

Essex ICC Team Reports 2010

1st Team - ICC Premier A

It was all change in the 1st team this season as two of the strongest Essex men's doubles stars took the decision to retire from County Badminton. Both Peter Jeffrey and James Anderson have played for Essex for over two decades and have each made a tremendous contribution to the County's successes over the years. The retirement of James and Peter paved the way for Eddie Chow and Andrew Brunning to step up and play as regular 1st team members, having both impressed the selection committee last season. Danny Plant, who has been the Essex number one singles player for some time, decided that his injuries were preventing him from playing whole weekends of 1st team Badminton, so also took the decision to retire. Danny, however, made himself available for the Essex 2nd team. The 1st team girls remained unchanged from last season, however, international and coaching commitments plus injuries meant that the 2nd team ladies were likely to have to cover at least one 1st team match each.

The season's first weekend of matches took place in Milton Keynes in November. Essex had their full complement of 1st team men, but struggled with availability as several 1st and 2nd team ladies were unable to play due to injury, England coaching commitments, veteran events and the dreaded swine flu! After over 30 phone calls (thank you Viv and Lynne – Sambucas for you ladies, if you can handle it, at the Dance), Marion Neale and Nancy Hitchens agreed to play, for which the team was most grateful. The most notable performances this weekend were from Atu Sagita and Sarah Walker, who were on top form picking up all of their respective six games; and the ever reliable Joel Gayle who won five out of six games. Results: five-all draws with Lancashire and Middlesex; and a 3-7 loss against Warwickshire.

Weekend number two saw the team up in Nottingham on a cold December weekend. Again, ladies' availability was an issue with Nicola Waller, Lynne Swan and Viv Gillard having to play up. The only nominated 1st team lady able to play was Tracy Dineen. This meant that the ladies were without any second singles players and as a result, Nicola, Lynne and Viv had to take to the singles court (photographic evidence can be found, on a ubiquitous social networking site, of Mrs Swan showing off her lithe antics in the backhand corner!). Overall, Essex played well and came out with three respectable 4-6 losses against strong opponents: Hertfordshire, Surrey and Glasgow & North Strathclyde.

At the start of the third weekend, which took place in April, Essex were bordering on the drop zone. Four teams at the bottom of the table, which included Essex, were within three points of each other. It was going to be a weekend of survival of the fittest combined with a little bit of luck. Again, the ladies had availability problems with Lynne, Nicola and Karina playing up alongside Sarah and Caroline Westley. Also joining the team were Danny Plant and Rohan Kapoor, the 2nd team men's singles specialists. The first match against Yorkshire, the title holders, was always going to be very tough. Our singles players, Rohan, Sarah and Caroline gave us a fantastic start by winning their singles. But, even though both ladies doubles went to three we were unable to win any further games. We lost 3-7. In the second match, our singles players yet again put us 3-1 ahead, but other than a win by Karina and Lynne at second ladies, we were still unable to add any more games to our total.

Overnight we were firmly in the drop zone – second from bottom, slightly ahead of Lancashire. Our final game of the season saw us pitched against Cheshire, who were laying one position in front of us in the league table. We absolutely had to beat Cheshire to stay up. Unfortunately Sarah, who had been hampered by an injury since the start of the season, withdrew. We were also without Danny Plant, who was unable to play due to another commitment. Two players down and our hopes of staying up looked dashed. What happened next was truly amazing – every player in the team turned out a fantastic performance. We were 4-0 up after the singles; both men’s doubles pairs of Andy and Joel; and Rohan and Eddie won; Karina and Caroline; and Lynne and Nicola added to the total by pulling off convincing straight set victories. Finally, at 8-0 going into the mixed, Karina and Joel brought the total to 9. Final score 9-1. Essex finished the season with a respectable joint 6th with Middlesex and sent Cheshire down to Premier B.

The 2009/10 season turned out to be a tough one for the 1st team, with availability issues resulting in the nominated players having to be supported by various non-regular players. In particular, special thanks must go to the 2nd team ladies who had to play singles (Emma Skingsley, Lynne, Nicola and Viv). Big fat pats on the back go to Joel, who won 13 out of 18 matches, had seven mixed doubles matches with five different partners and produced victories in both of his two singles ties; Rohan, who turned up for his debut and came away with an awesome clean sheet of four wins out of four; Atu, who played one weekend but won all six of her matches; Sarah who won eight out of ten matches; and both Andrew Brunning and Eddie Chow for having a good first season in Premier A.

The final table for the 2009/10 season:

POSITION	COUNTY	SECTION POINTS
1	Yorkshire	69
2	Hertfordshire	54
3	Warwickshire	48
4	Surrey	46
5	Nottinghamshire	44
6	Middlesex	41
7	Essex	41
8	Glasgow & NS	39
9	Lancashire	35
10	Cheshire	33

2nd Team – Division 1 Section C

Division 1 sits below Premier B and is split into four regional sections. The Essex 2nd team are in Section C along with 1st teams from Kent and Sussex; and 2nd teams from Hampshire and Middlesex. Matches are played both home and away and usually take place on Sundays. The Essex 2nd team was full of experience, with ex-regular 1st team players Ian Pearson, Danny Plant, Karina Bryant, Lynne Swan and Lorna Booth playing in virtually every match. Combined with quality players such as Nicola Waller, Chris Dakin, Rohan Kapoor, Emma Skingsley and Mark Law, we had a strong squad. When the time came to call on a reserve, it was handy to be able to rely on the likes of Steve Bish, Lee Scott, Ben Barber, Viv Gillard and Sue Crompton to fill in.

The season started really well with solid victories over Hampshire by 12-3 and Sussex 10-5. In the third match we played section favourites Kent, who turned out a very strong squad. In the singles, Danny lost out to ex-international Peter Knowles, whilst Rohan comfortably beat Peter Stock. After losing both ladies singles, we were 3-1 down. The ladies doubles were split – our first pair of Karina and Nicola beating Jo Muggeridge and Tracey Middleton and losing to Kim Steer and Emma Smethurst, whilst our second pair of Lynne and Viv beating Kim and Emma but losing to Jo and Tracey. The men's doubles were also split with both our pairs beating the Kent second pair. Unfortunately, the mixed doubles matches were a bit of a damp squib. The Kent 1st pair pulled out after an injury and the Essex 2nd pair suffered the same problem. Final score 6-9 to Kent.

The following three matches against Middlesex, Hampshire and Sussex went according to plan: 8-7, 10-5 and 12-3 wins. The away match to Kent was next on the agenda. Unfortunately, the team was without Lorna Booth, who had withdrawn from the remaining two matches of the season. After the singles, Essex were 3-1 down, a position we struggled to recover from. Final score 9-6 to Kent.

Finally, feeling a bit downtrodden, the final match of the season was fraught with disaster. Nicola and Karina had been pulled into a local Peter Gibbs Cup match in the morning and were foolhardy in thinking they could then play a County match in the afternoon. Karina, suffering from an ongoing virus had to retire early as a result. One issue after another with the team saw Essex suffer a surprising 4-11 loss. Overall, bar the last match, it was a good season. Ian, Rohan, Karina and Lynne stood out as players whose percentage of wins over losses was particularly high.

The final table for the 2009/10 season:

POSITION	COUNTY	SECTION POINTS
1	Kent 1	19
2	Essex 2	16
3	Middlesex 2	15
4	Hampshire 2	10
5	Sussex 1	1

Last, but in no way least, all the players would like to convey a few words of appreciation to those who paved the way for the County to field three teams and who have organised the fixtures, team selection, accommodation, courts, shuttles etc. Many thanks to the team managers Karina Bryant (aided most ably by Andy Frye), Lynne Swan and Graham Lane, as well as the Essex County Badminton Association Committee, especially Eric Brown, Eric Richardson, Nikki Richardson and Darryl Hardcastle.

Karina Bryant
Essex 1st Team Manager

3rd Team – Division 5 Section C

Essex 3rds had a perfect season with 8 wins and no loses. We finished top of the league with 23 points against a possible 24. I would like to thank all of the players who played this season, the team spirit was fantastic it was a pleasure to manage you.

Several players made their Essex 3rds senior debut's - they were Balpreet Chager, Beth McDonough, Rachel Gauntley, Ade Monro, Clare Roberts and Miles Milner. Also a big thank you to the regulars Basil Tallah, Kaleem Bhatti, Dave Wenn, Adam Sibley, Justine Miller, Emma Harris, Charlotte Lane and Alice King. As you can see from the table the matches were very one sided so perhaps Division 4 will be more of a challenge next season.

Finally thanks to Eric and Nikki for their help and support.

Graham Lane
Essex 3rd Team Manager

The Yehlex Inter-County Championships Division 5C 2009/10					
League stats					
	Ties For	Ties Against	Matches For	Matches Against	Section Points
1 Essex 3	8	0	103	17	23
2 Bedfordshire 2	5	3	74	46	16
3 Northamptonshire 2	4	4	58	62	11
4 Middlesex 4	3	5	49	71	9
5 Cambridgeshire 3	0	8	16	104	1