

Winter County Cup 2016, Barnstaple.

The team for this event was very young with Linden bringing his wealth of experience to the table.

This I feel is a great chance for the next generation to grow into the mainstay players of the future.

We were in a tough group with Somerset, Cornwall and Northamptonshire.



Day 1

Tarka very kindly gave full use of the courts which meant that we could get 3 matches on at a time. This meant day 1 started with Rhys Dunford, Buzzy Avis and Jack Large kicking the tie off. Rhys and Buzzy had long 3 setters and both went the way of Devon. Jack was a bit quicker and won with the loss of just 2 games. Thus Devon went 3-0 up after round one. The next round went the way of Somerset with Alfie Flatters losing a tight 3 setter but their 1 & 2 proved too strong for Andy Higham and Lewie Parker, both losing in straight sets. Andy put up a strong performance against Richard Gabb, 590 in the world, and got a respectable 4 & 5.

Thus it was 3 all after the singles. I did have a regular pair of Jack & Andy, albeit not played together for a while and I decided to pair Lewie & Buzzy at 2nd pair and bring in the experience of Linden to pair up with Rhys at 3. Linden and Rhys had a good win in the championship tiebreaker and Buzzy & Lewie just came up short against a strong pairing from Somerset and lost 6&2. This led to the match being decided with the final match of the day. There was some extremely competitive doubles and Jack & Andy were just too strong for Gabb and Miller (the player who beat Alfie).

This was a very good start, with a win on day 1. On the other side of the draw Northants beat Cornwall by the same score line, this led to the match up for day 2, Cornwall V Devon, Northants V Somerset.

Day 2



The match V Cornwall was a late start to enable Tarka to complete their junior coaching, so we had the morning bonding on Saunton Sands beach. This worked as a great warm up with Linden and Pat Daykin jogging to the sea and lots of sand dune sprints.

We had the addition of Pat for today but unfortunately the loss of Alfie to injury.

The first round thus started with Pat at 4, Buzzy at 5 and Rhys at 6. Today did not start off as planned as Rhys again went to a 3 setter but today was on the wrong end and Buzzy lost 2 tight sets but Pat coming in managed to bring 1 back for Devon. Thus Devon were 2-1 down after the first round. Jack was first on of the 3 against an 18U player, fresh from his doubles win at an 18U ITF event in Liverpool. Jack showed the strength a big serve has and managed to prevail 6-4, 7-6. That brought us level in the score line with Lewie and Jack to go on. The Cornwall pair proved too strong and won both. Andy did manage to take the middle set in his match but just fell short in the final set as the Cornwall No1 upped his game to take the singles to 6-2 in their favour.

With the doubles having the addition of Pat, but with Rhys having a slight injury I moved Pat with Lewie and Linden with Buzzy, keeping Jack & Andy at 1. We made a valiant effort to take all 3 doubles, but unfortunately Linden & Buzzy lost 3&4 but the other 2 pairs gelled well again and manage to take the remaining 2 rubbers against very strong Cornwall pairs. Thus unfortunately Cornwall ended the tie with a 5-4 win. This meant at the end of Day 2, Northants 2 wins, Cornwall and Devon 1 win, Somerset on 0 wins. Due to the nature of the beast we were 3rd in the rankings behind Cornwall and Northants.

Day 3

It was quite an important match as it was possible to get promotion or even be relegated. Cornwall were also playing for promotion or relegation and Somerset to overhaul either Cornwall or Devon, even though they had not won a match yet.

The lower end remained the same with Rhys staying fit and we again had a strong showing in the first round with wins for Rhys and Pat. Unfortunately Buzzy struggled against an inspired Northants player but we did take the round 2-1. Then we had good wins for Jack and Lewie but the Northants No.1, was just too strong for Andy however that did mean we had taken the singles by 4-2. The other Counties' match ended 3-3 after the singles. I had the calculator out working out differing scenarios on what we needed to gain promotion. Albeit the tie was still not won by us, as you need to get to 5. With the other tie at 3-3 we would definitely not be relegated, a possibility at the start of the day.

To overhaul Northants we needed to get to 6, but that still left our fate in the hands of the other match. I brought Rhys and Linden back at 3 and kept the same 2 pairs from Saturday. The standard of all 3 doubles was exceptional and even though we had taken all first sets I was still wary of how things can turn around on the championship tiebreaker in the doubles. Pat & Lewie were the first to finish, so thus the tie was won and soon Rhys and Linden tied up their doubles and thus we had the 6 to overtake Northants. I did relax a bit and was keen to check the score of the doubles on the other side of the fence. Somerset had won the first 2 doubles, and thus the tie, so now promotion was guaranteed. The impetus was now firmly on the other match as the winner of the last rubber would remain and the losing team would be relegated. It was Cornwall who prevailed and thus even though Somerset got a win over Cornwall it was them that left it too late and could not avoid relegation.

So, after some intense tennis and I must say some absolutely outstanding doubles, Devon gained promotion to Group 4. It was at this stage I found out that the Ladies had also gained promotion to Group 4 as well. What a great end to the 2016 tennis calendar.

It was also very good that the LTA Councillor at the event was our very own David Vinall. It was very pleasing to receive our winners medals from David.

The team that performed so well this weekend is very young, Linden and myself being the exceptions and with a large group of young players coming through as well, the future of Devon tennis is looking very strong. The nucleus of the team is a group of mid to low 20 year olds, plenty of time to develop and bring Devon back up the groups...maybe Division 1 is waiting.....let's hope so.

Thank you to all those who took part and followed the team on my, shaky at times, live broadcasts. I promise I will get better at filming.