

## Essex ICC 3<sup>rd</sup> Team Report 2015

The county 3rd team season began as always at the Essex Restricted in September, a whole host of players competed across the three disciplines with some news faces on show for our coaching team to look at. Shortly after this event we began the behind the scene process, identifying players that we wanted to look at for the team in a controlled training environment along with last year's players. After missing out on a second promotion last season by one point we were determined to improve and make sure this season we got the promotion. After a few tough training camps for the players we had our squad selected for the season ahead. So with a few new faces on the team and the same commitment and passion to succeed as ever we as a team were ready for the challenge ahead.

Our first match was away to Sussex 3rds who we had not played before so we didn't know what to expect, but preparations were the same as always and the players were ready for the new test. With a convincing 11-4 win we were off to a flyer and team spirit was looking good.

A week later we were again away to Norfolk 2nds, who the coaching team had already identified as a possible title contender so we knew we were in for a test well before the day. True to form it was a tough test from the outset with a couple of our players missing we didn't start well losing 3 out of 4 singles. But we dug in and got it back to 7-5 before disaster struck when Reece went over badly on his knee and had to retire for the remaining tie so this meant us giving up 2 rubbers. We still fought on though and finished losing the tie 8-7 but we were happy with that after a few adversities and missing players. We were confident we could claw this result back in the return.

After a month off for the players it was back into the mix with another title contender, Surrey 3rds. This as we thought was tough, but at home we felt we could cause them a problem. Unfortunately on a day when we were losing lots of close games to 19 or 20 we came up quite a bit short losing 13-2. This being one of our highest defeats to date and a real test of the squads resolve and how the rest of the season would play out.

A few weeks later and with one or two new faces added to the squad it was another home game against Kent 3rds who we knew we could start our drive back to the top with against. We needed to get points on the board and maximums were the order of the day. The team duly delivered with a very impress 15-0 win, 3 points in the bag and we were back on the hunt.

After the Christmas break it was another home match late January to Sussex. We knew going into it they would have strengthened after the first match but didn't expect it to be as close. We started well 6-2 up, this then became 7-5 and it was crunch time but we held out for 8-7 win. The players had kept the run going on what was a tough day both physically and mentally.

Then came the first return crunch game against league leaders at the time Norfolk, we all knew if we wanted to win this league these were the games we needed to win and win big, so the pressure was on. Taking a 3-1 lead, then 6-2 we were only 4 games away from the magic 10 rubbers for the bonus point. Shortly after the score line jumped to 12-3 with some fantastic performances from the players and a real team spirit and determination it was job done and Norfolk had the long journey home to contemplate the defeat.

So with two games remaining and us in 2nd place it was time to hold our nerve and push Surrey all the way. The stage was set perfectly for us with our next trip to Kent where once again the target was the magic 10. Unfortunately with a few regulars away and one even stuck on a plane it was a real test of the teams resolve. I even stepped in to play the singles after numerous years away from a singles court, but that is what our team ethos is all about, we all play for each other and do what needs to be done for the good of the team. With a rip roaring start we were 5-0 up, this became 8-4 with the three mixed to play and the magic 10 in sight we just needed two more. Drama from the outset with three very close mixed games with

a lot at stake. We came up just short only getting the one, but a win is a win and we would have to wait on other results before our final possible shoot out game against Surrey for the title.

With a week between and by now we knew that a win of any kind would probably be enough but not make certain of the title, once again the magic 10 was the target with this it was over and the title was 100% ours and Surrey couldn't catch us. So with the team in high spirits, we arrived in Surrey earlier than normal to really prepare ourselves for the day's events. All were focused and ready and knew what they had to do. With a 3-1 lead we were off, 3-2, 6-2, 6-4, 8-4, once again it was edge of your seat stuff with the mixed left we needed two to win the title. As previously, we gave it our all and couldn't get the two rubbers only one again. Everyone was pleased to have returned the early season defeat but gutted we couldn't finish it with the magic 10 on their home patch. After a long briefing with the players we had to wait until the following Sunday to find out if we had done enough this time, with fears again we might come up one or two points short.

However..... normally working out all possible options I realised late one night that we had actually one more ties than Surrey and as they didn't beat us in the last game, even with them winning their last match a win wouldn't be enough as they would be behind us on ties won.

Keeping this quite from the players I had to sweat it out with the guys to see how Surrey got on at home to the other title chaser Norfolk.

Finally on the following Monday morning the result came through that Surrey had lost and the title was ours, by one point, some might say a sense of irony but for us it was all down to hard work back in September, the team spirit during the highs and lows, the commitment of the players and parents at every match and finally the determination to win and win after losing out last season. All these elements make for a strong bond and great team dynamic that has worked well for the team over the last three years.

It's not down to individuals, player or coach, trainer or mentor it's what the player puts in both on and off the court that together with their team members gets the team result.

I would like to thank all involved again this year especially John Scott and Carl Barnard for their continued efforts to improve the county 3rd teams rise. Also I would like to thank the parents for taking the time to bring the players and support during some tough days. Finally the players, you all once again have been fantastic and a real pleasure to work with. I know a few of you may well be moving up next season and so should you, let's hope you keep these attributes and carry them forward with you.

I hope to see you next season in the new division, which will be another test for us but I'm confident that our processes and approach will be the key to our success.

Enjoy the break and look forward to putting you through your paces in pre-season in September.

Lee Scott  
Team Manager