

The race for the Braintree Table Tennis League title so far this season has resembled one of those cartoon cats that tries to run away but keeps being reeled back in because someone is standing on its tail.

Black Notley A have been the cat in question, stretching out a lead only to have it pulled back by chasing Cressing A.

But two factors have pushed the advantage markedly towards the defending champions.

The most important has been the debilitating tendonitis that has plagued Cressing's No.1, the 2007 men's singles champion Peter Hayden, who has not been able to play since November 4.

The chances of a speedy return to fitness appear slim, and that will put a strain on the team's slender resources.

That was illustrated in their last match of the year, the second factor that has tilted the balance towards Notley.

They were only able to field two of their regular squad, Ian Hayden and Trevor Carter, against a strong Rayne A side and plummeted to a 7-3 defeat.

They came up against a resurgent Jon Hill, whose form has dipped somewhat in the last couple of seasons but who was clearly back somewhere near his best.

He opened the evening with a four-game victory over Hayden and ended it with a similar win over Carter with a three-game set against reserve Sean Cliff in between.

Andrew McEwan, on university vacation, chipped in with two wins – and a narrow defeat by Hayden after leading two games to one.

It means Notley finish the year eight points clear at the top and although they too have had occasional availability problems, they have far richer resources.

Ken Lewis, Ian Brown, Graham Farmer, Steve Kerns and Gary Young have all played fairly regularly and they have the more than useful Richard Goodhand to call on in extremis.

They finished their year with a typical 10-0 win against bottom team Rayne C, their fourth maximum-point win compared with Cressing's one.

Bocking, as ever, have the ammunition to upset them but have yet to turn out their big three, Paul Davison, Nigel Hodder and Kevin Gowlett, in the same match.

Indeed they have only included two at once in half their matches.

As always anticipated, that is likely to keep them away from the title, but they retain the potential to cause difficulties at random.

Ron Fosker

11.1.09

table tennis

Roy Hooper's virtually unsullied record in division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League has received an unexpected dent.

Defeated only by Tom Elder, the ex-first division player having a post-heart attack sojourn in the lower reaches, Hooper won 28 of his first 29 sets.

But he was no match for Charles Wilkinson.

The Rayne F player, sixth in the division four averages last season but looking more vulnerable this time round, stormed through Hooper in three straight games.

And he almost brought off the double when he faced Graham Cannon later in the evening. Cannon, also with 28 wins out of 29, is used to gentle three-game canters, but was given a tough time by Wilkinson who stretched him to five before bowing out at 11-7.

Wilkinson and Peter Taylor both beat Mark Brown – no mean feat as Brown had has only five defeats in 26 sets – to produce a scoreline of 7-3 in Hedingham's favour, their tightest yet apart from the one match that Brown missed.

But Hedingham remain a virtual certainty for the title as they begin their 2009 programme. They are 23 points clear at the top and it would probably need two of their players to break a leg to deny them.

The more interesting question is who will finish second. At the beginning of the season it looked like a toss-up between Rayne F and Black Notley F but Rayne F

have been off the pace up to now and it has been the young faces of Cressing C who have been the surprise of the season.

Third from bottom last season, Cressing C have proved much more resilient this time round. The addition of the experienced Derek Agent may have helped but their other four players, Adam Clift, Matt Shelley, Dan Tordoff and Ash White, all in their very early 20s, have clearly added a bit of extra steel to their game this season.

They are not quite yet in the league of their B team whose lead at the top of division two is even more convincing than Hedingham's.

They are 24 points clear and it will need a disaster of major proportions to stop them taking the title.

Duncan Elloy remains undefeated, Sean Clift has lost only once and Chris Ciniglio twice.

His one defeat came against Keith Flowers and the Notley E player came close to repeating the dose in their second meeting. He took the first two games and got to deuce in the third, but Clift held on to win 10-12, 8-11, 12-10, 11-7 11-9.

Cressing won the match 10-0.

Like division three, this division was expected to feature a close tussle between a Rayne team and a Notley team for second place, but it has not quite turned out like that.

With the addition of Paul Whybrow to their ranks, Rayne E have proved to be the joker in the pack and have slipped ahead of both Rayne D and Notley C.

It has not all been Whybrow's doing. Richard Whiteside has a 73 per cent average and Phil Wade is on 63.

They won't catch Cressing B, but the three Ws will take some shifting from the runners-up spot.

Things have also been stirring at the bottom where Notley D have won their first match of the season.

They gave themselves some hope of avoiding relegation with a 6-4 win over Nomads, the team one place above them.

It was one of those matches where no one won all three or lost all three. Notley's Adam Pitt and Keith Perrins and Nomads' Lorraine Burgess all won two.

Ron Fosker 18.1.09 `table tennis

Black Notley E are the latest team to win through to a cup final in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

They had to battle against their own D team and for the third time this season upset the alphabet by taking six of the sets available. The two league matches between the two teams have finished 6-4 in the E team's favour and this time it ended 6-3.

Adam Pitt was in form for the D team and won both his singles, but Keith Flowers held the E team together with an unbeaten evening. They will now face Sible Hedingham in the final in April.

In the handicap cup, there were first round wins for both Liberal teams plus Black Notley I and Rayne G.

Notley I dashed any hopes their E team may have had of appearing in two finals when they dispatched them from the handicap version by 7-2. Sixteen-year-old Will Jackson, on his debut, and Leon Hewitt were undefeated.

Rayne G progressed past Notley H. Jason Hearn, Barry Mouser and Ian Rubens all won twice.

Liberal A put out Rayne F 7-2 while Liberal's B team went one better in beating Notley C 8-1. Gordon Fairchild won the one for Notley but two each for Diane Garner and Derek Finch sealed it for Liberal.

In the league division three, three singles from Mike Pitt helped Notley H a 6-4 win over Rayne G.

The league's coaching scheme continues to run successfully at Black Notley Community Centre.

More than 25 players have turned up for the Sunday sessions and 16, including four adults, are now regulars. Will Jackson, whose league debut is mentioned above, has come through these sessions.

The sessions have been particularly well supported by league players. Those who have lent their coaching expertise have included Dean Andrews, Robin Armstrong, Steve Elmes, Gordon Fairchild, Lyndon Griffiths, James Hicks, Keith Martin, Mike Smith and Ian Whiteside.

Six of the top players in the Braintree Table Tennis League staged one of its most exciting matches when two title challengers came face to face.

Four players entered the match with an unbeaten record. Only one survived.

And it ended up with the points split down the middle: Black Notley A 5 Bocking 5.

Richard Goodhand, Nigel Hodder and Steve Kerns all tasted defeat for the first time this season, in Kerns' case for only the second time in eight years.

Gary Young, who had lost only once – to Andrew McEwan - in 17 sets, and Kevin Gowlett, defeated only by Ian Brown in 20 sets, both found themselves twice on the losing side.

Rising above it all was Braintree's current men's singles champion Paul Davison. Not only did he win all three, but he did so without dropping a game.

Gaining the men's crown last season seems to have given the Bocking man a fresh impetus, as evidenced by gaining the No.3 seeding berth in this weekend's Chelmsford championships.

He was in imperious form, dealing with Goodhand 11-9,11-9,11-8, Kerns 11-7,11-6,11-8 and Young 11-6,11-7,11-6.

Bocking's other points came from Hodder's win over Goodhand, at 11-9 in the fifth game and Gowlett's win over Young at 11-7 in the decider.

For Notley, Young and Kerns both beat Hodder while Goodhand and Kerns got the better of Gowlett.

Young and Goodhand's doubles win over Hodder and Gowlett (both sides curiously leaving out their most successful player) came in five games and started Notley's revival from a 4-2 deficit.

It was only the second time Bocking had turned out their top three players this season, the first being the previous week against Liberal A.

That, unsurprisingly, resulted in a 10-0 win although Barry Pritchard was two games to one up on Gowlett and Robin Armstrong stretched Davison to 11-7 in the fifth.

There was a 10-0 scoreline at the other end of the table as well when Rayne B faced their own C team.

The match had finished 6-4 to the B team the first time the teams met and with a modicum of fortune could have done so again, the B team winning sets at 11-6, 11-7, 11-8 and 11-9 in the fifth.

Rayne's A team took seven points from Notley B with the help of three sets from Ian Whiteside, two from Dean Andrews and one from Phil Wade, promoted from division two for the evening.

Back in his normal habitat, Wade helped his own team, Rayne E, to a 10-point win over Notley D in division two.

Notley C's Gordon Fairchild and Lyndon Griffiths took all their team's seven points between them against their own E team.

In division three Crossing C's short reign in equal second place came to an end when Notley F, the team they were sharing the place with, took seven points off them.

Steve Willis, Clare Johnson and Adam Purslow all won twice, Johnson and Purslow losing to Derek Agent and Willis to Adam Clift.

Leaders Sible Hedingham had a predictable straight games-only 10-0 victory over bottom team Notley I while Notley G dropped only one – a good win for Nguyen Tran over Mike Smith – in beating their own H team.

Peter Taylor came close to creating the week's headlines when he extended Tom Elder further than anyone so far.

Taylor is a tough player to get past when he gets the bit between his teeth as Elder discovered.

He won the first two games narrowly, 14-12, 14-12, then lost the next two 12-10, 11-8 before regaining control to take the final leg 11-7.

Ron Fosker

1.2.09

table tennis

After 30 sets, Duncan Elloy has lost his unbeaten record in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Keith Martin deprived Elloy of his 100 per cent when he sneaked home 8-11, 9-11, 11-5, 13-11, 11-9 in the second division match between Cressing B and Rayne D.

It was only Elloy's second defeat in two seasons.

But in one of those round-robin type matches, Martin had earlier lost to Ryan Pitt who went on to lose to Dave Punt who then lost to Elloy.

With four sets going to five games, it was a long evening, but in the end Cressing took the final two sets to win 6-4.

Without Elloy, Cressing also had a close encounter with lowly Black Notley D, but three sets each from Sean Clift and Chris Ciniglio saw them home 7-3.

Rayne D also had a 7-3 win, in their case over Notley's D team with Punt and Martin both unbeaten.

That scoreline means they drop further behind their own E team in the race for second spot. The E team dropped only one set – Phil Wade's defeat by Kevin Saunders – against Nomads.

Liberal B also took nine sets against Notley E, Diane Garner and Trevor Laird unbeaten.

Division one matches have been overshadowed by the death of Sheila Hayden, mother of Peter and Ian, of Cressing A. Mrs Hayden was a frequent spectator at table tennis events and will be much missed around the circuit.

Cressing postponed two matches during her illness, including the crucial clash with leaders Black Notley A, and as a result Bocking have taken over at the top after their 10-0 win over Rayne C.

Rayne's A and B teams had a tight encounter in which only two sets were decided in straight games. Rayne B won two of the four sets that went to five games: the doubles plus a creditable win for Peter Hance over Steve Pennell.

It was tight as well in the middle-table match between Notley B and Liberal A.

The visitors led 3-1 only for Notley to turn that round to a 6-4 win in their favour. Rob Stannard and James Hicks won two each for Notley while Robin Armstrong and Barry Pritchard did likewise for Liberal.

In the Essex League, Braintree B team have now won three out of three in veterans division five.

Their latest success, a 7-2 win against Southend C, follows earlier wins of 8-1 and 9-0.

Robin Armstrong and Mike Johnston won two singles and Cec Butcher one.

Ron Fosker

15.2.09

table tennis

Sixteen-year-old Will Jackson has taken no time to get to grips with competitive table tennis.

He failed to register on his debut in division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League in October, nor in his second outing, against league leaders Sible Hedingham in January.

But his two singles against Rayne G were a sign of things to come and in his last match he went one better by taking all three for Black Notley I against Notley's G team.

Nor were they negligible opponents.

Liz Heath is still finding her feet after a lay-off from the game but had six wins to her credit before Jackson got the better of her.

Both Mike Smith and Alan Cook had won around half their sets this season, but they fell by the wayside too.

And the mood was clearly infectious. Jackson's teammates Josh Rhodes, who celebrated his 18th birthday last week, was suitably inspired to record his first win of the season.

Having scored only nine points in their first 12 matches, Notley I have now gained seven in their last two, five of them off Jackson's bat.

At the top end of the table, Hedingham's steamroller ran up against Rayne G's Tom Elder who put three further dents in their record.

But the 7-3 win enabled them to increase their lead to 28 points as second-placed Notley F dropped four points in overcoming Rayne F.

Peter Taylor was largely responsible for their difficulties. He won his three singles for Rayne F.

Cressing C kept in touch after a 7-3 win over Notley H.

In division one leaders Black Notley A dropped two points against their B team, the doubles and James Hicks' win over Graham Farmer in the final set of the evening.

Rayne A had only two players, the unrelated Dean Andrews and John Andrews, but took all seven sets available against their own C team.

Liberal A and Rayne B had the tightest encounter of the week. They took five points each with only two sets decided in straight games. Barry Pritchard emerged unscathed with his three singles.

In the second round of the handicap cup, higher ranked sides came out on top in all but one of the ties.

Rayne will have four sides in the last eight, with Black Notley and Liberal providing two each.

The closest match was the one between Liberal A and Notley G which Liberal won in the final set. Frank Neill won that one to give him three sets for the evening.

The Notley B-Notley I match also finished 5-4 but was settled in the eighth set when James Hicks (off -8) overcame Steve Baines (+7) 12-10 in the fifth. Will Jackson won his three sets for Notley I.

Brian Cook won his three singles as Rayne B came past their own G team 6-3 and Paul Lombardi was unbeaten in the two singles he played in Liberal B's 5-2 win over Cressing C.

Ted Sims won all his in Rayne D's 7-2 win over Hedingham, Hedingham's first defeat in any competition this season, and Phil Wade carried his bat in Rayne E's 5-3 win over Cressing B, the team one place above them in division two.

The Rayne A v Rayne C match has yet to be played.

Ron Fosker

22.2.09

table tennis

Bocking have drawn level with champions Black Notley A at the top of the Braintree Table Tennis League. And they did so with what was almost their second team.

Neither Paul Davison nor Nigel Hodder was in action in their match against Black Notley B but that did not matter.

Kevin Gowlett, Richard Jennings and David Edwards got the job done just as well.

Notley B are not a team to trample over – James Hicks in particular has been picking up useful wins – but Bocking were in no mood to compromise. They took all ten sets, six of them in straight games.

Notley A meanwhile had to call on a reserve for their match against Rayne B and dropped four points.

Cressing A are behind on their fixtures but remain a threat. They scored a 9-1 win over Rayne C.

The one that slipped away represented a victory for experience over promise, Tony Hammond, the oldest player in the first division, prevailing over Scott Dowsett, the youngest, in five games.

Jon Hill and Ian Whiteside were unbeaten as Rayne A put aside Liberal A 9-1.

Division two leaders Cressing B faced their closest challengers Rayne E who had dropped only 12 sets out of 70 since the teams last met. But they showed who is boss with a crushing 8-2 victory.

It was not without pain, however. Duncan Elloy lost his second set of the season, to Paul Whybrow.

But Chris Ciniglio was the man in form. He dealt with Whybrow by the convincing scores of 11-6, 11-3, 11-9.

Keith Martin, the man who ended Elloy's unbeaten record two matches earlier, was himself the victim of two surprise defeats, doubling his total of reverses for the season.

Liberal B's Paul Lombardi and Diane Garner were the ones to get the better of him.

For once he was trumped by Alastair Brown. Struggling for form all season – four wins out of 24 before this match – Brown rose to the occasion to beat both Lombardi and Trevor Laird.

It was Liberal who probably went away the happier team. They turned a 5-1 deficit into a draw.

Black Notley D went one better than that. They lost the first five sets against their own E team, then won the next five.

Despite an earlier defeat by Peter Foster, Adam Pitt's two wins, plus the doubles with Keith Perrins, were central to the comeback.

Division three's top team Sible Hedingham registered their seventh 10-0 win of the season. Notley G were the latest to fall by the wayside although Steve Ascott stretched Graham Cannon to five games.

Second-placed Notley F fell further behind when they dropped four points to their own I team, or more precisely to Will Jackson who took his three singles and shared in a doubles win with Josh Rhodes.

Mike Pitt took his three singles for Notley H against Rayne F, but the home side won the rest.

Ron Fosker

1.3.09

table tennis

Former champions Rayne A have blasted a large hole in the current champions' attempt to defend their Braintree Table Tennis League title.

They took six points off Black Notley A in a somewhat bizarre match in which Notley's players turned up singly and all played their three games in a row.

Steve Kerns was untroubled, as may be expected, but Graham Farmer and Ian Brown found it tougher and only Brown's win over Jon Hill was added to Kerns' three.

Steve Pennell and Ian Whiteside both won twice for the home side and combined to take the doubles.

Notley had previously shared top spot with Bocking but their defeat enabled Bocking to open up a four-point lead at the top after an 8-2 win over Rayne B.

Liberal A registered their first 10-0 win of the season when a two-man Rayne C (one of them a reserve) failed to disturb them.

The tightness at the top of division one is matched by that at the opposite end of division two.

Nomads, once some way adrift at the bottom, continued their upward momentum with a vital win over Black Notley E, one of their main rivals for safety.

The Great Cornard team's revival has coincided with Kevin Saunders' greater availability and he was to the fore in this match, taking his three singles for the first time this season.

Notley D also stole a march on their E team by taking four points from Rayne D. Three of these came from the absence of Rayne's third player, but Keith Perrins also did his bit with a good win over Ted Sims.

By contrast the top of division three is the least closely contested. The top two came head to head with the result much as before, a 9-1 win for Sible Hedingham over Notley F, who have won all their matches apart from those against the leaders.

The only noteworthy result here was Steve Willis's win over Mark Brown although Willis came mightily close to producing an even better one when he stretched Roy Hooper to 16-14 in the fifth game.

The teams in third and fourth place also faced each other and Adam Cliff's three wins helped Cressing C to a 6-4 win over Rayne F.

Barry Mouser was kept busy in Rayne G's 8-2 defeat by Notley G. He pushed Steve Ascott to 11-9 in the fifth, then Mike Smith to 11-7 in the fifth before finally getting a reward for his efforts with a victory over Nguyen Tran, together with a doubles win with Ian Rubens against Tran and Ascott.

In the veterans division four of the Essex League, Braintree B had a 7-2 win over Chelmsford C. James Hicks, on his league debut, won both his singles and Duncan Elloy and Mike Johnston one each.

Becky Lockwood was the star of a top 12 competition for local school children hosted by the Netts club at Earls Colne Recreation Club.

Lockwood (Messing), Joshua Forbes-Brown (Bradwell), Joe Nourse (Halstead) and Oliver Hicks (Black Notley) all topped their groups after the first stage.

In the semi-final Lockwood lost the first game to Forbes-Brown but came back with some impressive top-spin play off both wings to win the next three games comfortably.

Nourse and Hicks fought hard for every point in the other semi final, resulting in some long rallies. Nourse's extra aggression on the forehand was the key factor as he came through in four games.

Lockwood immediately stamped her authority on the final by taking the first game 11-1.

Nourse came back strongly with some powerful forehand top-spins and smashes but Lockwood's all-round game was too strong as she took the next two games 11-9, 11-8 for her first tournament win.

Ron Fosker

8.3.09

table tennis

Black Notley A issued a 'rule us out at your peril' statement with a stunning victory in the race for the Braintree Table Tennis League title.

It came over Cressing A, who could have hit the top spot with strong victories in their matches in hand.

Instead, they failed to register even a single set: Steve Kerns, Gary Young and Ian Brown won the lot.

Rarely can former men's singles champion Terry Dowsett have lost three singles in one evening in Braintree yet he suffered alongside his teammates as he attempts to claw his way towards his old form.

There were suggestions he was heading that way as he won the first game in each of his sets but he wilted after that and lost the next three in each case.

Notley added another ten points from their match with Liberal A and with Bocking dropping three to Rayne A, they are back in the driving seat.

But the top three still have to play each other again and there is every reason to suspect that the race will not be decided until the last couple of weeks of the season.

Cressing showed what they are capable of with a 9-1 win over Rayne B where 14-year-old Scott Dowsett's wins over Paul Mitchell and Peter Hance illustrated his continuing promise.

Notley B were on the right end of the same scoreline when they took on Rayne C where Mark Lewis made a welcome return to the league after illness and remained unbeaten.

Duncan Elloy's record received its third dent of the season in division two, and it was another of the league's younger talents, Notley C's Stevie Pell, who inflicted it.

Pell won 11-8, 11-9, 11-5. She added the scalp of Ryan Pitt but found Sean Cliff's wiles a little too much as Cressing recorded an 8-2 victory.

Rayne's E and D teams continued their somewhat forlorn chase of the leaders with wins of 9-1 and 8-2 over Notley E and Nomads respectively.

The surprise in the latter match was that Keith Martin lost the only singles set – to Kevin Saunders – and was once again bettered by Alastair Brown, something that would have been unimaginable during Brown's early season trough.

Notley D's relegation fears were not helped by their 9-1 defeat by Liberal B.

In division three, Black Notley F's record of having won every match apart from those against leaders Sible Hedingham came to an end at the hands of Rayne G.

Tom Elder's three sets are a given, but it was Matt Millbank who made his mark this time. He scored an excellent victory over Clare Johnson and helped Elder to a win in the doubles.

Millbank came close in his other two singles too, missing out at 11-5 in the fifth game against Adam Purslow and taking a two-game lead against Steve Willis before bowing out 11-6, 11-9, 4-11, 9-11, 9-11.

There were three sets for Will Jackson in Notley I's 7-3 defeat by Rayne F and for Matt Shelley and Ash White in Cressing C's 8-2 win over Notley G.

Ron Fosker

for w/b 15.3.09

table tennis

Reigning champion Paul Davison will be backed by an unbeaten league record as he sets out to retain his title in this season's Braintree Table Tennis League individual events.

The preliminary events will be held this weekend with finals night the following Thursday at Black Notley Community Centre (7.00).

Davison has only played in four matches but he has twice faced league champions Black Notley A and includes the strong trio of Steve Kerns, Gary Young and Richard Goodhand among his victims.

Against that, though, can be set a quarter final defeat in this year's Chelmsford championships by former Braintree champion Peter Hayden who is seeded No.2 in this year's events.

Hayden relied on painkillers to see him through the Chelmsford event and will do so again this weekend, having played very little in between.

If the pills keep the tennis elbow at bay, he still has the strokes to bring him his fourth title, but he will have memories of succumbing to Davison at the semi final stage last season.

Ian Hayden, runner-up to his brother in 2007, and Kevin Gowlett, beaten in the 2006 final by Steve Pennell, are the No.3 seeds.

Ian Hayden will be hoping his brother's elbow holds together to enable them to regain the men's doubles title they won in 2007 while Davison and Gowlett will be striving to avoid their fourth successive set of runners-up medals.

The Haydens will also have their sights on the veterans' singles final which they contested in 2007 but they will have to be wary of Steve Kerns and Nigel Hodder.

Because of clashes, neither was able to enter the men's event but will be in action on Friday in the over 40s, Hodder hoping to crown his first season in the league with a title and Kerns hoping to win back the trophy he won in 2005.

Duncan Elloy's league form has slipped of late but he will be hoping to rise to the occasion in the restricted singles, an event he last won 22 years ago.

His main opposition comes from his Cressing B teammates who make up the other three seeds. Sean Clift is at two, with Chris Ciniglio and Ryan Pitt at three.

Scott Dowsett is a strong favourite to take the junior singles in his first season in the league, but Stevie Pell's recent form suggests it will not be a pushover.

The league's handicap cup semi finals will feature three teams from Rayne, the club whose representatives have won the trophy more times than any other.

The club's A, B and E teams are charged with continuing the legacy with only Black Notley F, last year's runners-up, standing in their way.

Last year's winners Rayne B could retain the cup. They beat Liberal B 6-3 with each of their players, Paul Mitchell, Brian Cook and Brian Riedling, winning two singles.

Rayne's A team, who won the trophy in 2004, had a slightly easier passage past Black Notley B. They won 5-1 with both Ian Whiteside and Steve Pennell taking both their singles.

The E team knocked out their own D team 5-2 with Paul Whybrow unbeaten.

Notley F have retained their knack of winning cup matches. As well as being runners-up last year, two-thirds of their team – Clare Johnson and Steve Willis – were in the Notley F team that won the trophy in 2006.

Johnson was to the fore this time, winning her three singles in the 5-3 victory over Liberal A.

She had a somewhat topsy turvy encounter in the clinching set of the evening. With the score at 4-3 she beat Barry Pritchard (off -6 to Johnson's +5) 10-12, 11-0, 9-11, 11-7, 11-0.

Braintree veterans' C team have won division five of the Essex League. In their final match they beat Harlow B 8-1 (two singles each for Robin Armstrong and Mike Johnston) and have a sets record of 32 wins out of a possible 36.

Former Black Notley junior Mark Palmer won the mixed wheelchair singles in the English national championships. Now 27 and based in Cheshire, he beat Shaun Newcombe of Hampshire in the final 11-7, 11-9, 11-9.

Ron Fosker

22.3.09

table tennis

Paul Davison's chances of retaining his Braintree Table Tennis League men's singles crown were greatly enhanced when Kevin Gowlett, many people's tip for the title, had his progress unexpectedly stopped at the quarter final stage.

Trevor Carter brought off a superb win over the No.2 seed to reach his first men's singles semi final with the convincing scores of 11-9, 12-10, 9-11, 11-3.

On finals night at Black Notley Community Association tomorrow (Thursday) night, Carter will face Ian Hayden, runner-up in 2007 and flying the family flag in the absence of original No.2 seed Peter Hayden, sidelined with a knee injury.

Davison beat Scott Dowsett in the last eight and will now face Dowsett senior, six times champion Terry, in the other semi final.

Dowsett, back in action this year after an eight-year lay-off, is not yet the player he was but had too much for Rob Stannard in the quarter final.

Hayden and Carter joined forces to reach the men's doubles final but it was a close run thing.

In their semi final they lost the first two games to Stannard and James Hicks and just pulled home at 11-9 in the third before taking the last two games 11-7, 11-6.

Davison and Gowlett, runners-up for the last three years, dropped a game to Dean Andrews and Sean Cliff in the quarter final but came past the two Dowsetts comfortably in the semi final.

The veterans singles final features two players who may well have contested the men's final had they been available on Sunday.

Steve Kerns and Nigel Hodder were both committed elsewhere but took their places in the veterans' events on Friday and made their way through to the last two.

Kerns had a comfortable victory over Hayden in the semi final while Hodder was stretched to four games by Ken Lewis.

Scott Dowsett and Adam Pitt will contest the junior boys' final where Pitt will be hoping to go one better than his brother Ryan who lost in the final in 2004.

And Ryan will be making two finals night appearances himself this year, in both the restricted singles and the division two singles.

It was in the restricted that Sible Hedingham's returning stars Graham Cannon and Roy Hooper made their mark.

Promising juniors some 30 years ago, Cannon and Hooper have picked up their bats again after a long lay-off and showed how quickly they have come to terms with the game by scoring victories over the Nos 2 and 3 seeds Sean Cliff and Chris Ciniglio respectively..

Cannon reached the semi final where he lost to Pitt who had beaten Hooper in the previous round.

Ciniglio also lost to Kevin Saunders which meant he did not progress from his group.

By coming second in his group, Cliff lost his position in the draw and found himself facing No.1 seed and teammate Duncan Elloy in the next round where he perished in four games.

Elloy went on to beat Saunders to reach the final of the event he won in 1987.

The top two seeds in the restricted singles are taken out of the division two singles to avoid duplicating the event and as a result are allowed to play in the division one singles.

And that gave Elloy a chance to shine again as he removed two first division players, Laurie Sapiano and Dean Andrews, to reach his second final of the evening.

He will face Stannard who came past Cliff with the undulating scoreline of 8-11, 13-11, 11-4, 1-11, 11-8.

Ryan Pitt's second final will be the division two singles where he faces Ciniglio.

And Hedingham's Cannon and Hooper got their reward for their weekend's endeavours with an appearance against each other in the final of the division three singles final.

Adam Pitt has already secured one trophy, the handicap singles which was played through to a finish at the weekend.

He had a titanic battle to come past Lyndon Griffiths in the semi final at 12-10 in the fifth, but in the final found a way through Ian Whiteside's defences where everyone else had failed. He won 13-11, 7-11, 11-8, 11-0.

Whiteside had more success in the over 50s singles in which he beat No.1 seed Ken Lewis 11-8 in the fifth then No.2 seed Trevor Carter 11-9 in the fifth.

Juniors were to the fore in the handicap doubles in which partners are drawn at random on the day.

Griffiths and 11-year-old Oliver Hicks emerged victorious against Ryan Pitt and 16-year-old Will Jackson.

Jackson and Adam Pitt won the junior doubles with a victory over Dowsett and Hicks 11-8, 7-11, 11-6, 11-6 while Dowsett won the cadets' singles with Hicks in second place.

Ron Fosker 27.3.09 table tennis

Reigning champion Paul Davison swept to his second successive Braintree Table Tennis League title with a convincing display at the league's finals night on Thursday (March 26). Throughout the five rounds, he did not drop a single game.

His semi final and final opponents suffered the same way as those in earlier rounds – defeat in three straight games.

Both Terry Dowsett in the semi final and Ian Hayden in the final stretched Davison to deuce but neither could capitalise on the position.

Dowsett, who returned to the game this year after an eight-year break, showed only glimpses of the style that brought him six titles in the past.

The first two games went by in something of a haze for Dowsett and although he rallied to reach 12-10 in the third, Davison always appeared firmly in control.

Hayden took a while to come to terms with a battling Trevor Carter in the other semi final. The sharp half-volleys and quick reactions of his Cressing teammate caused him some difficulty but he eventually crept through in four tight games.

He looked livelier in the final and initially gave Davison something to think about with some crushing drives on both wings. But the champion gradually got to grips with his game after something of a loose start. He remained positive, showed great speed round the table and had the ability to put the ball where it was not expected.

Hayden always appeared to be in with a shout but Davison got the points that mattered and ran out a 12-10, 11-6, 15-13 winner.

Unlike last year, Davison also took home the men's doubles trophy.

He and Bocking teammate Kevin Gowlett had fallen at the last hurdle in each of the last three years but never looked like doing so this year. Davison's speed and Gowlett's quick hits proved too much for Hayden and Carter.

They played the angles cleverly and showed more consistency than their rivals who played their part in an entertaining contest but eventually went down 11-8, 11-8, 11-5.

Ryan Pitt was another player to go away with two titles.

He defeated two of his Cressing B teammates, No.1 seed Duncan Elloy in the restricted singles, and Chris Ciniglio in the division two singles.

Pitt plays a punchy fast game with a leading backhand and strong forehand and refused to be driven back by Elloy's probing topspin.

It was a game of attack and counter attack but it was Pitt who was hitting the harder and he held the upper hand throughout to win in three straight games.

Ciniglio had similar difficulties in the division two final. Pitt worked hard to deny him the opportunity to get in his big hits before pitching in with some excellent ones of his own.

Again he took the title without dropping a game.

Elloy, however, did not go home empty handed. As one of the top two seeds in the restricted singles he was ineligible for the division two singles and so was given his chance in the division one event, a chance he took with both hands.

After dispatching two first division players in the earlier rounds, he made it three in the final when Rob Stannard fell by the wayside.

Initially discomfited by Stannard's deep chop and heavy loop, Elloy dropped the first game, but then got his own game in order and pushed his opponent back with a steady stream of aggression on both wings.

The division three singles final was the longest of the evening and provided an early upset.

Not only has Roy Hooper suffered four league defeats to his Heddingham colleague Graham Cannon's two this season, but he also lost to him in straight games in the veterans' singles.

But after a lengthy battle of attrition he found his way past him on Thursday. Hooper was two games to one behind and trailed again in the decider, but he stuck to his task and in the end it was his teammate who showed the greater vulnerability.

The veterans' singles was the second game of the evening to be decided by two points in the fifth game but was an entirely different affair.

Nigel Hodder and Steve Kerns hammered attacking shots at each other. In a fluctuating set, they took it in turns to find their fluency, with some loose shots sprinkled among the excellent ones.

It was the climax of their encounter that brought the evening's outstanding moment.

Kerns looked in control in the final game as he moved to a 10-6 lead and four match points.

But Hodder refused to lie down, remained positive and pulled back three of them. The next point was an all-out attacking blitz as both players crashed the ball at each other until Hodder unleashed an amazing backhand kill from the back of the court to leave Kerns dumbfounded.

He took the next two points to take the title in his first season in the league, some compensation for losing the Ipswich League title at deuce in the fifth four days earlier.

The other final saw a small piece of history as Scott Dowsett followed his father into the record books as the junior singles winner, the first father and son combination to win the event.

Dowsett senior's first junior title came with a crushing 21-11, 21-10 victory over Kevin Howard in 1977 and his son was in a similarly dominant mood.

Adam Pitt is a player who likes to come in with flat hits but he was given no chance to do so by a fired-up Dowsett who totally dominated the game with his heavy topspin and speed about the table.

Ron Fosker

for w/b 5.4.09

table tennis

A stunning victory over the reigning champions has given Bocking at least one hand on this year's Braintree Table Tennis League first division trophy.

They thumped Black Notley A 9-1 and lead the table by nine points with only two matches left to play.

Bocking turned out their strongest team of Nigel Hodder, Kevin Gowlett and Paul Davison to take the nine points.

It was Davison, the current men's singles champion, who lost the only set, not, as may have been expected, to Gary Young, but to Ian Brown.

Davison sneaked home at 11-8 in the fifth game after losing the first two against Young.

He lost the first two against Brown as well and appeared to have rallied again when he took the next two. But the Beccles battler came back at him to take the final game 11-7.

Hodder was stretched to five games by Brown but beat both Young and Ken Lewis in straight games while Gowlett won his three singles in four games.

Bocking also beat both Liberal A and Rayne C 10-0 while Notley beat Rayne C by the same score.

Elsewhere Rayne A more or less ended any lingering hopes Cressing A may have had of taking the title when they beat them 6-4.

Other first division results: Liberal A 2 Cressing A 8; Rayne B 6 Notley B 4; Rayne C 1 Rayne B 9; Notley B 1 Rayne A 9.

Cressing B have clinched the title with two matches to go in division two but they suffered an unexpected hiccup when they were held to a draw by Rayne D after chalking up 18 successive wins.

Dave Punt was in top form for Rayne D. He was stretched to 11-8 in the fifth by both Ryan Pitt and Chris Ciniglio but emerged with his three singles. And Keith Martin won twice – losing only to Duncan Elloy.

Second-placed Rayne E succeeded where Cressing B failed in beating Rayne D 7-3 to ensure they finish in the runners-up spot.

Punt won twice but Paul Whybrow remained in charge for the E team.

Rayne E also beat Notley D 8-2. They dropped the doubles and Adam Pitt picked up the other with a good win over Phil Wade.

Other results: Notley C 6 (Tim Huxtable 3) Liberal B 4; Liberal B 8 (Trevor Laird and Paul Lombardi 3) Nomads 2; Nomads 6 Notley D 4 (six sets went to five games); Cressing B 10 Notley E 0; Notley C 4 Nomads 6.

Division three leaders Sible Hedingham also had their tightest result so far, a 6-4 win over Notley I.

Mark Brown's unavailability cost them three points but it was the other point they dropped that provided the talking point, Will Jackson scoring his best win so far with a victory over the new division three singles champion Roy Hooper.

Their victories over Notley H (10-0) and Rayne F (9-1) mean that Hedingham cannot now be caught.

Other results: Notley G 6 (Steve Ascott 3) Notley H 4; Rayne G 0 Rayne F 10; Notley F 7 Notley G 3; Notley I 1 Cressing C 9.

Ron Fosker

12.4.09

table tennis

Last year's runners-up, Black Notley F, have made their way through to a second successive final in the Braintree Table Tennis League handicap cup.

And for Clare Johnson and Steve Willis it will be the third time in four years as they were in the team that lifted the trophy in 2006.

They and Adam Purslow lost in the final last year to Rayne B but gained their revenge on them this season when they knocked them out at the semi final stage.

Willis and Purslow both beat Paul Mitchell and as Rayne were without a third player that was enough to take them through.

In the final they will face Rayne E, who knocked out their own A team in the other semi final.

This was a much tighter match, decided in the final set.

With the score at 4-4, Paul Whybrow (+1) got the better of Steve Pennell (-3) in three straight games to register his third win of the night and take his team through.

The final will be played tomorrow night (Thursday) at Black Notley Community Association alongside the final of the restricted cup which features Black Notley E against third division Sible Hedingham.

The team knock out final, which will be played at a later date, will be between Bocking and Black Notley A after Bocking dealt summarily with Cressing A in the remaining semi final.

Kevin Gowlett, Nigel Hodder and Paul Davison won all eight sets played.

In the league division one, Rayne A gave themselves a strong chance of finishing third when they took 19 points from wins over their own B (10-0) and C (9-1) teams.

Andrew McEwan, on university vacation, and Jon Hill were unbeaten in both games.

Mo Hardy picked up the C team's one win by getting the better of Dean Andrews.

Black Notley B included Mark Lewis for the second time this season and he rewarded them with a full house in the 6-4 win against Liberal A. James Hicks did likewise.

Liberal bounced back to beat Rayne B 7-3.

In division two, Notley E improved their chances of avoiding relegation by holding their own C team to a draw, a result the C team went on to repeat against Rayne D.

Leaders Cressing B borrowed Adam Clift from division three for their match against Notley and he did not let them down. His win over Keith Perrins helped Cressing to an 8-2 win.

Second-placed Rayne E slipped a point further behind after beating Nomads 7-3.

The major news in division three was a first win for Notley I.

After losing their first 19 matches, they finally found their way over the finishing line in their penultimate fixture, a 7-3 win over Rayne G.

Will Jackson won three, Josh Rhodes two and Steve Baines one.

Rayne G were also on the wrong end of an 8-2 scoreline at Notley H where Mike Pitt and Nguyen Tran were unbeaten while Mike Smith had the upper hand in Notley G's 6-4 win over Rayne F.

He had to work hard, though. His three wins all came in five games.

Ron Fosker

25.4.09

table tennis

Sible Hedingham have become the first team from the league's lowest division to win the Braintree Table Tennis League's restricted knock out cup, a competition now in its 18th year.

On the same evening, Bocking completed the league and cup double and Rayne E became the 12th team from the club to win the handicap cup.

It was the first time all three finals had been held simultaneously and division three champions Hedingham took to the big stage to crown their season with a second trophy.

All three of the team's regular members, Graham Cannon, Roy Hooper and Mark Brown won one singles and they crucially took two of the three doubles for a 5-4 win over Black Notley E.

But it was a close run thing. Cannon and Brown were two games to one down in the final doubles against Keith Flowers and Peter Foster with the match score at 4-4.

But they pulled it round with wins of 11-7, 11-6 in the final two games to take the cup.

Bocking's success was more comfortable. Without Steve Kerns, Ian Brown or Richard Goodhand, Black Notley A were unable to match their opponents' first-choice team of Kevin Gowlett, Paul Davison and Nigel Hodder on the evening.

Gary Young gave them some hope with a straight-games victory over Hodder but Bocking took the rest.

Rayne E had to work hardest on the evening. Their success did not come until 11.10pm after a typical cat-and-mouse cut-out-the-mistakes cup tie.

They were giving away between six and nine points a game but both Phil Wade and Paul Whybrow have the ideal patient game for these circumstances.

Wade won all three sets – only once dropping a game – and Whybrow two.

Adam Purslow showed how it could be done against Whybrow, with a number of forceful hits leaving the ex-first division player stranded. His concentration lapsed in the middle but ended with a flourish in an 11-1, 11-0, 7-11, 10-12, 11-0 win.

There was only an eight-point difference, so in three of those games he actually won on the table.

But it was Whybrow's earlier win over Steve Willis that effectively turned the match.

After a tense struggle, Willis (off +4 to Whybrow's -5) was leading 7-0 in the final game. But that was the signal for Whybrow to dig even deeper and 0-7 became 11-9 in his favour.

The cups and league trophies will be presented at the league's AGM on June 4.

It is rare to have a three-team race for the Braintree Table Tennis League championship but until a late stage of the season that is how it turned out this year. And the final result was in doubt until the last few matches.

In the end Bocking triumphed by eight points from Black Notley A, last year's winners.

The signing of Nigel Hodder made the difference to Bocking this season. He played in all but five of their matches and lost only four times.

Kevin Gowlett was his usual reliable self. He lost only three times out of 47 and finished with a run of 24 unbeaten sets.

Men's singles champion Paul Davison was persuaded into action seven times, as opposed to five last season, and chipped in some vital sets.

But the roles of Richard Jennings and particularly David Edwards should not be overlooked.

Jennings won 16 out of 27, but in many ways it was Edwards who was the revelation of the season.

He had always struggled at this level in the past but found a new steel in his game this season.

After a completely barren 2007-08, he broke his duck in the most emphatic way with a victory over the redoubtable Peter Hayden. An injury-hit Hayden, maybe, but even an injury-hit Hayden knows what to do with the ball better than most able-bodied individuals.

He followed that up by winning nine of his next 12 sets to give him 11 overall. Given that Bocking won the title by eight points it was a telling contribution.

Hayden's injury – a recurrence of the tennis elbow that has troubled him for some time – effectively put an end to Cressing A's challenge for the title.

They led the table after six matches before Bocking took them apart 8-2. Although Hayden dropped out of the next seven matches Terry Dowsett – returning to the game after eight years' absence - Ian Hayden and Trevor Carter kept the momentum going for the next few matches.

With 12 of the 21 fixtures completed, Cressing remained ahead of Bocking with Notley just ahead of both of them.

Notley's 10-0 win over Cressing finally put paid to the Tye Green club's hopes and left Bocking and Notley to go head to head for the rest of the season.

The match that turned everything round was the third meeting between the two.

The first two encounters had been tight affairs, 6-4 to Bocking and a 5-5 draw.

Cressing led by just one point as they went into the third match. At the end, they led by nine.

Gowlett and Hodder were undefeated and it was only Davison's defeat by Ian Brown that blotted their performance on the day.

Bocking still had to negotiate two matches against Cressing, one scheduled, one rearranged, but two 7-3 victories eased them to the title, their first since 1996 when they were represented by three of the current Cressing team of Hayden, Hayden and Dowsett.

In the end Cressing fell away to fourth behind Rayne A.

Ron Fosker

17.5.09

table tennis

The first division may have provided one of the most interesting races in recent years, but once the season got under way there was little doubt who was going to win divisions two and three of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Cressing B were the clear favourites for the division two title and became even more so when they signed Ryan Pitt after four matches.

Sean Clift, Duncan Elloy, Chris Ciniglio and Bob Keefe could doubtless have won the title without him but a bit of extra backing did them no harm.

They won their first 17 matches and their draw in the 18th with Rayne D was only a minor hiccup on their way to winning the division by 25 points.

Rayne D looked destined to claim second spot but fate took a hand when Simon Fleming was taken ill and Rayne's E team managed to persuade former first division stalwart Paul Whybrow out of retirement.

With strong backing from Richard Whiteside and Phil Wade, he ensured that it was the E team that collected the runners-up medals.

Division three looked fairly open at the start of the season – until it became clear that Sible Hedingham were something special.

Graham Cannon and Roy Hooper had been out of the game for more than 25 years and no one knew how quickly they would find their feet.

No time at all was the answer as both of them won their first 18 sets. Apart from the inevitable defeats by former first division player Tom Elder, they lost only one and two more respectively.

Mark Brown proved that he too was no slouch – he finished fifth in the individual averages – and the team strolled through the season with a 100 per cent win record, the only one in the three divisions.

The fight for the runners-up medals was perhaps the closest in the league.

With two-thirds of the season gone, Cressing C trailed Black Notley F by ten points.

But they had a far stronger final phase, gradually pulled back the deficit and met Notley F in the final match needing just a draw.

That was the result they achieved to give them second spot by just a point.

Ron Fosker 24.5.09 table tennis

It was not quite the hundred per cent record that he managed for six consecutive seasons, but Steve Kerns was still a cut above the rest in this year's Braintree Table Tennis League.

Kerns lost to men's singles champion Paul Davison in January, only his second defeat in nine years, but won the rest of his sets to finish top of the individual averages for the 11th time.

He did not play in the league in 2006-07 but has topped the list every other year since 1999-2000.

Kevin Gowlett, who finished first in 2007 and third last year, is in second place this time after losing three times, to Kerns, Ian Brown and Richard Goodhand.

Nigel Hodder, new to the league this year, missed out four times in his 44 sets while Davison occupies the No.4 berth with two defeats, by Brown and Ian Hayden.

Division winners Cressing B have four players in the top ten in division two. Twenty-three-year-old Sean Clift, one of the youngest players in the league, led the way. He lost only twice, to Paul Whybrow and Keith Flowers, and remained unbeaten from mid-November.

Second is Clift's Cressing B teammate Duncan Elloy, who did not taste defeat until the second half of the season, with Chris Ciniglio sixth and Ryan Pitt eighth.

All three Sible Hedingham players are in the top five of division three.

Even a half-paced Tom Elder is too good for anyone at this level but Graham Cannon and Roy Hooper dealt comfortably with nearly everyone else. Apart from Elder, Cannon lost only to Matt Shelley and Hooper to Charles Wilkinson and Will Jackson.

Shelley was the best of the rest, with only five defeats in 30.

Sally Wellington, wife of Paul and a league player herself for around 20 years, has died of cancer at the age of 50.

Sally Franklin, as she then was, first made her mark as a very young junior, representing the league at the age of 12 in Braintree's first ever Essex inter-league team. It was a team that also included her husband-to-be Paul.

Introduced to the game by her uncle, the league's late life member Roy Franklin, Sally went on to reach the final of the Essex schools under 16 tournament and won the Braintree League ladies' doubles in both 1988 with Celia Whybrow and 1989 with Kate Gower.

It was not just in table tennis that she excelled.

Sally, who lived in Vaughan Close, Rayne, represented Essex in both the long jump and the sprints and finished seventh in the 100 metres at the all England schools championships.

She still holds the age group records at Tabor High School for both the long jump and 200 metres. Her records have stood for 35 years.

Sally represented Essex at hockey and was playing for Braintree Hockey Club until she retired two years ago.

Sally worked for a number of caring organisations, starting with the Department of Health and Social Security as a visiting officer for single parent families.

After a break to bring up her children she became a teaching assistant at Edith Borthwick School for Special Needs, where she worked for 15 years.

She then had two years at King & Co Tree Nursery in Rayne, where she carried out all roles from selling, unloading, delivering and planting trees.

She had recently started work as sports and leisure development officer for Mencap, a role that suited her perfectly, combining her love of sport and caring for others.

She is survived by her husband Paul, her children Matthew and Vicki, her mother Molly and sister Gill.