

BRITISH INTER COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP

PREMIER DIVISION

ESSEX VS WARWICKSHIRE

Essex made a quick fire return to Inter County action looking for a better result than the previous weeks drubbing by champions elect Yorkshire. At the start of the weekend Essex were looking to maintain pressure on Yorkshire at the top of the Mens 'B' team league and otherwise just ensure second place was assured in the overall table. By the end of the weekend the first objective had been achieved, however both Ladies teams will have been left pondering earlier season misdemeanours as they are looking to finish so close but yet so far.

As quickly as the previous weeks Ladies 'B' match had started this weeks stumbled and bumbled its way along. Neither Lucy Ward-Geddes (14.23) nor her opponent Kerry-Ann Fulford could find any consistency, however it was Ward-Geddes who took the 3-1 win. Nicky Bradley (16.95) was another to start slowly but eased home 3-1 against Kim Morris (15.84) whilst Jenny Powell (13.69) returned to winning ways again winning 3-1 against Linda Farrell (13.13). Stacey Ellis (16.39) made a winning start on her debut having earned her place on the back of some good Inter County Youth performances. Last weeks sole winner Sheila Busby (17.66) was this week's sole loser as she lost out in the game of the day against Warwickshire's eight from eight lady Angela Jones (18.85). Lynn Kelly (18.61) then produced a high class 'B' team performance in overcoming Wendy Adams (17.96) in the deciding leg.

The momentum going into the Mens 'B' was all with Essex and they weren't about to let it disappear easily. However Warwickshire had other ideas, the first set saw Coen Wicamp (25.61) do little wrong, but Dave Atkins (25.47) finished clinically giving the visitors an early strike. Tim Franklin (27.33) on his return to the team included a 105 checkout on the way to a 3-0 win. Mick Peel (23.60) was pleased to dig out a win, however the next three sets were to prove pivotal. Shaun Walsh (27.08) checked out on 92 and 72 to come from 2-1 down and beat Mark Westgarth (28.11) whilst Paul Marsh (27.51) overcame Peter Hughes (30.24) in a high scoring affair. When Andy Kateley (26.39) edged out Jamie Atkins (23.99) Essex had put themselves in charge.

Mick McCombe (24.06) hit the one and only Essex maximum of the day as he pushed the home county 6-1 ahead. Paul Walker (20.18) will be left to rue a catalogue of missed doubles as he went down to Martin Brown (22.24), however this was only a blip on the Essex bandwagon. Wayne Gleed (27.33) overcame an out of sorts Colin Laffar (23.33) before Alan Collins (25.49) battled back from 2-0 down to beat Matt Edgar (23.95). Gary Phipps (24.24) returned to winning ways, however the final set went the way of the visitors as Eddie Gosling (28.65) missed doubles in going down to an impressive David Sanders (28.90), with Essex gaining a 14-4 overnight lead.

Essex had completely overwhelmed Yorkshire Ladies 'A' team the week before and Warwickshire were to have that same feeling. The first set saw Sue Baker (20.56) edge out Sue Gulliver (19.36) in the deciding leg and Sue Condon (20.12) overcame Terri

Bellamy (17.76) 3-1 giving Essex a platform to build on. Donna Russell (16.63) continued her winning ways before Viv Dundon (23.20) produced another Lady of the Match performance in pushing Essex 4-0 ahead. Last season Amanda Dodd (25.91) missed doubles to overcome Trina Gulliver (27.33), and again missed doubles cost the Essex lady dearly as Gulliver finished clinically to pick up the £350 divisional award for the top lady of the weekend. The final set saw Carol Pinfold (19.20) overcome Louise Graham (18.32) giving Essex a 5-1 victory, and with it a chance of the divisional title. The Mens 'A' team match provided the high class entertainment anticipated, with 24 maximums, six ton plus shots out and only seven legs left un-played. The first set saw Barry Adlam (25.58) edged out by Rob Hawker (26.95) in the deciding leg. Up until this point Essex had only managed one maximum over the weekend however seven were to follow in the next five sets. Kevin Edwards (27.76) hit two on the way to a 4-1 win over Dave Harris (23.55) which levelled the scoreline at 1-1. Steve Johnson (29.22) started off with a maximum in beating Mark Carter (26.39) in a seven leg thriller. The next three sets were all high scoring affairs and all went the way of Warwickshire. Paul Barham (28.51) hit two maximums but Robert Nixon (29.43) hit three in a 4-2 win, Phil Halls (24.71) and Darren Peetoom (28.96) both hit maximums as did their victors Tom Aldridge (26.39) and Mark McGenney (30.24).

Warwickshire at this stage looked favourites, however Essex this season have had a strong resolve all of which was tested in the closing stages of this contest. Steve Smith (26.98) scored heavily, missed a catalogue of doubles early on, but just overcame Ryan Thomas (26.42) in the deciding leg. Another final leg decider was to give John McFall (25.34) victory over Steve Hine (27.92) and when Richard Howson (27.01) overcame Tommy McGlone (22.36) Essex had moved from 4-2 behind to 5-4 ahead. Phil Brewster (24.31) picked off checkouts of 103, 100 and 84 in overcoming Richard Foster (25.38). Jamie Robinson (27.28) and Nigel Heydon (28.18) also picked off three figure checkouts with Heydon edging the set in the deciding leg. The final set saw dad to be Scott Lawrie (29.86) reproduce his Superleague form on the County stage for the first time in a long while and with it he picked up the Man of the Match award.

This 26-10 victory secures the runners up spot for Essex in the overall title race, with the Mens 'B' and the Ladies 'A' teams still fighting for their divisional titles.