

Essex ICC 3rd Team Report 2014

The Essex 3rd Teams 2013-2014 season campaign for back to back promotions.

The season began with myself, John Scott and our new addition to the Management team Carl Barnard. For the players it was business as usual at the restricted in September. Unfortunately we lost three of the boys from the winning side last season to university. I'm sure they will return to one of the county teams in the years to come and we wish them all the best with their futures.

So we needed to bring in some new players and with our promotion last season to a higher division some senior presence was required to balance the side. We were fortunate to be able to keep about three quarters of the winning side from last season so that did make the selection process slightly easier for us. But there was and still are a number of promising juniors knocking on the door of the team and with plenty of our players in demand by the second team.

Due to timing constraints and player availability we were unable to run our usual pre season training camp for the prospected squad. This we know to be key to the initial bonding of the team and how we set up for the season and throughout. We on the coaching team were not too worried though as we knew we had the majority of last year's team involved and they knew what was expected of them and that would filter through to the new players.

So our campaign for back to back promotions began with a tough home match against Middlesex. As most of you will know Middlesex are very strong across the board with very experienced players both in age and ability. Some of which I personally use to do battle with on the national circuit. So we knew they would be favourites for the title and would be a real challenge for our younger but growing squad. We started well and it was a tight first few games and going into the reverse doubles we were tied at 3-3. Unfortunately after that we lost a series of very close games even own match was lost 26/24 so this gives you an idea of how tight these games were. We eventually lost 12-3 not a real reflection on the days games. But we had experimented with some different pairs and players that would give us the information for the matches going forward.

Next up was Kent away. Again we knew this would be tough but with a few changes in personally made after the first game we got our season up and running in style with a fantastic team display with a 11-4 win. Hats off must go to the girls who didn't lose a game, some tinkering would be required on the boys side going forward.

In early December we were on the road to our opponents Bucks. We had to make a few adjustments to the girls as some of the players from the previous match were unavailable. This gave us the opportunity to bring in some new players to the fold, all of which performed very well. After the previous two matches and with the men's doubles setup not quite working I decided to flip the pairs in what turned out to be a key moment in the season as they won all four men's in this match and it worked so much better for us all. This resulted in us winning the match 12-3.

So with the change in setup and confidence high we had our chance at revenge against Middlesex away. As always with Middlesex there was drama from the outset with most of their team not turning up until 45min after the arranged start time. But our players handled it very well and kept themselves focused and ready to go. Once things got underway it was back to business and once again it was a tight affair with most of the games being won or lost on the third end by one or two points. With us back to full strength we pushed them all the way but as before the 12-3 score line didn't reflect the passion and effort put in by our players to get the win. We all knew this had potentially been a mid season title decider already.

We then returned to our home venue for the remainder of our games. We knew we had to push Middlesex all the way now so only maximum wins would do. We went full out to win by 10 games or more to get the bonus points to try and close the gap on Middlesex and hope they slipped up. So first up we're Kent and we fired back with an impressive 14-1 win, a great team display after a disappointing defeat the previous week.

Then came Bucks who suffered a similar fate, with us running away with a impressive 11-4 win. The team were really pushing hard now and the drive and competitiveness between the players not wanting to be the pair or player to drop a rubber was fantastic. They all wanted to do their bit for the team and didn't want to let their fellow team mates down.

So with two games remaining against Jersey on the same weekend, the title was still on depending on the Middlesex results that same weekend. We knew it was a tough ask for them to slip up but we said to all the players before the start that we didn't want to rue a missed chance should middlesex slip up. So in impressive style we won on the Saturday 15-0! The first and only white wash in the league that season and something that is not normally seen. A great professional performance by the squad at a crucial time. We knew overnight that we couldn't win the league but we all wanted to finish as close to Middlesex as possible and leave a clear gap between us and the rest. Once again the players responded fantastically with a 13-2 win that meant we finished just 5 points behind the winners.

In what was a tough start to the season and with some changes along the way I feel we have a even better chance of getting that promotion next season. From a side that had suffered a couple of relegations and was close to dropping into the lowest national division we have now gained promotion and runners up in two seasons to the 4th tier and came very close to reaching the 3rd tier that our 2nd team had just won this season. Our aim is to push the 2nd team and players as best we can to close that gap and improve our players so they can one day play just as an important role in the 2nd and 1st teams of the future.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank John and Carl on the Managment team who without their help and expertise we as a team would not be where we are today. Also the squad of players that have been involved from the previous year and the new additions, we thank you for your dedication, commitment and drive to succeed. I'm hopeful that if we bring that same determination next season we will gain that promotion!

I hope to keep the majority of the squad together next season and add some new emerging talent where possible as this is the key to our success both now and in the future for both the county and the players!

Thank you for reading and supporting us this season and special thanks to the parents who continue to encourage their sons and daughter forward and also taxi them to the games haha!

See you in September enjoy your summers!

Yours sincerely

Lee Scott