

Hertfordshire U160 2018/19 - *Mike Price*

We had a really difficult start to our season back in October, when we could only raise twelve players for our first match against Suffolk. Not surprisingly, we lost 4-12. For the afternoon, we had thirteen players to the fifteen of Cambridgeshire, but despite that deficit we turned in a remarkable performance to win the match 9.5-6.5.

In February, we mustered fifteen players to the fifteen of Norfolk, and in a match where no less than ten of the boards played were drawn, we shaded a close contest 8.5-7.5. In the afternoon we had a full team of sixteen to face Suffolk, and although we were outgraded on just about every board, we produced a shock 9-7 win.

In March we maintained our winning momentum beating both Cambridgeshire and Norfolk by 9-7. Both Suffolk and Herts finished on 10 points, having each won five and lost one during the season. However, Suffolk take the title by virtue of their better head-to-head record in their matches with Herts. Statistically this was our best performance since 2013-14, when we secured our only EACU U160 title with 10 points.

Mark Heffer with his two wins completed a run of three wins without intervening defeat, and joins Derick Price in qualifying for a county award. Mark finished the season with 4.5 points from his 6 games, a tally that only Corinne Mountford could match, and by virtue of playing on a higher board, Corinne is this season's winner of the Tom Wright Trophy.

This season has not been without problems, especially when we have struggled to raise a full team. Our first match in October against Suffolk when we could only raise twelve players, was particularly costly. The March matches were no exception, and I am especially grateful to Mark Harris, who travelled all the way from Yorkshire for one last hurrah with Herts, and to Sanjay who mobilised the Watford contingent at short notice. Although our second position would have qualified us for the ECF stages, we declined nomination in protest at the unjustified threat posed to us by Rule D4.2. This rule concerns defaulted boards at the ECF stage, and last season Herts U140 were fined £60 for defaulting three boards.

I have been organising the Herts U150 and U160 teams since 2003. It all started with an autumn day at Rothamsted with a match against Sussex when we arrived to discover the venue had been double-booked. Some of you may remember that day! Things could only get better, and they did, as we went on to reach the U150 finals of 2007 and 2008, and an U160 semi-final in 2014. We have had some adventures along the way. For the last two seasons Mark Heffer and Ian Mutton have captained the side in my absence, and I am grateful for all the support they have given me. The time has come for me to step aside, and I hope Corinne will be given all the support she will need.

Thanks again for all who have supported the team this season.

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