

Paul Davison, with very little sweat, and Peter Hayden, with rather a lot of sweat, made their way through the preliminary rounds of the Braintree Table Tennis League's annual individual tournament and are on course for a rerun of last year's final.

Davison was in commanding form, with wins of 11-3, 11-3, 12-10 over James Mullane in the last 16 and 11-8, 11-7, 11-6 over Andy Holmes in the quarter final, while Peter Hayden teetered on the brink of defeat in an epic encounter with Ian Whiteside in his last 16 match.

Whiteside's superb defensive game brought him a 10-7 lead in the final game, and he had two further match points at deuce, before Hayden finally found a winning shot in his locker for a scoreline of 9-11, 11-9, 11-4, 7-11, 15-13.

Alarms over, Hayden found the attacking instincts of James Hicks more to his liking in the quarter final and progressed in straight games.

The semi-finals, to be played on finals night at Earls Colne Recreation Centre on Friday, will feature the same four players as last season after Adam Buxton and Lee McHugh made their way through.

Buxton was also given a fright by Whiteside in his group, sneaking through only at 11-9 in the fifth, while McHugh had to undergo an unexpected test by second division player Stewart Ireland, where he recovered from two games to one down.

As last year, Davison and Hayden will face each other in the final of the veterans' singles, an event in which Hayden again needed five games to get past Whiteside in the quarter-final. This time he had to come from two games down to win before again putting out Hicks.

Davison was stretched to four games by Ken Lewis but was otherwise untroubled.

Hayden is able to avoid 42-year-old Davison in the over 50s singles, but he was not able to avoid Whiteside, who was in his path again. Another five games, a little more sweat, and he was through to the final, where he will face Lewis, conqueror of the holder Steve Pennell and No.2 seed Andy Holmes.

Davison is also through to the men's doubles and veterans' doubles finals.

In the men's, he and Graham Playle put out the No.1 seeds Buxton and McHugh in another pulsating set that went to 11-9 in the fifth.

In the final they will face Hicks and Holmes, who put out Whiteside and Pennell, the 2015 finalists (and 1996 winners).

Holmes will also be on the other side of the net in the veterans' doubles, a new event this year, after he and Lewis beat Pennell and Whiteside.

Davison is paired with Buxton in this event and they came through their two rounds comfortably in straight games.

The restricted singles will see a return to finals night for Patrick Gilbert, a winner of the men's doubles in 2013, in between two junior boys' singles titles.

He has made a return to the game after finishing university and made an immediate impact in division two. He started slowly here, dropping the first two games in his first set against Peter Pond, but then made his way safely to the final.

He will face 2012 winner Sean Clift, who came past Garry Fryatt and Roy Hooper.

The divisional singles at last gave some reward for Whiteside, who battled past Ryan Pitt and Hicks to reach the final, where he will face McHugh, conqueror of Lewis in his semi-final.

Hooper gained some compensation for missing out on the restricted singles when he came through a tough semi-final to reach the final of the division two singles. Kelly Yuenyongpkan stretched him all the way but Hooper just got over the line in the fifth game.

He will face Kevin Saunders, whose passage was even more fraught with danger. He beat Ireland 11-9, 9-11, 7-11, 11-9, 11-7 before Ireland's teammate Takunda Nerutanga took him even further 12-10, 6-11, 11-9, 9-11, 12-10.

Pond, new to the league this year, reached the final of the division three singles, where he will face Ron Fosker, not quite so new, who put out No.2 seed Peter Taylor.

In events decided before finals night, there was a triple success for 14-year-old Elliot Game, who won both the junior singles and the cadets singles as well as the handicap singles.

He took some time to settle in the final of the cadets before finishing off Daniel Farquharson 8-11, 6-11, 11-3, 11-8, 11-2, whereas in the juniors he dealt more comfortably with the same opponent 11-9, 11-6, 11-8

The most arresting scores in the junior event were an excellent win for Zara Darcy-Willis over Jack Cains 15-17, 11-8, 6-11, 12-10, 20-18.

Game was not able to add the junior doubles when he and Jonny Evans were beaten by Cains and Farquharson in the final 11-9, 11-9, 3-11, 5-11, 11-7.

The under 13 singles was played as a four-person round robin and resulted in another close finish. Thomas Henrici and Jack Dearsley both won their other two matches but the title went to Henrici, who pipped Dearsley at 13-11 in the fifth.

The handicap singles gave the league's lower-ranked players (and Lewis) a chance to shine.

Lewis came through some stiff handicaps to reach the semi-final before losing to Scott Whiteside (+15) 21-15, 18-21, 21-19.

Chris Adkins, who has only just taken up the game, made the other semi-final, where Game put him out in three games before beating Whiteside 22-20, 21-15 in the final.

Adkins made up for it in the handicap doubles where he and Nerutanga overcame Taylor and Alan Billing in the final 21-16, 17-21, 21-11.

The hard bat tournament was won unsurprisingly by Holmes, who plays with a hard bat anyway, with a final win over Pitt.