

Essex ICC 3rd Team Report 2013

The journey began when in late summer I was approached by the county to take charge and reform the fortunes of the Essex 3rd team. The team had just been relegated the previous season and the County wanted someone to change the ethos and approach to the running of the team.

So after having time to think I decided to enlist the help and assistance of a few experienced players namely (Sue Crompton, Viv Gillard and my dad John) and would take on the challenge.

First it was the selection meeting, where I was given a squad of players to use, plus any others I wanted to add to it. Then on to the Essex restricted where I had the opportunity to see some of the younger players we would be using in action with a mix of experienced senior players.

After drawing up a squad list, it was time to ring the changes and bring back a few elements that I know would help us to succeed in the season to come.

Firstly, it was to bring back squad training element, where the players were put through some physical training both on and off the court to assess each individual's player's fitness. Then onto court drills which allowed us to see who would be best used for each discipline. This is where Sue, Viv, John and I had the opportunity to start the selection process for singles, level doubles and mixed.

All throughout this process we were building our most important element, teamwork as this would prove invaluable during the course of the season. The players began in our squad environment with some team spirit but finished with an exceptional level of team cohesion.

So after a couple of team training sessions and our team selected it was time for the season to begin. We began our campaign with a home tie against Middlesex. It was to be a mixed start with some close games and with a few new partnerships, but we prevailed in the end with a 9-6 win. Next was Surrey, where things really started to click with a 14-1 home win. This would really get the season going. Then onto our toughest test yet, Sussex who were as predicted at the start of our season to be our main rivals for the title, but even with Sussex pulling in two ex international players we managed with some great individual efforts to grind out a 8-7 win. After this result the team really started to gel and believe we could be in with a shout this year.

So next came Surrey, and our first away trip of the season and once again the team cohesion and spirit really came to the fore. After the fantastic result against them at home the away game was a lot tighter with some of the seasons most dramatic games but we got through with a 9-6 win.

Our next game would be the first of two very interesting and demanding games against Suffolk. This was another home tie for us and again we took full advantage of it with a 10-5 win knowing the away leg would be tougher.

Then we were into the final three game of the season and only a few points behind Sussex. The team knew before every game what we needed to achieve in each match and really used that to their advantage. There was a definitive change across the team as we approached these three crunch games. There was always a desire to win their own match but then at the same time wanting to know the results of their team mates that really drove them on.

So first up was Middlesex away and after the first close leg we knew we were in for a battle. However the team put on a title winning display and destroyed Middlesex 14-1 a fantastic motivator at this stage of the season. One down two to go and away to Suffolk was the next big test for the players. This was to prove a make or break as a

win here would set up a showdown winner takes all game against Sussex the following week. But things didn't go to plan at the start and we found ourselves 3-1 down after the singles. Then came the doubles after which we were back in the game at 5-5 with two games on court going the distance. This like all the other matches was where the support of the parents and players together really shone though. We managed to pinch the girl's doubles to take a 6-5 lead with one boy's doubles going to the wire in the 3rd end. At the 3rd end interval I informed the boy's that this is a massive moment in our season and to think about all the hard work we have all put in to get to this stage, now let's get the win. They duly did with a very tense 21-19 3rd end win after being some way behind. This was a massive boost for the team and we ran out 9-6 winners.

So to the final game away at Sussex with both teams knowing that a win for either team was the key to the title so it would be about who wanted it most? As for every game this season the players had to report 30 minutes before the match for a team brief. The parents were again out in force to support the team's fantastic efforts all season. The team talk was brief – well you know what you have to do so go and do it and win the title. So with a great 3-1 start in the singles and after the doubles the score was 6-6. So it was down to the mixed games to win the title. All season we had stuck with our preferred pairs taking note from previous matches and the training sessions to combine the best partnerships.

The first mixed went perfectly with a win in two games so the score was now 7-6 to Essex but the next mixed game was tight but with a 23-21 first game win we had the upper hand. The second end was also close but we came though from behind to win 21-17 and with that the league title.

At the end of the match I was congratulated by one of the Sussex senior players who remarked "We had heard you were a well drilled and professional team and you are all a credit to you County, well done " This was the effect our set up had on our opponents that they had almost lost before they stepped on court.

The mission was now complete, the players, parents and supports had all played their part in what was a fantastic season with the highs and lows and all the drama in- between. I believe we proved something with this team that is hard work, dedication, teamwork and belief you can achieve your goal especially that at the start of the season we were not expected to finish highly but I knew if we got our game plan and team in order we could push for the title.

I would like to thank all the players who represented the 3rd team this year, you all did a fantastic job and always showed 100% commitment whenever and whatever the circumstances. To the parents, thank you for supporting the team and making the effort to get players to the training sessions and matches.

Finally thank you to the coaching team mentioned earlier for all your help and support with our goal it would not have been possible without you all.

I look forward to picking up the challenge next year with the 3rds and continuing our success and returning Essex to the highest possible league.

Third Team Manager

Lee Scott