

Leinster Senior Team Trip Report March 2023



The Leinster Senior Team travelled to Leicester for the third and final weekend fixture of the 2022-23 Senior County Championships, 25-26th March. Going into the weekend Leinster was in fourth position, with a game in hand. Not only did the team have to play against Nottinghamshire, the table leaders at the beginning of the weekend, the team also had to play the rescheduled extra fixture, so player management was going to be a key factor in achieving maximum results. The objective for the weekend was to come in the top two and gain promotion to the Premiership.

Sussex was first up on Saturday morning. Leinster stormed into a 4-1 lead with singles wins from David Walsh, Adam McAllister, Sara Boyle and Siofra Flynn. Vincent just fell short in his singles. The mens doubles rewards were shared equally. Adam and Sean Patrick Laureta lost to the formidable pairing of Jonty Russ and Dean George. Scott Guildea and Vincent Pontanosa won their doubles comfortably in two. The team won both womens doubles matches. Sara and Sophia Noble fought for a great win against former Olympian, Heather Olver and partner, Amber Roberts. Jennie Magee and Siofra had a convincing win in their doubles. The two mixed matches were last up, and unfortunately, both were lost in three sets. On our previous weekends, we had been on the right side of the three-setters, however, it was not to be on this day. Some wondered was this an ominous portent for what was to come over the rest of the weekend. Leinster took the win 7-4.

The second match on Saturday was against Nottinghamshire, the table-toppers going into the third and final weekend. Once again, Leinster took a 4-1 lead after singles win from Adam, Sean, Sophia and Siofra, with David losing first singles. David and Adam lost first mens doubles and Scott and Vincent won second. Sara and Sophia won their doubles in three sets, whereas Jennie and Siofra lost

in three. The spoils of the mixed were also shared equally, with Sara and Scott winning first mixed, and Jennie and Vincent losing second mixed in three sets which led to another 7-4 win for Leinster.

It was with mixed emotions that the team met for dinner on Saturday evening. All the players were delighted to have won both Saturday fixtures, however, there was a feeling in the camp that possibly enough hadn't been done to get into the top two by the end of Sunday. The team was facing the possibility of being the only team in the Championship to win all matches, but maybe only come third based upon total number of rubbers won. Three teams, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire, and Leinster were in contention for 1st, 2nd and 3rd positions. By the end of play on Saturday, Warwickshire had 62 points, Nottinghamshire had 60 points and Leinster had 51 points with a game in hand. The team decided that our objective was to win 19 matches from 22 on Sunday to finish in the top two – an extremely hard ask for any team!

On Sunday morning, the team was ready for the first challenge of the day – Kent. Confidence was high, and all the players fully believed in the Team Objective. Point after point after point was put on the table with an “L” beside it. Murmurs started to flow down the hall that Leinster was making a statement and Kent genuinely didn't know what hit them! David, Adam, Sean, Sophia and Siofra won the 5 singles. David & Adam, followed by Scott & Vincent won 1st and 2nd mens doubles respectively. Not to be outdone by the lads, Sara & Sophia and Jennie & Siofra won 1st and 2nd womens doubles respectively. Sara & Scott played 1st mixed and Jennie & David played 2nd mixed. And Leinster was delighted to come away with an 11-0 win.

8 more points needed to achieve the Team Objective!

The hall quickly emptied as most teams had played all 9 of their fixtures and were free to head home, leaving Northumberland and Leinster to play the rescheduled fixture from November. The other morning results of interest also started to filter through. Warwickshire had finished on 72 points after beating Derbyshire 10-1. Nottinghamshire had finished on 66 points after beating Glasgow & NS 6-5. There was growing excitement within the team as players quickly understood that promotion to the Premiership was within our grasp without needing to achieve all 19 points that the team had set the previous evening. However, the players maintained their composure and set to the task at hand with a laser focus. All 5 singles began at the same time and Adam, Vincent, Sophia and Siofra had 4 points on the table for Leinster. The courts in use dropped to 4, and as soon as the singles players had caught their breaths, Sara & Sophia, Jennie & Siofra and Scott & Vincent went out for their doubles. Meanwhile an epic battle continued on court 1 between David and Neville Baptist. The doubles results started to come in – all in Leinster's favour. Finally, the result of 15-21 21-14 21-18 went in David's favour in a phenomenal match that lasted approximately 75 minutes. David was allowed a few minutes of rest before returning to court to bring home first mens doubles with Adam. We now had 9 and were equal with Warwickshire. Sara & Scott played 1st mixed and went for it, to win the match 14-12 21-18 23-21. Jennie & David made certain not to break the team's winning of the streak and won their mixed to make the final score 11-0 to Leinster.

Two 11-0 back-to-back results in a single day. A new record perhaps!

Much thanks go to Northumberland for agreeing to play the rescheduled match this weekend. Four matches at this level are demanding for all players involved, and Leinster is extremely appreciative of Northumberland's flexibility and understanding. Leinster would also like to thank the Tournament Referees, Brenda & Steve Bird, for facilitating the fourth match of the weekend. And finally, thanks go to Badminton England and their staff, Mark Downie and Jon Hancock for all the assistance provided to Leinster over the course of the season.

The English Senior County Championship was not won in a single weekend. The Leinster Senior Panel of players won the Championship over the course of three weekends. And congratulations go to the full panel of players: Declan Bennett, Sara Boyle, Ashleigh Coyne, Siofra Flynn, Erwin Guan, Scott Guildea, Jennie King, Adam McAllister, Michelle Shochan, Sophia Noble, Vincent Pontanosa, David Walsh. This panel of talented players has a great future and with additional talented younger players coming through the Leinster pipeline, the intention will be to compete in the Premiership next season and develop into an even stronger team for the future.

The Senior Team would like to extend its thanks to the Leinster Executive Committee for their ongoing support and investment. Thanks go to Betty & Barry in the office for organising the logistics for the trip. The Senior Team is interested in partnering with a sponsor for additional support for travel and training purposes and would be happy to engage in any discussions. Please contact Leinster Badminton privately if interested.

Many thanks go to Yonex, the official equipment supplier to Leinster Badminton.

Team: Sara Boyle, Siofra Flynn, Scott Guildea, Jennie King, Adam McAllister, Sophia Noble, Vincent Pontanosa, David Walsh.

Manager: Liza O'Rourke

