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ROUND 1 - 2022 MIDDLETON CUP

MIDDLESEX 90 – SURREY 120

Rumble strips are intended as a road safety measure to alert drivers of potential danger through tactile vibration, well if anyone wants a live demonstration of the effect of a rumble strip you couldn't do worse than a trip to Iver Heath BC at present.

You have to feel for all the fantastic members at Iver Heath who like so many clubs give up their time freely to volunteer and host such matches. For many years they have had one of the best surfaces around, whatever the current issue, it spoilt what was a highly anticipated clash between Middlesex and Surrey in the Middleton Cup.

When you hear bowlers of the caliber on display laughing sardonically that they don't know what their wood is going to do you know there is a problem and the ongoing damage to Iver Heath's reputation could take longer to rebuild than what is probably a temporary green problem.

At times the complexity of judging consistent line and length across the green turned the game into something of a lottery and sadly for Middlesex it was Surrey whose numbers came up and they progress to a 2nd round tie against Sussex.

As it the way with the British weather the match was played in glorious sunshine one minute and rain the next. The removal of the high hedge on the park side also added an element of breeze to the challenge.

The game started slowly as players felt their way into the match. At 5 ends it was 24-24 with the rinks of Dave Pitt (Masonian), Tom Brooks (Poplar), Barry Wheeler (West Ealing) and tom Smith Paddington) plus Dave Thomas (Hendon), Will Allen, Chris Dunkley and Scott Reading (all Poplar) taking early leads.

Over the next 5 ends things stayed relatively tight with Middlesex 8 behind at halfway (46-54) but still ahead on 2 rinks. Ashley Tanner, Mark Smith (Ashford), Craig Hill (West Ealing)

and Matt Larman (Ashford) suffered most in those 5 ends at the hands of Surrey's experienced skip Simon Clarke.

Mid game there was the amusing site of past International Steve Touhy mis delivering a wood, in frustration he picked it up and lobbed it onto the bank at the end of the green where it promptly rolled into the hedge and out of Steve's reach. The much taller Charlie Souter's long arms were required to retrieve the wood so Steve could carry on!

The next 5 ends saw the vital shift in momentum and by 15 ends Middlesex were chasing being down 66-87. It was the Hendon rink of Glen Adams, Alfie Hill, Norman Worley and Pat Briscoe who suffered worst losing 1-11. Middlesex still had 2 winning rinks but Tom Smith's had been replaced by Paul Reynolds (Ladygate), Kevin Liffen (Ashford), Tony Waller (Ladygate) and Paul Cater (West Ealing) who had sneaked ahead 12-11.

So, Middlesex needed to push on but Surrey maintained their lead and at 18 ends had actually increased it by 1 to 22, 80-102. Scott Reading now had the only winning rink. Try as they might Middlesex could not pull back the gap and as the rinks began to finish the chances of victory began to fade.

Tom Smith's rink dropped 2 on the last end to lose 19-20, Paul Cater's rink dropped a 3 on the last end chasing a rink win to go down 14-20, Pat Briscoe's Hendon foursome never recovered their mid game problems and lost 12-21. The rink of Kevin Hill (Hendon), Geoff Lawrence (Bounds Green), Jason Rowlands (Rosedale Park) and Nick Edwards (Bounds Green) dropped 3 shots on the first 2 ends and were then held virtually the entire game at that range eventually losing 16-19.

With the game out of reach the final 2 rinks shook hands with 20 ends completed. Matt Larman's rink ended 10-22 behind but Scott Reading's quartet returned the only winning card 19-18.

So, Middlesex bow out at the first hurdle and again reflect on what might have been. The game will no doubt have given team Manager food for thought for 2023 when the Middleton returns to a league format.

With thanks to Iver Heath for hosting and best wishes for resolving their on green issues.

Middlesex now look ahead to the Balcomb Trophy against the Isle of Wight on June 26th at Ashford, 12 noon start and the Home Counties clash with Kent on July 2nd at Broomfield, 1100hrs start.

