

U15 Shires League Play-offs – Sunday 6th April 2008 @ Babington College, Leicester.

To some it may seem over-indulgent to claim a triumph in achieving 5th place in the finals but this was A TRULY AMAZING PERFORMANCE, especially when, after the first draw we had to play Bucks, the favourites and ultimate winners, effectively removing any last vestige of finishing in the top 4.

Moving into the bottom half of the draw, we then had to win both remaining matches to finish 5th.

To put this performance into perspective, the Essex team could only boast 2 players ranked in the top 50 of either sex in the country, had only one grade 1 player and only 3 grade 2 players. ALL OF THE OPPONENTS WE PLAYED HAD MORE PLAYERS RANKED IN THESE TOP TWO GRADES.

This was truly a TEAM PERFORMANCE with stunning performances from all the players not to mention the fortitude of those who had to face up to the country's elite players in the cause.

EVERY SINGLE PLAYER PLAYED THEIR PART - everyone won crucial matches but there were some truly dramatic highlights that played a major contribution to the achievement:

- Joe defeating Elliott Miles in the Herts match. Personally, I think this was the best 15 mins of singles play by any Essex player this season. What is more it instilled in the rest of the team a belief that they could beat Herts, our closest (and friendliest!) rivals - we have lost narrowly to them twice in the Team Challenge this season. It is true they were missing their top two players but arguably so were we!
- Oscar's defeat of Dominic Ashton in the final match against Cheshire. Dominic is a grade 1, ranking at last 20 places higher than Oscar. Given that Cheshire boasted 2 grade 1 boys and 2 grade 1 girls, this victory gave us at least a glimmer of hope. Oscar, like Joe against Elliott, has never played better for the team this season than in this match.
- Despite Oscar's efforts we still reached the doubles 5-7 down and therefore had to not only beat all the No.2 level doubles but at least one No. 1 pairing. Step in Robbie who, hitherto had probably not played his best but, ably assisted by Joe, secured a fantastic victory against the grade one couple Li and Ashton.
- So we reach the final 2 crossover girls doubles - the score is 9 all. Word suddenly goes round that there can't be a draw - if it is 10 all, the result is determined on "goal" or "points difference". Team Manager's Maths goes into overdrive and determines that the first couple must defeat the Cheshire second couple by at least 6 more points than our second couple are defeated (if they are) by Cheshire's first couple - comment from Rachel was "we've just got to muller the so and so's" [ed: this has been toned down somewhat!]. Half the parents/team watched one, the other half watched the other - the count was on for each point - Deborah/Alice (No. 2) 12, 13, 14, 15 - oh no Cheshire are on 20! 16, 17 yes!! Oh dear they have lost. All eyes then turned to Rachel and Beth - half of us didn't know the score but we at least seemed to be winning. Both girls picked this game to play to their peak with few errors. A few more points, then an error! Oh what is the f***** score! Then it was all over - 21-what? 13,12,11? **No 9!!!**. Team Manager was heard to shout - "I think we've ***** won!"

A nervous 5 minutes with the organiser and the Cheshire TM thankfully bore this assumption out and we had won by 2 points out of over 700 played in the match!!

Congratulations to everyone! I certainly shan't forget the day!! I am proud of everyone who has represented the team this year.

Simon Gauntly (Team Manager)