

Devon County 60s – 2015 Inter County Season End Report

The story so far.... Promoted to the 2nd tier of the Inter County league as a result of finishing runners up last year, this year promised to be one of trying to stay there. 2 new players joined for this season; Paul Ley from Westward Ho! and Keith Johnson from Torquay.

Team Captain, Phil Plummer continues the tale:

1st match with South Wales at Torquay. It's a good start as we win 3-2 in sunny, windy conditions (pretty close to tennis players' version of hell) and Keith gains revenge over a rival (David Byfield) for a recent defeat in a singles tournament (get'em back on the dirt, that's the way!!). John Norman saves 3 match points, but doesn't then convert 2 of his own in the 3rd set tiebreak and eventually loses 13-11. Peter Hennessey-Smith and I come back from a forgettable 1st set to take our 2nd doubles match to a 3rd set tiebreak and also pass up a match point before losing 12-10. The other rubbers are won in straight sets, but, it could have been a 4-1 or even 5-0 win, so I wondered whether we might come to regret these lost chances.

Before our 2nd match at Exeter with Bedfordshire, I checked the league tables and Bedfordshire had played and won all 3 of their matches to date. That would have seemed unlikely last year as they finished below us, we had beaten them on the 2 previous occasions we'd played them (and both occasions were away matches), but now they were setting the pace this year having been promoted presumably to even up the divisions. What was going on?

We soon found out, as only their captain remained of last year's team and 2 of their team told us later that they had been playing 1st tier in the 55s last year and, having reached 60, decided to move across to their new age group. Nevertheless, we gave them a scare and, in a reversal of last year's match with them, took the sets 7-6, the games 49-38, but lost the match 3-2 as a result of losing all 3 of the rubbers which went to a 3rd set tiebreak. This was to be the closest they would come to losing a match.

Now to our next 2 away matches, at Norfolk and Hampshire. "Which car do you think would be most likely to make it to Norwich and back?", I asked the mechanics at my garage, "a 6 year old Audi A3 or my 15 year old Peugeot 206?". They started smiling, so I phoned Paul Ley and asked whether he could take a few of us to Norwich.

Another tight match, but another 3-2 defeat, although this time, at least we shared the 3rd set tiebreaks 2-2. I played 2nd singles and had a set point in the 1st set, but, failing to convert it, succumbed to a straight set defeat in the other rubber. Paul and Anthony Lyons played well in their doubles debut, winning their 1st rubber on a 3rd set tiebreak, but losing their 2nd also on a tiebreak ("we were a set and 2-0 up at one point" said one – that's tennis for you).

Sometimes you've just got to acknowledge when a team is better than yours and that's what happened at Winchester playing Hampshire. We lost 4-1 with Peter Hennessey Smith preventing a whitewash by winning his singles, but otherwise, save for a close 1st set in the 1st doubles rubber (Paul Ley and Mike Cox took them to a tiebreak), it was, as the cliché goes, one way traffic. The after match food was good though, we'd brought a couple of supporters with us and the weather was warm and sunny, so there were consolations as we drove back to Devon. However, with only 1 win from 4 matches, despite good percentages, we really needed to win our final match with Sussex at Torquay to stay in the division.

The weather was perfect, no wind, no sun, but still pleasantly warm. Unfortunately, too, no Keith, who was still involved in a singles tournament miles away and who had played and won all 3 of his

singles matches to date, even if he was by his own admission, “a bit of a loose cannon” at doubles, though I never minded it. We all have our moments!

Against Sussex, we again had to play 3 tiebreaks, but, finally, they all went our way with Paul Ley saving 2 match points to come through in the 2nd singles and Mike Cox and Trevor Taylor saving another two to win the 1st doubles 13-11. Peter Hennessey Smith, playing 1st singles, had a slightly easier time, but still needed a 3rd set tiebreak, which he took 10-5. Always good to get to “half time” (the remaining 2 doubles rubbers), knowing that you've already won the match and Peter & I played some solid tennis to overcome their doubles pair in straight sets, whilst Mike & Trevor lost the final rubber in 2 tight sets (4-6,5-7).

So, with 2 wins, we stayed up as did Sussex in the end and Norfolk, last year's winners in our division, dropped back to the 3rd tier along with South Wales having won just the one match each.

My thanks to all who played whether in the matches or the very useful practice sessions at Torquay Tennis Club and Exeter Tennis Centre, to the hospitality received both home and away and to the admin and other support from Ken Jones and Maureen Sowerby and Steve Maslen at Torquay.

Phil Plummer.