

Inter County over 60 Stage 2 – 24 March 2018

Represented by Malcolm Balls (Disley), Rob Lathbury (Burton), Neil Nightingale (Duffield), John Pearson (Queens Park) and Steve Coppard (Lichfield), Derbyshire travelled to Crosby Northern Squash Club in Merseyside to take on the host county and Durham & Cleveland expecting a hard fought contest.

Rather than play one county to a finish then the second in a separate match later in the day, we played in an interesting format whereby the 3 matches were mixed in together in an attempt to prolong the interest regarding the final outcome.

The day kicked off with John Pearson at no. 3 taking on the Merseyside no. 3; having won the first John quickly found himself 2 – 1 down with everything to do! However John dug in after coming through a close 4th game 15 – 12, he triumphed in the 5th to give us a 1 - nil advantage.

Next on court was Malcom Balls making his debut for the county against the Durham & Cleveland no. 1, an awkward opponent who other team members had come across in previous years. Malcolm was outstanding, using his long reach to great effect with excellent retrieving, and won quite comfortably in the end 3 – 0, giving us a 1 – nil lead in that match too.

The first round was concluded by the Merseyside vs. Durham & Cleveland no. 2s after which Steve Coppard stepped up to play at no. 3 against the Durham & Cleveland no. 3. Steve was in good form and was altogether much too strong for his opponent who was seen off 3 – 0, giving us an unassailable 2 – 0 lead in that match.

Steve was followed on to court by Neil Nightingale at no. 2 in the Merseyside match. Neil has had a few entertaining and exciting tussles with his opponent in the past and so it proved once again; 1 – 0 Neil, 1 – 1, 2 – 1 Neil, 2 – 2, but unfortunately Neil could not keep the trend going and went down 3 – 2 leaving the Merseyside match poised at 1 – 1.

The second round of matches was concluded by a titanic struggle between the Merseyside and Durham & Cleveland no. 1s (won by D&C) and this was followed by those counties' no. 3s also won by Durham & Cleveland. This brought the showdown match between Malcolm and the Merseyside no.1 on to court – this would decide the match itself and indeed the final group placings.

Malcolm started slowly in contrast to his earlier match but soon got into his stride and eventually took the first 17 – 15. Games 2 and 3 were not such close affairs and having established leads in the middle of both games, Malcolm managed to maintain these leads to register his second win of the day, Derbyshire's second win of the day and thereby a first place finish in the group.

The dead rubber between Rob Lathbury and the Durham & Cleveland no. 2 wasn't played as the D&C man had sustained an injury in his first match; disappointing for Rob, but that was lessened by a win in a friendly (no such thing!!!) against John Pearson!!

This was a thoroughly enjoyable trip made all the more so by the camaraderie of all concerned, winning the group and getting promoted to the next tier unless England Squash have yet another re-think and re-organisation! Many thanks to the players and especially the supporters for their contributions to a successful weekend.