

BICC PREMIER DIVISION

ESSEX VS LANCASHIRE

Essex welcomed Lancashire to Chelmsford Social Club knowing that this fixture could be pivotal in deciding the champions in all five sections of the BICC Premier Division.

With Lancashire only twenty points adrift because of their earlier postponed match away to Glamorgan it meant that the winner of the match would almost certainly be favourites as main challengers to leaders Yorkshire.

The two top teams in the Ladies 'B' section came head to head and with half of the matches going the distance the competitiveness was evident, however for Essex only Chelmsford's Nicky Mynard (20.03) could manage a victory, a result which puts Lancashire and Essex level on points but with Lancashire having that game in hand.

Lancashire were last seasons Mens 'B' champions, however Essex look favourites to replace them following their impressive 7 – 5 victory in a match where Essex once again maintained a team average above 25 points per dart. Colchester's Jamie Robinson (27.74) had to come from 3-1 down to win the first set, Rayleigh Cavaliers Dan Day (25.97) picked up the second set and Southend's Paul Marsh (22.51) held his nerve to pick up the third set in the deciding leg. Lancashire won three of the next four sets with only Southend's Richie Howson (25.28) picking an Essex win up. However Essex then turned on the pressure as Walton's Alan Currihan (23.57), Colchester's Man of the Match Kevin Edwards (28.00) and Southend's Paul Barham (24.14) winning the next three sets with their winning legs being 18, 17 and 16 darts respectively. Not being outdone Lancashire responded with the last two sets of the afternoon ensuring they went into the 'A' team matches 10-8 ahead.

Essex Ladies 'A' are looking to retain their title, but Lancashire were in no mood to allow them to runaway with anything. Rayleigh's Donna Russell (20.99) missed a crucial double as she lost out to England International Lisa Ashton (21.99) before Clacton's Viv Dundon (19.64) held her nerve to overcome Laura Howarth (19.00). Braintree's Amanda Dodd (20.76) lost out in the deciding leg to Anne-Marie Swindells (20.65), however the turning point came when Rayleigh's Sue Condon (14.59) won a scrappy match against Trish Hughes (14.92), this gave the confidence for Braintree's Lady of the Match Stacey Ellis (21.17) and Chelmsford's Sue Baker (20.91) to ensure the Essex victory and with it a three point cushion over nearest rivals Devon.

With the match score sitting at 12 -12 going into the Mens 'A' it was all to play for. Rayleigh Cavaliers Jimmy Allison (25.27) lost out in the deciding leg of the first set before Southend's Mick Peel (27.17) levelled proceedings. The Springfield pair of Darren Peetoom (27.75) and Phil Brewster (30.83) picked up the next two sets with both players hitting ton plus checkouts along the way. Saffron Walden's Wayne Bloomfield

(22.64) and Springfield's Wayne Gleed (25.85) were two more to lose out in deciding leg shootouts, as the scoreline once again levelled up, this time at 15-15.

Essex started to pull out all the stops as Walton's Man of the Premier Division Scott Lawrie (33.41) and Brentwood's Steve Johnson (30.41) both had resounding wins, but back came Lancashire as Barry Adlam (23.51) found doubles elusive going down to Mick Oversby (27.83). Basildon's Phil Halls (24.45) celebrated his son Bradley's England Youth call up with an emphatic 4-1 victory, however back came Lancashire as Riverside's Dave Solly (23.36) found Paul Whitworth (28.30) too hot to handle. This left Essex one set ahead going into the final showdown of the weekend. Colchester's 'Steady' Eddie Gosling (24.44) facing Lancashire's Douggie Smith (23.68). Gosling won the first leg taking just one dart to check out on 40 and when Smith missed darts at a double in legs two and three Gosling pounced. In the fourth leg Gosling finally hit his straps checking out on 110 in fifteen darts to give Essex an important 7-5 Mens 'A' win as well as the even more important three bonus points for an overall win. With Yorkshire going down away at Glamorgan, Essex once again top the Premier Division Table with just three matches remaining.