

Ron Fosker

17.9.06

table tennis

When the Braintree Table Tennis League starts its new season this week it will be without a team from Colne for the first time for more than 30 years.

A club based in or around Earls Colne has not only been a fixture in the league since 1973, it has also been the league's most successful outfit.

But now that Rupesh Harding is both working and studying he has had to cut back on his table tennis activity and no one has come forward to run the club. Last year's members are either cutting back on their activities or playing elsewhere.

It is a sad end for a club that once ran 12 teams and won the first division title a record 13 times.

A number of its players, including Rob Milne, Rob Hellaby and Terry Dowsett, won the men's singles while its ladies' singles winners included Julie Dowsett, Tricia Taylor, Cathy Thompson and Sarah Davison.

In addition to its successes on the table, the club was noted in its early days for its ability to find and nurture junior players, under the tutelage of its first secretary, the then league coaching officer Peter Hill.

It was also known for a somewhat peripatetic existence. Over the years it has played at various venues in Earls Colne, as well as the Old School Room in Halstead, Halstead Snooker Centre, the Queens Hall, off Colchester Road, Halstead, Halstead Football Club, Greenstead Green Village Hall, the Yellow Dot Club in Sudbury and finally back to the Recreation Club, Earls Colne.

Table tennis will not be lost to the venue, however, as the Netts club is now housed there and hosts individual and team competitions as well as running a team in the British League and a vibrant coaching programme.

Ron Fosker

24.9.06

table tennis

For the first time for nearly 30 years, the Braintree Table Tennis League this season includes a team from Cressing.

A team representing the village last appeared in the league in 1978 before moving en bloc to form a new club at Liberal.

The new club has been put together by former singles champion Peter Hayden who made a comeback in 2005 after some years out of the game.

He has recruited his brother Ian, which whom he won three consecutive division one titles from 1994 to 1996, and has persuaded his sister Lisa, a former Essex junior No.1, back into the game after a protracted absence.

They will be joined by Trevor Carter, who moves across from Rayne C, and can be expected to put in a strong challenge for the title in a new look league system.

The league's 24 teams will play in two sections with each section having two equal pools of six. Each of the six teams will play each other twice before Christmas when the top three in the two pools in the top section will form a new division one for the second half of the season.

The other three teams in each of the two pools in the top section will become division two while the second section will split similarly to form divisions three and four.

How strong Cressing's title challenge will be will depend partly on who finally turns out for champions Black Notley A.

Hayden helped Notley to the title last season and will clearly be missed. More crucially Jon Hill, who played 15 times, more than twice as many as Hayden, has yet to sign. That is likely to stretch the existing resources of Steve Kerns, Ian Brown, Ken Lewis and Graham Farmer.

As cover they have added former Pillar House player Gary Young who now lives in Ipswich and has picked up the Clacton men's singles title during his five years out of the league.

Any availability problems could let in 2004 and 2005 winners Rayne A with their tried and tested team of Dean Andrews, Steve Elmes, Ian Whiteside and new men's singles champion Steve Pennell.

In the first half, Rayne and Cressing are in the same half where Black Notley B and Rayne B will expect to challenge for the other ticket to the second half top slot.

Notley B is a mixture of last year's B team (Ryan Pitt), C team (Tony Stredder and Laurie Sapiano) and E team (16-year-old Andrew McEwan getting a deserved crack at a higher standard).

To cover Carter's departure, Rayne B (last year's C team) have added Keith Martin, back again after a short absence, and Fred Button, now living in St Osyth and prepared to travel back for an occasional game at his old haunt.

Bocking and Liberal A, who keep last season's line-ups, are the likely choices to accompany Notley A into the final top six.

Black Notley D (Stuart Ascott, Simon Churchman, Bill Facey and Lyndon Griffiths) appear a class apart in pool A of group two. Notley E and Panfield, last year's top two in division three, will hope to join them.

Liberal B, Braintree Removals B and Delphi, the latter including Colne's former secretary Rupesh Harding, have the best credentials in pool B.

Other new signings include Chelmsford veteran Peter Hance at Removals A, the return of Neil Daines to Notley F and newcomers to the league Charles Wilkinson, Niall Campbell and Ian Rubens at Rayne.

Ron Fosker

1.10.06

table tennis

Champions Black Notley A got off to an uncertain start in their bid to hang on to the Braintree Table Tennis League first division title.

They needed to call in a reserve for their opening match against Liberal A where they dropped a point in winning 7-3.

Then, with a full side, they were held to a draw by Bocking.

In the Liberal match, Robin Armstrong and Barry Pritchard both beat Rob Stannard but it was Armstrong's excellent win over Ken Lewis that won them a point.

Against Bocking, Gary Young demonstrated the improvement in his form since he last appeared in the league five years ago, when he started with a good win over Paul Davison, seeded No.2 in last year's men's singles.

Notley stood at 4-2 up after Lewis had got the better of Kevin Gowlett, but after a tight five-game doubles win had put them back on track, Davison overcame Lewis and Gowlett finished the evening with a win over Young to give Bocking a share of the points.

Without Davison, Bocking also ended 5-5 against Braintree Removals. Removals' new signing Peter Hance won twice, as did Duncan Elloy, but Gowlett's three singles held Bocking together.

There was also a draw in the other match in pool A of group 1 when Rayne's C and E teams took two points each.

In pool B, Cressing made their bow in the league with an 8-2 win over Rayne D. Peter Hayden and Trevor Carter were untroubled but after her long break Lisa Ashdown clearly needs a little time before the rust wears off.

Rayne A, last year's runners-up, cruised to a 10-0 win over their own B team while Black Notley C upset the alphabet with a 6-4 win over their B team. Mark Lewis won three for the C team.

In group 2 pool A, Black Notley D wasted little time in demonstrating their likely superiority when they beat their E team – the second best team in the division based on last year's placings – by a comfortable 9-1.

Adam Pitt scored a good win over Bill Facey but Lyndon Griffiths and Simon Churchman remained unbeaten.

The E team, without Pitt, later had a 7-3 win over Rayne who had earlier beaten Removals C 8-2.

In the other match in the pool, 14-year-old Stevie Pell scored an excellent win over Nick Readhead for Notley G, but Panfield took the rest for a 9-1 win.

Delphi and Removals B finished close together last season and they were close again in their opening match of this season. Lorraine Burgess hit top form to take her three singles and steer Delphi to a 6-4 win.

Liberal B took all ten against Rayne G while Notley F beat their own H team 7-3.

The latter match was a landmark in Braintree history when Harold Jones became the first octogenarian to play in the league. He had celebrated his 80th birthday five days earlier.

Ron Fosker

8.10.06

table tennis

Black Notley D have taken little time to emphasise their superiority in pool 2A of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

They have now played the two teams who on last year's results looked likely to give them the most trouble – and have beaten them both 9-1.

Last week's win over Panfield followed a win by the same score the previous week over Notley E.

Nick Readhead took Panfield's set by overcoming Stuart Ascott but Notley's Dacre Pell, who celebrates his 17th birthday this week, won both his singles – Panfield were a man short – in straight games.

In the other result from the division, Notley G recovered from last week's defeat by Panfield to beat Braintree Removals C 7-3. Peter Foster was unbeaten for Notley.

Liberal B are looking similarly dominant in pool 2B. They had a crushing 9-1 win over Removals B, the team ranked one place below them, to follow their 10-0 win the previous week.

Derek and Matthew Finch and Diane Garner won all their singles but unaccountably let the doubles slip away.

Delphi and Notley F have also won twice. Delphi followed their win over Removals by taking all ten against Black Notley H while Notley F beat Rayne G 9-1, a match notable for the return of Neil Daines after a short absence from the game. He remained unbeaten.

In pool 1B, the curse of Rayne B struck again. A team of that name has finished below its C team for each of the last three years, despite a complete change of personnel one year to reflect the previous results.

The teams have been reordered again this year so that the combination of Paul Mitchell, Alan Hearn and Brian Cook, who started as the D team three years ago, then became C, are now B.

Almost inevitably, when they faced their D team (last year's B) they lost. They had the excuse of having to call in a reserve, but credit also goes to the D team's Dave Punt who took his three singles in the 6-4 success.

Rayne A followed the previous week's 10-0 win with a 9-1 scoreline against Black Notley C.

Chelmsford junior Brad Hudgell, No.11 in the new Essex under 18 rankings, had an excellent win over Dean Andrews and came within a whisker (11-9 in the fifth game) of repeating the feat against Ian Whiteside.

Liberal A registered their first win of the season in pool 1A, a comprehensive 9-1 against Rayne C.

Removals A, who drew their first game, also put a tick in the wins column when they beat Rayne E 6-4.

Ron Fosker

15.10.06

table tennis

The first match between the big guns in the top section of the Braintree Table Tennis League has resulted in the first defeat for newcomers Cressing.

They took on former champions Rayne A in pool 1B and, despite three wins by Peter Hayden, found their opponents' strength in depth was too strong and too deep.

Dean Andrews and Steve Elmes both beat Trevor Carter and Ian Hayden to see the home side home.

But there were some tough matches on the way. Elmes was taken to 11-8 in the fifth game by Ian Hayden while Andrews and Steve Pennell just held on to win the doubles at 11-9 in the fifth.

The older Hayden's win over men's singles champion Pennell shows he is rapidly approaching his old form.

Cressing had dropped a point in their earlier 6-4 win over Black Notley B – and another one for sending in the scorecard late. Trevor Carter was the man to hold them together this time while Lisa Ashdown scored her first win since her comeback, a good one over the fast improving Andrew McEwan.

In pool 1B champions Black Notley A scored the maximum four points for the first time this season when they beat Braintree Removals A 8-2. Mark Lewis, in as a reserve from the B team, took his three singles.

After drawing their first two matches, Bocking went beyond the halfway point for the first time when they beat Rayne C 8-2. Richard Jennings, out of form so far this season, came good to remain undefeated alongside Kevin Gowlett.

Liberal A scored their second successive four-point win in beating Rayne E 10-0.

After only three matches, Black Notley G are the only team throughout the league to have maximum points.

They made it three 9-1 wins on the trot with a victory over Notley G in pool 2A. Peter Foster was the one to prevent the whitewash with a win over Stuart Ascott but Lyndon Griffiths and Simon Churchman maintained their unbeaten records.

Notley E and Panfield occupy the next two spots in the table with identical records.

Notley had a 9-1 win over Removals C – Adam Cliff's win over Steve Ascott spoiling the sequence – while Panfield beat Rayne F 7-3.

Liberal B dropped their first point of the season in pool 2B when they beat Notley F 6-4. It was Notley's first defeat and it came despite an unbeaten evening from Neil Daines.

Delphi and Removals B, likely challengers for upward mobility at the season's halfway point, both had 10-0 wins, Delphi over Rayne G and Removals all in straight games against Notley H.

Ron Fosker

22.10.06

table tennis

Andrew McEwan, who celebrated his 16th birthday less than two months ago, announced his arrival in big-time table tennis last week with a superb string of victories against three of the Braintree Table Tennis League's most experienced players.

Brian Riedling, Paul Mitchell and Brian Cook have been playing the game more years than they care to remember but they still win a healthy percentage of top division matches. Yet McEwan, in only his third season in the game, went through all three of them.

Mitchell was the first to go, 11-9, 8-11, 11-9, 12-10, followed by Cook 5-11, 11-8, 11-1, 12-10 and finally Riedling 11-13, 11-6, 11-7, 11-7.

To put McEwan's feat in perspective, his two Black Notley B teammates failed to win a set between them and Rayne B emerged winners of the pool 1A match 6-4.

In an earlier match, Rayne B had registered their first win of the season, 7-3 against Notley C.

Ian Whiteside, temporarily registered in the lower team, won his three singles but lived dangerously against Brad Hudgell. The Chelmsford junior, also 16, won the first two games and narrowly missed out at 11-9 in the third before losing in five.

In pool 1A Rayne C staged an excellent comeback from 5-1 down against Braintree Removals A.

Tony Hammond and Cec Butcher won the doubles, then Butcher beat Gordon Fairchild and Hammond beat Peter Hance, who had won eight out of 11 so far this season, to make it 5-4.

Both were tight five-game tussles, but the next set was even tighter, Duncan Elloy scraping home 15-13 in the fifth against Paul Wellington to give him his three singles for the evening and Removals three points.

After three 9-1 wins Black Notley D at last made it 10-0 in pool 2A, but it was not without a few alarms against Rayne F.

Brian Hill took Simon Churchman to 14-12 in the fifth and Stuart Ascott to 11-9 in the fifth, then Charles Wilkinson stretched Bill Facey to 11-8 in the final game.

Panfield could only field two players against Removals C but Nick Readhead and Danny Canning won all seven between them.

In the restricted knock out cup, Notley D (Tony Bamsey, Adam Pitt and Simon Pohl) and Notley F (Clare Johnson, Neil Daines and Adam Purslow) advanced to the second round with 5-0 wins over Removals C and Rayne G respectively.

Ron Fosker

26.10.06

table tennis

Delphi surrendered their 100 per cent win record in the Braintree Table Tennis League – one of only four left throughout the four pools – when they lost to Liberal B last week.

Liberal retained their own unblemished record when they won the pool 2 B tie 7-3. And had it not been for a surprisingly destructive 11-9, 11-5, 11-3 defeat in the doubles, they would have taken the full four points.

Otherwise they lost only the opening two singles, both at 12-10 in the fifth game, with Derek Finch going through the evening unbeaten.

The match was notable for the return to action of Paul Lombardi, a former junior star, out of the game for many years, but soon back to something approaching his old form.

Braintree Removals B and Black Notley F are the other two teams hoping to finish in the top half of the pool and they could not be separated when they came head to head last week, which should mean this pool going to the wire. Neil Daines' three singles held Notley together.

Rayne G and Notley H had a close fight in the battle to avoid sixth place, won by Notley 6-4 with Barry Mouser unbeaten.

In pool 2 A Notley E sneaked above Panfield into second place after beating their own G team 8-2.

Rayne A's 100 per cent win record remained firmly intact in pool I B, a 10-0 win against their own D team brooking no argument.

Black Notley A in pool 1A had an almost equally convincing 9-1 win against Rayne C, spoiled only by Cec Butcher's hard fought win against Graham Farmer, while Bocking dropped two sets in coming past Rayne E.

Notley A beat Rayne E 8-2 while Bocking, slightly more surprisingly, had a win by the same score against Liberal A.

Ron Fosker

5.11.06

table tennis

With the first half of the opening phase of this season's Braintree Table Tennis League more or less complete, a pattern has emerged in three of the four pools.

In each case two teams look certain to finish in the top half at Christmas and another two in the bottom half.

That means one place is up for grabs when the pools split into four divisions at the end of the first set of matches, and in pools 1A, 1B and 2B, two teams are locked together in the middle of the table ready to contest the final place.

In pool 1A, the battle is between Liberal A and Braintree Removals A. The two met last week and after a series of close sets, Liberal came out on top 6-4 to open up a gap of three points on their rivals.

Peter Hance won his three singles for Removals.

In pool 1B, Black Notley C and Rayne B are separated by one point in the middle of the table.

Notley C overtook their challengers with an 8-2 win over Rayne D while Rayne B were losing by the same score to Cressing.

Cressing turned out all three Hayden siblings for the first time. Peter and Ian remained unbeaten while sister Lisa's win over Paul Mitchell at 13-11 in the fifth game in the final set of the evening clinched a four-point victory.

Rayne A, well clear at the top, had a 10-0 win over Notley B, who have now lost four out of four.

There was a similar turnaround in the middle of pool 2B where Removals B's 10-0 win over Rayne G enabled them to hurdle Notley F, who lost 9-1 at Delphi.

Leaders Liberal B had a straightforward 10-0 win over Notley H.

The pattern is broken only in division 2A, where a surprise defeat for Rayne F at the hands of Black Notley G has left the top three teams well clear of the rest.

Rayne's 8-2 defeat had much to do with the absence of Brian Hill, but the return of Keith Perrins has strengthened Notley and he and Peter Foster remained unbeaten.

Notley D sailed on at the top with another 10-0 win, this time over Removals C, while the teams in second and third places had their own private tussle, Panfield eventually emerging 6-4 better off against Notley E.

Ron Fosker

12.11.06

table tennis

Braintree Table Tennis League champions Black Notley A suffered their first defeat of the season – and only their second in two years – when Bocking proved too strong for them.

Paul Davison was the dominant force in the game, winning his three sets comfortably and combining with Kevin Gowlett to take the doubles.

The match started well for Notley when Graham Farmer scored an excellent win over Gowlett, but Ken Lewis and Ian Brown could not follow suit. Although they all beat Richard Jennings, it was Bocking who emerged with a 6-4 win.

Earlier Notley had a 10-0 win against Liberal A, not quite as routine as the scoreline suggests as four sets went the full five games.

At the other end of pool 1A, Rayne C picked up their first win of the season, 6-4 against Rayne E. A full house from Mo Hardy was largely responsible.

In pool 1B, Rayne A registered their fifth four-point win in six matches when they beat their own B team 9-1. Brian Riedling's win over Dean Andrews was the one to get away.

Rayne D got even less change out of Cressing who were only twice stretched beyond three games in their 10-0 victory.

Black Notley B avoided defeat for the first time when shared the points with their own C team.

It was a good evening for Ryan Pitt who won his three singles.

After three 9-1s and two 10-0s in the first half of the semi season, pool 2A leaders Notley D were made to fight harder second time round against Notley E who became the first team to take more than one set off them.

Tony Bamsey beat both Lyndon Griffiths – his first defeat of the season - and Stuart Ascott to cut the deficit down to 8-2.

And it could have been closer. In an epic father v son battle, Stuart Ascott just prevailed against dad Steve at 16-14 in the fifth game.

Second-placed Panfield had a 7-3 win at Notley G while Rayne F beat Removals C 6-4 thanks to three wins from Charles Wilkinson.

Braintree Removals B, who had a slow start to the season, kept themselves on track for a top-three finish in pool 2B when they beat second-placed Delphi 6-4.

Arthur Wilson, who is normally outscored by his teammates, did all he could for Delphi and registered three excellent wins.

Leaders Liberal B had a comfortable 10-0 win over Rayne G while Notley F kept up their hopes of finishing in the top half with a 9-1 win over their own H team.

Ron Fosker

26.11.06

table tennis

It has taken them some time, but Braintree Removals C's young team have finally notched up their first win of the season.

After a closely fought match in which six of the sets went the full five games, they emerged 6-4 ahead of a fairly strong looking Black Notley G in pool 2A.

Adam Clift held the side together with his three singles and it was his victory over Peter Foster, who won his other two, in the final set of the evening that clinched the three points. He just nicked it at 7-11, 7-11, 11-9, 11-9, 12-10.

Matt Shelley won two singles and although Ashley White did not figure on the winning side of the scoresheet, he came mightily close, losing out at 11-8 in the fifth on one occasion.

In pool 1A, Removals' A team scored their third win of the season when they beat Rayne E 7-3 although they went on to lose by the same score four days later to Bocking.

James Mullane and Dave Edwards both made their first appearances of the season for Bocking but it was Kevin Gowlett who led the way with his three singles.

Liberal A were made to fight hard against Rayne C – two sets went the full five games while another five were decided in four – but in the end they took all ten.

The second round of the knock out cup produced only one close match, Rayne B's 5-3 win over Black Notley C.

Five of the eight sets were decided in five games.

Brian Riedling had to work the hardest. His wins over Brad Hudgell and Rob Stannard both came at deuce in the fifth.

In the other matches, Black Notley A and Cressing had 9-0 wins respectively over Rayne C and Rayne E while Rayne A declared at 6-0 against Rayne D.

The restricted cup produced fewer one-sided affairs. Only Black Notley D's 8-1 win over their own E team was convincing.

Rayne F beat Notley H 6-3 with Brian Hill on the winning side in his two singles and two doubles.

Delphi won by the same score against Notley G although they only dropped one singles, a good win for Peter Foster over Barrie Applegate.

Black Notley F came past Removals B 6-2 where one scoreline showed the delightful lack of logic in the game.

Steve Willis and Steve Clift had fought out four tight sets 11-7, 13-15, 9-11, 11-8. Then one Steve became tired and the other inspired, or both, and the final game ended 11-0 to Clift.

In the Essex League, Braintree veterans B team of Graham Farmer, Ken Lewis and Duncan Elloy beat Burnham C 8-1 while the C team of Robin Armstrong, Alastair Brown and Cec Butcher had a 7-2 victory at Ilford B.

Ron Fosker

3.12.06

table tennis

It has been a good week for the unsung heroes of the Braintree Table Tennis League. Following the previous week's duck-breaking by Braintree Removals C, both Black Notley B and Notley H recorded their first wins of the season.

Notley B's may be the more important as it keeps alive their chances of finishing in the top half of pool 1B and so making the top division after Christmas.

Their victory came over Rayne D and was almost exclusively the work of Laurie Sapiano and Andrew McEwan who won three singles each in the 7-3 victory.

For Notley H success was of a different order. Not only was it their first of the season, it also lifted them off the bottom of the pool 2B table.

Yen Tran took his three singles to lead them to victory over Rayne G in a match in which two players broke their individual ducks. Harold Jones scored his first win of the season for Notley H while Rayne G's newcomer Ian Rubens registered the first league win of his career.

Elsewhere in pool 1B, Notley C kept themselves in the prime slot for a top half finish when they beat Rayne B 6-4. Mark Lewis's three wins held them together.

At the top Rayne A scored their second 6-4 win over Cressing and need only two more points to be certain of first place. Ian Hayden proved he is pretty much back to his best with three neat wins.

In pool 1A Black Notley A and Bocking remain neck and neck on 26 points from eight matches.

Notley added four points to their total with a 9-1 win over Removals A. Peter Hance's win over Graham Farmer was the exception that proved the rule.

Liberal A are almost certain of third spot after their 7-3 win over Rayne E. Robin Armstrong was unbeaten for Liberal but Phil Wade scored good wins over Barry Pritchard and Frank Neill.

When leaders Liberal B met Black Notley F in pool 2B, they knew that to get the full four points, someone would have to deprive Neil Daines of his unbeaten record, the only one in the pool.

When Paul Lombardi stepped up to do just that in the penultimate set of the evening, it looked as though they had succeeded.

But they had reckoned without Steve Willis who pulled off a superb win against the redoubtable Peter Byford in the final set of the evening to give his side a point.

In the Essex League Braintree veterans A team had a close contest with Chelmsford A before coming away 5-4 winners. Steve Pennell won twice while Ian Whiteside and Dean Andrews won one each.

The veterans B team recorded their second successive 8-1 win this time over Basildon C. Ken Lewis and Duncan Elloy won two singles and Graham Farmer one.

Ron Fosker

10.12.06

table tennis

Panfield and Black Notley E have ensured they will join Notley D in the Braintree Table Tennis League division three after the Christmas shake-up but Notley F's hopes took a major nosedive when they tumbled 10-0 to rivals Braintree Removals B.

Panfield secured the points they needed in pool 2A with a 7-3 win over Removals C while Notley E had wins of 8-2 over Removals B and 10-0 at Notley G.

Liberal B made sure of first place in pool 2B with a 6-4 win over Delphi.

Diane Garner held the side together with her three singles but Paul Lombardi's three-match unbeaten run was ended when he fell to both Kevin Saunders and Arthur Wilson.

But Delphi are still on course for a top-half finish alongside Removals B whose win over Notley F and another 10-0 against Notley H leaves Notley with a mountain to climb if they are to overtake them.

Pool 2A leaders Notley D sailed on with wins of 9-1 against Notley G and 7-3 against Rayne F.

Rayne F, who also beat Notley G 8-2, have the consolation of knowing that they and Notley F start as favourites for the division four title.

A shock defeat for last year's champion Neil Charles by Dave Cole in week 1 of the Netts Top 12 Premier Competition gave other players hope that Charles domination of the past two seasons was over.

Cole, who had struggled in an early round to overcome Hamish Innes, showed the greater determination in a five-game final thriller.

Innes also worked hard before losing in four sets to Nigel Hodder, of Ipswich.

Of the new players Aaron Fennell (Chelmsford) showed his improvement with excellent victories over Greg Yarnell (Southend) and Peter Hayden (Braintree).

Jon Hill also caused a surprise with a comfortable victory over his Netts teammate and number four seed Paul Davison.

Week 2 of this Earls Colne Recreation Club-based competition saw normal service resumed for Charles despite the inclusion of Essex senior county player Gary Tendler (Brentwood).

In an impeccable display Charles overcame Cole in round 2 and Davison in the final despite losing the first game.

Other notable results saw Innes overcome Tendler in five sets, Vicky Stredder's shock win over team-mate Hill and Kelly Skeggs' narrow defeat to the number 3 seed Cole.

After two weeks the premier division leading players are Charles (23 pts), Cole (22 pts) and Davison (18 pts).

Ron Fosker

17.12.06

table tennis

The race to win a place in the six-strong top division of the Braintree Table Tennis League after Christmas has gone to the final match in both the qualifying pools.

Liberal B and Braintree Removals A are separated by three points in pool 1A. They face each other with Removals needing at least an 8-2 victory to secure their place among the elite.

Removals kept their hopes up with a 9-1 win over Rayne C – Tony Hammond sneaking a five-game win over Neil Thompson to prevent the whitewash – while Liberal picked up a point in a 6-4 defeat by Bocking.

Bocking and Black Notley A, who have both already booked their places, had wins of 9-1 and 10-0 respectively over Rayne E.

Pool 1B is even tighter. Rayne A and Cressing have qualified (both had 9-1 wins, over Rayne D and Black Notley C respectively) but all four of the other teams still have at least a mathematical chance of taking the final place.

Notley C remain the most likely candidates after Notley B and Rayne B cancelled each other out in a drawn match.

It was a close encounter in which four of the ten sets were decided by two points in the fifth game, three of them in Rayne's favour.

Notley's Andrew McEwan was not involved in any of them. He won his three singles in straight games.

Simon Webber (Chelmsford) and Ashley Skeggs (Sudbury) are the early pacesetters in section A of the Netts Top 12 competition.

With Essex county senior player Kelly Skeggs now promoted to the premier division, the event seemed open and with an excellent display of hard hitting in week 1 Webber took the top spot.

Good performances from Trevor Carter (Chelmsford) and Larte Lawson (Fordham) gave them a top four finish.

In week 2 saw Webber lost out to Ashley Skeggs in round 2 while the fast improving Andrew McEwan (Panfield) scored an excellent five-game win over Carter. The final saw the defensive play of Skeggs wear down the attacking prowess of McEwan.

Ron Fosker

22.12.06

table tennis

A late run has ensured that it is Black Notley B who will play top class table tennis next year.

They came from behind in pool 1B of the Braintree Table Tennis League to secure the third spot that will mean a place in the first division after the Christmas shake-up.

Two results were crucial.

The first was a draw with Rayne A. The league leaders had only two players but the two points were ensured by an outstanding performance from Andrew McEwan who beat both Dean Andrews and men's singles champion Steve Pennell, his biggest scalp yet.

Then Notley B had to face Rayne D who had held Notley C, the B team's rivals for third place, to a draw in the previous match. The B team emphasised their superiority with a convincing 10-0 win.

Notley C's hopes had earlier taken a dive when they lost 9-1 to Cressing despite a stunning win by Rob Stannard over last year's No.1 seed Peter Hayden.

Cressing also beat Rayne B 10-0.

Lisa Ashdown is beginning to find her feet after her long lay-off. The former England junior was unbeaten in both matches.

In pool 1A, Braintree Removals A could not quite achieve the impossible, an 8-2 win over Liberal A, to take third place. But they did manage 6-4 which leaves them just a point behind their opponents

Panfield finished with a flourish in pool 2A. They beat Notley E 6-4, but it was not enough to wrest second place from their opponents who take it on sets difference.

Danny Canning too finished the year on a high. His three wins included an excellent one over Tony Bamsey.

It was in effect the previous match, when they were held to a draw by Rayne F, that cost Panfield second place.

Braintree Removals B recovered from their slow start to the season to take the final place in pool 2B. And they did so in some style. Their 10-0 win over Rayne G was their third maximum win in a row.

Liberal A and Delphi, the other two teams to go into division three next year, also finished in convincing fashion.

Delphi beat Notley F 9-1 and Rayne G 10-0 while Liberal racked up a 10-0 win over Notley H.

In section B of the Netts Top 12 competition, Notley teammates McEwan and Stannard lead the field with the former taking top place in each of the first three weeks.

Good performances have also been seen from a fast improving Vicki Stredder (Braintree), Phil Lawson (Fordham) and Chris Bragg (Earls Colne).

The top of the table shows McEwan (36 pts), Stannard (33 pts) and Stredder (27 pts).

Ron Fosker

7.1.07

Table tennis

The second part of the season will be crunch time for Braintree Table Tennis League champions Black Notley A.

Under the new format, their matches in the first half of the season were only as qualifiers for the real thing.

The top halves of the two pools in group one will now amalgamate to form a six-team first division, and that will make life tough for the champions.

Without Steve Kerns and Jon Hill, two of the mainstays of their title-winning team, their resources have been stretched so far. Now that every match counts, that could be vital.

Team captain Graham Farmer played in all but the first three matches in the first half, but no one else played more than 60 per cent.

He will need solid support if Notley are to withstand the challenges of the more consistent Rayne A – although they had availability problems themselves in the first half – and the more hit and miss Cressing and Bocking.

Bocking will need more regular appearance from Paul Davison to ensure any realistic title challenge and his numerous other commitments mean that is unlikely to happen.

Cressing on the other hand have used the first half of the season to play both Ian Hayden and Lisa Ashdown back into form after lay-offs and with the class of Peter Hayden and the reliability of Trevor Carter to call on, they could have the squad to wrest the title from the village on the other side of the valley.

Division two has four Rayne sides in it, but it was the other two, Black Notley C and Braintree Removals A, who nearly made it into division one and the division is likely to be between them.

Division three has a very even look although Black Notley D look capable of continuing the run of form that saw them win all their matches in the first half.

As with the top group, there were two teams who stood out among those who failed to finish in the top half. Rayne F and Black Notley F finished well clear of the next team in their pool and it should be a straight fight between them for the top slot in division four.

Ron Fosker

21.1.07

table tennis

The new Braintree Table Tennis League season was only two days old when it produced its first important result – a win for Cressing over champions Black Notley A.

And Cressing only had two players.

Brothers Ian and Peter Hayden took six sets between them to establish themselves as real contenders for the title.

It was Peter Hayden who lost the only set, falling not for the first time to Ian Brown.

Brown came desperately close to doing the double but the older Hayden just got the better of him at 14-12 in the final game.

An excellent three wins from Brad Hudgell – including a straight games victory over Kevin Gowlett - gave Black Notley B a 6-4 success over Bocking.

Rayne A were the only division one team to score maximum points in the opening week. They beat Liberal A 9-1.

There were no pointers to possible champions in division two where both matches played ended in a draw.

Duncan Elloy's three sets held Braintree Removals A together against Black Notley C while the welcome return of Paul Whybrow was instrumental in gaining Rayne E two points against their own D team.

Whybrow has not played for four and a half seasons but his opponents found that the old magic was still there as he won each of his singles with some ease and helped Simon Fleming to a win in the doubles.

The fixture chart threw together the winners of pools 2A and 2B in the first match of the new season, and Black Notley D quickly showed why they are regarded as head and shoulders above the rest of division three with an 8-2 win over Liberal B.

Lyndon Griffiths and Simon Churchman were undefeated. Liberal picked up the doubles and Paul Lombardi saved some face with a win over Bill Facey.

Delphi and Removals B both played themselves into contention for the runners-up spot with 7-3 wins.

Rupesh Harding turned out for the first time this year and remained undefeated as Delphi beat a two-person Panfield.

In the other match father and son Steve and Sean Clift swept up all seven sets for Removals against Black Notley E.

Braintree veterans C team scored a tight 5-4 win over Southend D in division 6 of the Essex League.

Mike Johnston won both his singles, against players called Chester and Barnes, names that, had they been run together, might have provided a more formidable opponent.

The match win was secured by success in all three doubles.

Former Colne player Philip Lawson has become Essex under 13 champion.

He came through his first two matches in straight games and although he dropped the first game of the final against James Austin, of Chelmsford, he went on to win comfortably 6-11, 11-3, 11-5, 11-4.

Netts' Kelly Skeggs won both the ladies' singles, and the mixed doubles with Gary Tandler while former Braintree men's singles champions Steve Kerns won the over 40s doubles with Mark Wicker.

Ron Fosker

28.1.07

table tennis

Many people had predicted that division two of the Braintree Table Tennis League would be very tightly contested.

But few could not have anticipated the remarkable start to the season in which all five matches in the first two weeks have finished 5-5.

The scoreline conceals three different stories in matches played last week.

For Black Notley C, a rush of form from Grant Sharpe held them together against Rayne C. Mo Hardy won twice for Rayne but Sharpe, who only won two sets out of 15 in the first half season, went through them all.

Dave Punt did likewise for Rayne D against Braintree Removals A – and that included an excellent win over Peter Hance, a player with an average of 74 per cent up to Christmas.

Rayne had to come from 5-3 behind to secure the draw but effectively it was Removals who were hanging by a thread. Their five wins included the doubles at 14-12 in the fifth game and Gordon Fairchild's 8-11, 11-6, 6-11, 13-11, 11-9 victory over Malcolm Mosedale.

In the other match, Rayne B v Rayne E, it was the Paul Whybrow effect that was decisive. His second appearance after coming out of retirement was the same as his first – three singles wins and a share in the doubles.

He had to work hard though. The B team's Paul Mitchell stretched him to five games and the doubles was decided at 11-9 in the fifth.

After last week's upset against Cressing, league champions Black Notley A returned to familiar form with a 10-0 win over Liberal A in division one.

Rayne A, the only team in the division not to drop a point in the first week, did so in the second thanks to an outstanding performance from 16-year-old Brad Hudgell who won his three singles for Notley B.

Black Notley D and Liberal B, winners of pools 2A and 2B respectively, carried on in the same vein as before with comfortable wins in division three. Notley beat Panfield 9-1 while Liberal got the better of Notley E 8-2.

Tony Bamsey took the two for Notley E but Derek Finch prevented him taking a point on his own.

Delphi scored their second win, 7-3 over Removals B. Lorraine Burgess remained unbeaten for Delphi.

The division four title looks likely to be a race between the two teams who finished fourth in the first half, and Black Notley F struck the first blow by beating rivals Rayne F 7-3. Neil Daines and Steve Willis were unbeaten.

Notley had won their first match against Notley H 9-1 while Rayne beat Removals C 8-2.

Notley G cannot be discounted. They beat Rayne G 8-2 and a two-man team took two points against Removals C.

Notley H and Rayne G registered only one win in the first half – they beat each other – and it was Notley who triumphed 6-4 in their latest encounter. Barry Mouser took his three singles for Rayne G but two each for Yen Tran and Tony Murray helped Notley over the line.

Ron Fosker

4.2.07

table tennis

Black Notley D's run of 12 consecutive wins in division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League has come to an end.

And with it has gone Simon Churchman's unbeaten record.

Braintree Removals B were the team responsible for stopping the run, which had lasted since the start of the season, when they held them to a draw last week.

In a switchback of a match, Notley went from 3-0 up 5-3 down before taking the final two sets.

It was Bob Keefe who became the first person to get the better of Churchman, and he did it in straight games too.

But curiously he lost his other two sets.

Two wins by Tim Huxtable, one from Sean Clift and the doubles gave Removals a share of the points.

Liberal B, like Notley winners of their pool in the first half season, also found life tougher.

After remaining undefeated up to Christmas, they lost their second match in the new division three when they floundered at Panfield.

A storming performance from Danny Canning, who won his three sets and a share in the doubles, led Panfield to a 6-4 victory.

An unbeaten evening from Tony Bamsey enabled Black Notley E to share the points with Delphi.

The top three teams in division one all won.

Black Notley A took all ten against their own B team while only a Mike Johnston win over Lisa Ashdown prevented Cressing doing the same against Liberal A.

For the second match running an individual performance prevented Rayne A taking the full four points. This time it was Kevin Gowlett who ran through them all to restrict Bocking's defeat to 6-4.

After the first five matches were all drawn, division two has moved on to a new level. The next set of three matches all ended 6-4.

And in each case it was the doubles that was decisive.

Paul Whybrow was again behind Rayne E's success against Rayne C as was Peter Hance in Removals A's win over Rayne B.

Black Notley C though turned to a new hero, 17-year-old Karan Baxi recording his first unbeaten evening of the season.

Black Notley G have turned the notion that division four would be a straight fight between Rayne F and Notley F on to its head.

They crunched Rayne F 8-2 and now lead the division. Bruce Wickham was unbeaten.

At the other end of the table, Removals C scored their second win since September, an emphatic 8-2 over Notley H. Adam Clift led the way and clinched his three singles with a tight 11-5, 6-11, 10-12, 11-9, 11-6 win over Mike Smith in the final set of the evening.

Ron Fosker

9.2.07

table tennis

Braintree veterans B team have won division four of the Essex Table Tennis League.

They clinched the title with a 9-0 victory over Brentwood B.

Although they lost an earlier match 5-4 to Chelmsford, their 8-1 win over Basildon C together with their win over Brentwood have put them in an impregnable position.

Ken Lewis and Duncan Elloy were unbeaten in both the wins while Elloy and Mike Johnston took one singles each in the defeat at Chelmsford.

In the Braintree League, Rayne A have suffered their first defeat of the season.

They came up against Black Notley A's in-form pairing of Lewis and Gary Young who won seven sets and the doubles for a 7-3 victory.

Cressing moved to within a point of Notley with a match in hand after their 9-1 win over Black Notley B.

Notley's Brad Hudgell was unable to repeat the clean sweeps he had put in against Bocking and Rayne and it was Ryan Pitt who snatched the only set for the visitors.

Division two's run of close matches – five draws and three 6-4s in the first eight games - ended with a bang when Rayne B overcame their own C team 10-0.

Dave Moles, Brian Riedling and Brian Cook were the men responsible.

But Rayne C bounced back creditably the following week with an unexpected 8-2 win over a previously unbeaten Braintree Removals A.

They were helped by a guest appearance by Paul Whybrow but Whybrow-Hammond-Butcher versus Hance-Elloy-Fairchild does not look an 8-2 win on paper.

But it was. Hance took two singles but Rayne won the rest.

Black Notley G increased their lead in division four with an 8-2 win over their own H team. Keith Perrins and Bruce Wickham were unbeaten.

Ron Fosker

18.2.07

table tennis

Braintree men's team have failed by a whisker to lift the Essex Table Tennis League first division title.

After a series of tight matches over one weekend they finished just two sets adrift of winners Southend A.

But they remained undefeated over the five matches and had the table been calculated on the basis of two points for a win and one for a draw, they would have been champions.

They started with a routine 9-1 win over a two-man Clacton A, then had a real scrap against a strong Ilford side before emerging with a draw.

They pulled back from 2-4 to lead 5-4 with three pulsating wins all decided in the final game.

First Paul Davison beat Didier Ngoma at 13-11 in the fifth and this was followed by a win for Peter Hayden over Ray Lam at 15-13 in the decider.

Kevin Gowlett then beat Matt Spero 11-6 in the fifth but the doubles eluded them to give Ilford a share of the points.

Against Colchester Davison remained undefeated in the 7-3 win then Clacton B were dispatched 8-2. Hayden and Gowlett were unbeaten and junior Brad Hudgell, drafted in at the last minute, excelled with two wins.

In their final match, they needed a hefty win over Southend to take the title, but in Kevin Read, their opponents had the star of the weekend.

He won his three sets fairly comfortably – although Gowlett stretched him to five games – and that restricted Braintree's win to 6-4, not quite enough to take the title.

A series of very close matches marked the first round of the Braintree League handicap cup. Three matches were decided in the final set with two 6-3s and only one comfortable looking 8-1.

Braintree Removals A's win over Black Notley H was the tightest. A win by Duncan Elloy (off -6) over Yen Tran (off +5) at 12-10 in the fifth game of the final set of the evening ensured their passage.

Danny Canning took his three sets for Panfield but was powerless to prevent a 5-4 defeat at the hands of Black Notley E while Adam Purslow's three singles were enough to tip the balance for Notley F against Removals C.

Richard Whiteside was undefeated as Rayne E came past Notley G 6-3 and Trevor Carter registered a similarly unblemished evening in Cressing's win by the same score over Removals B.

Rayne A, winners of the cup in 2004 and on four other occasions, made an early exit, going down 8-1 at Liberal A.

In the league, Rayne B moved to the top of division two after a 7-3 win over their own D team in which Brian Riedling was unbeaten.

But Rayne E are level with them on ten points and proved they did not need Paul Whybrow to keep their unbeaten record. Three wins from Richard Whiteside, two from Phil Wade and the doubles were enough to deal with Black Notley C.

Delphi are also unbeaten in division three. Their latest win, over Liberal B, was one of those matches where everybody beat everybody else, but they hung on for a 6-4 victory.

Removals B are just a couple of points them behind after their 7-3 win over Panfield. Tim Huxtable was unbeaten for Removals.

Black Notley F have won three out of three in division four, their latest a 9-1 win over Removals C in which Adam Purslow and Stevie Pell were unbeaten.

Rayne F also registered a 9-1 win over their own G team.

League players of long standing were saddened this week to learn of the death of Ron Cuddeford, a stalwart of the league in the 1970s.

Unorthodox but difficult to beat, Ron played for Crittall in the upper echelons of division one for a number of seasons. An amiable and laid-back character, he won the veterans singles in 1973.

Not for the first time Bocking have found a way through champions Black Notley's A's defences and have significantly loosened their hold on the Braintree Table Tennis League title.

Bocking accounted for Notley's only defeat last season and again in the preliminary phase of the current season. But their latest win in the competition proper is likely to be the most damaging.

It leaves Notley a point behind Cressing, who have a match in hand – against Bocking – at the halfway point of the competition.

And with illness sidelining Graham Farmer, Notley are down to three players, each of whom has to travel from Suffolk to play, which means they face a precarious existence for their remaining five matches.

Against Bocking all three – Ian Brown, Ken Lewis and Gary Young – failed to find a way past either Kevin Gowlett or Paul Davison. It is a duo that would get the better of most teams but the busy Davison has restricted his appearances in the Braintree League so far to four, three of them against Notley.

Cressing meanwhile dealt with the other main title challengers Rayne A.

Steve Pennell brought off an excellent win over Ian Hayden, his first defeat since October 5, but Peter Hayden stamped his authority on the match to bring home a 7-3 win.

Ironically, Notley are the only team Bocking have beaten so far, a situation that was not changed when could only draw with Liberal A in a rearranged match.

Liberal had earlier lost 9-1 to Notley B, their only consolation coming in the doubles.

Rayne B have opened up a three-point gap in division two after their 8-2 win over Notley C. On his division two debut, Chelmsford junior Dacre Pell won Notley's two singles but could not overcome Paul Mitchell.

Rayne E suffered their first defeat at the hands of Braintree Removals A's double prong of Duncan Elloy and Peter Hance while Rayne's C and D teams ended a tight match with five sets each. Dave Punt was unbeaten for the D team.

Delphi fell to their first defeat in division three although they managed to take a point off league leaders Notley D. Notley's 7-3 win included a second defeat for

Simon Churchman – unbeaten all the first half-season – this time at the hands of Barrie Applegate.

At the other end of the table, Notley's E team jumped off the bottom by beating Panfield, the team immediately above them, 6-4. Three wins from Tony Bamsey steered them home.

Black Notley F have won four out of four in division four, their latest a 6-4 over Notley G where they needed Steve Willis's three wins to see them through.

That was the G team's first defeat and it allowed Rayne F to jump over them into second place after 8-2 wins over both Notley H and Removals C. Charles Wilkinson won six out of six.

Removals C put any thoughts of sixth place behind them with a convincing 9-1 win over Rayne G in which Dan Tordoff registered the first unbeaten evening of his career.

Ron Fosker

4.3.07

table tennis

Black Notley A gave notice that they are not going to give up their Braintree Table Tennis League title without a fight with a stunning 7-3 win over a Cressing side who had looked like carrying all before them.

It was a full-strength Cressing side of Peter and Ian Hayden and Trevor Carter, but Ian Brown, Gary Young and Ken Lewis were on top of their game and it was only a cliffhanging win by Peter Hayden over Lewis in the ninth set of the evening that prevented Notley taking all four points.

Hayden won that one 6-11, 9-11, 12-10, 11-3, 14-12 but the man who will be the No.1 seed in this year's individual championship lost his other two sets in an evening he will not want to remember.

Brown was Notley's mainstay. He dealt with the younger Hayden in three straight games, won his other two in four games and joined Lewis to take the doubles set.

Not only did that result put Notley back in the hunt, but it also revived Rayne A's hopes.

They beat Liberal A 8-2 and join Notley on 16 points from six matches with Cressing a point behind with a match in hand.

Bocking, who have yet to play Cressing, won their second match of the season – Notley A being the first – when they came from 3-1 behind to beat Notley B 6-4.

Kevin Gowlett won his three singles, gaining revenge over Brad Hudgell for his only defeat since Christmas, and Richard Jennings, whose form has slipped a bit this season, added good wins over Laurie Sapiano and Ryan Pitt.

Division two leaders Rayne B scored their fourth successive win, 7-3 over Rayne C. Brian Cook and Brian Riedling were both unbeaten.

Rayne E continue to over-achieve and scored their third win in four matches. Phil Wade (2), Simon Fleming (2) and Richard Whiteside (1) guided them to a 6-4 win over Rayne D.

Braintree Removals A stay one point behind Rayne E in third place after their 7-3 win over Notley C.

Panfield registered the win of the week in division three. Bottom of the table at start of play, they took the full four points from second-placed Delphi.

Nick Readhead was to the fore in their 8-2 victory.

Leaders Black Notley D dropped a point in beating Liberal B 7-3 – a doubles defeat was crucial – while Removals B jumped above Delphi with an 8-2 win over Notley E.

Ron Fosker

11.3.07

table tennis

Braintree's three veterans' teams have carried out a clean sweep in this season's Essex Table Tennis League.

The A and C teams both won their final matches to secure the titles in divisions two and six to add to the B team's earlier success in division five.

The A team's 6-3 win over Colchester B leaves them four points clear at the top of division two.

Ian Whiteside was unbeaten while Steve Pennell and Dean Andrews each won one singles but lost to an inspired Sue Welham.

Former Rayne player Fred Button, now living in St Osyth, was in the visitors' line-up but could not get the better of either of his erstwhile colleagues Whiteside and Pennell.

The C team's success was an altogether tighter affair. Although they had won all their matches, they still needed a 7-2 victory over Harlow B in their final match to pip Southend E to the title.

That was exactly what they managed after racing into a 6-0 lead.

Then a five-game defeat for Laurie Sapiano at the hands of Trevor Laird put the pressure on Cec Butcher in the final singles.

But he was equal to the task and beat Andy Bellworthy in three straight games, allowing Alastair Brown – who won his own two singles – and Sapiano the luxury of knowing they could lose the final doubles and still take the title.

Cressing are the only division one team to go through to the last eight of the Braintree League handicap cup. They will be joined by one team from division four, two from division two and no fewer than four from division three.

Cressing came through 6-3 against a two-man Black Notley B but none of them could get past Andrew McEwan.

Notley's C team fared better. They ran up a 5-1 win over Rayne G whose sole success came from Jason Hearn's creditable victory over Rob Stannard.

Rayne's C team are the other division four side through to the quarter final. Cec Butcher and Paul Whybrow were the only players on duty but they won all six against Liberal A.

Division three leaders Notley D eased through 7-2 against Rayne F with Bill Facey unbeaten while their E team, at the other end of the table, saw off Braintree Removals A 5-3. Duncan Elloy won the three for Removals.

Delphi faced a one-man Rayne D team. Dave Punt put one tick in the Rayne wins column but as no one else turned up it mattered little.

Liberal B were the other successful third division side. They were stretched the full distance by Rayne E but with the score at 4-4 and a nailbiting finish in prospect, Ray Fairless (off +2) put paid to any such notions with an 11-0, 11-0, 11-3 victory over Phil Wade (-4).

Black Notley F also left it late. Adam Purslow's victory over Alan Hearn with the score at 4-4 took them through despite the best efforts of Paul Mitchell who took all three for Rayne B.

Former Black Notley player Mark Palmer, who learned his table tennis in Braintree, was crowned national champion in the disabled (wheelchair) singles at the English Closed championships.

He beat Shaun Newcombe 11-4, 11-7, 8-11, 11-5 in the final.

The veteran women's singles winner was Shu Huang, who played in the Braintree League in the 2004-05 season when she won the mixed doubles with Hamish Innes.

Ron Fosker

18.3.07

table tennis

The Bocking steamroller did not quite manage to do to Cressing what it did to Black Notley A. But it came pretty close.

The Braintree Table Tennis League title favourites just managed to scrape a draw with a win at deuce in the fifth game of the final set of the evening.

But not before Kevin Gowlett had demonstrated what excellent form he is in at the moment by winning his three sets.

On this occasion Paul Davison was unable to match him and was bettered first by Peter Hayden and then, in that vital final game, by Ian Hayden.

Richard Jennings played his part with an important win over Trevor Carter.

In their next match Bocking snuffed out any vague notion of Rayne regaining the title they won in 2004 and 2005. This time Gowlett and Davison were both unbeaten as Bocking won 8-2.

Rayne were also held to a draw by Black Notley B where Andrew McEwan ran through all three of them.

Notley A could not take full advantage of Cressing's slip-up as they dropped a point to Liberal A. Mike Johnston and Barry Pritchard won one set each and, crucially, combined to win the doubles.

Division two, which at the outset looked like producing the closest of finishes, now looks the most clear cut with Rayne B holding a nine-point lead.

They beat Rayne E 9-1 and Braintree Removals A 6-4.

Rayne C beat Notley C 7-3 – Notley's three wins all coming from Dacre Pell – but the most curious result was Rayne D's 6-4 win over Removals A, not so much the scoreline as the way it was arrived at.

Removals' Peter Hance, who has a 77.8 per cent record, won only once, Duncan Elloy, with 66.7 per cent so far, failed to win any, and it was left to Gordon Fairchild, with only one win to his credit since Christmas, to win two.

Malcolm Mosedale, Alastair Brown and Dave Punt won two each for Rayne.

Any residual relegation fears that Liberal B may have had in division three were swept away with wins over the other two teams in the bottom half of the table. Black Notley E perished 9-1 and Panfield 8-2.

At the top Notley D carried on majestically with wins of 7-3 over Notley E and 8-2 over Panfield.

Notley F are looking just as majestic at the head of division four. They kept up their 100 per cent win record with a 9-1 victory over Rayne F.

Rayne F recovered to win their next match 6-4 against Notley G, a result which leaves the two teams locked together in second place on 20 points with two matches left to play.

Removals C, who beat Notley H 8-2, are two points further back.

The major question of the week is whether Kevin Gowlett can carry his current run of form into the individual events which start this weekend.

He has lost only once – a surprise defeat by Brad Hudgell – since Christmas and after his victories over the Hayden brothers, he will be hoping to go one better in this year's men's singles after losing in the final last year.

But Peter Hayden and Paul Davison have the big match experience and are given the top two seeding berths with Ian Hayden and defending champion Steve Pennell at equal three.

Gowlett shares the No.5 seeding spot with Gary Young, a former Clacton champion, Ian Brown, semi finalist last season, and Ian Whiteside, six times a semi finalist.

Sadly, there has been only one entry in the ladies' singles which means that the event will have to be scratched, along with the ladies' doubles and mixed doubles.

The favourite Peter Hayden, the returning Ian Hayden and the up-and-coming Karan Baxi were the stars of the preliminary events in the Braintree Table Tennis League's annual individual championships at the weekend.

As a result, all three will be appearing in three events at finals night tomorrow at Black Notley Community Centre.

Peter Hayden is due to play the holder Steve Pennell in one men's singles semi final while his brother takes on Ian Brown, through to his fourth semi final in six years, in the other.

Pennell and the younger Hayden's progress was reasonably smooth – although Pennell had to work hard to get past Barry Pritchard who had earlier beaten the seeded Gary Young.

Brown on the other hand had a five-game win over teammate Ken Lewis, who had beaten him the previous day in the final of the over 50s event, then scored the win of the tournament in knocking out No.2 seed Paul Davison.

And Ian Hayden only narrowly survived his quarter final meeting with the in-form Kevin Gowlett. He came back from two games to one down to win the fourth at 11-9, then recovered from 5-2 down at change of ends in the final game to clinch his place.

The men's semi finals will be a repeat of the veterans' singles. In that event, Ian Hayden needed only three games to beat Brown whereas Pennell stretched the younger Hayden to five.

The Haydens will therefore face each other in the veterans' final but will be on the same side of the table in the men's doubles.

In their first outing in the league as a doubles unit – both have won the title with other partners - they will play Gowlett and Davison, conquerors of the Lewis-Brown combination in the semi final.

Seventeen-year-old Baxi's appearances will be in the junior singles, the restricted and the division one singles.

He was seeded to reach the final of the restricted and junior events and duly did so by overcoming the difficult Dacre Pell in both semi finals. In the restricted, he will face Mark Lewis, who put paid to Rob Stannard's hopes, while his opponent in the junior singles will be Brad Hudgell.

And he already has one win over Hudgell under his belt. In one of the upsets of the tournament – Hudgell went on to beat the seeded Ian Whiteside in the men's

singles - Baxi got the better of his fellow junior in the first division singles and will face Ken Lewis, who knocked out son Mark.

Pell and Stannard face each other in the division two singles final while Tim Huxtable plays Adam Pitt in the division three event and Steve Willis will take on Stevie Pell in division four.

Hudgell and Dacre Pell took the junior doubles, which was played to a conclusion at the weekend, and Matt Shelley proved himself the master of the handicap. Not only did he win the singles, with a win over Stevie Pell in the final, he also teamed up with Mark Lewis to take the handicap doubles with a hard-earned final victory over Dan Tordoff and Sean Clift.

Ron Fosker

1.4.07

table tennis

For the first time in the league's history, two brothers contested the men's singles final at the Braintree Table Tennis League's individual championships.

It was also the first time that brothers had won the men's doubles title and the first time that the veterans' singles had featured the same two players as the men's singles.

In all three cases it was Peter Hayden that triumphed, beating older brother Ian in the veterans' singles in the first set of the evening, then repeating the win even more convincingly in the men's singles in the final event.

In the middle the two teamed up to dispose of the challenge of Paul Davison and Kevin Gowlett in the men's doubles.

Peter Hayden may not be quite the player he was when he last won the title in 1994 (although in a physical sense, he may be slightly more than the player he was then) but he is still a class act.

His exquisite sense of touch, timing and speed of thought were in evidence now as much as they were 13 years ago.

His brother can almost match him in all those departments and has matched him in success in league matches. But it was concentration that was the telling factor.

It was a word Peter could be heard muttering to himself between points and it was undoubtedly where he scored.

The two had not played each other competitively for around 15 years - both took a break from the game and otherwise were in the same team – and it takes a certain kind of mental toughness to knuckle down against a brother and best mate who in any other circumstances you would be urging to win.

On the night it was Peter who had it.

Together they formed a lethal combination and one that Davison and Gowlett could not find a way round.

The Bocking pair knew they had to be in an attacking frame of mind to stand any chance of an upset but often overstretched themselves in their efforts to dictate play.

They threatened only briefly and in the end the Haydens came away with a comfortable win in three straight games.

While the evening belonged to the Haydens it definitely did not belong to Karan Baxi. Like them, he reached three finals but in each case he started the underdog and was not able to overcome the odds.

But he was in no way overawed and can be proud of contributing hugely to the evening.

He was bettered by Mark Lewis in the restricted singles, Ken Lewis in the division one singles and Brad Hudgell in the junior singles. But in each case he displayed some strong flowing shots on both wings and with a modicum more control might have made greater inroads.

But each of his opponents demonstrated why they were the No.1 seeds.

Mark Lewis has a high risk game that can go horribly wrong at times, but he produced some of the most outrageous shots of the evening, notably some searing backhand loops to which there was no answer.

Father Ken is an entirely different type of player who relies on outfoxing his opponent then nipping in with a sharp smash. Baxi initially looked as if he had worked out how to play against Lewis's long-pimpled surface and actually led 10-7 in the first game.

But Lewis took the next five points and was always in control thereafter.

Hudgell too was always on top in the junior singles but again Baxi pushed him – to 11-9 in the second and 12-10 in the third.

Hudgell, 16, has a neatly controlled game with smooth hits, particularly the one down the wrong side, and some neat pick-ups off the table. His league form and his excellent win over Ian Whiteside in the men's singles suggest this will not be his last appearance on finals night.

Just as those events all followed an expected pattern, so too did the remaining three finals, together with the men's singles semi finals, which made up the evening.

Dacre Pell, 17, another junior of considerable promise who, like Hudgell, appears to have an excellent temperament, was too strong for Rob Stannard in the division two singles, just as his sister Stevie, 14, with a similarly equable approach, had too much in her armoury for Steve Willis in the division four singles.

The one match that produced what could be conceived as an upset was Tim Huxtable defeat by Adam Pitt in the division three singles as Huxtable has a 66 per cent league record against Pitt's 50 per cent.

But it takes a special sort of energy to organise and run a tournament and play in it as well and Huxtable was not able to cope with 15-year-old Pitt's strong smashes on both sides of the table.

Ron Fosker

15.4.07

table tennis

Cressing are the new Braintree Table Tennis League champions.

They ended the season with a defeat but the point they gained was enough to put a new name on the league trophy.

They did the hard work in their penultimate match against former champions Rayne A, never easy opponents.

Steve Pennell was in good form for Rayne – his two wins included a victory over Peter Hayden who had beaten him in the men's singles semi final the previous week – but the 8-2 scoreline gave them breathing space going into their final match, an even tougher one against Bocking.

Black Notley A ensured the race went to the wire with a 6-4 win over a Bocking team minus Paul Davison on the same night Cressing were playing Rayne.

That left Cressing needing just a point from Bocking in their final match. Although Davison took his three singles, Bocking were never likely to take eight and a 6-4 defeat was good enough for the new champions.

Hayden inflicted on Kevin Gowlett his first league defeat since the second week of January.

The fight for second place in division two was finally settled in Braintree Removals A's favour. Their 7-3 win over Rayne E kept them a point ahead of Rayne C who won 6-4 against Rayne D.

After sitting at the bottom of the table most of the season, Black Notley C ended up in fourth place after holding division champions Rayne B to a draw.

Liberal B, who lost four of their first six matches, rose out of the pack to claim second place in division three after a 6-4 win over Removals B in their final match coupled with Delphi's 9-1 defeat at champions Notley D.

Derek Finch and Paul Lombardi did the damage for Liberal. They took all six against possibly Removals' strongest side of Bob Keefe, Tim Huxtable and Sean Clift.

Black Notley F's season ended in anti climax in division four. After winning eight out of eight, they needed only one point from their next match to win the title – and that was all they got.

Notley G turned in a stunning performance to win the first six sets then cruised to a 7-3 victory. They almost took the full four points but Steve Willis just sneaked home against Bruce Wickham 11-9 in the fifth game of the final set of the evening.

Alan Cook was the man in form. He took all three for the G team.

Had that Willis-Wickham set gone the other way, Notley G would have finished second on sets difference above Rayne F. As it was Rayne's 9-1 win at Notley H was enough to bring them the runners-up medals.

Ron Fosker

22.4.07

table tennis

The race for this year's Braintree Table Tennis League championship was the closest for 14 years.

Cressing only clinched the title in their final match and eventually won by just one point, the same margin that Witham FC A held off BUSC in 1993. That BUSC side coincidentally included Peter Hayden who led this year's title-winners.

The tightness of Cressing's success is illustrated by the fact that had the league been decided either on two points for a win, or on sets records, the trophy would have gone to reigning champions Black Notley A.

By chance the league's AGM next month will have before it a proposal to change the scoring system to a point per set. It was submitted some weeks ago and was in no way influenced by this year's result, but that will add considerable poignancy to the discussion.

Cressing's success was built round the outstanding form of the Hayden brothers. Although it was Peter who took the men's singles title, Ian had the better league record (83 per cent compared with his brother's 71).

They were ably backed by Trevor Carter and, until illness ruled her out, by Lisa Ashdown, nee Hayden, returning to the game after many years' absence.

Illness robbed Black Notley A of the services of Graham Farmer for most of the post-Christmas season which meant they had to rely on their three Suffolk-based players, Ian Brown, Ken Lewis and Gary Young.

It is to their considerable credit that they were prepared to make lengthy journeys to ensure their side did not falter. Young and Lewis missed only one match since Christmas and Brown two.

Young lost only four times, Brown, who was last weekend crowned the new Clacton champion, lost five and Lewis ten.

Bocking proved to be the thorn in the side, the kingmakers rather than the kings. Kevin Gowlett swept nearly all before him, losing only twice in the mini-season, but it was when he was joined by Paul Davison that the sparks began to fly.

With Davison in the side, they beat both the two leading clubs and a thumping 8-2 win over Rayne A ensured they took third place, ahead of the 2005 champions, who finished out of the first three for the first time since 1998.

As anticipated the two teams who finished third in their respective divisions in the first half of the season before the league was reordered found life none too easy.

But Black Notley B's young side – Brad Hudgell, 16, Andrew McEwan, 16, and Ryan Pitt, 21, were joined by the more seasoned Laurie Sapiano – scored some memorable wins and will be a force to be reckoned with in future seasons.

Ron Fosker

6.5.07

table tennis

There was disappointment in Braintree Table Tennis League's men's singles but in the league Kevin Gowlett was this year's outstanding player by a comfortable margin.

He lost only twice in the preliminary stages before Christmas and twice after.

After a surprise defeat by Brad Huggell in the first match of the competition proper at the beginning of January, Gowlett remained undefeated until the final match when Peter Hayden proved his win in the men's singles was not to be taken lightly.

Hayden's own league form has suffered from lapses of concentration that places him only in sixth place, three places behind his brother Ian whom he beat in the singles final last month.

League winners Crossing have players in third, sixth and 11th places while runners-up Black Notley A's regular trio finished second, fifth and tenth.

Bocking's potential for upsetting applecarts is illustrated by the presence of Gowlett at the top and Paul Davison in third place.

Paul Whybrow's brief but successful return to the game brings him first place in division two but it is division winners Rayne B who dominate, with players in second, fifth and sixth places.

Black Notley D were even more successful in division three where Simon Churchman and Lyndon Griffiths take the top two places with Stuart Ascott at five.

Fifteen-year-old Stevie Pell beat her teammate Steve Willis in the final of this year's division four singles and she heads him again in the averages. Bruce Wickham and Charles Wilkinson just nudge out a third Notley F player Clare Johnson.

Ron Fosker

12.5.07

table tennis

Black Notley D's squad of Lyndon Griffiths, Simon Churchman, Bill Facey and Stuart Ascott have become the third team from the club to lift the Braintree Table Tennis League's handicap cup in successive years.

It is Ascott's second success. He was in the H team alongside his father Steve and Simon Pohl that won the cup in 2005. Last year the trophy went to the F team of Steve Willis, Clare Johnson and Karan Baxi.

The D team triumphed in the final this year over their own C team, the second time in the three years that there has been an all-Notley final.

Churchman, Facey and Ascott were completely dominant in the final, taking the five sets necessary without reply.

It was tougher in the semi final where they faced new league champions Cressing.

With Griffiths in for Facey, they won the first three sets but were taken to five games in two of them.

The last of those, Ascott's encounter with Ian Hayden, was a curious affair. After four tight sets (9-11, 11-4, 10-12, 11-5), Hayden completely ran out of steam. Starting on minus 7 against Ascott's plus 5, he failed to get out of the minus figures and lost 11- minus 1.

Peter Hayden (off -6) then pulled one back for Cressing after a momentous struggle with Griffiths (+4). The scoreline of 7-11, 9-11, 15-13, 13-11, 11-8 says much for his staying power.

Trevor Carter followed with a three-straight victory over Ascott but Churchman put Notley back on track with a comfortable victory over Ian Hayden.

Ascott (+5) clinched victory with a five-game win over Peter Hayden (-7) but they carried on to play the two 'dead' sets, both of which also went to five games, making it six in all that went the full distance.

Notley C had a more straightforward semi final win, 5-0 over Rayne C.

Ron Fosker

25.07.07

table tennis

Braintree Table Tennis League will be adopting a new points system from next season.

Last week's annual general meeting agreed to move to a point per set in place of the current 4-3-2-1 system that has been in force since the early 1970s.

It is a system favoured by most of the town's neighbouring leagues such as Colchester, Chelmsford, Clacton and Burnham, and means that for instance a team winning 6-4 gains six points while the defeated team gets four.

Although several people spoke against the proposal at the AGM, the final vote was in favour of a change.

A second change was to the rule that allows players to play three times for a higher team before they become automatically registered for that team. This has been changed to five wins, however many matches are played.

It was also agreed to put back the closing date for entries for next season's league competition from July 1 to July 15.

Officers elected for the coming season were: President, Len Woolmer; chairman, Ron Fosker; secretary, Tim Huxtable; treasurer, Kevin Saunders; fixture secretary, Ian Whiteside; competition secretary, Tim Huxtable; development officer, Brian Davison; coaching secretary, Robin Armstrong; inter-league secretary, Peter Hayden; press officer, Ron Fosker; auditor, Brian Cook; committee, Alastair Brown, Lyndon Griffiths, Steve Kerns, Alan McEwan.

The Martin Bawden award for service or achievement was presented to Alastair Brown who has just stood down after ten years as inter league secretary.

Ron Fosker

10.6.07

table tennis

The De Vere Netts Women's British Table Tennis League Team have gained promotion in their first season in the competition.

Lying in second place after the first weekend's play, the Earls Colne-based team secured the points they needed at weekend 2 held at Nottingham University.

They started by drawing their first match against third-placed Waterside (Reading) thanks to a double from Sarah Charles (nee Davison). The former British schools champion from Braintree showed she retains her skills after a six-year break.

An important match was against leaders Woolwell B (Plymouth) who had beaten them 4-2 in the first half.

This time Netts stormed into the opposition. No 1 Kelly Skeggs from Sudbury and no. 2 Holly Stubbings (Great Bentley) produced their best in an exceptional 5-1 victory.

With Charles feeling an old shoulder injury former England under 12 squad player Vicky Stredder, now 19, stepped into the team against the veterans of Halton.

The unusual styles and combination bats of the northern team proved a tough challenge but Skeggs was more than up to the task.

The U.E.A. student's aggressive attacking game was now firing on all cylinders and she won both her sets. Stubbings played with solid defence and attacking flair to win one of her singles to give Netts the point they needed for promotion to Division 3.

Stredder also played well, just going down to Halton's Karen Tonge 3-2 in the final tie, leaving the match level at 3-3.

Although Stredder did not add to her win tally in weekend 2, her 50 per cent win ratio in weekend 1 played an important role in pushing Netts into the leading pack, backing up the impressive Stubbings (70 per cent), Skeggs and Charles (both 67 per cent).

The young north Essex team (only Charles is out of her teens) are still improving and will look forward to the challenge of chasing consecutive promotions in Division 3 next season.

Ron Fosker

17.6.07

table tennis

Netts, the table tennis club based at Earls Colne Recreation Club, have been crowned regional cadet champions for the first time.

The team of Phillip Lawson (Fordham), Chris Bragg (Earls Colne) and Luke Tarrant (Coggeshall) were the only unbeaten team during the season with 17 wins and three draws from 20 matches.

The achievement is all the more remarkable as Luke has three years left at the under 15 level, Phillip has two years and Chris a further year.

Netts finished on 92 points, 18 ahead of nearest rivals, Chelmsford A, and 28 Clear of Chelmsford B.

Fourth-placed Stowmarket A included the League top player Josh Broadbent, who lost only two matches during the season, one to Lawson and the other to Chelmsford B player Scott Dowsett, son of former Braintree League champion Terry Dowsett.

Broadbent topped the averages with a 93 per cent win ratio, followed by Lawson on 92.5 (37 wins from 40 matches) and Bragg 79 (30/38). The less experienced Tarrant provided solid back-up with 21 wins from 38 (55%).

Netts demonstrated their dominance by beating nearest rivals Chelmsford A 5-1 in the final match of the season.

The next challenge for the boys is to test themselves against the region's under 18 teams in the 2007-08 season.

The club are also working closely with Ramsey Sports College to develop new players who can follow in the footsteps of the current team and past club teams who competed in the Junior British League.