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London began life back in the second tier of UKDA with a home fixture against Cleveland. Although the opposition were far from fielding their strongest line up, there were still enough quality players to make life difficult for the Londoners if they were to slip up at any point.

The weekend began as always with the Ladies B. However there was a new look, with Eileen Waving in the role of Ladies Team Manager after succeeding long-serving Carole Belcher who stepped down at the end of last season.

She oversaw a dream start, as the London girls whitewashed their opposition with clinical efficiency. First up to the oche was **Emma Smith** (15.66). A ton forty at her second visit was the perfect response to her opponent's 124. With her opposition missing chances at the Madhouse, Smith stepped in to break throw. A routine hold followed, and the third leg followed the pattern of the opener. Both players scored solidly, then missed shots at the double before Smith found the outer ring for the straight legs win that also yielded the Lady of the Match award.

The second match of the session went the full five leg trip. **Nikki Patten** (15.60) quickly found her usual rhythm in the scoring stakes, and despite her opposition firing in three tons was more assured at the business end as she roared into a two-nil lead. The break of throw in leg two was replicated in leg three, and Patten was some way from having a chance at the double in leg four which sent the match to a one leg shootout. Patten had the darts in the decider, although she wasn't scoring as heavily as earlier in the contest, she was still well ahead in the leg and could afford to miss seven legs at the double before pinning the outshot to double the overall lead.

The next three matches only saw London lose one leg. **Kelly Livett** (15.18) managed to edge a scratchy opening leg to break throw, and then capitalised on a poor opening nine darts from her opponent to ease her way to within a leg. She then produced her best darts in leg three. With the Cleveland lady already well in arrears, Livett fired in a lovely 123 to set up a chance at 46, which she cleaned up at her next visit to round off a comfortable win.

Up next was **Lynne Biondini** (13.47). The first leg took a while to get going, with neither player able to establish themselves in the scoring stakes. The early attempts at double fared little better, but it was the home side celebrating as Biondini hit the leg winner. The second leg mirrored the first save for who struck the game shot and so the match was all square. An early 120 left Biondini chasing in leg three, but two poor throws were seized on as Biondini

cracked in a great 121 to put the pressure on. The timing was spot on as she then knocked over 40 to go one away. The fourth leg was fairly even, but a break of throw prevented the match from going to a fifth leg as Biondini departed the stage having deposited another point in the London win column.

Luci Cunningham (12.22) started the penultimate match well enough, but the opening leg quickly became a story of “double trouble” as both players struggled to nail down the winning dart before Cunningham bagged the outshot. It was a similar story in the next but with the same outcome to put the London Chair in the box seat. Leg three was far better, as Cunningham showed her true form. A ton did try to put some pressure on, but Cunningham had already left herself with the opportunity to close the game out which she did at the first time of asking.

It was down to **Emma Little** (15.33) to try and get the point on her debut to complete the sectional rout. She was broken in the first leg, but immediately broke back to level the contest. A smart 64 finish secured the third on throw, and she couldn't quite finish the job one leg later. So, it was off to a fifth and final leg we went. Little started slowly but picked it up as the leg wore on. A score of 83 heaped on the pressure with her opponent within reach of the double, and the pressure bore fruit as she smacked home the remaining 45 to complete the clean sweep.

The perfect start continued as London took the opening two games of the afternoon session. However, the visitors were probably thinking they were finally going to get off the mark when holding a two-nil advantage in the first match. **Clive Barden** (23.75) then clicked into gear, hitting three straight ton forties to open up the third leg before taking out the remaining 81 in just five more darts to halve the deficit. Leg four began equally as impressively, with Barden firing in another 140 before cracking in the first maximum of the weekend on his next turn at the oche. That gave him enough room to be able to miss a few shots at the outer segments without any duress, to make it all square with three to play. The fine scoring continued and he mopped up the fifth and sixth to take four legs on the bounce without his hapless opponent having darts at the double in either of the last two that were played.

Six legs were required in the next match as London chalked up another point. **Alan Reeves** (25.44) took the Match award with a display that combined solid scoring with some excellent finishing. The first five legs went with throw, and Reeves only needed 12 darts in leg three, a maximum in his third visit left him on 126 which he took out in some style. After being unable to break in the fourth, he held in leg five, three tons were hit in the leg before his second ton plus finish in the contest, a 116 was taken out with consummate ease. The only break of the match came at the crucial juncture, in a fairly even leg the Cleveland thrower missed a chance to force a decider and Reeves nailed the outshot.

The visitors finally got their season up and running at the ninth time of asking. **Geoff Mortimer** (23.13) traded the first four legs, in each of them the player with first use of the oche took the leg without any fuss. Leg five also went with throw and it would seem that the pattern of the match would continue to a seventh leg. In the sixth though, Mortimer could

only look on when poised to have at least two darts at the double as his opponent cleaned up the remaining 52, with the away support cheering as much in relief as in celebration at taking their first point of the weekend.

Any hopes that Cleveland had of mounting some semblance of a comeback were soon quashed as London promptly took the next three points on offer. Debutant **Bhav Patel** (23.82) started well. Two tons followed his first maximum in the black shirt as he cruised to the opener. Patel wasn't really in it in the next, but he held well in leg three. The fourth saw him fire in his second 180 of the contest before knocking over a nice 91 finish to create some daylight. He was immediately broken back, but after a slowish start in leg six, two red figure scores set up the chance for his first win on the London stage which he duly took.

Liam Hill (25.05) ensured his time on the oche was brief, with a win in minimum time. Three red figure scores in the opening leg, including his first two visits, laid the platform. The opening leg break was followed by a smart 87 take out to double the advantage. A poor first set of darts in the third was quickly shrugged off with three consecutive scores of a ton or more to saunter to an easy break of throw. Little changed in leg four, another slow beginning to proceedings was not pounced on and Hill eased to the win.

After losing the first leg against the head, **Tony Fleming** (20.47) reeled off four on the trot in a low scoring affair. Two tons in the second leg restored parity and he edged ahead courtesy of a nice 73 checkout to take the third. Neither player really caught fire in the two legs that followed, but Fleming had no problems when aiming for the outer segments and sealed the seal in the fifth.

The seventh match of the session saw the visitors claim a rare point, and in fact what was to prove to be their last in a desperately disappointing day. **Danny Brown** (23.17) didn't really do much wrong, but some quality finishing from his opposition, who cleaned up on 82, 62 and 96 soon saw him on the brink of defeat after the first three legs. Match darts were avoided in the fourth as Brown kept the argument going, but that proved to be a brief respite as four straight red figure scores left him squarely behind the eight ball as he was seen off in the fifth.

London ended the day with a real flourish. Five matches were still to be played, and they came out on top in each one. Matches eight and nine both went six legs. **Hayden Robbie** was another to make his debut in the senior ranks, in a match that saw no less than five breaks of throw. After losing the first, Legs two and three were won without Robbie allowing his opponent darts at the double, and the fourth saw him create a two-leg advantage. Leg five yielded the fourth break of the match to halve the deficit, but Robbie then stepped up in the sixth and his produced best darts of the match, with three scores of a ton or higher ensuring that he would walk off stage with his first point for the senior team.

Another graduate from the Youth ranks was **Harry Kelly** (23.81). He started well, taking the first two legs although the opener could easily have gone the other way. Although he was still finding the big trebles, he was on the receiving end in the third and fourth which left the match even. Chances were spurned in leg five, but at with his eighth dart at the outer ring,

he got the break of throw which turned the tide in his favour. He then began the sixth leg with a maximum and that enabled him to cruise to the win.

The tenth match went the full seven leg distance. **Tom Riding** (20.55) held on throw in a scrappy opening leg, but then was outscored by some margin as he promptly lost three in a row. The Cleveland supporters must have thought their man was favourite to secure what was becoming a rare point, but Riding was having none of it. Another scruffy hold of throw went his way in leg five, and then he came back to win the sixth when he fired in a maximum that set up 46 which he promptly chalked off to force a deciding leg. With the darts in his favour, a ton was immediately backed up with another maximum and that fashioned the chance to finish off a great comeback, which he duly took.

Gene Hill (24.44) tailed off in the first leg of his match, but quickly equalised when he started the second leg as he did the one preceding it, with two red figure scores in succession. He did likewise in the next, but this time did so later on in the leg which ended with a great 90 finish to go ahead for the first time. He then broke the Cleveland throw for the second time to leave him on the precipice of victory, but missed chances in legs five and six were punished as we went all the way for the second match running. Hill was behind for most of the leg, but he saw three darts missed at tops and then stepped in to smack home the match winning double.

A simply magnificent day for London ended in the best possible fashion, as **Peter Gallacher** (24.14) breezed his way to a straight legs win. His scoring prowess was not matched, and this was really evident in the second leg when he began with three scores of a ton and above. Three legs were safely deposited without his opponent getting a sniff of an outshot, and the misery was compounded still further when Gallacher took out the remaining 56 in the fourth to end the day's play.

That meant London would start off the second day with an almost unassailable 16-2 lead, which must have sent shockwaves through the rest of the division as they were checking on the scores throughout the league at the halfway point.

Only three points were now required for London to secure the overall win and the all-important three bonus points. With Cleveland now playing for little more than pride, the hosts needed to remain focused throughout in order to post a large winning score that would set them up nicely for the games ahead. They didn't have to wait too long, as the Ladies A got the job done as they halved their section in the first session.

Debs Watling (16.16) kicked things off with a win in minimum time. She quickly found her rhythm when it came to hitting the big numbers, but in the second leg her doubling wasn't quite as fluent. Her opponent was finding it equally as touch to locate the outer ring, and was made to pay as Watling managed to nail the out shot in the second to add to the one which she bagged to claim the opener.

Mandy Solomons (16.34) continued in similar fashion as she also swept to a straight legs win. She broke open a fairly even first leg with a score of 137 and that gave her enough scope to able to take out the double in good order. She could easily have seen the match

squared as her opposition missed over 15 darts at the outer segments, but she hung in there and found the outshot on her first attempt to go within one. The third leg saw Solomons really hammer home the advantage. A ton on her second visit was soon followed by a great 140 which put her within touching distance. One chance came and went but it didn't matter with her opponent still some way adrift, and in her next turn she promptly found the match winning dart which meant London were guaranteed a draw with no less than sixteen matches still to be played in the day.

Cleveland were now squarely looking down the barrel at a humiliating defeat, but with the pressure well and truly off, to their credit they did take the next three points, which exceeded what they had accrued up to that stage.

Carly Townsend (17.40) did hit two tons in leg one but couldn't quite manoeuvre herself into a position where she could force the early break, and was struggling for a consistent rhythm as she was herself broken in the next. She was better in a nip and tuck third leg, which she won, but although she piled on the pressure with a 116 to set up the game tying opportunity in the fourth, two red figure scores from the other side were enough to get the visitors their first point of the session.

The fourth match would certainly go down in the "one that got away" category. **Tammy Mackenzie** (17.89) shrugged off the opening leg break against her by doing likewise in the next, although both players had chances to finish the leg earlier. She looked all set to gain the upper hand in leg three, with two 140's in a row getting her to the business end first. But again the doubles were proving hard to find, and her opponent nipped in to pinch the leg. Another 140 started off the fourth leg and a lovely 113 set up 41 at which Mackenzie duly obliged, for the fourth straight break of throw to force the one leg shootout. The finale was a close affair throughout, and as in earlier legs, the doubles were being evasive towards both ladies. Alas for Mackenzie, it was her opponent who pinned the outshot to conclude the match in which every leg went against the head.

The penultimate leg of the session, although only lasting for the minimum duration, was a fair bit closer than the scoreline may otherwise suggest. **Jo Deamer** (18.41) scored well in the opening two legs, but was still chasing in the first which she lost. In leg two had hit a ton and a ton forty so seemingly looked set for the equaliser. But she could only look on as the proverbial rabbit was pulled from the hat – as she saw firstly a maximum struck, before in the next visit, a 97 finish from out of nowhere to give the visiting thrower the two-nil advantage. It was a body blow from which Deamer could not recover, as she then lost leg three.

The session was rounded off with a win for London. On debut, **Felicia Blay** (22.00) took the Lady of the Match and Weekend awards with a fine display that could have easily produced a higher average with more clinical finishing. She coasted to the opening two legs, hitting two tons in each of them with her opponent some way adrift in each. She should have ended the argument in the next, but after hitting two more tons en route to the double, was unable to close it out. Leg four saw Blay back in amongst the big trebles, with three red

figure scores setting up 32 which she cleaned up with plenty in hand to ensure the three bonus points were safely in the bag with the final session still to come.

With the score now standing at 19-5 in London's favour, it was matter of claiming as many points as possible to make a real statement to the rest of the teams in the Championship.

The final session began with a win for the North Easterners. The first five legs of the match involving **Chris Holt** (26.03) all went with throw, and in each case the man going second being some way from the double at the end. Holt began leg two with a maximum, and he squared the match again the fourth with two red figure scores helping things along. Needing to restore parity for the third time, a ton in Holt's second visit to start leg six was immediately answered with a maximum. The only break of throw was secured as the Cleveland thrower checked out on 66 for the win.

The first London point of the afternoon's play came in the second match. It was pretty much one way traffic throughout as **Nigel Fisher** (27.45) strolled to a straight legs victory. His opponent only managed one score of 100 in the four legs played, whereas Fisher was hitting the big trebles far more frequently. At least two red figure scores were recorded in each leg, with three in succession occurring in leg two. Fisher's finishing was equally as impressive, an 84 to conclude matters in the third being the highlight.

Nick Cocks (28.01) started off nicely in the opener with two scores of a ton or above, but he didn't have the throw and was unable to force the early break. He began the second with a ton forty sandwiched between two tons, and equalised with plenty in the tank. In leg three, two more 140's were hit in his first three visits, before a 128 in his next set up the finish to complete a fine 14 dart leg to break the Cleveland throw. Cocks again was quickly out of the traps in leg four, and took his third leg in a row, all achieved without allowing his opponent a chance at the outer ring. A second break concluded matters. Cocks was ultra consistent with four consecutive tons to start off, and although he did allow a rare chance for a leg to go to the visitors, he calmly stepped up and cleaned up to round off a fine performance.

The next contest saw **Lee Cocks** (27.39) take to the stage with partner Steph and London's newest fan, their new baby daughter Frankie proudly watching on. He didn't disappoint, but was taken to the last of the seven scheduled legs before taking yet another point for the hosts. A maximum in his second trip to the oche should have secured the first leg even with three tons against him, but some early missed doubles were punished. A fifteen darter was enough to immediately break back, and third leg was the reverse of the opener, with the Cleveland man missing leg darts before Cocks stepped in to edge in front. A good start to the fourth didn't yield its reward as a 78 finish brought the Cleveland man level. Having first use of the oche was proving to be vital, Cocks produced his best leg of the match to take the fifth in just 14 darts. A couple of 140's in leg six seemed to put him in pole position but again he could only watch as 74 was taken out to send it to a seventh leg. On this occasion, as two more 140's were fired in by the Londoner, when at the double there was no messing about and the hard fought but deserved point made its way into the London coffers.

Liam Hill (23.06) was hoping to follow up from the previous day, but this time round was on the wrong end of the scoreline. He rarely had a chance to get in a blow, and the only leg he managed in the five played came courtesy of an 80 check out in leg two.

That point began a run of three in a row for Cleveland, as they only dropped a solitary leg in each match. **John Walters** (22.85) soon found himself two legs in arrears, but got off the mark in a lengthy third. His best scoring leg came in the fourth, but the leg went with throw and despite two red figure numbers in leg five, a 64 finish was enough to get the job done for the visitors.

Craig Watkins (24.41) began his match with a couple of ton forties and closed out the leg with an 87 to take the opener in an impressive 15 darts and break throw in doing so. A poor score in the next saw an immediate break back, and despite hitting two more red figure scores in the third, it wasn't enough to break for a second time. A chance to equalise in the fourth went begging, and this proved pivotal as the next went with throw to continue the Cleveland mini-revival.

The pendulum of momentum then swung back firmly in London's favour with four straight victories, two of them of the whitewash variety.

The eighth match saw plenty of heavy scoring, but it was **Wayne Brown** (26.79) who came out on top. After taking the opener in good time, he led off the second with a maximum. His scoring in the latter half of the leg tailed off though, and the match was squared. Another maximum brought him the third, and he seized upon a poor opening visit from his opponent in the fourth leg, as two ton plusses were followed by a smart 72 finish to complete a fine 14 darter to put him well in control. Brown had first use of the oche in leg five, and he made full use of it. Two tons and yet another ton forty saw him to the double well in advance of his opponent, and although going inside on the double nine, he knew he would be returning and in his next three darts closed the game out.

Dave Wawrzewski (28.63) lived up to his nickname as he lit up the treble 20 in his four leg stay at the oche. A maximum in his second visit of the match was enough to bag the opener against the head, and after a ponderous start to leg two, he broke it open with another three perfect darts as his opposition was left floundering in the background. A third 180 in as many legs backed up a couple of tons to put him within touching distance of the winning line, and he crossed it in the next, three scores of a ton and above began the leg which ended with a 62 finish to conclude a very one-sided contest and the Man of the Match award

Three matches remained, and **Matt Wood** (25.37) kept the win going with a very consistent showing. Wood was soon finding the large trebles with ease, and when getting to the business end, the "Shearer" lookalike was finishing things off with the same sort of aplomb so often seen in front of the Leazes End at St James's Park. The first three legs were all completed in 20 darts. The heavy scoring continued into the fourth. As in the two legs which preceded it, Wood fired in three scores of a ton and upwards before taking out the match winning point to ensure that he wasn't "walking alone" as he departed the stage.

Fred Box (24.10) was next up, and the first three legs of his contest all went to the man with first use of the oche. His scoring picked up in the third, and a 121 which came in between two tons to start leg four ensured that the holds of throw continued. Another good opening to leg five set up a chance of the first break in the match, which Box grabbed with both hands as he clinically took out the 66 remaining. Having gained the advantage, Box then promptly held throw in leg six to take what would prove London's final point of the weekend.

The final match was a brief one. **Graham Rackstraw** (25.44) was slowly out of the blocks and had no answer to a superb 177 that set up the game winning shot that gave Cleveland the early lead. A maximum against him started the second, and despite two tons in response and a 140 later on, he wasn't quite able to carve out the chance to return the favour and break back. From then on, he was always chasing. The third went against the head and although Rackstraw tried to battle back, a fine 100 finish rounded off the fourth to give the visitors a consolation point.

London still gained the honours with a 7-5 sectional win, and ended the match with a superb 26-10 overall victory.

It was the ideal start to the season and sent out a real statement of intent that to the rest of the Championship that London are looking to immediately return back to the Premiership .

Their next match sees them make the short journey to take on near neighbours Hertfordshire, whose opening fixture to Oxfordshire was postponed until next May.

The other matches from the opening weekend saw wins for Kent, who narrowly won at Derbyshire, Northamptonshire who had a home win over Cheshire and in a match that was put back a week, Sussex overcame Cambridgeshire.