



### **Battle of the 'Sexes**

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by Graham Woodcock

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Boasting no fewer 11 boys and 6 girls in top 50 of the respective national cadet rankings, Middlesex were hot favourites to retain the title of Cadet County Champions. The real question was who, if anyone, would be able to challenge them over the weekend of play at the Draycott Table Tennis Centre? Might Warwickshire, the Premier division runners-up of 2008, go one better? Could Yolanda King follow up her Junior British League success to drive Sussex onto glory? Or could newly-promoted Nottinghamshire, boosted by the inclusion of no.5 cadet Sam Walker, mount a threat?

Middlesex got the defence of their title underway with a commanding 7-3 win over Surrey, a result which was matched by Sussex in their win over Yorkshire. South Yorkshire went to the head of the table thanks to a 8-2 victory over Buckinghamshire.

The other round 1 fixture saw Warwickshire face Nottinghamshire and neither county could be entirely happy with the resulting draw, as both lost ground on the early leaders. Sam Walker put Notts ahead with a routine 3-0 win over Mitchell Nash but Laurence Sweeney (3-1 over Harrison Chalkey) and Jessica Birbeck (3-0 over Amber Zygadlo) put Warwickshire in front. After a slow start, Aiden Keyworth overcame Matthew Outhwaite (9-11, 9-11, 11-1, 11-4, 11-7) and Lea Dickinson recorded a straight game win over Holly Thompson to make it 3-2 to Notts.

However, the lead changed hands yet again as Nash beat Chalkey in 4 ends and Thompson outlasted Zygadlo to get the better of their 5-game encounter. Sam Walker levelled matters by prevailing over Outhwaite (12-10, 11-6, 11-8). Birbeck restored Warwickshire's advantage, gaining a 3-1 win over Dickinson before Keyworth earned his team a share of the points with a comfortable 3-0 demolition of Sweeney.



**Nottinghamshire's Sam Walker, arguably the player of the weekend.**

Sussex slaughtered Buckinghamshire to hit the top of the table at the end of round 2. Edward Mitchell's 3-0 win over Tejas Padalkar was the sole act of defiance in what was a disappointing 9-1 defeat for Buckinghamshire. Middlesex joined Sussex on 4 points due to a good 7-3 win over Nottinghamshire. Sam Walker made short work of Connor Neenan and showed plenty of fighting spirit to come from 2-1 down to beat no.4 ranked Ping Ho (11-9, 6-11, 9-11, 13-11, 12-10). Aiden Keyworth also bested Eden Fung in 5 games, but the strong Middlesex team claimed the other 7 sets. South Yorkshire dropped from 1st to 3rd as they could only manage a draw with Surrey.

South Yorkshire's title ambitions suffered a further set-back in the third round of matches when they fell to a 6-4 loss at the hands of Sussex. Eric Wan beat Tejas Padalkar 3-0 and Robert Shaw gained a 3-1 win over Jack Bennett, giving South Yorkshire an early lead but Yolanda King and Helshan Weerasinghe got the southern county back on track with straight-game victories over Victoria Vuong and Scott Hollowood, in that order. Laura Robinson played well to earn a 3-0 win against Emma Torkington and put South Yorkshire back ahead. However, a run of successive wins for Sussex tipped the balance in their favour before Yolanda King sealed the points with a closely contested 5-end win over Laura Robinson (9-11, 6-11, 11-9, 11-9, 11-9). Middlesex's 8-2 trouncing of Yorkshire meant that they stayed tied with Sussex at the top of the leader board going into the fourth and final round of play on Saturday.

A point behind the joint leaders, Warwickshire lay in third place following their 9-1 win over Buckinghamshire but they fell to a 6-4 defeat against South Yorkshire. This enabled Sussex and Middlesex to open up a 3-point gap at the top when they eased to wins over Surrey and Buckinghamshire respectively.

Middlesex and Sussex continued in dominant fashion when play resumed on Sunday morning. Middlesex began with a 9-1 rout of an under strength South Yorkshire, who were missing one of their boys. Laura Robinson gained South Yorkshire's one win (11-6, 9-11, 11-9, 6-11, 13-11 over Sushmita Limbu) and was close to upsetting the higher ranked Tin-Tin Ho but was edged out in the deciding 5th game.

Sussex responded with an equally impressive performance against Warwickshire. Matthew Outhwaite and Laurence Sweeney gained wins for Warwickshire but with Yolanda King, Emma Torkington and Helshan Weerasinghe in formidable form, Sussex took control to claim an 8-2 win and join Middlesex 5 points clear at the top, with only 2 fixtures remaining.

Round 6 brought about the crunch match-up that everyone had been waiting for. Middlesex faced Sussex, knowing that the winners of the match would almost certainly go on to be crowned champions.

Middlesex started the quicker as Ping Ho got the better of Tejas Padalkar in 4 games and Eden Fung held off a spirited fight-back from Jack Bennett to claim a 5-end victory. However, the Sussex outfit were soon on the board as Yolanda King overcame Sushmita Limbu 3-1. Helshan Weerasinghe made it 2-all when he refused to be put off by Connor Neenan's persistent screaming to triumph in 5 ends.



**Helshan Weerasinghe [left] was found some inspired form to defeat Ping Ho [right].**

However, that parity was short-lived as Middlesex retook the lead through Tin-Tin Ho's clinical 11-8, 11-9, 11-8 win over Emma Torkington. Fung and Limbu made it a 5-2 advantage as they gained nail-biting 3-2 wins over Padalkar and Torkington respectively. With no room for error, Weerasinghe breathed life into Sussex's challenge when he won another thrilling 5-game encounter, this time disposing of Ping Ho (10-12, 11-5, 11-6, 7-11, 13-11).

Yolanda King did her bit to keep Sussex's hopes of a draw alive as she vanquished Tin-Tin Ho 3-1. But on the other table, Neenan finished strongly to record a 9-11, 11-0, 11-5, 11-5 victory over Bennett and seal a crucial 6-4 win for Middlesex.



**Yolanda King [left] on her way to overpowering Tin-Tin Ho [right].**

With a 2 point lead going into the final round, Middlesex needed only a draw from their match with Warwickshire to ensure overall victory, meanwhile Sussex faced Nottinghamshire needing a big win and praying for a slip-up by Middlesex. At the other end of the table, demotion for winless Buckinghamshire had already been confirmed but 7th-placed Yorkshire still had a slim chance of catching Notts or Warwickshire.



**Action from the final round of matches as Yorkshire takes on local rivals, South Yorkshire, in a bid to escape relegation.**

Wins by Yorkshire's Nicole Finn, Daryl Gee and Adam Tompkins provided some hope in their match against South Yorkshire. However, after being level at 3-all, the South Yorkshire team took the last rubbers through wins by Victoria Vuong, Scott Holloway, Laura Robinson and Robert Shaw to condemn their neighbours to relegation.

Sussex did all that could be asked of them in their fixture against Nottinghamshire. Sam Walker showed his class with comprehensive wins over Padalkar (3-0) and Weerasinghe (3-1) and Aiden Keyworth beat Jack Bennett (3-0) but Sussex had the rest of it their own way, gaining a 7-3 final score.

In the other hall, Middlesex were being given a scare by a determined Warwickshire team. Losses by Connor Neenan (to Matthew Outhwaite and Laurence Sweeney), Eden Fung (to Sweeney) and Sushmita Limbu (to Jessica Birbeck) put Middlesex in a hole at 4-2 down.

Sushmita Limbu stopped the rot with an emphatic 11-2, 11-1, 11-0 win over Holly Thompson and Ping Ho then levelled the score at 4-all when he disposed of Outhwaite 3-1. Tin-Tin and Eden Fung wrapped up a hard-fought 6-4 success with wins over Birbeck and Mitchell Nash, respectively.



**Eden Fung [right] celebrates as he clinches a 3-1 win over Warwickshire's Mitchell Nash [left], which secures the championship for Middlesex.**

### Cadet Premier Division Table – Final Standings

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Diff	Pts
Middlesex	7	7	0	0	51	19	32	14
Sussex	7	6	0	1	48	22	26	12
Surrey	7	4	1	2	37	33	4	9
South Yorkshire	7	3	2	2	36	34	2	8
Warwickshire	7	2	1	4	33	37	-4	5
Nottinghamshire	7	1	3	3	32	38	-6	5
Yorkshire	7	1	1	5	28	42	-14	3
Buckinghamshire	7	0	0	7	15	55	-40	0

Draycott and Long Eaton club Chairman, Jon Bayliss, was on hand to present the prizes to the gallant runners-up, Sussex, and the Champions, Middlesex.



**The Sussex team [from left to right – Yolanda King, Emma Torkington, Jack Bennett, Helshan Weerasinghe and Tejas Padalkar] admiring their consolation shields.**



**The Champion Middlesex team [from left to right - Eden Fung, Ping Ho, Connor Neenan, Sushmita Limbu, Tin-Tin Ho] are presented with their awards by Draycott and Long Eaton Chairman, Jon Bayliss.**