

# Derbyshire Squash Rackets Association

Press Release - 08 January 2008

## Derbyshire Men's Leagues 2<sup>nd</sup> Half

<http://www.derbyshiresquash.co.uk>

### Preview

#### **Division 1**

The second half of the season starts on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> Jan and immediately there is a crunch match between the two top teams as home side Hood Park take on LA Fitness (Dragons), LA Fitness lead table by 5 points. This tie always seems to throw up some great squash and with no.1s Joel Hinds and Darren Lewis looking set for another huge encounter. Duffield need a miracle if they are to avoid a second loss to The Manor and home advantage is unlikely to help them. Brampton will look to reverse the early season loss to their guests Burton and climb back up the table to their early season position just behind the top two. Ashbourne welcome back Grant Nicholson after a long injury layoff and could record their first win of the season against fellow strugglers Lumb Farm.

#### **Division 2**

In the last match of first half, Duffield 2 scored maximum points against Burton 2 to maintain a slender 5 point lead over Dragons 2 to finish at the top of Division 2. Dragons 2 also recorded a full 20 points away at Hood Park 2. Repton 1 had a vital away win against Burton 3 just before Christmas, but still slid a little further behind Dragons 2. Lumb Farm 2 finished well winning their second match of the first half, beating The Manor 2; they will need to have their eyes on beating Burton 3 to avoid the drop.

#### **Division 3**

Draycott look firm favourites to gain promotion and a win against Dragons 3 will surely ensure that happens. Hood Park 3 will need to target David Lloyd to escape relegation.

#### **Division 4**

Dragons 4 finished the first half of the season 20 points clear of Sandiacre 1 and Duffield 3. Rolls-Royce 2 moved away from the relegation zone with a stunning win over Sandiacre leaving Burton 5 and Hood Park 4 deep in trouble.

#### **Division 5**

Queens Park 2 and LA Fitness 5 will vie for honours in Division 5. Queens Park will need to comprehensively beat LA Fitness if they are to close the 19 point gap.

## Masters Squash

<http://www.englishsquashmasters.com>

The increasingly popular Masters' Series moved to Broxbourne SC, Hertfordshire for the South of England Open. Four Derbyshire players are vying for enough points to qualify for England selection and a chance to take on Scotland, Wales and Ireland in May.

In the **O35s** category, recent Derbyshire recruit **Jason Foster** looked to have a tough draw in the bottom half with a quarter-final match against Lancashire's Paul Thomas and potential semi-final against Norfolk's Jamie Goodrich, the latter no. 2 seed and at the head of the points table. An early exit here could have left Foster far behind in the race. Foregoing a full English breakfast, Foster was clearly in no mood for slip ups and immediately got to work on Thomas with some seriously good racket-work. Thomas wasn't allowed to settle into any rhythm as Foster cut the ball in short, stretching his opponent and picking off the loose returns. Superb ball control on bouncy, hot courts allowed Foster a 9-1, 9-2 advantage before Thomas could assert himself and led 5-3. Foster refused to budge and held on to his frustrated opponent for a while before reapplying the pressure - going short and pouncing on any loose volleys to take the game 9-5 and match.

Foster now had the chance to avenge his early season defeat at Goodrich's hands in the semis of the East of England tournament. There Foster had led 7-4 in the fifth, but a leg injury and some dogged retrieval work by Goodrich saw the tie go the Norfolk man's way. Foster had made relatively short work of Thomas in the morning and was full of confidence. Foster began as he left off cutting the ball into the front corners making retrieval difficult for Goodrich. Goodrich's loose returns were punched away to the back corners or superbly disguised by Foster. Foster managed to keep Goodrich at bay in a tough 3<sup>rd</sup> game with some majestic touches and with a couple of decisions going his way ran out 9-6 9-1 9-5.

Meanwhile, two time Masters' winner and England O35 captain **Kevin White** applied too much pressure on Warwickshire's Gary Bagley in a straightforward 9-2, 9-1, 9-6 win. However, Lancashire's Glen Ragou proved very stubborn and almost caused an upset. White took the first 9-5 and was cruising 5-1 in the second, when Ragou upped the ante, cut the ball cross-court to a consistent and excellent width and took the second 9-5. White, struggling to find form, cut his error count and ran was able to run Ragou ragged in the third; 9-0.

White started the fourth in the same vein, but at 5-0 took his foot off the gas, allowing Ragou to take his chance retrieving seemingly impossible balls and striking some impressive overhead winners. Ragou went through to 8-5, but then he was guilty of

relaxing and White managed to level at 8-8; Ragou refused to let go and held a game ball, but made two fatal errors to let a mighty relieved White through 10-9.

Derbyshire and Duffield SC team mates Kevin White and Jason Foster had practised together twice earlier in the week, but now the gloves were off. Foster had been 'on-fire' the previous day and White had looked a little below par, could there be an upset? The finals had moved to the show court where White had won last year, and within a few rallies it was clear White intended to repeat that feat. Fast out of the blocks White established an early lead and didn't let go; the first game slipped quickly from Foster, unable to find the previous day's immaculate touch.



Kevin White

Foster began well in the second patiently building a 6-2 advantage, but White upped the pace forcing Foster to the back court and quickly putting in drops to Foster's forced boasts. At 5-6 both players sensed a crucial point was being played and huge rally ensued, White dug the ball out of the back corners time and time again, but his tight boasts never let Foster an easy shot at the front and soon it was Foster doing the chasing. White clinched that rally as Foster was forced to take a risk. Foster looked spent and White powered through to win 9-0 9-6 9-1 and with it his third title of the season. Foster had an excellent couple of wins over close rivals and appears to be in the running for an England place.

In the **O45s**, **Greg Loach** had a key match in the second round against Stuart Farrar, just one ranking place above. Although Farrar (1050 points) remained a mere 10 points above Loach (1040 points), it was a decisive victory for Loach 9-2, 9-2, 9-6. Loach looked determined from the outset and struck an excellent length and volleyed short with authority. Only in the third did Loach's game slip allowing a brief run of points to Farrar, but once concentration was restored Loach

finished the match 3-0 denying Farrar any bonus points.



Greg Loach

Loach then faced the peerless Greg Pearman in the semi-final. Loach threw everything at Pearman, hoping to take a game and some bonus points. Pearman just doesn't give anything away and Loach fought for every point, slowly, painfully edging towards a prized game point. Eventually he was there, game point, but such is Pearman's consistency and immaculate game that Loach expended much energy to finally take game on the third time of asking 9-2. Loach bellowed a huge roar of satisfaction which resounded throughout the club. Loach worked hard in the second, but his efforts winning the first curtailed a serious push for the second game as Pearman eased through 9-5, 9-2, 9-0.

In the **O55s Neil Nightingale** collected sufficient points to remain at the top of the O55 rankings. Despite having the top ranking point haul, Nightingale wasn't seeded, but was scheduled to play his East of England Open conqueror Paul Reader, the no. 3 seed. And what a contest this turned out to be. First blood was drawn by Reader who took the opener 10-9; both players leading at times and having several game balls each. The second went to Nightingale 10-8, despite Reader having a game ball for what might have been an unassailable 2-0 lead. This wasn't classy squash, but was full of huge chunks of grit and determination.



Neil Nightingale

The pattern of the next two games was identical; Reader controlled the rallies, built up a decent lead, but Nightingale somehow stayed in the frame, picking up points that rightly weren't his. Nightingale picked up some incredibly tight balls in the backhand front corner and Reader confidence began to wane. Reader just couldn't shake his gutsy opponent and the pressure began to tell, mistakes came Nightingale's way and he edge both games out 9-7 for a well deserved win. In the semi-final later that day Nightingale appeared to have recovered well, taking the 1<sup>st</sup> game off no. 2 seed John Duckworth 10-8, but began to suffer as Duckworth eased through the next three.

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