's Mick McCombe (25.05) and Hockley's Man of the Match Gary Phipps (27.83) both recorded 3-0 wins and these were followed by Galleywood's Andy Kateley (23.29) who edged out a hard fought 3-2 win. The match of the day resulted in Essex's only other defeat as Colchester's Coen Wicamp (27.44) did little wrong other than find Cornwall's Bill Mann (30.67) in top form. Springfield's Wayne Gleed (26.84) took Essex into double figures in the final set a result which puts Essex four points ahead of their nearest rivals Yorkshire going into their head to head clash in a few weeks time.

Essex Ladies 'A' team will need three big wins if they are to retain their title following a hard fought draw against an impressive Cornwall team. Clacton's Viv Dundon (18.69) got Essex off to the best possible start. Braintree's Carol Pinfold (19.33) was left to rue missed doubles in the second set. Chelmsford's Sue Baker (18.23) picked up a win on her return to the 'A' team. Southend's Donna Russell (23.06) must be wondering what she has to do to get a victory. Her average was the second best in the match but still not enough for victory. Braintree's Amanda Dodd (23.80) picked up the Lady of the match award before Southend's Sue Condon (18.00) was left to rue missed doubles going down 3-1 and in doing so leaving the score at three sets apiece.

The competitiveness within the Mens 'A' division has increased following the introduction of seven legs to a set at the start of the season and this fixture was to be no different. Hockley's John McFall (24.60) and Steve Smith (24.44) ensured Essex had at least the draw for the weekend with eight sets still to play, and two sets later Rainham's Richard Howson (24.87) on his 'A' team debut clinched the victory. Southend's Paul Barham (26.78) picked up his first 'A' team man of the match before another 'A' team debutant Phil Halls (26.60) pushed Essex 5-3 ahead. Cornwall however replied with three of the final four sets with only Springfield's Phil Brewster (25.15) picking up an Essex win.

The overall result of Essex 25 Cornwall 14 leaves Essex just seven points adrift of leaders Lancashire with a game in hand. That game in hand is the aforementioned encounter with Yorkshire who are just two points behind.