

Essex o55's Phase II – away to Redcar.....



Essex o55's Men travelled the 250 miles to Durham to compete in the 2nd Phase of Inter County for the prize of promotion to The Premier League. Suffolk had pulled out, so we had a match on Saturday and Sunday. The venue was the excellent Redcar Squash and Rugby Club. We had a smooth 4 hour run up the A1 with much banter and also had new shirts for both ties, sponsored by Prince.

Saturday - Essex v Derbyshire

The match began with Mark Kirkman at 5th string setting a cracking pace against Derby's John Beastall. The tie stood at 2-0 when Kirkman twisted awkwardly and lost the third game from 7-3 up. It was apparent that he was injured, and he dug deep in the 4th to secure a 3-1 victory. First blood to Essex! Meanwhile Andy Brown on the other court was in fine form, and chopped his 3rd string opponent up in very short order allowing him only 1 point collectively in games 2 and 3 for a comfortable 3-0 win. Very unsportingly, the Derby man swore horribly and stamped off. So – a flyer from the southerners. On the far court the number 1's hammered it out with John Fowles getting to grips with his awkward opponent and handing out a 3-0 spanking.

The next game had Lee Horton roar off into a 1-0 lead only to be pegged back by his fit and fast opponent. The Essex man rallied, but went down 3-1. Steve Impett, fresh back from his skiing trip without breaking anything again ran up a 2-0 lead (must have been the sea air for us!) only to be brought back to 2-2. A nip and tuck 5th game ensued leading the Essex man to 2 match balls, which Impett couldn't convert and the Derby man pinched it 10-8 in the 5th.

A 3-2 win for Essex, an excellent meal courtesy of the club and back to The Holiday Inn and a night in Middlesbrough. The Micro bars and the locals were very entertaining although the fire we saw at a local power plant was a concern.

Sunday - Essex v Durham & Cleveland.

D & C is one of the stronger counties, and have 2 players in Colin Shields and Neil Harrison who currently represent England. An uphill struggle was made more difficult when Mark Kirkman declared that his Achilles hadn't responded to massage, Ibuprofen and being iced down so wouldn't be able to play due to the injury. This was doubly disappointing as Kirkman hasn't lost since becoming available for the county o55's last year. Lee Horton needed to play and go (he had a ticket to see his beloved West Ham) and had arranged to play earlier. Horton, hurting from yesterday's brutal game started slowly but surely – and took a 2-0 lead. Both players tried to throw it away in the third, but Lee held his own and ran out a 3-0 winner. His vanquished opponent then sportingly ran him to Middlesbrough Rail Station (which reflected his honest on-court attitude) for him to travel to Manchester.

On the other court John Fowles faced Neil Harrison at 1st string. Harrison is fit, strong and very deceptive and tricky. Fowles was magnificent in his battle with the Durham man, who plays the game with a smile on his face. Steve Impett played at 2 and faced southpaw Colin Shields, another England man. Their 3-0 losses were no reflection on their performances, and Andy Brown went down by the same score to experienced and hard hitting campaigner Brian Duke.

Durham & Cleveland had handed out a 4-1 defeat to Derby on Saturday, and beat Essex by the same score. My injury stopped me playing on Sunday, which was a shame as I fancied I'd win my game against D & C's no5. All in all, a true reflection of our standard in County competition. Essex finished 2nd to Durham and Cleveland over the weekend with Derby 3rd and Suffolk 4th.

Team squad – John Fowles, Steve Impett, Andy Brown, Lee Horton and Mark Kirkman.

Report by Mark Kirkman. Pictures by Mark & Lee.





