

LONDON STAY IN CONTENTION

London County forced a narrow victory over a strong West Midlands side and put themselves firmly back into the promotion race.

Kelly Bobby (13.32) started the day off for London and got a 3-1 win over Gemma Poole (11.54), a defeat followed for Tina Hamilton (14.52) who lost 0-3 to the West Mids Lady of the Match Diane Tolley (18.56), debutant Jane Johnson (15.06) played very well in her first start for London and suffered a narrow 2-3 defeat, Dee Belcher (17.68) kept up her fine county record with a 3-0 win over Jacqui Simmons (14.24) and too many missed doubles cost Lynne Biondini (16.84) victory in a 2-3 defeat to Doreen Kaye (16.38), then Ged Carney (15.38) levelled the match score with a 3-1 win over Jenna Couch (13.26). The Mens team didn't start off too well with Chris Copeland (20.22) losing to Mark Lloyd (24.30) and Paul Hackett (19.89) losing to Lance Hackett (24.35), then up stepped our baby faced assassins, 14 year old George Killington (26.37) was dominant in a 3-0 win over Vivian Gould (23.35) and 18 year old Tom McGurn (27.49) won 3-1 against Ian Stanton (26.54) to gain the Man of the Match award in a scintillating display that let everyone know what he is capable of, Tom had levelled the overall score at 5-5 but West Midlands surged away at this point as Wayne Livett (19.94) lost 2-3 to Wayne Griffiths (21.68), Alan Hardy (25.58) lost a close one against Danny Coyle (24.74) and London were again two sets down, Tony Hamit (22.77) fought back for London and won 3-0 against Chris Stanley (22.15), Lee Cocks (22.95) lost to Lol Fraser (25.16) before John Nelson (26.37) returned to the County side with a fine 3-0 win over Chris Hickman (20.70), London were now just a set behind, no more victories came as Rob Edwards (23.69) lost 0-3 to Greg Parkes (25.05), Dave Goodwin (21.40) lost 1-3 to Chris Plumpton (25.77) and Stuart Pickles (26.59) lost 1-3 to the West Midlands match award winner Ian Hartlands (30.20).

Ladies (B) 3-3...Men's (B) 8-4...OVERALL: West Midlands 11-7 LONDON

London were going to need a very strong display to turn around a four point deficit over such a strong side and the London Ladies A Team showed the sort of fight needed, a great 5-1 win for them saw Kerry Simmons (15.82) beat Tammy Chance (12.45), Sue Holt (16.77) in her first A appearance won 3-2 against Heather Wright (16.29), Hayley Plume (18.85) beat Kim Fellows (16.73) to keep up her 100% win record, Tammy MacKenzie (21.17) got the Match Award for her superb display against Lisa Astbury (19.30) and this was followed by Clare Bywaters (19.16) win against Katherine Jenkins (18.38) in a very close game, London loss came from Lisa Dunford (14.49) who lost a close game to Sarah Robbins (16.48).

With the match now even at 12-12 after the great efforts from the Ladies A team, the men had to step up to the mark against a strong West Midlands side, first up was Lewis McGurn (29.55) who earned the match award for his performance against Matthew Dicken (26.55) winning 3-1, Lewis hit 2 x 180 in the first leg, and followed that up with another in the 2nd leg and sitting pretty on a 13 darter had to watch Matty take out a 120 finish, Lewis went on to dominate the next two legs for a fine victory, Dan Day (23.23) then went on to beat Mark Rollinson (21.71) 3-2 in a close battle that could have gone either way and Chris Stevens (25.70) continued the winning run with a dominant 3-1 victory over Neil Pointon (22.50), Paul Amos (25.93) despite 2 x 180's had no answer to a very good display from Jamie Hughes (28.11) and went down a 1-3 loser before Graham Rackstraw (25.61) making only his second A appearance won comfortably 3-1 after losing the first leg against Richard Platt (24.30), two 0-3 defeats followed for London, Richie Buckell (25.94) lost to Dean Stewart

(28.90) and Graham Inniss (24.98) lost to Andrew Forrester (29.47), The game now stood at 16-15 in London's favour so all the following games would be pivotal to a result, and the closeness of the next three games proved that to be the case, first up there was Steve McHale (26.36) who fought a hard battle to come out a 3-2 winner against Nick Fullwell (25.51) and this was followed by two 2-3 defeats for Jimmy Foster (24.58) against Peter Wyse (23.44) and Richard Angelo (29.51) against Ian Jones (30.96), this was Richard's first ever County game and to come into the team at the top county level and put on this type of performance cannot be commended enough, he had a chance to take the set 3-1 after going 2-0 up against the very experienced Jones, the game was now even at 17-17 and I feel that Dickie's performance was the inspiration behind London's final two victories, Paul Killington (23.01) was steady in his 3-1 win over Martin Angell (22.96) to set up the stage for a final shootout between Paul Wright (27.56) and Avtar Singh (23.93) in a game that was highly charged given the importance of the outcome Paul went 2-0 up quickly with 21 and 15 dart legs then slackened as Avtar took the 3rd in 23 darts, then amid the delirium from the watching crowd Wrighty produced a superb 15 dart leg to make sure London went away with the all important 3 bonus points.

Ladies (A) 1-5....Men's (A) 5-7....OVERALL: West Midlands 17-22 LONDON

This win cannot be understated because it came against a strong West Midlands side, in previous seasons London have had a pretty good time of it with some strong performances in the Saturday matches meaning London were going into the A games with an overnight lead, this hasn't been happening recently and the A teams have had to show a lot of fight to go along with their undoubted abilities. More was expected from the B teams this month and despite some fine winning performances and debut games, some players were simply under par and will have to knuckle down for the next few games. George and Tom showed the way with determination and endeavour, Johnny Nelson back on the County stage was great to watch, the Ladies A team were magnificent getting a 5-1 victory and evening things up and giving the men every opportunity to win the match, and the men delivered a determined display, Lewis McGurn winning the match award to equal his brothers achievement the previous day is almost certainly a first for London, there were so many good performances in the A, Steve McHales win was the most pivotal game for me and his game was great to watch and Wrighty taking the honours for winning London the match in a charged atmosphere was immense all this was capped off for me by Dickie Angelo, playing County darts for the first time against probably the best the West Midlands had to offer would have been daunting for most players but he's a determined lad and he took it all up on the stage with him, a performance he can be very proud of.

Next up London play the game that was previously cancelled away to County Durham in December, there has been some players pull out of this fixture so I expect some new faces will be called into the reckoning, a new influx of players determined to help the County is a good thing in my opinion because it will keep those existing players on their toes and make sure that the County are getting the best out of them.

Johnny Stefano