

## Essex 1<sup>st</sup> Team – ICC Premier A Division

### Report on the third Premier 'A' weekend held at the National Badminton Centre, Milton Keynes 5<sup>th</sup> / 6<sup>th</sup> April 2008

Essex went into the final Premier A weekend of the season four points behind the strong Yorkshire team at the top of the table. There was a slim chance that we could catch Yorkshire, however a last minute injury to Caroline Westley, a call up to Finland for a tournament for Sarah Walker and the wonderful news that Paula Anderson is expecting her third child meant we were down three of our top ladies. Realistically, our hopes of catching Yorkshire were dashed, but we were confident that we could maintain 2nd place in the division and come away with silver medals (we were 11 points ahead of Glasgow & Strathclyde in 3rd place, who were slightly ahead of Warwickshire in 4th).

With a distinct lack of young ladies yet of the standard to play in the Premier divisions, the County's over 40's squad proved to be an excellent source of players to replace Caroline, Sarah and Paula (replacements - Allison Pearson, Viv Gillard and Sue Crompton). Usually feeling a little old at these events, Karina Bryant, at 36, was in the unusual position of being the youngest lady in the squad (what they may lack in age, they make up with an immense amount of experience - and the advantage that some of the young superstars have no idea who they are!).

Our first match on Saturday was against Glasgow & Strathclyde, aka virtually the entire Scottish national squad! To start, Danny Plant was neck and neck with Gordon Thomson in the top men's singles, when Gordon fell and had to be taken to hospital with a fracture. Joel Gayle had a tough game against Kieran Merrilees (who was close to beating Nathan Rice later in the day), but was unable to trouble Kieran too much and lost in straight sets. Allison Pearson's skill and experience was no match at all for Frances Heslop in the top ladies' singles and Allison came through very comfortably 21-9, 21-11. Sue Crompton, who had only been called up to play the night before, lost out in the second singles. Our top men's doubles pairing of Peter Jeffrey and James Anderson were, yet again, on fine form to beat David Forbes and Colin Hall 21-10, 21-13; whilst Joel Gayle and Andy Frye's men's was conceded by the opposition as a result of Gordon's injury. Tracey Dineen and Karina Bryant had a good game at top ladies, however, just missed out 16-21 in the third end to Imogen Bankier and Helen Blair, whilst the current All England over 40s ladies doubles champions Viv Gillard and Sue Crompton had a great win over Kaity Hall and Frances Heslop 21-19 in the third end. Glasgow were just a bit too strong at mixed doubles with both Essex pairings of Peter and Allison and Andy and Karina losing out in straight sets. Result:- a perfectly respectable 5-5 draw.

On Saturday afternoon, Essex were pitched against Yorkshire. Danny and Joel gave it their all, but could not overcome Yorkshire's top singles players, Alex Marritt and Marcus Ellis. Danny had beaten Alex (currently ranked no.5 at singles in England) on his way to the semi finals of the English Nationals some weeks before, but could not quite get the better of him this time round. Allison, yet again, demonstrated how much of a quality player she is by beating Helen Ward (currently ranked no.10) in straight sets at top singles, whilst Sue's mountain was just too steep to climb as she lost to Sarah Milne. Yet again, our men's doubles pairings won two very entertaining games. James and Peter overcame the Foster brothers, Stephen and Edward, in three very competitive sets and Joel and Andy were impressive beating Marcus Ellis and James Vincent in two close sets. The ladies doubles pairings of Sarah Bok and Jenny Wallwork; and Jenny Day and Jessica Fletcher proved too strong for Karina and Tracy; and Viv and Sue with both losing out in straight sets. Peter and Allison were 19-17 up in a great game of mixed against Stephen Foster and Jenny Wallwork, when Foster pulled out with an injury. James and Karina had an excellent game against Edward Foster and Sarah Bok, but just lost out 18-21 in the third. Result:- Yorkshire 6, Essex 4 - not bad at all considering!

On Sunday, the travelling Sarah Walker returned to the team having landed from Finland the night before. Both Allison and Tracey were unable to play on the Sunday, Allison due to coaching commitments and Tracey as a result of a dental infection.

Essex played Warwickshire on the Sunday, the team which had overtaken Glasgow in the division and were therefore in 3rd place. Essex only needed to win one game to retain silver, which Joel delivered convincingly by winning his singles against Chris Dakin in two sets. Danny had a long hard game against Mark Sellwood, but a few uncharacteristic errors in the 3rd end led to Mark winning 16-21. Sarah Walker (currently ranked no.9) had the formidable task of playing England no.3 Jill Pittard in the top ladies' singles and was beaten in straight sets by an impressive performance by Jill. Sue battled bravely in the other ladies' singles losing out in a close game to Mary Le Druillenec in straight sets. The ever reliable James and Peter took the top men's' doubles in straight sets against Chris Tonks (who had been brought in to play Essex on the Sunday) and Rajeev Bagga, the over 40s All England superstar. Having been victorious for the whole of the season, Andy and Joel just lost out 18-21, 19-21 to Carl Goode and Chris Roe in their match. An impressive Sarah Walker and on-form Karina Bryant played exceptionally well together to beat Catherine Grant and Jill Pittard in straight sets in the top ladies, whilst Sue and Viv could not quite reach the level they had played the day before and lost their doubles against the strong pair of Nicky Duerden and Claire Millward. Peter teamed up with Viv to play top mixed against Chris Tonks and Catherine Grant. Both Peter and Viv played really well but just lost out 16-21 in the third. After a disappointing first set, James and Karina pulled their socks up to beat Carl Goode and Claire Millward 21-13 in the third end of their mixed. Result:- Warwickshire 6, Essex 4 - again, a satisfactory result.

Overall Team Result - Silver!

As for the season's individual performances, special mentions must go to our Essex' men's doubles pairings. James and Peter were unbeaten the whole season, overcoming several current international players - which is fantastic! Our second men's doubles pair of Joel Gayle and Andy Frye won all bar one game, again an exceptional performance. Singles players Danny Plant and Joel Gayle gave us several great starts by winning most of their games and Caroline and Sarah's all round performance was rock solid and always entertaining. Allison's singles victories on Saturday were a joy to watch and her experience on a mixed doubles court with Peter helped Essex along the way. Special thanks go to the second team players who played up, namely Sue Crompton, Viv Gillard and Ben Barber. We could not have done it without you. As usual, Essex excelled at mixed doubles throughout the season with Peter Jeffrey, James Anderson and Andy Frye; Allison Pearson, Viv Gillard, Karina Bryant, Caroline Westley and Paula Anderson amongst those contributing to our mixed doubles successes.

The team played really well and, whilst we didn't catch Yorkshire, we ended the season well ahead of 3rd place Warwickshire.

Karina Bryant  
Team Manager

## Essex 1<sup>st</sup> Team – April 2008



The players are from left to right - Peter Jeffrey, Sarah Walker, James Anderson, Paula Anderson, Andy Frye, Danny Plant, Karina Bryant, Viv Gillard, Tracey Dineen and Sue Crompton.

Players not shown in the photo were: Joel Gayle, Caroline Westley and Allison Pearson.