

Inter County Men's o50's – Phase II – Promotion Group

Essex played host to old foes Suffolk and new opposition Yorkshire and Surrey. Looking around the balcony, I saw 9 Internationals (that I recognised) out of the 20 players who would be playing. This would be a tough weekend and a step up in class for Essex – but this is where I want the county to compete at all levels.

First match was **Essex v Yorkshire** – and Wyn Edwards usual dogged determination to chase the ball paid dividends with a 3-1 win. Stewart Court was having the first of his marathon battles on court 3, whilst Martyn Ballands lost out to Yorks No1 and England player Ged Martin. Graham Jones at 2nd string went down 3-0 and Stewart converted his match 3-2. So, 2 all.....Newly crowned Essex o55's champion Brian Clay's match at 5th string swung back and forth – and at 4-0 up in the fifth it looked good – but a bit of Yorkshire grit from Brian's opponent gave him the game – and the match 3-2 to Yorkshire.

On the other court Suffolk's Peter Alexander, former World over 50's champion and current British o55's champion was blasted out 3-0 by Surrey No1 Greg Pearman. When Surrey No 2 Dermot Hurford took Suffolk's Dave Taylor out by the same score we all realised that Essex would have a big task later that afternoon in the second session. Surrey had brought a top side to win the weekend and put Suffolk to the sword 4-1.

So, **Essex v Surrey**. First up was Graham Evans, my first "squad rotation" player. A fresh pair of legs is always an advantage in the Masters events and I used my strongest squad and 8 players. Evans started well, and took the first game 9-5. After being in control of the 2nd and 3rd games which he lost narrowly, it was all one way traffic in the 4th and Graham lost 3-1. Stewart Court was in another marathon and the other court saw Greg Pearman too strong for Martyn Ballands. Ian Holdsworth came in at No2 and gave a good account of himself against England International Dermot Hurford – but again went down fighting 3-0. Stewart Court closed out his marathon game 3-2 when his Surrey opponent literally fell to pieces in the 5th game and conceded. Wyn Edwards had tricky Surrey no3 Dave Clark to play. Losing the first two games, Wyn pinched the third 10/9 only to just lose the 4th 10/8. So Surrey took the tie 4-1.

Suffolk v Yorkshire was on the other court, and Suffolk won that one 4-1 with some excellent performances, Sadly the Yorks No 1 pulled up injured, so they would be a man short on Sunday.

Sunday saw **Essex v Suffolk** and Surrey v Yorkshire

This is a familiar fixture to Essex as we have played Suffolk many a time – without success. A fresh set of legs is a great thing and Mark Kirkman at 5 won 3-0 with Wyn Edwards unfortunately losing to Suffolk's excellent No3 Gary Robinson. Stewart Court was now into his third match, playing ex England International John Goodrich. This match again swung back and forth with Stewart taking it 3-1 after an hour and 20 minutes. **A top performance over the weekend from Stewart, winning all his 3 matches.** Familiar foes Martyn Ballands and Peter Alexander battled it out at top string – with the Suffolk man taking it 3-1 leaving the number 2's to sort it out. Graham Jones came into the match knowing a win would seal it for Essex – but so did Dave Taylor, and the Suffolk man wrapped up the points and the match.

Surrey brought in reinforcements, leaving the mercurial Greg Pearman at home. Dermot Hurford moved up to first string and 3 new players came in below. Yorkshire was playing with only 4 players – all of whom were battered and bruised from Saturday, and had to play fresh players – and they went down 4-1. The weekend was won comfortably by Surrey.

Surrey 55
Suffolk 37
Yorkshire 31
Essex 20

Squad – Martyn Ballands, Graham Jones, Graham Evans, Wyn Edwards, Stewart Court, Ian Holdsworth, Mark Kirkman, Brian Clay.

Mark Kirkman
Essex Over 50's Captain