

National Championships 25th to 26th October 2025

Hertfordshire travelled to Potters, Hopton-on-Sea on 24th October 2025 for the National Championships, held over the weekend. This year Bedfordshire would rejoin the competition, taking the number of counties back up to 9. As our rest session was the final session, everybody would get to play 4 games on both Saturday and Sunday. The teams selected were:

Herts A	Herts B	Herts C	Herts D	Sanitizer	Herts F
S Gamage	J Warren	J Harris	S Palmer	E Thurley	Maz Cook
Mick Cook	G Young	P Harris	D Danby	J Hilson	D Smith
L Edmead	S McNeil	J Smalley	A Missing	T Ellis	S Missing
C Hearn	N Tuckey	J Ellis	M Thurley	R Hearn	P Cook

First up on Saturday for A/B/C were Northumberland. Herts were dazzled by the opposition's snazzy new shirts, and combined with the slow, dead carpets, this produced a dour, attritional session of bowls. Sadly two of the three games went Northumberland's way by a single shot, with Herts A losing 8-9 and Herts C losing 9-10, and it was only Herts B who clung on to a win, 9-6.

First up for Herts D/E/F were Sunderland. Having watched the first session Herts were understandably flat, against a confident Sunderland outfit who had drawn the Friday night inter-county match with Suffolk on exactly the same carpets in the same positions. Team D could not get out of the blocks, and were hammered 2-18, while team F were embroiled in a low scoring tactical affair, eventually succumbing 3-8 after what seemed about 3 hours of bowls. The only glimmer of light came from the sanitized, smooth hands of Team E who controlled the game against Jamie's rink to come though 11-6.

Next up for A/B/C were Norfolk. Herts A as expected were involved in a tight battle with Steve Frost and his rink. Neither team could assert the upper hand and the game ended in a fair draw, 6-6. Herts B played well, but the Norfolk skip kept them in the game with some accurate running shots. Eventually Tuckey managed to display a vague idea of weight control and drew shot with the last wood to clinch a 7-5 victory. Herts C were far more comfortable and controlled their game for a solid 10-3 win. This was a good session for Herts who took the overall spoils 5-1.

Second up for Herts D/E/F were Cambridgeshire. Herts D struggled again, albeit not as much as in their first game. They battled to try to stay in the contest but eventually came out on the receiving end of a 5-9 scoreline. Herts E looked settled, and a lavender aroma surrounded them as they strolled to a 12-2 win. It was not so easy for Herts F, but they scrambled to their first point of the day with an 8-8 draw. At lunch on day 1, Herts were only on 12 points from 24 and it had been a poor start.

Saturday afternoon started with Herts A/B/C facing Durham. Herts A and B were in trouble early in their games and never recovered, losing 3-12 and 5-12 respectively. It looked possible that Durham could sweep this session but Herts C put in a solid effort to seal a 10-8 win. Herts had had a bad day against the northern counties, only scoring 6 from a possible 18 points.

Next up for Herts D/E/F were Essex, who had made some tactical tweaks to their line-up. Essex are usually tough opponents at Potters due to the consistency of their lead and number 2 bowlers. Herts knew they would need to raise their game, and they did exactly that. Herts D found some form and battled to an 8-4 win, while Herts E kept their momentum from the morning with a narrow 7-5 victory. Herts F delivered their best performance of the day, controlling the contest and easing away to an 11-3 win. Essex had been dismissed 6-0 in what was the first clean sweep of the day for Herts.

In slightly more upbeat mood, Herts A/B/C closed their Saturday against historical local rivals Bedfordshire. It was great to see Beds back, and it was still fresh in some memories that a couple of years ago Beds had swept Herts 6-0 in a Sunday morning session which would prove very costly. Beds were a scratch team this year, with little county experience, but nonetheless you cannot take these games lightly. All three Herts rinks did the job and signed off their Saturdays with impressive wins, 15-1, 17-3 and 20-2. The Herts C win included a full house, possibly the loosest 8 ever seen at this level, but the consolation for Patricia was that this was not the first 8 caught on camera at Potters this year, and at least she didn't do it in a semi-final.

A big session loomed for Herts D/E/F to finish their Saturday, with the opposition being the leaders Suffolk. Herts D delivered their best performance of the day, easing away to a 12-4 win. The sanitizers were at it again, controlling the game with sensible bowls and completing their 100% winning day by a margin of 13-8. It was far from a bad display by Herts F, but some awkward heads developed towards the end of the game and nothing they tried really came off, with the game slipping away 5-10.

Hertfordshire had finished Saturday on 30 points, in third place but level on points with second placed Sunderland. Some pride had been restored in the last 3 sessions with 16 points from 18 available, but with Suffolk 9 points ahead overnight, any realistic chances of the title had gone. With Durham 1 point behind Herts in fourth, it looked like Sunday would be a close 3 horse race for second place.

Sunday started with Herts D/E/F facing Northumberland. In stark contrast to the first session the previous day, Herts looked relaxed and were bowling well. All three rinks dominated, with 19-7 and 12-3 wins for D and E respectively. Herts F kept their foot to the floor, racking up an impressive 22-1 win, the biggest victory margin for a Herts team all weekend.

First up on Sunday for Herts A/B/C were Sunderland, with a positive result needed in the second place battle. There wasn't much between the teams in a tense, tactical session. Herts C couldn't get to grips with a stodgy carpet, with Sunderland taking the contest 3-10. Herts A settled well despite some moaning about the brightly coloured woods, and got over the line 10-7. In a gripping contest, Herts B looked down and out before a lucky 3 brought them back into the game, and with the help of some experimental hand sanitizer they were able to block the Sunderland skip out to secure a 7-5 win. So 4 points against Sunderland reversed the damage from Saturday for what was probably a fair 6-6 draw overall between the two counties.

Next up for Herts D/E/F were Norfolk. Herts D put on a masterclass for the camera against Arthur's rink, romping home 19-3. The Herts F game against Matt Frost was predictably high quality and tactical, with fine margins deciding the outcome. Not much went Herts F's way as the game slipped away 5-8. The sanitizers were once again on their game; with no messing around they showed Norfolk the way with a straightforward 9-4 win.

The last session before lunch for Herts A/B/C was against Cambridgeshire, and with calories from breakfast wearing off, this was going to be a tricky test. In a tense session of bowls, Cambs just had the edge on Herts A and Herts C, resulting in narrow 7-10 and 7-8 losses. I'm not sure if there was an issue with the air conditioning, but some red mist appeared to descend on mat 6. It was nip and tuck, but the Herts B rink played an excellent last end, with the skip regaining some composure with a well placed back wood to take the win 8-6.

After lunch it was the turn of Herts D/E/F to face Durham, who had fallen away somewhat from the second place battle. Herts D were in a battle; in the lowest scoring contest of the weekend, they stayed in the game throughout but a solid Durham rink never let them build any heads, and the game was lost 4-6. With extra hand sanitization before and after lunch enhancing their lavender flourish, Herts E were in no mood to give Durham a chance and delivered a business-like 11-3 win. Herts F raced away to an early lead then managed their game to a 14-7 finish.

The next opponents for Herts A/B/C were Essex. Herts C faced a strong rink, confidently skipped by Ginge Searle, and were unable to gain a footing in the contest, losing 5-11. Herts A were comfortable and kept Essex at arm's length for most of the game, easing out to a 13-6 win. Herts B had a strong start, but Essex won 5 ends in a row to lead the last end by one. A dominant last end secured the 2 shots required for Herts B to nick the game 9-8 and round off a good overall team win against Essex, 10 points to 2.

Finishing their weekend against Bedfordshire, Herts D and Herts F eased away to early leads and never looked back, completing 18-5 and 15-5 wins. Herts E applied one final squirt of hand gel, but their contest was much closer early on. However they kept their heads and gained the upper hand mid-game, eventually coming home 10-4. It cannot be underestimated how difficult it is to go 8 wins from 8 at this level, and it's never been done in Hertfordshire history. It was a phenomenal weekend from Emma, Jo, Thomas and Rebecca to finally achieve this.

So the final session of Herts involvement arrived, and it was none other than the champions elect Suffolk. Herts A were on form against Neil Jolly's rink, easing away to an 11-4 lead after 8 ends. Game over? It never is against Suffolk, who built a tight head around the jack and threatened a big count. Thankfully the Suffolk skip missed both his woods tight and Herts crawled over the line 11-9. Herts B put on their best performance of the weekend with a convincing 12-4 win. Herts C had drawn the short straw having to play an unbeaten Sam Runnacles rink, they tried their best and stayed in the game a long time, but in the end their miserable day was capped off with a 4-8 defeat. Overall Herts had shown that they can match Suffolk head to head, in fact beating them 8-4 on aggregate, but Suffolk were far more clinical against the other counties.

So Hertfordshire finished with 64 points after a slightly improved Sunday, not losing any of the afternoon sessions. The remaining question was whether Sunderland could do enough against Norfolk to get the 3 points required for Sunderland to finish second, as Hertfordshire took their rest session. As it turned out, they could not get over the line, with Norfolk taking 2 games, leaving Hertfordshire to finish second by just 13 shots.

This was second place at the Nationals for Hertfordshire for a third year running. The opening two sessions on Saturday morning proved just as costly as they looked, but it was a good achievement to keep battling away through Sunday to steal the runners-up spot.

A summary of the team scores and overall results can be seen below:

Team	Beds	Cambs	Durham	Essex	Norfolk	N'land	Suffolk	S'land	PI	Pts	F	A
A	15 - 1	7 - 10	3 - 12	13 - 6	6 - 6	8 - 9	11 - 9	10 - 7	8	9	73	60
B	17 - 3	8 - 6	5 - 12	9 - 8	7 - 5	9 - 6	12 - 4	7 - 5	8	14	74	49
C	20 - 2	7 - 8	10 - 8	5 - 11	10 - 3	9 - 10	4 - 8	3 - 10	8	6	68	60
D	18 - 5	5 - 9	4 - 6	8 - 4	19 - 3	19 - 7	12 - 4	2 - 18	8	10	87	56
San	10 - 4	12 - 2	11 - 3	7 - 5	9 - 4	12 - 3	13 - 8	11 - 6	8	16	85	35
F	15 - 5	8 - 8	14 - 7	11 - 3	5 - 8	22 - 1	5 - 10	3 - 8	8	9	83	50
Pts	12 - 0	5 - 7	6 - 6	10 - 2	9 - 3	8 - 4	8 - 4	6 - 6				

	Sat	Sun	Total
Suffolk	39	36	75
Hertfordshire	30	34	64
Sunderland	30	34	64
Essex	24	27	51
Cambridgeshire	22	28	50
Durham	29	16	45
Norfolk	17	28	45
Northumberland	19	8	27
Bedfordshire	6	5	11

Hertfordshire now look forward to a crucial Eastern Counties league fixture against Suffolk at Applecroft School on Sunday 14th December.