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**Middleton Cup – Group Game 2**

***Middlesex 112 (4pts) v Hampshire 127 (18 pts)***

Game 2 and an opportunity to right some of the wrongs from game 1.

Team Manager Ray gave a rallying talk before the game highlighting areas to target and improve on in the game to come. Then before battle commenced President Keith Robinson presented Nik Waker (Broomfield) with his 1st game flash and Tony Ward (Poplar) with his 3rd game full flash.

Under threatening skies, the game commenced and Middx made a positive start. At 5 ends the side were up on 4 rinks and led 27-19. Luke Mann, Joe Lovett, Matt Larman (all Ashford) with Dave Pitt (Cambridge Park) recorded a pair of 3’s to go 7-3 up and the notorious rink 2 was in the safe hands of home bowlers Kevin Hill, Norman Worley and Glen Adams with Tony Ward and they notched a 4 in their opening 7-3 lead.

The next 5 ends did not go so well. The heavens opened and Middx lost the section 17-44. Pitt’s rink shipped 11 shots as did Ollie Shearing (North Greenwich), Robbie Carter Jnr, Tommy Brooks and Perry Cook (all Poplar). John Stacey (Poplar), Mark Smith (Ashford), Tony Waller (Ladygate) and Nick Edwards (Bounds Green) were now one of only 2 winning rinks, ahead 7-6 in a tight game.

Middx needed to dig deep and ensure there was not a repeat of the one way slide from game one and they did that narrowing the margin to 17 at 15 ends, 77-94. Adam’s rink was now 11 in front and Edwards, 4 but Vikash Gandhi (Brentham), Nick Waker, Craig Hill and Barry Wheeler (West Ealing) had narrowed their deficit to 5.

Big finish needed and with the sun now out Middlesex were threatening. Ashley Tanner (Ashford), Will Allen (Poplar), Rob Hackwell and Gary Clarke (both Ashford) won the sections 3 ends to trail by only 4. Cook’s rink were closing as were Pitt’s. Adam’s and Edwards still led and the gap was down to 12, 95-107.

Middx knew they needed to win to stand a chance of progression, so risks needed to be taken over the closing stages. First off were Edwards’s rink and they had held onto the narrowest of wins 15-14. 2nd off were Adam’s rink and they had maintained a 9 shot win., 25-16. Two rinks down, 4 pts in the bag.

Sadly, that was as good as it got. Clark’s rink lost a pair of twos on the last two ends to go down 18-25, Pitt’s side lost a pair of 3’s chasing shots to lose 18-26 and Wheeler’s rink, in trying to kill the final end, lost a 5 to go down 13-22.

On the other side of that coin Cook’s rink picked up an 18th end 5, 19th end 4 and 21st end 5 to end up only 1 behind at 23-24 but it was to late. Middx had lost by 15 overall, 112-127.

So, a much tighter result and better performance but ultimately another defeat and the end of Middlesex’s chances of progression after only 2 games.

In the groups other tie Kent beat Surrey 14-8. This leaves the group as follows: -

Surrey 50 from 3, Hampshire 38 (2), Kent 36 (3), Isle of Wight and Middx 4.

Next Saturday Hampshire host Surrey in a game that could decide the group. Middx are due to travel to the Isle of Wight but with both sides out of contention questions are being raised as to whether this tie will take place.

Updates in the week.