

MIDDLETON CAMPAIGN ENDS AS MANAGERLESS MIDDLESEX HAMMERED BY HAMPSHIRE

Middlesex's 2018 Middleton Cup campaign is over at the first hurdle.

What turned out to be the third and final game of this campaign was against Hampshire BA at Ladygate BC on the 7th July. It was another glorious day for bowls but the build up to the game had hardly been conducive to getting the positive result Middlesex had hoped for.

Heading into the game, whilst mathematically, Middlesex were still capable of qualifying from the section realistically they knew their hopes were severely limited. In the build up, half the originally selected side declared themselves unavailable for a number of reasons then the Team Manager resigned. As the match grew ever closer the England football team made the World Cup Quarter Finals which clashed with the Middleton game further distracting participants' focus. Then as a final nail, immediately prior to the game starting, it was heard that Buckinghamshire were already 35 shots up on the Island and more than doing what they needed to win the group!!

It was not all doom and gloom though. The loss of all those players gave the Executive the opportunity to blood a number of others into the Middleton Cup. This valuable experience may prove beneficial to whoever takes over the Managers role in 2019 and looks to rebuild.

Consequently prior to the game beginning remaining selector Tony Waller presented Jack Fisher (Rosedale Park), Colin Pink (Broomfield), Ken Pheasant (Holtwhites), Russell Rooks (Rosedale Park) and Andy Docker (Century) with their red Middleton flash for playing in their first game. Then Tony presented Martin Tasker Poland (Harefield Hospital) with his full Middleton flash for 3 games. Paul Wiltshire (West Ealing) was also due his red flash but no one realised, apologies Paul.

Anyway onto the actual game! When it eventually got underway on Ladygate's currently tricky green, which certainly provides no home advantage, it was tough to tell if Middlesex were being out bowled or if some were simply going through the motions to get the game played and head off into the lounge to watch the football!?

At 5 ends Middlesex trailed 20-32 but had 4 drawing rinks so everything remained possible. At 10 ends the gap had widened to 40-61 but Nick Edward's rink had pushed in front. Middlesex seemingly, for whatever reason never managed to get a grip on the game and at 15 ends the gap was 37 (62-98). Positively Jason Rowland's youthful rink had fought back to lead but at that stage everyone else was trailing. The hoped for fightback never materialised and the deficit stretched ever further to 41 (76-117) at 18 ends and ultimately 42 at the end, 94-136.

Middlesex did have 1 winning rink to earn the County 2 points to Hampshire's 20. That rink was Ashley Tanner (Ashford), John Carey (West Ealing), Rob Hackwell (Ashford) and Nick Edwards (Bounds Green) who won 19-16.

In the days other game Buckinghamshire eventually beat the Isle of Wight 18-4 on points to win the group and progress to the quarter finals where they will face Kent who sneaked through their group by 1 point.

For the record Middlesex finished 3rd of 4 in their section as follows:-

Bucks 55 pts, Hampshire 43, Middlesex 26, Isle of Wight 8.

So thoughts turn to 2019. Middlesex need a new manager, new selectors and possibly a clear out of players and a new approach. Already one or 2 senior players have indicated they will not be available in 2019 but the Hampshire game showed that with experience and the right combinations Middlesex have players to work with going forward. Question is will we even participate?

All these considerations and Middlesex face the prospect of a change of section and games next year against Berkshire, Surrey, Kent and this year's section winners Bucks.

Footnote – as it taking some time to get these reports done I can confirm that Bucks won their quarter final against Kent at Cranleigh BC and will now face the might of Devon at Leamington on August 4th.