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**Middleton Cup Group Game 1**

 ***Middlesex v Surrey – Hendon BC – Sat 8th June - 1100hrs***

Where to start?! Middlesex opened their 2024 Middleton Cup campaign by setting a number of unwanted records. They say revenge is a dish best served cold, well having been beaten by Middlesex at Cranleigh last season, on a cold and blustery morning at Hendon BC this year Surrey exacted painful recompense.

The result 73 (0) -143 (22) represented Middlesex’s heaviest ever Middleton loss, surpassing the 2010 defeat against Surrey. The 73 shots scored was the Counties lowest return ever with the 143 the 6th worst ever concession.

Positives, well Ollie Shearing (North Greenwich) and Vikash Gandhi (Brentham) made their debuts; Robbie Carter Jnr and John Stacey (both Poplar) played their 3rd game and got their flashes and Paul Cater (West Ealing) was playing his 75th game. Oh, and the pre match bacon rolls were lovely!!

Hendon’s green is without doubt, currently, the best in Middlesex but with it being so much better than most played upon is it now becoming a white elephant and not actually providing a home advantage. Surely though the best players adapt and thrive on better greens otherwise how can we expect to ever achieve at Leamington?

The game started steadily for Middlesex. Vikash Gandhi, John Carey, Craig Hill and Barry Wheeler (last 3 all West Ealing) led 3-2 and Alfie Hill (Hendon), Tony Ward (Poplar), Norman Worley and Glen Adams (both Hendon) led 4-3. Luke Mann, Joe Lovett (both Ashford), Chris Harris (Ladygate) and Matt Larman (Ashford) started slower and trailed 1-9. Overall, it was 17-26.

The next 5 ends saw Surrey extend their lead to 32, 33-65 with all rinks now behind. John Stacey (Poplar), Mark Smith (Ashford), Tony Waller (Ladygate) and Paul Cater (West Ealing) playing on the tricky rink 2 did best only losing 4 shots in the 5 ends to trail 5-9.

The next 5 ends would be key but Surrey simply pulled away. Ollie Shearing (North Greenwich), Robbie Carter Jnr & Tom Brooks (Poplar) and Dave Pitt (Cambridge Park) did best winning the section 4-2 whilst Ashley Tanner (Ashford), Will Allen (Poplar), Rob Hackwell and Gary Clarke (both Ashford) shared the spoils 4-4. Sadly, Larman’s rink shipped 11 and Adam’s 14. Overall the margin was now 60.

With only pride to play for, or so it looked, Middlesex tried to put some points on the board. At 18 ends Middx trailed 61-127 with Wheeler’s rink in the best position only 3 behind. So, the final 3 ends, could Middx gain any consolation points? Well no. Surrey retained their stranglehold closing the game out 73-143 and claiming all 22 points.

The final margins make painful reading for those who took park. Clarke’s boys down by 11, Cater’s 14, Larman’s 17, Adam’s 16, Pitt 9 and Wheeler 3.

In the days other game Kent beat the Isle of Wight 20-2.

So, Surrey lead the way with 42 points. Middx quite obviously have some serious work to do to get back into things with next Saturdays home clash with Hampshire the first opportunity.

Team Manager Ray Fortune will be spending the next few days picking some heads up and creating positivity ahead of that game.