

The Peter Gibbs Cup quarter finals took place at Rayleigh Leisure Centre at the weekend with two ties in the morning and two in the afternoon. The early fixtures saw Phoenix Flames, who had already beaten last year's finalists Fitzwimarc, against East Thurrock and Eastwood faced off against Hawkwell.

Reigning champions East Thurrock defeated Phoenix Flames (formerly Greensward) on their way to the cup last season and looked set to do the same again as they stormed into a four nil lead in the men's and ladies doubles.

Natalie Smith (-12) won both her rubbers in straight games with Leanne Wall (-11) and Courtney Downey (-8). Alex Penny (-7) also secured a brace but was pushed to three games with Michael Clark (-6) against Phoenix pairing Tom Cook (0) and Tim Baskett (-5).

A straight sets win for Zak Pryor (-7) and Leanne guaranteed victory and an injury to Tim meant two of the remaining four had to be conceded. Phoenix could do nothing to stop East Thurrock in the other two mixed ties though meaning the champions advanced with an impressive 9-0 win.

The other morning match was a much tighter affair as Eastwood took on Hawkwell, back in the cup after several seasons out.

Eastwood lead three rubbers to one as Peter Brumwell (-6) won both his men's doubles in tight clashes and Laura Whiteman (-5) and Debbie Moon (0) won one of the ladies but Sue Mills (+3) and Caroline Trace (+4) picked a rubber up to keep Hawkwell in touch.

Andrew Strutt (0) and Caroline reduced the overall score to 3-2 before Peter completed his hat-trick to put Eastwood just a point away from victory. They nearly got it in the the seventh rubber as Dave Virgo (-4) and Debbie won the first game against Sue and Russell Dobson (+1) but lost out 21-20 in the second and succumbed in the third to make it 4-3.

Keith Wood (+1) and Farnaz Siddiq (+3) levelled the score up for Hawkwell before Andrew and Caroline went to three games against Debbie and Dave. After a gruelling encounter, the Hawkwell pairing edged it 21-17 to secure a 5-4 victory meaning a third straight first round exit for Eastwood in the cup.

The afternoon saw two more close encounters with Westcliff facing Phoenix Flames Seconds and SLH Rayleigh played Fitzwimarc Seconds.

Westcliff and Phoenix Seconds shared the opening four rubbers. Vicki Russell (-3) helped Westcliff to their two points in the ladies, winning both in straight games. Meanwhile, Danny Peach (0) picked up a brace for Phoenix in the men's to make it 2-2.

Matt Tonge (-5) and Andrea Lloyd (-4) put Westcliff 3-2 up with a straight sets game victory but Phoenix responded straight away with Robert Dunn (-2) and Tracey Carey (+1) also winning in straight games.

Danny and Emily Shaw (-6) edged the seventh rubber 21-19 in the third for Phoenix to put them a point away from victory and Rob and Tracey secured that with another straight games win for them. Ben Bradford (-1) and Vikki Walker (+2) won the final rubber for Phoenix to seal a 6-3 triumph and put the Seconds into the semi-final for a second successive year.

The fourth tie followed the example of Westcliff and Phoenix Seconds as they shared the opening four rubbers.

Fitzwimarc Seconds won both the ladies doubles as Kay Bailey (0) didn't drop a game while Joe Garnett (-3) secured a double in the men's for SLH Rayleigh with both of his going to three games.

SLH Rayleigh then took control as they won the next two rubbers courtesy of Peter Hall (-3) and Jan Watt (-2) and Joe and Judy Slater (+4) to lead 4-2.

However Fitzwimarc reduced that to 4-3 thanks to Kay and Adam Dixon-Peters (-1) winning in three games. Then the penultimate game also went to three and SLH had the chance to seal it at 20-20 but Peter and Jan lost that point to Adam Reader (-1) and Carole Reader (0) meaning it was all square overall.

The final rubber also went to three and Sarah Hall (-3) and Adam Whiting (-5) sealed victory for SLH Rayleigh as they won 21-15 to advance 5-4 and banish last year's demons when they lost by the same scoreline at this stage.

SLH Rayleigh, finalists in 2016, will meet Hawkwell now in the semi-final, while East Thurrock look to reach a fourth straight final and must overcome Phoenix Flames Seconds.