

Essex Over 45 Team Report for 2016/17 Season

The fixtures in the Masters County Championships South & East Division East were reduced this season down to 4 matches with only Cambridgeshire & Hertfordshire as opponents. A home match v Cambs was the only match before Christmas and we got the perfect start with a 12-0 win. A fortnight later Cambs beat Herts, so increasing our chances of progressing to the play-off. The away game at Herts did prove a stern test with 5 matches going to 3, but we won all of them in an 8-4 win. The return match at Cambridge was also tighter in part due to clashing with the Yorks Gold event; we were in the end comfortable with a 9-3 win. Having already qualified for the play-off, only pride was at stake in the home game v Herts but they put out a strong team. The ladies saved the day winning all 4, as we only won 1 men's and 2 mixed as we triumphed 7-5.

The playing squad was: Amanda Austin, Donna Tubb, Lesley Pallett & Tracy Hutchinson; Trevor Rogers, Andy Bailey, Dave Wood, Ian Smith & Paul Belcher. We were indebted throughout the season for help from the O40s & O50s squads with June Hammond, Julia Cloughton, Pam Lee, Jacqui Twitchell, Ady Munro, Marion Neale, Simon Gilhooly, Phil Tuffee & Bhanu Sisupalan who all happily helped out when asked to do so.

The New Year came and it was time for another crack at the Masters County Challenge back at Worcester. We welcomed Bhanu to the team for the weekend. Compared to previous years we received 'good' news at the start of play. Herts were seemingly down a player and the West of Scotland were no longer in our group having moved up to O50s. The first match v Hants proved to be a rude awakening as we lost the men's. The ladies, most unusually was a tight affair for 2 sets before we were comfortable winners in the 3rd. Then both mixed went to 3 sets but both matches were won in close deciding sets. So a 3-1 win to start with. A more comfortable win followed against Warks, only Lesley & Dave seemed keen on extra practice taking top mixed in another close 3 set match. Lancs was the last match on Saturday and again didn't start well as we dropped the men's in a marathon 2 setter. Ian & Bhanu were definitely favourites had they forced a 3rd set, but eventually succumbed 26-24 in the 2nd. The team remained focused and secured the other 3 matches all in straight sets, to record a 3-1 win leaving us sitting pretty after day 1. Day 2 and the usual start v Surrey; a tactical change gave no benefit as we still lost the men's again in 3 sets, won the ladies probably too easily – a tactical change missed, then Lesley & Ian lost top mixed in 3, 22-20 in the 3rd set, leaving Amanda & Trevor to secure the draw, also by going to 3, but storming through the end of the 3rd set. A 4-0 win followed v Middlesex, then onto the decider v Herts. They were still missing a lady and announced they would concede the ladies to us. As we were 2 points clear, we only needed a 2-2 draw; whereas Herts needed to get a 3-1 win. Another pairing at men's didn't work, so the tie was level going to the mixed. Tracy & Dave had a slow start, but Lesley & Ian flew into a lead. Roles reversed as both matches went to 1-1, but both matches started well in the 3rd sets and both maintained to the end, securing a 3-1 win and the squad's first County Challenge win.



The League play-offs at Hatfield saw the team at full strength with Andy Bailey available. Again we expected tough match against Surrey, but they were understrength on the day and we had few alarms winning 10-2.

The finals were back at Hatfield a fortnight later and we were drawn against Yorkshire. On paper they looked a strong team, having 3 of the ladies who had pushed our 40s team to a 6-6 losing draw in last year's finals. The men's did not begin well with first sets dropped in both opening rubbers, but both Dave & Andy and Ian & Trevor fought back to win both and go 2-0 up. Tracy & Amanda also dropped their first set before staging their own fightback. No such alarms for Donna & Lesley and we were 4-0 up. The reverse men's was a bit of a surprise as Dave & Andy lost in 3 sets, but Ian & Trevor won in 2. Tracy & Amanda won again, but Donna & Lesley suffered a rare defeat, leaving the match at 6-2 going in to the mixed. Tracy & Dave recovered after a slow start, but eventually went down in 3 sets. The 3 other mixed were all secured in 2 and a 9-3 win was secured. On paper the hard work was done, but we had found Hampshire tough opposition at Worcester. Again we got off to the perfect start winning the opening 4 levels. Ian & Trevor and Tracy & Amanda both made it 2 wins from 2 and again we were 6-2 up going into the mixed. Tracy & Dave played the match of the weekend to come back from a set down to beat Debbie Miller & Trevor Darlington. Again mixed 2-4 were won in straight sets and we had retained our crown for the 5th successive year!



ESSEX O45 County Champions for a 5th successive season & Winners in the County Challenge.

Again with thanks to all the squad for another great season! – Trevor ☺
Trevor Rogers O45 Captain