

Newsletter

BRAINTREE TABLE TENNIS LEAGUE

Affiliated to the English TTA and the Essex County TTA

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NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the new season. I'll start with another reminder that all clubs must register their players with Ian Whiteside, the fixtures secretary, before they play, and that every player must be registered with the ETTA.

Obituaries

To begin with the sad news, last season we lost five current or past members of the league.

Ray Fairless died in October, Tony Murray in December, Colin Fleming and Phil Wade on the same day in January and then Fred Sheldrake in March.

Ray and Tony only finished playing around two years ago and in 2010 took part in the first over 80s singles. Colin and Fred's playing careers finished some time ago but Fred will be remembered by many as a three times men's singles champion. Phil did not play in the 2011-12 season but had made a comeback this year and appeared to be getting back to his best in the weeks before he died.

It's always sad when we get this sort of news. But five in one season is a record I hope not to see repeated.

General secretary

Lyndon Griffiths has moved to Kent to be closer to his grandchildren and has therefore resigned as general secretary, a post he has held very efficiently for the past three years. No volunteers came forward at the AGM to fill the post, which therefore remains vacant.

A league cannot run effectively without a general secretary and it is vital this post is filled very shortly. All players are urged to consider if they might have a few hours to spare to take on the role. I can fill in the details for anyone who is interested.

League Composition 2013-14

The league will have 29 teams this season, one up on last year and the highest since the 2001-02 season. The new team comes from Rayne, who will have nine teams in the league, the same as Black Notley.

The additional team will be placed in division two, which will increase from nine to ten teams. Divisions one will stay as last year, with ten in the top division and nine in division three. Black Notley requested that their B team drop from division one to two as they have effectively combined their A and B teams from last year into one division one team. The league has therefore agreed to Sible Hedingham's request that they retain their division one place,

which they lost only after a surprise 9-1 defeat in their final fixture to Black Notley A, who had needed what looked like an improbable 8-2 win to stay up. Hedingham existed largely on two players last season but hope to have Graham Cannon back in action after two operations kept him out for the whole of the season, apart from an appearance in the team knockout final in May.

Rayne's new team have been placed in division one, leaving last year's division two winners (minus Adam Buxton) in division two.

Rayne's G team (last year's F) have been promoted from division three, taking the place of White Lions, who go down to division three.

Fixture grid

The fixture grid remains the same as last year, which means a one-week break at Christmas and a cup week over the new year. Any cup games scheduled for that week can be played early if the teams wish to do so, but the fixtures secretary must be informed in advance.

Finding your fixtures

Players can have a look at their team's fixtures on the league website tabletennis365.com/Braintree. Click on Winter 2013-14 on the panel down the left, then Fixtures, then the relevant division to get the opening week's fixtures. On the right are a number of filters. Putting your team in the team filter brings up all the fixtures for the season.

Martin Bawden award for service or achievement

The award went this year to competition secretary [Keith Martin](#).

Keith has been in post for two years and has done an excellent job. But the award was for more than that. It principally recognised his complete dedication to coaching those just starting out in the game.

Keith is the main coach at the Sunday coaching sessions at Notley and has hardly missed a week. He's the only person in the league to have gained a coaching qualification in the last couple of years and has enthusiastically pursued the Continuing Professional Development courses.

As Lyndon Griffiths commented: "It is primarily through Keith's dedication to coaching that we have maintained numbers at the Sunday coaching and even increased them to the current record level of 24 attendees including 19 juniors and cadets."

Management committee

With the exception of the general secretary post mentioned above, all league officers were returned unopposed at this year's AGM. There have, however, been two changes on the league management committee. Richard Whiteside has joined and Steve Kerns has returned after a short absence. They replace Mark Brown and Zach Harrington, who leave with our thanks for their contributions to the running of the league.

Website

All relevant information will again be available on the league website, <https://www.tabletennis365.com/Braintree>. We are grateful once again to Alan McEwan for continuing to run the site. Alan had intended to retire at this year's AGM but has agreed to continue for the time being. This is another post that we need to fill. If anyone feels they are able to take it on, please let me know. Alan will be able to give anyone full training before they take it on.

Some gentle nudges from the fixtures secretary

The first is that all matches must be played on the due date. Postponements are only permitted with the ADVANCE permission of the Fixture Secretary and then only for good reasons. Matches postponed without permission will be awarded to the opposition, a rule that will be strictly enforced this season.

In order to keep the season to a reasonable length, there are fixtures scheduled in the week before Christmas, and the weeks containing Good Friday (18th April) and Easter Monday. I would encourage team captains to look now at any matches which fall on days when it might be difficult to raise a team and decide with the opponents whether it is possible to play those matches during a free week, rather than trying to fit them in at the end of the season.

Secondly result cards are to be with me no later than SEVEN days after the match is played. To clarify this, if a match is played on Tuesday then the card must be with me by the following Tuesday. As last year, I am happy to receive cards electronically. If you do scan cards, please make sure the scanned copy is legible!

And from me:

Refreshments: Team captains are reminded that refreshments must be offered during a match to visiting teams (and your teammates, come to that). This has been in the last couple of newsletters, but it is still sometimes not observed. Whether it is tea, beer or orange squash, players should be offered something during the evening.

Coaching

League coaching will begin at Notley on Sunday and then run regularly on Sunday afternoons during the season. The league is grateful to those players who have helped out at the sessions. More help is needed this year. Anyone who thinks they can lend a hand in whatever capacity should ring Ian Wallace on 07842 117883

Diary dates

Quiz night: Saturday 25 January, Rayne Village Hall

Individual tournament: 14-16 February, Black Notley Community Association

AGM: Thursday 29 May, Liberal Club

Child Protection Officer

Should it become necessary, and of course we sincerely hope it won't, the league has a child protection officer. If any junior, or parent of a junior, has any concerns, they should contact Clare Johnson on 0794 165 4434.

Summer League

Congratulations to Garry Fryatt and Gareth Davies (Liberal C) and Clare Johnson and Victor Chan on winning the Tuesday and Thursday summer leagues respectively. Clare and Victor called themselves the Tenacious Trio, accurate enough apart from the trio bit – a bit like the Thompson Twins in reverse

Ron Fosker

Chairman

Last season Netts Phoenix became the first B team ever to win the first division title in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

And they start the current season, which begins this week, as favourites to retain their title.

Their B team status resulted from their late entry into the league with a restricted squad, but by week four they had added Tony Reardon and Maria Boulton to the nucleus of James Hicks and Graham Farmer and began to look like potential champions.

The addition of Kevin Grey towards the end of the season was the final cog in the wheel.

All are expected to return this season, which will make them the team to beat.

They can expect a challenge as before from Liberal A, who have promoted Simon Webber from the B team, and have signed former boys' singles champion Scott Dowsett, now 18, to join his uncles Ian and Peter Hayden.

But Hayden junior's chronic wrist injury continues to threaten his participation and he is seriously considering changing his style and playing with an old-fashioned hard bat.

Rayne A led the table for much of last season and are likely to be up there again, assisted by new signing Kuan Lim, from Bishop's Stortford. He will add strength to the usual consistent line-up of Steve Elmes, Jon Hill, Steve Pennell and Ian Whiteside.

Whether last year's Netts A team, now renamed Argyle and ranked as the club's second team, will challenge will depend largely on whether Paul Davison picks up his bat more often this season. Kevin Gowlett will lose very few and Patrick Gilbert, 17, will continue to improve but that may not be quite enough to push them up to the summit.

The relegation place was settled last season by an unexpected 9-1 win for Black Notley A over Sible Hedingham in the final match of the season, when 7-3 would have been enough to keep Hedingham up.

In the end it turned out to be irrelevant as Notley A have pulled out of the league after losing both Rob Stannard, to Rayne, and Zach Harrington, to Nottingham Trent University to study accounting and finance. Duncan Elloy has also left the B team so last year's A and B teams will make up one team this time.

That saved Hedingham from relegation and with the expected return of Graham Cannon, out all last season after undergoing two operations, they will be in a stronger position to retain their status.

Not only were Hedingham not relegated, but Rayne D, winners of division two, were not promoted.

Instead Rayne have entered a new team, following the arrival of Stannard, and the signing of Hector Rogers. They will join Brian Riedling, who drops down from the B team, and Adam Buxton, who moves up from division two, leaving the remainder of last season's division two champions to defend that title as Rayne E.

Rayne D will be one of the teams Hedingham will be hoping to finish above. Others in the mix are likely to be Rayne C and, depending on how often Steve Kerns plays, Notley A. Without Riedling, Rayne B could also hover uncomfortably close to the relegation spot but while Liberal B will be weaker without Webber they should have enough strength in depth to stay out of trouble.

I will look at divisions two and three next week.

An additional team from Rayne means that 29 teams will battle for honours in this season's Braintree Table Tennis League, the highest figure for 12 years.

The Rayne team slotted into division one, which allows last year's D team, winners of division two last season, to remain at the lower level and have an opportunity to make it two titles in two years.

Rayne E, as they now are, have lost Adam Buxton, who has been given a chance of a crack at division one, but retain their nucleus of Mo Hardy, Dave Punt and Paul Wellington. To ensure that Buxton will not be greatly missed, they have recruited the Halstead-based Dave Miller and look odds-on to keep their title.

They were chased home last season by Liberal C, but their campaign was given added impetus with the mid-season signings of Neil Freeman and Jon Fieldsend, who won 11 out of 12 and 11 out of 13 respectively. If both play regularly, they will put in a strong challenge but the indications are that they will only fill in occasionally.

Felsted A, third last season, will have the same squad of Ian Butler, Gareth Joice and Jenny Thomson.

Black Notley E, fourth last year and ranked as C this year, have lost the formidable services of Chris Parr, who has been promoted to division one after winning 45 out of 48 last season. But juniors Warren Baines, Oliver Hicks and Matt Wallace will be determined to prove they don't need him.

One team to watch will be Nomads, who survived on three players last season, but have doubled their squad for the new campaign. Not only has Arthur Wilson returned after a short absence, but they have added the useful signings of Richard Kemp and former ETTA coach Aad Kwakkelstein.

Such a wide squad increases their unpredictability, but they will undoubtedly prove to be a handful on occasions.

White Lions footed the division for the second season running and with no drop-outs above to save them, will return to division three – at least for a season. Their line-up of Clare Johnson, Adam Purslow and Steve Willis should be able to withstand most of what is thrown at them.

Black Notley F, second last year, can be expected to be up there again, especially after adding the signature of Ranleigh Attwood, who returns to the game after a lengthy absence.

But most eyes will be on Netts C, whose junior collection of Chris Hillman, 16, Sam Johnson, 15 next month, and Joe Nourse, 16, finished with a flourish of five wins last season, including a victory over divisional winners Rayne F. It will be a surprise if they are not causing considerably more problems for other teams this season.

League champions Netts Phoenix have shown they mean business in retaining their title in the Braintree Table Tennis League by turning out one of their strongest possible teams in their opening match.

Tony Reardon and Maria Boulton were joined by Kevin Gray, who played only four times last season, to tackle Rayne B.

It was little surprise that they were too strong for them, Rayne's only success coming from a good win by Ryan Pitt (11-9, 11-7, 11-1) over Boulton.

Pitt and reserve Dave Punt stretched Reardon to five games and 11-8 and 11-9 respectively in the final game, but otherwise it was all fairly straightforward for the Netts team.

Netts' other first division team, now known as Argyle, found things a little more difficult against Rayne D, but three wins each for Nikki Davison and John Cleasby saw them through to a 7-3 win.

The first week of the season also served up one of the top fixtures, a match-up between Liberal A, second last season, and Rayne A, who finished third and led the table for much of the season.

Rayne's run of seven successive wins at the start of last season came to an end when they encountered Liberal A and it was much the same treatment this time, three wins each for Peter and Ian Hayden, plus the doubles, and a 7-3 victory.

Black Notley A v Sible Hedingham was also one of the pivotal matches of last season when Notley's 9-1 win took them out of last place at Hedingham's expense.

The two met head on in the first week and Notley again prevailed although this was a completely different Notley team. Had Steve Kerns and Chris Parr been playing last season, they would not have sailed so close to the wind.

After rising from divisions three to two to one in successive seasons, Parr showed that his new habitat was not going to faze him and, like Kerns, started off with an unbeaten evening in his team's 7-3 win.

Second division title favourites Rayne E began as they no doubt hope to carry on by beating their own G team 8-2.

Vicki Stredder will strengthen newly promoted Rayne G's chances of staying in the division and duly took her team's two singles. But she missed out at 11-8 in the fifth game to Paul Wellington.

Last season's runners-up Liberal C had a less steady start when they were held to a draw by Notley D.

Gareth Davies won his three singles, but the set of the evening was saved to last when Keith Flowers faced defeat against Martin Wells after losing the first

two games. It then went to 20-18 before he survived the third, and he just held on to win the fourth and fifth 11-9, 11-8.

It was the tried and tested double act of Ian Butler and Gareth Joice who held Felsted RBL A together against Rayne F. They won their three singles and the doubles to lead their team to a 7-3 victory.

Despite signing on three extra players, it was the old firm of Kevin Saunders, Lorraine Burgess and Barrie Applegate who were on duty for Nomads. But they did not get very far against Notley C's younger firm. Unbeaten hands from Warren Baines and Matt Wallace led them to an 8-2 victory.

In the meeting between two Notley teams, Guy McKenzie did his best to upset the alphabet in taking his three singles, but it was not quite enough and the B team beat the E team 6-4.

White Lions carry the burden of being favourites for the division three title and they may find that weighing heavily on them if their opening performance against Felsted B is a guide. No one remained unbeaten in their 6-4 win and 15-year-old Ashley Butler can be particularly pleased with his wins over Clare Johnson and Adam Purslow.

Notley G were the only team throughout the three divisions to get off to an unblemished start, Matt Carter, Keir Hughes and Andy Thompson winning everything against Rayne H.

The fixture list paired up the lowest ranked teams of the league's two biggest clubs, and it was Notley I who came out on top against Rayne I by 7-3.

After her injury-hit season last year, Helen Barnett was quickly back to winning ways and remained unbeaten while new signing Jill Canning won twice.

Great Cornard's Nomads signed on six players at the start of the current Braintree Table Tennis League season after surviving on only three last season. And after just two matches, all six have now appeared on the scorecard.

After regular players Barrie Applegate, Lorraine Burgess and Kevin Saunders had appeared in their first match in division two, it was the turn of new signings Richard Kemp and Aad Kwakkelstein and the returning Arthur Wilson to make an appearance in the second.

And Kwakkelstein immediately showed what an asset he is going to be when he won all three singles against last season's division winners Rayne E.

Paul Wellington, Dave Punt and new signing Dave Miller were all dispatched in three straight games, which is not something that will happen very often this season.

Kemp chimed in with a victory over Miller and the two of them combined to win the doubles to claim a share of the points.

Liberal C, last season's runners-up, ended at 5-5 for the second successive match. In an all-beat-all affair, Gareth Davies and Garry Fryatt won two each for Liberal while Matt Wallace and Warren Baines did likewise for Black Notley C.

With only two matches played, it is something of a surprise that only two teams in the division, Notley B and Felsted RBL A, still have 100 per cent win records.

Victor Chan's three singles led Notley B to a 6-4 win over Rayne G while Gareth Joice and Ian Butler repeated their feat of the previous week in remaining undefeated in Felsted A's win over Notley E.

But it was 15-year-old Ashley Butler who came up with the performance of the week, a convincing three-game win over the experienced Guy McKenzie to make it 8-2 to Felsted.

Keith Flowers remained unbeaten, outscoring Sean Clift - something he did not manage at all last season - in Notley D's 7-3 win over Rayne F.

In division one, champions Netts Phoenix were another team to turn out an entirely different set of players from their first match.

Jermaine Fearon's three singles and Patrick Gilbert's two, plus the doubles between them, were enough to see off Notley A 6-4. The clincher was Fearon's narrow win over Chris Parr, who won his other two singles, 11-9, 5-11, 13-11, 3-11, 12-10.

Scott Dowsett made a winning return to the league when he and his uncles Ian and Peter Hayden took all ten for Liberal A against Rayne D.

Liberal's B team had an up-and-down time. They started with a 6-4 defeat by Rayne B, for whom Ryan Pitt was unbeaten, then followed it with an 8-2 win over Rayne's D team. Robin Armstrong and Barry Pritchard won their three singles.

In division three Tim Townsend's three singles led Rayne I to a 7-3 victory over their own H team while Notley F's Mike Smith and Vernon King were unbeaten in their team's 8-2 win over Notley I.

Rayne's two new division one signings have made an instant impression in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Kuan Lim, from Bishop's Stortford, joined the A team to strengthen their title ambitions and showed his worth in his first match for the club when he took his three singles in straight games in the 9-1 win against Rayne D.

Ian Whiteside also picked up three wins but Adam Buxton spoiled the clean sheet with a good win over Steve Pennell, coming from behind to win at 11-7 in the fifth game.

Rayne A also beat their own C team 9-1.

Hector Rogers' debut was more modest but he showed his value to the C team when he was responsible for their only two wins against the club's B team.

He beat both Buxton and Dean Andrews at 11-7 in the fifth, but Ryan Pitt prevented him making it a hat-trick.

Elsewhere there was a first defeat for the champions Netts Phoenix – at the hands of their B team, Netts Argyle.

Kevin Gray was beaten for only the second time in the 18 sets he has played since he signed towards the end of last season. Kevin Gowlett got the better of him, just as he did last season.

Phoenix only had two players and just missed out at 6-4.

Liberal A are the early leaders and they had little difficulty extending their lead against Sible Hedingham where they won everything in straight games.

Liberal's B team were not so successful. They met a Black Notley A team in good form and perished 8-2. Barry Pritchard picked up both Liberal's wins.

In division two, Andrew Huckson was undefeated as Notley E beat their own D team 8-2. It was a first win for the E team and a first defeat for the D team.

Notley B and Felsted RBL A kept up their records as the only teams in the division with a 100 per cent win record.

Notley B beat Nomads 8-2, with three wins from Dave Parker, while Rayne G's Vicki Stredder became the first person to beat Gareth Joice this season. It was not enough to stop Felsted winning 7-3.

Notley C's Oliver Hicks can lay claim to the best performance of the week. In the shadow of his teammates in his first outing this season, he put them completely in the shade in his second appearance, winning all three of his team's points in the 7-3 defeat by Rayne E.

Wins over Paul Wellington, Dave Punt and Dave Miller do not come easily, but Hicks took all three in four games.

Relegated White Lions have made an unspectacular but steady start to life in division three. They played twice in three days and racked up two 7-3 wins.

They faced only two players at Notley G but could themselves raise only two against Rayne H. Steve Willis won five out of five.

The juniors of Netts Jetts are another team who have got off to a surprisingly slow start. After their run of success towards the end of last season, they were expected to put up a strong showing, but have lost their first three matches.

After defeats of 9-1 against Notley F and 8-2 at Notley H, they improved by one to 7-3 against Felsted B. Joe Nourse gained their three points while Andy Laws, Sam Porter and Chris Butler won two each for Felsted.

Notley H ran into availability problems and so had to borrow three players from their Notley I – to face Notley I. Helen Barnett won her three singles for the I team, but H came out on top 6-4, partly thanks to a welcome return to the game by Adam Clift.

No one remained unbeaten in the match between Rayne I and Notley F. Brian Dixon and Tim Townsend for Rayne and Mike Smith and Leon Hewitt for Notley won two each.

A defeat for the current champions has left division two of the Braintree Table Tennis League looking as congested as the A12 on a Monday morning.

The top five teams are covered by just three points – and if Liberal C win their match in hand, they will be up there with them.

It was Liberal C who shook things up with an excellent win over Rayne E, divisional winners with something to spare last season.

Gareth Davies and Garry Fryatt both found their mojos working and seldom allowed the opposition a look-in. They both won their three singles, Davies all in three straight games while Fryatt was twice stretched to four.

They added the doubles to record a 7-3 win.

Felsted RBL A lead the division, but they suffered their first defeat when they came up against a strong Nomads side. Richard Kemp and Aad Kwakkelstein won all seven between them for Nomads.

Black Notley's C and D teams hover just one point behind after good wins.

The D team won all ten sets against Rayne G while the C team overcame their own B team 8-2. Victor Chan was responsible for the B team's two wins, but it was an unbeaten performance from Matt Wallace that led the C team to victory.

Despite the defeat, Notley B, who were without Dave Parker, are only three points behind the leaders and a point behind Rayne E.

After promising debuts from Rayne's two new first division signings the previous week, it was the turn of their division two acquisition Dave Marsh to shine. He held the club's F team together by taking his three singles in their draw with Notley E.

White Lions have moved to the top of division three with their strongest win to date while erstwhile leaders Notley F lost to their own H team 7-3.

Lions' 8-2 win over Rayne I came with the help of unbeaten performances from Steve Willis and Adam Purslow.

After a sluggish start to the season, Netts Jetts recorded their first win, a crushing 10-0 win over Notley G, while Felsted B moved up to fourth place with a 7-3 win over Notley I. Ashley Butler won his three singles in straight games.

- Apologies are due to Peter Hayden for a misreading of statistics in last week's report. While Kevin Gowlett was correctly credited with a win over Kevin Gray, it was Hayden and not Gowlett who had beaten Gray last season.

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Ron Fosker
tennis

20.10.13

table

Just what is it about playing doubles? No matter what happens in the singles matches, the one doubles set can often be something of a lottery in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Take the most recent set of first division fixtures. There were four matches and in all four, the team that won the match lost the doubles.

And in two of those cases, the two doubles players were unbeaten in their singles matches.

Against their own B team, Rayne A won eight out of nine singles – Ryan Pitt had a good win over Ian Whiteside – but Steve Pennell and Jon Hill found themselves floundering in the doubles against Pitt and Dean Andrews. It was close, 11-9, 12-10, 10-12, 12-10, but it did not go their way.

Adam Buxton and Hector Rogers were both unbeaten for Rayne D against a two-man Sible Hedingham. But in combination, Roy Hooper and Mark Brown found their way past them 11-9, 8-11, 11-9, 11-9.

Rayne D won the match 7-3, their first win of the season.

In the Rayne C – Black Notley A match, Chris Parr won three and Laurie Sapiano and Gordon Fairchild two each to lead Notley to a 7-3 win. But the doubles got away, Keith Martin and Simon Fleming triumphing 11-7, 11-2, 8-11, 11-8.

Nikki Davison and Kevin Gowlett were unbeaten in Netts Argyle's 6-4 win over Liberal B but Gowlett chose to sit out the doubles. Davison was joined by Patrick Gilbert, who did not have the best of evenings, and saw Mike Johnston and Barry Pritchard cruise home 11-6, 11-8, 6-11, 11-6.

There were no surprises in the first round of the team knockout cup.

In the only all-first division tie, Notley A overcame Rayne B 5-3 with unbeaten evenings from Parr and Steve Kerns, while first division Rayne A and Rayne D beat second division Felsted A and Notley B 7-1 and 8-1 respectively.

For Felsted, Ian Butler had a good win over Steve Elmes while Gareth Joice got as close as he could without quite making it. He lost 11-2, 3-11, 11-13, 12-10, 11-9 to Pennell and 11-9, 11-4, 8-11, 7-11, 12-10 to John Andrews.

Notley's win came from Dave Parker over former clubmate Rob Stannard.

After losing to them in the league, Rayne E faced Liberal C for a second successive week and suffered at their hands again. Dave Punt and Dave Miller got revenge on Garry Fryatt for their league defeats, but Liberal had Neil Freeman in for the first time this season and his two singles and two doubles helped to ease them home 6-3.

The restricted cup produced some closer results, two of them decided on the final doubles.

Notley's D and E teams faced each other and it was the E team who led 3-1 and 4-3. Keith Flowers scored a good win over Guy McKenzie to level the scores and then Peter Foster and Sean Clift ensured it was the higher rated team who progressed by winning the final doubles in three straight games.

The Rayne I-Notley H match went even closer to the wire. Rayne pulled back from 0-3 to 4-4 but Notley's Jill Canning and George Wallace just prevailed in the doubles 12-10, 8-11, 11-7, 8-11, 11-9.

Second division Rayne G's passage against third division Netts Jetts was a more comfortable 7-2 but there were good wins for Joe Nourse over Vicki Stredder and Chris Hillman against Charles Wilkinson.

Nomads are probably the favourites for the cup and they had little difficulty overcoming Notley G 8-1.

Ron Fosker
tennis

27.10.13

table

The last unbeaten record in the Braintree Table Tennis League division two has been surrendered – and to an unlikely source.

Liberal C had avoided defeat up to now. But then they ran into Black Notley E.

The club's fourth-rated team in the division did what neither their C nor D teams could manage in their matches earlier in the season and came home 7-3 better off.

Guy McKenzie was in sparkling form for the E team and won his three singles.

That included only the second defeat this season for Gareth Davies (at 12-10 in the fifth game), and the third for Garry Fryatt.

Fryatt went on to lose to Andrew Huckson, who had just missed out at 13-11 in the fifth against Davies.

Notley E remain in sixth place but are only five points off the top slot, where Felsted RBL A are level on points with Notley D, the surprise team of the season so far.

They finished in sixth place last year but have hit their stride this term. Sean Cliff was unbeaten as they defeated Nomads 7-3.

Felsted slipped back a point in beating Notley C 6-4. Gareth Joice won his three singles.

Rayne E and Notley B were separated by a point both before and after their encounter.

The draw was earned the hard way, Dave Punt just holding off Dave Parker at 13-11 in the final game in the last set of the evening.

Even at this stage the relegation place looks likely to be a battle between Rayne's F and G teams, and they shared the points when they came up against each other. Tony Stredder's three singles held the G team together.

Division one leaders Liberal A continued in serene fashion with their fourth successive 10-0 win, this time against their own B team, who they beat only once in three attempts last season.

The other title challengers all had handsome wins. Netts Argyle beat Rayne C 10-0, while Rayne A and Netts Phoenix had 9-1 wins over Sible Hedingham and Rayne D respectively.

Roy Hooper scored Hedingham's consolation with a good win over Steve Pennell, but more significant was the first appearance of Hedingham's Graham Cannon, who missed the whole of the last league season after two operations.

More surprising was Rayne B's 9-1 win over Black Notley A, who had started the match nine points ahead of them. Peter Hance and Ryan Pitt were unbeaten and Dean Andrews looked like following them until Chris Parr opted to forsake his usual cagey game and crashed a series of winners past him.

Notley's G and H teams registered wins in division three, but their F team failed to follow suit.

The G team beat Notley I 9-1 while a two-man H team had a 6-4 win at Rayne I.

Felsted B broke the sequence with an 8-2 win over Notley F.

Vernon King won the two for Notley F but just fell short against Ashley Butler 7-11, 7-11, 11-8, 11-7, 11-7.

Ron Fosker
tennis

3.11.13

table

Life is congested at the top of division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League where no team has yet made a decisive break.

Relegated White Lions are setting the pace but they continue to drop points and have three teams within three points of them.

Lions were pushed all the way by Netts Jetts, and in particular by Chris Hillman, who had an excellent evening.

He won his three singles, and brought about only the second defeat this season for Steve Willis. But the leaders pulled together to register a 6-4 victory.

Felsted RBL B moved into second place with a 6-4 victory over Black Notley H, who had held that position. Two each from Andy Laws and Ashley Butler helped their cause.

Notley F complete the leading pack, but they were held to a draw by their own G team.

Keir Hughes and Vernon King went into the final set unbeaten on the night and it was Hughes who just held on to that record at 11-5 in the final game.

An unblemished evening for Jill Canning led Notley I to an 8-2 win over Rayne H.

Felsted A scored what could be a significant win over Rayne E, one of their main challengers, to open up a clear lead in division two.

Their 6-4 victory took them clear of Notley D, who had shared the same number of points last week but tumbled 7-3 to their own C team.

Gareth Joice was unbeaten for Felsted and Warren Baines for Notley C.

The all-Notley clash was closer than the score suggests. Five sets went to the full five games and the C team won four of them. Bruce Wickham was on the end of two of those but got it right with an excellent win at 11-8 in the fifth against Matt Wallace.

Notley E are only one point behind the D team after their 7-3 win over Rayne G. Andrew Huckson won his three singles.

Liberal C recovered from their first defeat the previous week to take eight points off Notley B, and that included a first win of the season for Martin Wells.

Nomads turned out one of their stronger teams and that was too much for Rayne F, who took only one set, Brian How's win over Lorraine Burgess. Kevin Saunders and Richard Kemp were unbeaten for Nomads.

Liberal A continue to have little mercy in division one and recorded their fifth consecutive 10-0 win. As with the others, Ian Hayden, Peter Hayden and Scott Dowsett were the men responsible.

Liberal's B team were also on the winning side in their encounter with Rayne D. Hector Rogers got Rayne's two singles in the 8-2 defeat but just missed out at 11-8 in the fifth against Robin Armstrong.

The two Netts teams had healthy victories. Argyle beat Rayne B 8-2 while Phoenix went one better and dropped only one set – a win for Roy Hooper over Graham Farmer – against Sible Hedingham.

Rayne A were also 8-2 winners, in their case over Notley A. But that should not detract from a good win for Chris Parr over Kuan Lim.

Braintree veterans B team had a close match with West Essex in the Essex League but went down 5-4. Steve Pennell won two and Adam Buxton one.

Ron Fosker
tennis

10.11.13

table

After 11 successive wins, Liberal A's Scott Dowsett has lost his unbeaten record in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

It was the veteran campaigner Dean Andrews who succeeded where everyone else had failed.

It took him a game to warm up but after losing the first 11-9, Andrews settled into a rhythm and cruised home fairly comfortably 11-5, 11-6, 11-6.

Eighteen-year-old Dowsett, junior boys' singles champion in 2009, won his other two sets as Liberal beat Rayne B 9-1.

But there was more drama behind that scoreline. With just a slight twist of fortune, it could have been a match to remember for Ryan Pitt.

He took the first two games off Dowsett, and although he lost the third, he reached deuce in the fourth but could not muster the two points needed for victory.

He was even closer to beating Ian Hayden, where he lost 12-10 in the final game, and even took a two-game lead against men's singles champion Peter Hayden, before falling in five.

It was the first point Liberal A have dropped since the opening match of the season, but they still increased their lead at the top.

Second-placed Rayne A overcame reigning champions Netts Phoenix 7-3. Steve Pennell was in sparkling form, taking two sets in three games and the other in four.

Netts Argyle, who have a crunch match with Liberal A next week, took eight points off Black Notley A.

Sible Hedingham improved their chances of avoiding relegation when they took four points from Liberal B while Rayne C, who had been level on points, were defeated 9-1 by Rayne D.

Hedingham's Mark Brown, who has not touched top form this season, rediscovered his spark against Liberal B, where he won all three singles.

In the Rayne-Rayne match, it was just the doubles that got away.

Notley E are the surprise new leaders in division two. The club's fourth-ranked team in the division leaped out of the pack after a 10-0 drubbing of Nomads.

The Great Cornard side were without any of their big guns and the Notley E combination of Nick Readhead, Guy McKenzie and Andrew Huckson were too much for them.

Notley D's brief flirtation with the top spot turned out to be just that as they lost 7-3 for the second match running.

Rayne E were their conquerors this time in a match that marked Mo Hardy's return to the team. He won twice but it was three from Dave Punt that pushed them over the line.

At the other end of the table Rayne F pulled clear of Rayne G by holding Notley B to a draw while the G team lost 8-2 to Liberal C.

Brian How, with four wins out of 12 up to now, moved his game up by several notches to take his three singles for Rayne F.

After languishing in the foothills for much of the season, last year's champions Rayne E have at last climbed to the top of the pile in division two of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

They broke free after a convincing 9-1 win over Rayne F in which Dave Punt and Dave Miller were unbeaten.

Alastair Brown took the one for Rayne F with a win in three straight games over Mo Hardy.

They are just one point ahead of Black Notley C, who have become the latest team from the club to challenge, following the D and E teams' brief spells at the top.

It was the E team who suffered at Notley C's hands. Their 7-3 victory included two wins each for Warren Baines, Oliver Hicks and Matt Wallace.

The club's B and D teams were also in opposition and again the higher-rated team proved their worth. Victor Chan and Dave Parker led the way in the 8-2 win.

But the D team did not take it lying down and stretched four of their eight defeats the full five games.

Felsted RBL A and Liberal C are still likely to have a say in the destination of the title and fought out a tight encounter when they came together.

Gareth Joice and Ian Butler for Felsted and Garry Fryatt and Gareth Davies for Liberal each won two but it was effectively Jenny Thomson, in her first match of the season, who clinched the win with a nailbiting win at 11-9 in the final game against Martin Wells.

Rayne G moved off the bottom after holding Nomads to a draw. Richard Kemp won his three sets comfortably for the home team but Tony Stredder and Charles Wilkinson picked up two each and Tim Gowers registered his first win of the season for Rayne G.

White Lions continue to rule in division three but they encountered a top-form Mike Smith when they faced Notley F. Smith took all three singles in his team's 7-3 defeat.

Lions had earlier beaten Notley I 8-2. Adam Clift won the two for Notley I but found Adam Purslow too good for him.

Notley H sit only one point behind Lions – and face them tonight [Thursday]. They had a 7-3 win over Rayne H where Rayne's Steve Siggs, returning to the game after a 30-year absence, proved he still remembered what it was all about and took his three singles.

Felsted B made it six wins in a row with scores of 6-4 against Rayne I and 7-3 at Notley G.

Chris Butler won five out of six, losing out only to Notley G's John Breen.

Chris High returned from a lengthy overseas trip to win two singles in Rayne H's 6-4 defeat by Notley F. Vernon King was unbeaten for Notley.

And Sam Johnson and Chris Hillman took all seven sets between them in Netts Jetts' 7-3 win over Rayne I.

Eighteen-year-old Scott Dowsett brought off one of the wins of the season, or indeed the decade, in the Braintree Table Tennis League when he downed the redoubtable Steve Kerns, the league's most consistent player.

And he did not just beat him. He crushed him 11-7, 11-2, 11-8.

To put it into perspective, Kerns went into that match having lost only four times in 13 years. Those defeats were to players of the standing of Peter Hayden (twice), Kevin Gowlett and Paul Davison.

Up to now Kerns has always had the nous and the steadiness to see off everyone else but he had no answer to Dowsett, a player who had lost his unbeaten record to Dean Andrews in his previous match.

Kerns said afterwards: 'No complaints from me. All Scott's shots went on. He kept hitting the corners and lines. I was totally outplayed.'

To prove that Kerns had not suddenly lost all his powers, his set against Hayden, the reigning men's singles champion, went to the wire, Hayden just snatching it at 14-12 in the fifth game.

Kerns did manage to beat Ian Hayden and he and Chris Parr picked up the doubles for Black Notley A, but Liberal A won the rest to strengthen their position at the top.

Their cause was helped when Netts Argyle, currently their closest rivals, ran into availability problems against Rayne A and crumbled to a 9-1 defeat, their first reverse of the season.

They only had two players but Nikki Davison and John Cleasby might have expected more than Davison's win over Carl Johnson. Neither of them could do anything about Steve Pennell or Kuan Lim.

Things are beginning to look up, however, for champions Netts Phoenix who welcomed Tony Reardon back after his recent knee problems. He and James Hicks were unbeaten in their 9-1 win over Liberal B.

After his inspired efforts against Dowsett the previous week, Dean Andrews' form continued into his next match when he won his three singles to help Rayne B to a draw against their own D team.

At the foot of the table, Sible Hedingham picked up their first win of the season by beating the only team below them, Rayne C.

In only his second match back after missing all last season, Graham Cannon showed that the lay-off had done him little harm and took two singles, the same as Roy Hooper and Mark Brown in the 6-4 win.

The first round of the handicap cup brought an even spread of results in which the higher-ranked team won four matches and the lower-ranked five.

The only division one team to survive to the second round were Black Notley A, who beat their own B team by the narrowest of squeaks.

With the score at 4-4, Laurie Sapiano, giving away six points up to 21, scraped home against Victor Chan at 21-19 in the third game.

They will be joined in the next round by division two teams Liberal C, Notley E, Notley D and Rayne F.

Of those only Rayne F beat a higher-ranked team and it was their own A team who perished by 8-1. Peter Taylor and Brian How were unbeaten.

Liberal C came past Notley F 6-3 thanks largely to three sets from Martin Wells, while Notley D were comfortable 8-1 winners over Rayne H.

Notley's E and I teams were more tightly entwined. The E team won 6-3 but they needed two wins at 21-19 in the third game and one at 23-21 at the same stage to progress. Andrew Huckson, Nick Readhead and Guy McKenzie all won twice.

The remaining successes all came from division three teams.

Notley G had the closest scoreline but they were 5-2 up before losing the last two sets against Rayne D. Matt Carter was unbeaten for Notley.

Felsted B had little difficulty overcoming a two-man Rayne C 8-1 while White Lions declared at 5-1 against Rayne B.

And Netts Jetts overcame Heddingham 7-2. Chris Hillman was unbeaten for Jetts where he was the only one to beat Mark Brown.

Ron Fosker
tennis

01.12.13

table

One of the most impressive surges of form in the Braintree Table Tennis League this season has come from Felsted RBL's Ashley Butler, who celebrated his 16th birthday last week.

In only his second season of competitive table tennis, Butler was thrown in at the deep end and asked to play in division two to cover for the absence of Jenny Thomson.

But he has responded by winning one singles in most of his matches and then went one better when he took two off the strong Black Notley B side.

His evening included a win over last season's division two singles champion Dave Parker – in three straight games. Parker had won ten sets out of 12 up to that point.

His wins helped his team to a 9-1 win and he scored another vital win the following evening when he beat Bruce Wickham, a set that was vital to his team's 6-4 win over Notley D.

And he came close to making it two when he took Keith Flowers to 11-6 in the fifth game.

His record is all the more remarkable considering he won only seven sets out of 30 in division three last season.

His wins have helped lift Felsted back to the top of division two, the third change at the top in four weeks after Notley E and Rayne E's brief spells at the summit.

Rayne E drop to third after being held to a draw by Notley E, where they were indebted to Dave Miller's three wins.

Notley C climbed above them after turning out a team of Wallaces against Rayne G. With two regular players unavailable, 15-year-old George Wallace stepped up from division three to play alongside father Ian and brother Matt and rewarded his family's confidence by taking two singles to help his side to an 8-2 win over Rayne G.

Notley B recovered from their drubbing by Felsted to score a 6-4 win over Rayne F, Parker this time remaining unbeaten.

And Liberal C kept in the hunt with a 6-4 win over Nomads for whom Richard Kemp won his three singles for the fourth match in succession.

The big match in division one proved as tight as expected, with leaders Liberal A just creeping over the line at 6-4 against Netts Argyle.

Liberal, who had won 74 sets out of 80, lost three of the first four on the evening before they settled into a winning rhythm.

Kevin Gowlett was the main problem. He won his three singles and inflicted the first defeat of the season on men's singles champion Peter Hayden 3-11, 11-8, 11-9, 11-8.

Netts Phoenix had little trouble recording a 10-0 win over bottom club Rayne C while Rayne A had only slightly less difficulty in beating Liberal B 8-2. They had to call on reserve Adam Buxton but he did his bit by winning twice, and came close to making it three when he lost 11-6 in the fifth to Mike Johnston.

Netts Argyle also had an easy passage in an earlier match against Sible Hedingham, which they won 8-2. John Cleasby was the only Argylian not to taste defeat.

Hedingham came close to notching up a rare victory when they led 3-2 against Rayne B, but could not hold on and went down 6-4.

Like that match, Rayne D's encounter with Notley A passed by without anyone remaining undefeated. It ended in a draw but Rayne can count themselves unlucky as Notley won four of the five sets that went to five games, including two decided at 12-10.

In division three White Lions disposed of their nearest challengers Notley H by a convincing 8-2. Adam Purslow remained unbeaten.

In a good week for 15-year-olds, Sam Johnson scored a personal triumph when he became the first person this season to get the better of Helen Barnett. His 12-10, 13-11, 11-8 win helped Netts Jetts to a 6-4 win over Notley I.

It was a good week too for the slightly more mature Andy Laws whose three victories in Felsted B's 7-3 win over Rayne H included one over the formidable Steve Siggs.

White Lions have risen to the occasion when it was needed and finally pulled away at the top of division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

For the second week running they met the team in second place, and for the second week running they beat them 8-2.

Black Notley H had held that position but after their defeat by White Lions, it was Felsted RBL B who took it over.

But when they faced the league leaders they were able to get no further than their predecessors in that position.

Chris Butler and Dean Wood won one each but, as in the previous match, it was a top-form Adam Purslow who refused to let anyone past him and led his team to victory.

As a result, Lions have stretched their lead at the top to 11 points.

Any thoughts that Notley F may have had of closing the gap were quickly dashed in their encounter with Netts Jetts.

The first time the teams met, Notley came off best by 9-1. This time Jetts surged to a 10-0 victory. Notley F have the excuse that only Mike Smith of their team in the first meeting was available this time, but it seems clear that Jetts have put their shaky start behind them and are capable of climbing still further up the table.

There was less drama in the Rayne I-Notley I match where the scoreline of 7-3 in Notley's favour was a repeat of the first meeting.

The same six players were in action, the only differences being that this time Jill Canning beat Tim Townsend to give her her three singles for the evening, and Rayne pinched the doubles.

Rayne's H team avoided defeat for the first time this season when they fought out a draw with a two-man Notley G. Matt Carter and Keir Hughes won two singles and the doubles for Notley but neither could get past Steve Siggs.

There were mixed fortunes for division two leaders Felsted A who scored a resounding 9-1 win in a rearranged fixture against Notley E, but were then held to a draw by lowly Rayne F.

Dave Marsh, in only his second match of the season, made the difference. He won all his singles for Rayne.

Liberal C stepped up their challenge with a 9-1 against Notley D, a team they had drawn with first time round.

The major difference was a sparkling performance from Martin Wells. It has not been easy up to now for Wells, still coming to terms with the game after a lengthy absence. He had won only three out of his previous 24 sets, but he doubled that tally in one evening.

What is more, he outscored Garry Fryatt, a player with 18 wins from 24 sets, who lost to Sean Clift.

Rayne E remain in the chase after an 8-2 win over Rayne G where Dave Punt was undefeated.

Notley C, who had been edging towards a position of promotion possibles, had the misfortune to be the first team to face the strongest side Nomads can muster.

Were Aad Kwakkelstein, Richard Kemp and Kevin Saunders to play in every match, they would probably win the division but there are six in the club's squad and results have been mixed so far.

Oliver Hicks and Matt Wallace both beat Saunders and Wallace came desperately close to inflicting the season's first defeat on Kwakkelstein, but the former ETTA coach held on to win at 13-11 in the fifth game.

The first time Notley's B team played their E team, they managed to beat them 6-4 thanks in part to two wins by Andrew Huckson, playing up as a reserve.

In their second meeting Huckson was playing for the E team and won all three singles. Nick Readhead added two to enable the E team to share the points with their seniors.

Division one leaders Liberal A had to take on second-placed Rayne A without Peter Hayden and just managed to hold their own at 6-4.

Ian Whiteside became only the third player this season to beat Scott Dowsett – after Dean Andrews and Kevin Gowlett – but Ian Hayden's three singles held his side together.

Gowlett and John Cleasby remained unbeaten to help Netts Argyle to an 8-2 win over Rayne D while three wins for Kevin Gray led Netts Phoenix to a 6-4 win over Rayne B.

Liberal B needed only two players to beat Rayne C 7-3 while Sible Hedingham, one place above them, pulled further away from danger by holding Notley A to a draw.

Mark Brown won twice for Hedingham but it was Laurie Sapiano, in only his third outing of the season, whose three singles helped earn Notley the draw.

Ron Fosker
tennis

15.12.13

table

Felsted RBL A may continue to hold sway at the top but the week's most intriguing game in division two of the Braintree Table Tennis League was the one between Black Notley C and Liberal C, where every player won at least once and lost at least once.

Warren Baines set the tone by recording a surprisingly convincing win over Gareth Davies in the first set of the evening. Davies, who has the second best average in the division of those who have played more than four matches, was crunched 11-1, 11-8, 11-5.

Baines also beat Garry Fryatt but found his match in Liberal's third player Martin Wells who came off best 13-15, 13-11, 11-6, 11-5.

Davies won his remaining two sets, but had a tussle with Matt Wallace before coming through 12-10, 11-8, 10-12, 7-11, 11-5.

It was Wallace's only defeat of the night, although he was taken to five games by Fryatt and four by Wells.

Oliver Hicks also lost to Davies in five games, but managed to deal with Wells in three.

Davies and Fryatt took the doubles to ensure a share of the points for their team.

Rayne E maintained the pressure on Felsted at the top by winning all they could against Nomads. But as they only had Dave Punt and Paul Wellington on duty that meant three points went missing.

Dave Parker's three wins helped Notley B to a 6-4 win over Rayne G while Rayne F picked up their first win of the season.

Dave Marsh continues to be their talisman. His unbeaten evenings on his previous two outings helped his team to a draw, but this time they went one better and crushed Notley D 8-2.

It was not all down to Marsh. Ted Sims also found his best form and won his three singles for the first time this season.

It was a good week for the Netts teams in division one. Argyle had a comfortable 9-1 win over Sible Hedingham where only Roy Hooper's win over Patrick Gilbert disturbed their evening, while Phoenix took eight points off Notley A.

The Notley A – Phoenix match produced the first ever league meeting between James Hicks and son Oliver, playing up as a reserve from Notley's third team. It was little surprise that the Phoenix man took the honours but 11-8, 11-7, 11-8 represents a good return for Hicks junior.

And he went one better by recording a good win over the experienced Graham Farmer.

Leaders Liberal A's lead was pegged back a bit when they took to the table without Peter Hayden for the second week running.

Scott Dowsett took his three singles in their 7-3 win over Rayne D, but reserve Barry Pritchard did his bit by winning twice, one more than Ian Hayden, who lost to both Hector Rogers and Adam Buxton.

Steve Pennell and Kuan Lim took all seven points in Rayne A's 7-3 win over their own C team while the club's B team shared the points with Liberal B.

Ryan Pitt and Dean Andrews for Rayne and Robin Armstrong and Mike Johnston for Liberal each won two singles.

Ron Fosker
tennis

w/e 22.12.13

table

Netts Jetts' rise up the table continues in division three in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

After an unaccountably bad start when they were bottom after three matches, they have risen to third place after once again gaining revenge for one of their earlier heavy defeats.

After avenging a 9-1 defeat by beating Black Notley F 10-0, they repeated the dose against Notley's H team, turning an earlier 8-2 defeat into a 9-1 win.

There were extenuating circumstances in that Notley had only two players whereas Jetts had two players in the first match.

But both Chris Hillman and Sam Johnson gained wins where they had not done before, and they also won the doubles.

In doing so they climbed above their opponents into third place.

White Lions remain secure at the top after their 7-3 win over Rayne H where they introduced new signing David Lilley, returning to the league after a lengthy absence. He won one singles but it was Steve Willis's full house that led them to victory.

Rayne I played three games in nine days. They drew two of them and came close to a third draw before falling 6-4 to Notley F.

The draws were against Rayne H and Notley G.

Brian Dixon was unbeaten in the Notley G game but it was Rayne H's Chris High who took the honours in the intra-club encounter. For Notley F, Vernon King's unbeaten evening took them over the line.

Notley F also had a 7-3 win over their own I team. This time Leon Hewitt was the man in form, winning his three singles for the first time this season.

In division two, leaders Felsted RBL A had another comfortable victory, this time 8-2 over Rayne G, while challenging Liberal C fell back a bit when they recorded a 6-4 scoreline against Rayne F.

That match was notable for a first defeat for Dave Marsh, after 11 successive wins. He was second best to Gareth Davies.

Nomads' twin strike force of Aad Kwakkelstein and Richard Kemp took everything against Notley B, including the doubles, and a first win of the season for Arthur Wilson, slowly finding his feet after a spell out of the game, gave them an 8-2 victory.

For the second time this season, Notley E turned the alphabet on its head by beating Notley D – and they did so with the help of a Notley H player.

George Wallace gained promotion from division three and helped his temporary teammates to a 7-3 victory by gaining a good win over Bruce Wickham. Guy McKenzie was undefeated for the E team.

Any hopes that Netts Phoenix had of retaining their Braintree Table Tennis League title are all but extinct after availability problems hit them twice in two weeks.

First they had to take to the table with only two players against their own B team, Argyle, and then they were unable to raise a team at all to face league leaders Liberal A.

Argyle's team of Kevin Gowlett, John Cleasby and Patrick Gilbert had little mercy on their clubmates, who had only a James Hicks win over Gilbert to show for their evening's endeavour.

Those results, plus a 10-0 win for Liberal A over Sible Hedingham have left Phoenix 39 points behind the leaders.

Argyle remain possible challengers but they had difficulties of their own when they could only raise two players for their match against Liberal B. Cleasby and Paul Davison won all seven sets available but they may have cause to regret the three sets they were unable to claim.

Rayne A remain in second place but they have not been without availability problems.

They have had to call on a reserve on five occasions this season, the most recent being Richard Whiteside, who featured in their last two matches, against Rayne's D and B teams. He did his bit by winning one set on each occasion to help his team to wins of 7-3 and 8-2 respectively.

Black Notley A were the fortnight's other double winners. They beat Liberal B 6-4 and Rayne C 8-2 to lift themselves up two places in the table to fifth.

Chris Parr won five out of six but there was a second defeat for the once almost invincible Steve Kerns. Following his earlier reversal against Scott Dowsett, he fell foul this time of a top-form Barry Pritchard, who was also the only player to beat Parr over the period.

In the lower reaches, Hedingham helped their cause by holding Rayne D to a draw, thanks for Richard Jennings' unbeaten evening, while Rayne C put up a strong fight against their own B team before succumbing 6-4.

Richard Whiteside had good wins over Peter Hance and Dean Andrews, but, like his teammates, could not find a way past Ryan Pitt.

In the absence of both the league champions Netts Phoenix (conceded in the first round) and the league leaders Liberal A (did not enter), there is a chance of silverware for others in the Braintree Table Tennis League team knockout cup.

Rayne A, who have won it nine times in the past, and Netts Argyle are the most likely to benefit as they made their way through to the semi finals.

Argyle received a walkover for the second round running while Rayne A dealt with the challenge of Black Notley A.

Notley made them work hard. Steve Kerns won his two singles – although Jon Hill took him to five games – and he also won the doubles with Chris Parr.

But two singles from Ian Whiteside, including a drawn-out battle of attrition against Parr, plus one each from Hill and Pennell and the Whiteside/Pennell doubles saw them through 5-3.

Two of the league's lesser lights also have a chance of glory.

Rayne D, currently eighth in division one, and second division Liberal C are also through to the semi finals.

Rayne D had a comfortable 8-1 win over Black Notley C while Liberal C brought in Jon Fieldsend for his first outing of the season and his presence was vital in eliminating first division Sible Hedingham.

Fieldsend and Garry Fryatt won one each and Gareth Davies two as they crept home 5-4 after falling 3-2 behind.

One third division team and three from division two have made their way through to the semi finals of the restricted knock out cup.

Notley F will fly the flag for division three after their 4-3 win over Notley I in which one team had two players and the other an ineligible player. The most notable feature of the match was an excellent win for Mike Smith over Helen Barnett, beaten only once so far in the league.

Division three leaders White Lions' progress was halted by Notley D, who won 5-2. Keith Flowers won twice for Notley.

Rayne G, division two's basement team, may gain some compensation if they slip through the trapdoor as they too made their way past third division opposition, in their case Notley H by 8-1, a good win by Steve Baines over Tim Gowers the one that got away.

And in a match played earlier Nomads ensured their passage with a 7-2 win over Felsted RBL B whose Chris Butler will be pleased with his win over Barrie Applegate.

In the league there was a surprisingly heavy defeat for Notley C against their own B team in division two.

They may have been ranked that way round by the club at the beginning of the season but it is the C team who have had the better results so far and, with only one change of personnel on each side, had a comfortable 8-2 win in their first encounter.

But three wins for both Dave Parker and Victor Chan and two from Barry Evans led to a 9-1 thumping second time round.

Notley's E team remain the highest placed of the club's three sides in the division after their 7-3 win over Rayne F where Guy McKenzie's three singles included only the second defeat this season for Dave Marsh.

The D team also won – 7-3 over Rayne G – while Felsted A increased their lead at the top after a 9-1 win over Nomads.

In division three, Netts Jetts' charge up the lead was halted when they went down 8-2 to Notley G and fell two places in the table as a result. They only had two players and Keir Hughes beat both of them.

The gap at the top remains the same after both White Lions and second-placed Felsted B won 7-3.

All three Felsted players won two singles against Notley I, but none could get past Helen Barnett, while it was Adam Purslow's unbeaten evening that helped Lions to their win over Rayne I.

Notley H jumped above their F team into third place by beating them by the same score. Adam Clift, now promoted from the I team, won his three singles.

A 19-year-old and a 16-year-old have made a significant and possibly decisive impact on this year's Braintree Table Tennis League in ways that could not have been foreseen at the beginning of the season.

When Liberal A asked Scott Dowsett to join them to replace Trevor Carter, whose back problem may have ended his table tennis career, even they could scarcely have expected the level of consistency he has shown.

Beaten only three times in ten matches, he has anchored the team alongside men's singles champion Peter Hayden – one defeat in nine matches - while Ian Hayden has played third fiddle with five defeats in 11 matches.

As a result Liberal sit comfortably at the top of the table and unless further injury or some unforeseen circumstances intervene look likely to bring the club its first ever division one title, just as the Haydens and Carter did for Cressing in 2007.

The chances of champions Netts Phoenix defending their title appear to be considerably weaker than Manchester United's after conceding two matches and twice turning out with two players.

At the league's New Year break they were 39 points behind the leaders with only 14 matches to make up the leeway.

Netts Argyle, the club's B team who were last year's A team, look likely to regain their superior status as they sit 17 points ahead of their clubmates. An unbeaten Kevin Gowlett and strong contributions from Nikki Davison and John Cleasby have left them poised to take advantage of any Liberal slip-up but it may need more appearances from Paul Davison for them to make a real impact.

Instead it is the familiar faces of Rayne A that occupy second place.

Jon Hill, Steve Pennell, Ian Whiteside have displayed their usual consistency and with the help of new signing Kuan Lim they too will not have given up hope of a stab at the title.

At the bottom the return of Graham Cannon plus occasional appearances by Richard Jennings have stabilised Sible Hedingham, who footed the table last season but were saved from relegation after the withdrawal of a Black Notley team from the top division.

They look likely to stay afloat at the expense of Rayne C, who have lost all 13 matches so far and whose grip on the division is looking increasingly shaky.

It is division two that has produced perhaps the Roy of the Rovers story of the season.

With a long-term injury denying them the services of Jenny Thomson at the beginning of the season, Felsted RBL A had little option but to promote the

then 15-year-old Ashley Butler into the first team despite his record of only seven wins out of 30 in division three last season.

Butler has responded magnificently and shown dramatic improvement over a short space of time, so much so that his team now sit proudly at the top of the division.

His record this season in the higher division is already better than last season's and over his last six matches he has the eminently respectable win record of 41 per cent.

With his father Ian and Gareth Joice having won 30 and 33 out of 38 respectively that has been enough to give Felsted an edge at the top.

A mark of their improvement this season is that they finished 31 points adrift of Rayne D last year but with more or less the same team –Dave Miller has replaced Adam Buxton – Rayne E are 21 points behind, albeit with two matches in hand.

Liberal C, two points behind Rayne E, are the other main contenders. Gareth Davies and Garry Fryatt are holding them together and there are signs that Martin Wells, back after a lengthy absence, is beginning to rediscover his old form.

When Rayne E and Liberal C catch up on their fixtures, the picture will be clearer but this looks like a race that could be decided very late in the season.

That is unlikely to be the case in division three where relegated White Lions have slowly and steadily eased away from the rest of the pack.

They have not traded in 10-0 wins but a steady progression of 8-2s, 7-3s and 6-4s has enabled them to establish their authority in the division and they are the only team apart from Liberal A to have won all their matches.

The runners-up spot has been handed round a number of teams like an unwanted Christmas gift.

It is currently held by Felsted B, but their record was boosted by Ashley Butler's 13 wins before his permanent promotion to division two and it could be that Adam Clift's more regular availability, and the continued improvement of George Wallace, the winner of last season's league coaching award, could propel Notley H into that slot.

Their teammates at Notley F and G are still not out of it and nor are Netts Jetts. But they all know they are fighting for second place.

Tables at the New Year break:

DIVISION 1

	P	W	D	L	A	P
Liberal A	13	13	0	0	17	113
Rayne A	13	11	0	2	34	96
Argyle	13	11	0	2	39	91
Phoenix	13	8	0	5	56	74
B Notley A	13	5	2	6	71	59
Rayne B	13	5	2	6	73	57
Liberal B	13	4	1	8	76	54
Rayne D	13	2	3	8	84	46
S Hedingham	13	1	2	10	95	35
Rayne C	13	0	0	13	105	25

DIVISION 2

	P	W	D	L	A	P
Felsted RBL A	13	11	1	1	41	89
B Notley E	13	6	3	4	59	71
Rayne E	11	6	3	2	42	68
Liberal C	11	6	3	2	44	66
B Notley B	13	7	2	4	64	66
B Notley C	12	5	3	4	58	62
Nomads	13	4	2	7	73	57
B Notley D	13	4	1	8	74	56
Rayne F	12	1	4	7	73	47
Rayne G	13	0	2	11	92	38

DIVISION 3

	P	W	D	L	A	P
White Lions	11	11	0	0	31	79
Felsted RBL B	10	8	0	2	39	61
B Notley H	10	7	0	3	42	58
B Notley F	12	5	2	5	63	57
Jetts	10	5	0	5	46	54
B Notley G	10	3	3	4	52	48
Rayne I	12	1	3	8	72	48
B Notley I	11	3	0	8	66	44
Rayne H	10	0	2	8	69	31

Just when division two of the Braintree Table Tennis League appeared to be taking some shape, the atoms have been redistributed by one week's set of results.

Not only did the league leaders lose, but so too did the teams effectively in second and third places.

The major advance was made by Black Notley E, the team whose second place appeared to be only a temporary standing until the next two teams caught up with their matches.

But Notley may not see it that way after their 8-2 drubbing of Liberal C.

It looked to be only a matter of time before Liberal, five points behind with two matches in hand, climbed above Notley.

But Notley have yet to be beaten when Andrew Huckson, Guy McKenzie and Nick Readhead are on duty and three singles each from Huckson and McKenzie led them to an emphatic win.

Rayne E, another team with two matches in hand, also appeared to be on the cusp of overtaking Notley E.

But they fell foul of Notley's B team, themselves no by means out of the race.

Dave Parker's unbeaten evening led his team to a 6-4 win.

The losers' enclosure was completed by top team Felsted RBL A. But they had an excuse.

Neither Ian nor Ashley Butler was available and so they had to take to the table with two third division players against Notley C.

Gareth Joice won his three singles and partnered Chris Butler in a doubles win, but Notley took the other six.

The other two fixtures in the division featured the teams at the bottom, seventh versus eighth and ninth versus tenth, and predictably both ended in a draw.

Sean Clift's three sets helped Notley D to share the points with Nomads while Tony Stredder's unbeaten evening performed the same service for Rayne G.

Stredder had to work hard, twice winning at deuce in the deciding game, but it was another set that went the distance that was the vital factor. Had Peter Taylor not crept home in five games against Tim Gowers, Rayne G would not still be seeking that elusive first win of the season.

One result stood out above all others in division one, an astounding win for Robin Armstrong over men's singles champion Peter Hayden.

The two frequently share a carriage on an early train to Liverpool Street. One can imagine what the topic of conversation was for several days.

Armstrong's win was one of two that Liberal B managed to pinch off their own A team. Mike Johnston contributed the other by getting the better of Ian Hayden.

Simon Webber stood above it all and took his three singles to give the A team eight points.

Second-placed Rayne A moved two points closer with a 10-0 win over Sible Hedingham. Hedingham had only two players while Rayne borrowed Peter Hance from the B team and gave John Andrews his first game of the season.

James Hicks's three singles helped Netts Phoenix to a 7-3 win over Rayne D while there was a series of double wins in Rayne B's 6-4 win over Notley A. Hance and Dean Andrews for Rayne and Gordon Fairchild and Chris Parr for Notley all won two sets.

Felsted B consolidated their second place in division three with an 8-2 win over Notley F. Andy Laws remained undefeated.

Netts Jetts, who had dropped from second to fifth in recent weeks, regained two of those places with an 8-2 win of their own, in their case against Rayne H. Joe Nourse and Chris Hillman were unbeaten.

The third match in the division was also 8-2, this time by Notley I over their own G team, a win that enabled them to rise two places, overtaking the G team on the way.

The match marked the comeback of Gary Jackson, out of competitive action for 30 years. He took time to settle, taking five games before he overcame Matt Ward. But he won his next set 11-3, 11-2, 11-4, which suggests he has quite quickly rediscovered what the game is about.

Rayne's new signing Hector Rogers has made a substantial impact in his first season in the Braintree Table Tennis League and he illustrated his value to the club when he turned out twice in two days.

Playing for his own team, Rayne D, where he has won 73 per cent of his sets, his three singles were vital in the 6-4 win over Liberal B.

The following evening he was called on to play up for Rayne's A team and obliged again, matching A team regulars Steve Pennell and Jon Hill in winning twice against Black Notley A.

Rogers even gave former men's singles champion Steve Kerns something to think about as he stretched him to 11-8 in the deciding game.

Pennell came even closer against Kerns. He took the first two games and after losing the third, narrowly missed out at 11-9 in the fourth, before falling in five.

Paul Davison made a rare appearance for Netts Argyle and joined Kevin Gowlett in remaining undefeated in the 7-3 win over Rayne B.

Netts Phoenix went two better in beating Sible Hedingham 9-1. Tony Reardon, in only his third match of the season, and James Hicks were undefeated while Mark Brown nipped in with Hedingham's sole win in the final set of the evening.

League leaders Liberal A had a comfortable passage against bottom team Rayne C. Keith Martin stretched two sets to five games but neither he nor his teammates could disturb the flow of victories.

In division two Richard Kemp's run of 18 successive wins for Nomads came to an end at the hands of Rayne F's Dave Marsh by the surprisingly comfortable margin of 11-7, 11-4, 11-2.

Marsh also took his other two singles as Rayne F registered a 7-3 victory, only their second win of the season.

Rayne E's title hopes were further diminished by a defeat by the same score to leaders Felsted RBL A. Ian Butler was unbeaten for Felsted.

Notley E strengthened their hold on second place with a 10-0 win over Rayne G. All three Rayne players got to a fifth game, but none could finish it off.

Liberal C maintained their challenge by beating Notley B 8-2, a repeat of the score in the teams' first meeting, while Notley C kept in touch with a 7-3 win over their own D team. Warren Baines was unbeaten for Notley C.

White Lions faced possibly the biggest challenge in maintaining their unbeaten record in division three when they could only field two players against Netts Jetts, who have run into form in recent weeks.

Not this time though. Steve Willis took three, Adam Purslow two and they won the doubles to ensure a 6-4 win.

Notley I turned out their strongest team of Helen Barnett, Jill Canning and Gary Jackson against a Rayne H team without Steve Siggs. The 10-0 win occasioned little surprise.

Notley F meanwhile took on a Notley G team who had held them to a draw in their first meeting. With the same six players in action, the result this time was 8-2 to the F team.

Unlike the first time round, both Leon Hewitt and Vernon King remained unbeaten.

QUIZ SUCCESS FOR RAYNE

A team of past and present Rayne members regained their crown at the league's quiz night on Saturday January 25.

A team from the club have won the title on a number of occasions in the past but have missed out for the last few years to teams from Chelmsford and the Liberal Club.

But in one of the tightest races in the event's history, Paul and Celia Whybrow, Paul and Caroline Mitchell, Barry Mouser and Beryl Whiteside triumphed by just one point (out of 95) over a Black Notley team led by Chris Parr and Dave Parker.

A team including Rayne's Dave Moles and Steve Siggs were three points further back, just half a point ahead of Alan Hearn and president Len Woolmer's team.

And a special mention to the Liberal team of Robin Armstrong and Jan and Frank Neill, who finished in sixth place despite having only three players.

Thirteen teams took part, bringing the league a £332 profit, which will go towards keeping the subs down next season.

Ron Fosker

There is little doubt about the performance of the week in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Former ETTA coach Aad Kwakkelstein's run of victories in division two was brought to a halt after 12 sets by an outstanding performance from Andrew Huckson.

Huckson lost the first game 11-7, but then settled into his rhythm and won the next three 11-7, 11-9, 11-6.

And he went on to complete his hat-trick for the evening with wins over Lorraine Burgess and Richard Kemp, a player who had lost only three sets out of 24 before that evening.

In this case Huckson's teammate Guy McKenzie had got in before him and taken Kemp down by 11-5, 17-15, 8-11, 11-7.

Those defeats meant a first reverse for Nomads with Kwakkelstein in the team, Notley coming through 6-4.

Liberal C had more tangible success with a 10-0 win over Rayne G but the other two top-four teams, Rayne E and leaders Felsted RBL A, were made to work hard for 6-4 wins of their own.

Rayne E came up against a top-form Sean Clift, who took his three singles for Notley D and won the doubles with Peter Foster, but Rayne took the rest.

Felsted needed three singles from Gareth Joice to see them over the line against Notley B.

Rayne F were more unlikely winners. They won for only the third time this season – yet it was their second success in a row.

They followed their 7-3 win over Nomads the previous week with a 6-4 win over Notley C. Dave Marsh continued his solid run of form by registering an unbeaten evening.

Kwakkelstein's defeat means that there are only two unbeaten players throughout the three divisions, of those who have played more than three matches.

And those two players were in action together for Netts Argyle against Notley A in division one. Paul Davison and Kevin Gowlett duly maintained their records and were joined by Patrick Gilbert who helped his team to a 10-0 win.

Rayne's A and B teams both paid the penalty for turning out with two players. The A team went down 7-3 to Netts Phoenix while the B team lost out 8-2 to leaders Liberal A.

Liberal's B team were involved in one of the closest matches of the week when they crept home 6-4 against Sible Hedingham.

Liberal's Barry Pritchard was the only one of his team to beat Richard Jennings, but the only one to lose to Mark Brown.

Rayne C are still looking for their first win on the table and things looked promising when they led their own D team 3-1.

But reality set in after that and the D team took five of the remaining six sets for victory.

Like the Liberal B-Hedingham match, all players won at least one singles and lost at least one.

The C team's Richard Whiteside and the D's Hector Rogers and Brian Riedling all won twice.

Gary Jackson's unbeaten record in division three was rather a shorter one – six sets to be precise – since his return after 30 years away.

But he met his match in Steve Willis in Notley I's encounter with the division's leaders White Lions.

In the first set of the evening Willis triumphed 11-6, 7-11, 11-8, 12-10.

He won his three singles and both he and Adam Purslow inflicted rare defeats on Helen Barnett as Lions came through 6-4.

Felsted B strengthened their hold on second place with 7-3 wins over both Notley H and Rayne I.

Chris Butler won six out of six.

Vernon King racked up an excellent win over Steve Siggs as Notley F beat Rayne H 8-2. King remained unbeaten while Siggs accounted for Rayne's two victories.

In the Essex League veterans division two, Braintree B lost 7-2 to Clacton A.

Steve Pennell and Mike Johnston won one singles each and Adam Buxton came desperately close to joining them, missing out only at 15-13 in the fifth game to Phil Smith.

Braintree have been crowned Essex veterans table tennis champions for the second time in three years.

Wins over Southend, Burnham, Ilford, Brentwood and Becontree gave them 35 points out of a possible 45 and enabled them to retain the trophy they won in 2012, but was not contested last year.

The team of Peter Hayden, Kevin Gowlett and Steve Kerns led the table after three wins in November and sealed victory with two further wins over the second weekend.

Gowlett remained unbeaten during the second weekend as the team beat Brentwood 6-3 after going 2-0 down and then polished off Becontree 8-1.

Over the two weekends, Gowlett won nine out of ten, losing out only to former Essex men's champion Kevin Caldon, while Hayden lost two and Kerns three.

In the Braintree League there was a triumph of a different stamp for Rayne C.

After 15 consecutive defeats on the table (one match was conceded), they at last posted their first victory.

And an important win it was too. It came against Sible Hedingham, the team one place and one point ahead of them and so lifted them off the foot of the table for the first time.

It was also a personal milestone for Keith Martin. He steered the team to a 6-4 victory with his first unbeaten evening of the season.

There was a result of some importance at the top end of the table too where third-placed Netts Argyle beat the team just above them, Rayne A, 8-2 to move within two points of their opponents.

The duo of Paul Davison and Kevin Gowlett played together for the third successive match and there is little doubt that if they continue to turn out regularly, Argyle will wrap up the runners-up medals.

Whether they can catch leaders Liberal A is another matter. Their 7-3 win over Black Notley A kept them 30 points ahead.

This match staged a re-run of the encounter earlier in the season when 18-year-old Scott Dowsett brought off only the fifth win over Steve Kerns in 13 years.

It looked as if he was about to repeat the dose when he won the first two games. But Kerns has not stayed at the top so long without a bit of fight in him and he clawed back the next two games before a tense final game went to 11-11 before Kerns clinched the final two points for a revenge victory.

Liberal's B team had a win by the same score, in their case against a two-man Netts Phoenix. Barry Pritchard won both his singles.

Rayne's D and B teams faced each other and ended up sharing the points. Adam Buxton took three singles for the D team.

In division two Notley C's Matt Wallace was kept busy with two matches in three days.

He turned out as a reserve for the B team and took all three singles to help his temporary teammates to a draw with the club's D team and two days later won twice in the C team's 6-4 defeat by their E team.

He scored an excellent win over Guy McKenzie but found Andrew Huckson one step too far.

Leaders Felsted RBL A put another difficult hurdle behind them when they overcame Liberal C 7-3. Gareth Joice was undefeated.

In another Rayne club battle the E team just crept ahead of the F team 6-4, despite three wins for the F team's Dave Marsh, while three wins for Kevin Saunders enabled Nomads to gain a draw with Rayne G.

Like their C team, Rayne G went into the match without a win and at 5-2 it looked as though their time had come. Nomads had other ideas and took the final three games, including Saunders' win over Tony Stredder in which he had to come back from two games down.

Division three leaders White Lions continued their habit of doing just enough to keep their hundred per cent win record.

For the third match running they ran out 6-4 winners, this time against Notley F. This time it was Adam Purslow's turn to steady the ship by winning his three singles.

Joe Nourse's undulating form continued its recent upward trend when he took his three singles to help Netts Jetts to an 8-2 win over Rayne I while Notley H's win over Rayne H was their first 10-0 of the season.

In the handicap knockout cup, early results showed a tendency for higher-ranked teams to overcome those below them.

Second division Notley C had a 6-3 win over Jetts, who gave a taste of competitive action to two of their less experienced players. Jack Gooden won two sets and Jake Peach one.

In all-second division clashes, Notley E overcame Rayne G 8-1 while Rayne F came from 4-3 down to beat Nomads 5-4.

Third division Rayne I bucked the trend by beating Notley D, from division two, 6-3. Roger Hasler put his league form behind him to register three fairly comfortable victories.

This weekend sees the league's annual individual championships which promises another head-on clash between old rivals Paul Davison and Peter Hayden who have had sole possession of the men's singles trophy between them over the past seven years.

Hayden won the title last season when Davison did not enter but the Netts player won the title in four of the five previous years.

They will, however, both have to be wary of No.3 seed Kevin Gowlett who will only need to find his league form to trouble both of them.

Davison and Gowlett will be hoping to regain the men's doubles title they won four times in a row and which Gowlett also won last season in partnership with Patrick Gilbert.

Hayden, who won the title three times in the 1990s with Terry Dowsett, will be hoping to stop them alongside Terry's son Scott.

Hayden is also seeded to retain the veterans' singles title he has won six times in the last seven years. Both Gowlett and Kerns will be hoping to wrest it off him.

Gilbert will be scarcely troubled in regaining the boys' singles title that he won in 2012 but it is in the other junior events that most of the interest lies.

For the first time the league is able to run a cadet girls' singles as well as an under-11 singles. A junior girls' singles will also be held for the first time since 2005.

The event is being held Black Notley Community Association on Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday, with the finals on Sunday evening, starting at 6.30.

Paul Davison made it five wins in five final appearances when he won the men's singles at the Braintree Table Tennis League individual tournament on Sunday.

Like his last two wins, success in the final came against old rival Peter Hayden, who has also won the event five times.

But this was the toughest yet.

He had beaten Hayden in four games four years ago and in 2012, although he started hesitantly, he stormed through the final two games 11-2, 11-2.

This time Hayden stretched him all the way to 11-9 in the final game before succumbing.

At the start an entirely different outcome looked possible.

Hayden set out to deny his more nimble opponent the opportunities to play his natural attacking game and subdued him to the extent that he found himself two games up.

But Davison, whose form had fluctuated during the day, finally found the form that has brought him the trophy in the past as he visibly moved up a gear, pounced on everything and drove Hayden back to win the next two games.

The final had one more twist as Hayden moved into a 3-0 lead in the final game. But Davison took the next three points and then edged ahead to take the title by two points.

Earlier Davison had struggled to overcome a dogged Keith Martin before surging through Scott Dowsett in the quarter final.

In the semi final it was his own teammate Kevin Gowlett, unbeaten in the league this season, whose resistance subsided after two close games, Davison winning 14-12, 11-13, 11-3, 11-5.

Hayden had overcome another old rival Steve Kerns in the other semi final after losing the first game, and then repeated the dose in the final of the veterans' singles which he won in three straight games.

Davison and Gowlett teamed up to win the men's doubles for the fifth time in six years – a sixth in a row for Gowlett, who won with Patrick Gilbert in Davison's absence last year.

They faced Hayden and Scott Dowsett, whose father Terry had won the title with Hayden twice in the 1990s.

The younger Dowsett was not overawed by the company but their opponents had just that little bit extra and won 11-8, 11-9, 11-8.

It was a tournament of very few unexpected results – Steve Pennell's win over No. 5 seed John Cleasby was the only unscheduled result in the men's singles – but unseeded players made their mark in the over 50s singles and the restricted singles.

In the over 50s, it was No. 2 seed Pennell's turn to be on the other side of a seeding failure, when he lost out to Mike Johnston. Johnston, whose unusual penholder style offered rare variety to finals night, found the brick wall that is Ian Whiteside one hurdle too far in the final.

Kevin Saunders came from an unseeded berth to reach the final of the restricted singles. He knocked out No. 2 seed Guy McKenzie in the semi final, but found McKenzie's teammate Andrew Huckson a different proposition in the final.

Both players favoured a patient waiting game but it was Huckson's quick whippy loop that was the telling factor.

Whiteside also took home the division one singles trophy that he had won four times previously.

League newcomer Hector Rogers was the latest to founder on his clubmate's solid defence. Although he utilised a solid probing game on both wings and stretched the final to four games, he did not quite have enough to find a way through.

The handicap singles made a rare appearance on finals night and produced an absorbing encounter between first division player Roy Hooper and Victor Chan, from division two, who had eight start up to 21.

In a best-of-three, the two players took one game each, but all seemed lost for Chan when Hooper won the first eight points of the third game to level the scores.

But Chan got going at this point and stretched out a lead of 16-12. Hooper then had to be at his most patient to claw back the points and finally crawled over the line with much relief at 21-19.

The junior events were all played before finals night and, encouragingly, produced one of the highest entries for many years, almost exclusively made up of players who attend league coaching sessions but have not yet made their debuts in the league.

Patrick Gilbert, an established first division player, had no difficulty regaining the junior boys' singles that he won in 2012, but it was the runner-up in that event, William Bettley, who took home most of the trophies.

In addition to that runners-up medal, he won both the cadet boys and the under-11 singles and joined his younger brother Alex to win the junior doubles.

Alex was the runner-up in the under-11 event while Jamie Brooks took second place in the cadets event.

Brooks and Ollie Ledwith were runners-up in the doubles.

The girls' singles, included for the first time since 2005, went to Mia Charles, whose mother, Sarah Davison, had won the title in 1991 and 1995, the year she also won the ladies' singles.

Her final opponent Lydia Jackson turned the tables when the two faced each other in the cadet girls' singles.

Although Charles won the junior singles 11-8, 11-7, 11-3, Jackson triumphed 13-11, 9-11, 2-11, 11-8, 11-5 in the cadet event.

Dave Parker retained his division two singles title with a win over teammate Victor Chan in the final, while Helen Barnett was successful in the division three singles, a round-robin event in which Andy Laws finished second.

The handicap doubles, with partners drawn on the day, went to Chris High, winner two years ago, and league newcomer Matt Brooks. They beat Mark Brown and Keith Martin in the final.

Finals night results: men's singles: Paul Davison beat Peter Hayden 8-11, 5-11, 11-6, 11-7, 11-9. Semi finals: Davison beat Kevin Gowlett 14-12, 11-13, 11-3, 11-5; Hayden beat Steve Kerns 10-12, 11-9, 11-5, 12-10.

Men's doubles: Davison and Gowlett beat Hayden and Scott Dowsett 11-8, 11-9, 11-8.

Veterans' singles: Hayden beat Kerns 14-12, 11-7, 11-6

Over 50s singles: Ian Whiteside beat Mike Johnston 11-9, 11-6, 8-11, 11-9.

Division one singles: Whiteside beat Hector Rogers 11-6, 11-9, 7-11, 11-6.

Handicap singles: Roy Hooper beat Victor Chan (+8) 21-19, 15-21, 21-19.

Restricted singles: Andrew Huckson beat Kevin Saunders 11-5, 11-7, 17-15.

Umpires were Arthur Clark and Lyndon Griffiths, the former league secretary who returned to pastures old after moving to Kent last year.

Ron Fosker
tennis

23.2.14

table

Netts Argyle have opened up the title race in the Braintree Table Tennis League with a thumping win over the previously undefeated leaders Liberal A.

Argyle's twin spearhead of Paul Davison and Kevin Gowlett again did the damage and in the absence of their No.1 Peter Hayden, Liberal were only able to muster two sets.

But as the game came between Hayden's defeats by Gowlett in the Chelmsford League's veterans' singles and by Davison in the Braintree League men's singles, it is possible his presence would have made only minimal difference.

Scott Dowsett and Simon Webber both managed to beat John Cleasby – 11-9 in the fifth game in Webber's case – but Argyle took the rest to move six points closer to the table top.

It could get even closer. Davison has confirmed he expects to play more regularly from now on and Hayden is planning to rest his chronic wrist injury.

Both teams have nine matches to play, including a final one against each other. It could get interesting.

Having dropped points when Davison was not available, Argyle actually remain behind Rayne A who boosted their tally with a 10-0 win over Liberal B.

Champions Netts Phoenix also won, 6-4 with two players against Rayne C. Maria Boulton won three, Graham Farmer two and they took the doubles between them.

Rayne C's defeat means that they sink back to the bottom just a week after moving away from that position for the first time.

Sible Hedingham moved back above them after recording their second win of the season.

They had an excellent victory over Rayne B, 29 points ahead of them. Richard Jennings won his three singles while Mark Brown had good wins over Ryan Pitt and Dean Andrews.

Rayne D started the week three points behind Black Notley A in mid table, but reversed the positions by beating them 8-2. Adam Buxton and Brian Riedling were unbeaten.

There was a mixed set of results in the handicap cup second round.

Four teams had wins over opponents ranked below them while two others beat those above them.

There was one walkover, while the match between two teams separated only by a handful of points in the middle of division two produced the closest encounter of the round.

Notley A are the only division one team left in the handicap cup after their 7-1 win over Notley H although it was Ranleigh Attwood, promoted from division three for the cup, who led the way with three singles wins.

All three Liberal C players contributed to their 5-3 win over White Lions while division three side Felsted RBL B overcame division two's Rayne E 7-2. Andy Laws was unbeaten for Felsted.

There were some excellent performances by Braintree League players in the Chelmsford League's individual championships, notably a win for Kevin Gowlett in the veterans' singles and for Steve Kerns in the men's doubles.

Gowlett beat men's singles finalist George Reeves 13-11 in the fifth game in the veterans' final after overcoming Peter Hayden 11-8 in the fifth in the semi final.

Kerns, who had made his mark in the veterans' singles by knocking out the holder and top seed Dave Cole, chalked up his first win in the men's doubles since 1995.

He was paired this time with former Braintree League player Gary Young. After winning the veterans' doubles earlier in the tournament, they added the men's event with a win at 12-10 in the fifth in the final over No.1 seeds Steve Joslin, the men's singles winner, and Michael Andrews.

Liberal A's Scott Dowsett took home the under 21 trophy, coming from two games down to beat the 2011 winner Brandon Crouchman, while Liberal C's Neil Freeman won the division three singles and Notley B's Victor Chan was successful in the division five singles.

tennis

Twenty-year-old Trelawney Joice had a debut to remember in division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

In the first league appearance of his career, he overcame one of the division's top players in the match between the top two teams, White Lions and Felsted RBL B.

It was a match in which Lions retained their unbeaten record and one in which all went fairly smoothly for them to start with as they moved into a 7-1 lead.

Then Chris Butler got the better of Clare Johnson before the final set of the evening produced the performance of the week, a win for Joice over Steve Willis.

It was no scrape either. He won 14-12, 11-7, 6-11, 11-7.

Following their 7-3 win over Black Notley H the previous week and Felsted's draw with Rayne H, it increased Lions' lead to 20 points.

Felsted welcomed back Jenny Thomson for only her second league outing of the season in the Rayne H match and she quickly got down to business by winning her three singles and sharing in a doubles win with Dean Wood.

Notley I continue to move up the table after Gary Jackson's return to the game. He and Jill Canning won three each in the 9-1 win over Rayne I, where Tim Townsend had a good win over Helen Barnett, and then, with Matt Brooks in for Barnett, they beat Netts Jetts 7-3.

Townsend was on form again in Rayne I's matches against Notley's G and H teams where he won four out of five. His team beat the two-man H team 6-4 and drew with the G team.

Notley G's John Breen, whose results have been below his normal standard this season, found his form again against Rayne H, but despite his three singles, it was the home team who emerged with a 6-4 win.

Much the same could be said of Jetts' Joe Nourse, but he has run into a bit of form recently and continued the good work by winning both his singles against Notley F's two-man team. Jetts won 6-4.

Felsted A continue to lead the way in division two but Liberal C have moved closer after catching up on their match in hand.

Felsted had wins of 9-1 over Notley D, in which Ashley Butler added Sean Clift to his growing list of impressive conquests, and 7-3 over Rayne F.

Liberal C meanwhile drew with Notley D but had wins of 7-3 over Nomads and 8-2 against Rayne F.

Cliff's three singles were the stumbling block in the Notley D match.

Ian Wallace was another player to have a week to remember when he registered his first unbeaten evening of the season in Notley C's 7-3 win over Rayne G. He and Oliver Hicks won the seven sets between them.

In Notley C's next match, a draw against Nomads, Hicks and Matt Wallace won two each while Kevin Saunders and Richard Kemp replied for Nomads.

Rayne E remained in the promotion hunt with wins of 6-4 over promotion rivals Notley E and 8-2 over Rayne G.

Vicki Stredder returned to action after a lengthy absence and won the two sets for Rayne G but she could not quite find a way past Dave Miller after five games.

Andrew Huckson was unbeaten for Notley E, as he was in their next match, a 6-4 win over Notley B.

Rayne F can lay claim to one of the wins of the week. They started their match against Notley B 12 points adrift of their opponents but recorded an unexpectedly heavy 8-2 win in a fixture they had lost 6-4 in the first phase of the season.

Sible Hedingham took a major stride towards saving their first division status in the Braintree Table Tennis League when they recorded a stunning 8-2 win over Black Notley A, a team 21 points ahead of them.

Hedingham were boosted by the inclusion of Richard Jennings, for his eighth game of the season, but it was team regular Mark Brown, who has not missed a match, who caught the eye with three wins.

He had to work hard to overcome Gordon Fairchild in five games. He then got the better of reserve Guy McKenzie in three straight games and finally dealt with Chris Parr in four.

Jennings also won three. He won twice in straight games but was stretched to five by Parr.

Roy Hooper chipped in with a win over Fairchild and he and Brown won the doubles without dropping a game.

It was Hedingham's second win in a row, after success the previous week against Rayne B and it takes them six points clear of Rayne C, who lost 7-3 to Liberal B.

Rayne C, who had climbed above Hedingham two weeks earlier, stretched four sets to five games against Liberal B but could only win one of them, Keith Martin's win at 11-9 in the final game against Barry Pritchard.

Martin also beat Mike Johnston while Richard Whiteside beat Pritchard but Robin Armstrong's three singles saw the Liberal club home safely.

At the top of the division, Netts Argyle pulled level with Rayne A in second place after a 7-3 win over Rayne D in which Paul Davison and Kevin Gowlett were unbeaten.

Adam Buxton and Hector Rogers won one singles each for Rayne D and recorded an excellent doubles win over Gowlett and Patrick Gilbert, the league men's doubles champions in 2013.

Rayne A meanwhile lost 7-3 to league leaders Liberal A where Scott Dowsett and Peter Hayden remained unbeaten but Jon Hill, Steve Pennell and Carl Johnson all beat Simon Webber.

James Hicks was undefeated for Netts Phoenix, who drew with Rayne B.

In veterans division two of the Essex League, Braintree B finished their programme with a 5-4 defeat at the hands of Burnham B, which was just enough to retain their place in the division, in fourth place out of five.

Robin Armstrong, Adam Buxton and Steve Pennell all won one singles and Buxton and Pennell won their doubles set.

PICTURE STORY



Sixteen-year-old Ashley Butler is this year's winner of the Braintree Table Tennis League's Martin Bawden Award for service or achievement.

The award recognises Ashley's dramatic improvement when he was asked to play for Felsted RBL A in division two after a season in division three in which he won only seven of his 30 singles.

Already this season his average is above that even though he is playing in a higher sphere.

Presenting the award, league chairman Ron Fosker said:

"Ashley was thrown in at the deep end after a modest season in division three last year. Yet he's thrived at the higher level.

"He has brought off some excellent wins over established and experienced players.

"And, as things stand, he is currently in with a very good chance of ending up with a division two winners medal as well.

"We like to encourage junior talent and Ashley has shown promise, endeavour and no little courage. That's why he is a worthy winner of this year's award."



Presentations were also made to Abbie Kirtley, who won the most promising girl award.



To James Bettley, who was chosen as the most promising boy.



And to Charlene Evans, who won the coaching award.



After 16 matches White Lions' unbeaten run has come to an end in division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

The absence of their leading player Adam Purslow had much to do with that, but credit must also go to the disparate collection of individuals who lined up against them.

Officially their 6-4 defeat was by Black Notley G but in fact consisted of one player from each of Notley's G, H and I teams.

Matt Carter, Steve Baines and Jill Canning each won twice. Carter lost to Clare Johnson while Baines and Canning lost to Steve Willis.

It could have been even more decisive. Three of Lions' four wins went the full five games.

Lions still look unlikely to be caught. Their nearest rivals Felsted RBL B could not take advantage when they were held to a draw by Notley G – their normal team this time, with Carter unbeaten – and restricted to a 6-4 win by Netts Jetts.

Jetts also had an 8-2 win over Notley H where Chris Hillman was unbeaten.

Notley I are now the club's highest placed team in the division after their 8-2 win over the F team while Rayne I also continued to prove pre-season ratings inaccurate by staying well clear of their H team, after beating them 7-3.

Two records came to an end in Felsted A's 6-4 win over Notley E in division two.

Ian Butler and Gareth Joice's run of 13 doubles victories in a row was brought to an end by Andrew Huckson and Guy McKenzie 11-5, 11-4, 11-7.

But Huckson suffered in the singles. He had gone 20 sets without defeat when he lost to Butler by the surprisingly convincing scores of 11-7, 11-4, 11-3.

Liberal C climbed one rung to second place after a draw with Notley C, but they had to contend with a top-form Warren Baines, who took his three singles.

Aad Kwakkelstein suffered only his second defeat of the season in Nomads' 7-3 defeat by Rayne E.

He was downed by Dave Miller, and in keeping with the other run-breakers, it was a comfortable win of 11-7, 11-4, 11-8.

Keith Flowers was unbeaten in Notley D's draw with Rayne F while Notley's B team took all ten against Rayne G.

Netts Argyle crept one point ahead of Rayne A in second place in division one after an 8-2 win over Sible Hedingham while Rayne beat their own C team 7-3.

Liberal A remained well clear at the top after their 8-2 win over Rayne D whose points came from Richard Storey's win over Ian Hayden and Adam Buxton's over Simon Webber.

Notley A ended a run of six successive defeats when they overcame ailing champions Netts Phoenix 7-3. It was Phoenix's fourth successive match with only two players.

Five sets went to five games and the remaining five to four in Liberal B's match with Rayne B. Fittingly the match ended in a draw and no player either won everything or lost everything.

Mike Johnston for Liberal and Ryan Pitt and Peter Hance for Rayne won two singles.

Liberal B are one of those unpredictable teams that make life interesting in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

They have three players of roughly equal standard who take it in turns to be on good form or, occasionally, not good form.

Against Black Notley A in division one, Mike Johnston was the man who had all the answers, taking his three singles to help his team to a 7-3 win.

He was to the fore the previous week as well, but only a few matches further back he was outscored by both his teammates, Robin Armstrong and Barry Pritchard.

In their 21 matches, Armstrong has been top scorer or joint top scorer ten times, ahead of Johnston's nine and Pritchard's seven.

But Armstrong shares with Pritchard the distinction of also being his team's lowest or equal lowest scorer on 11 occasions, compared with Johnson's nine.

In their last five matches, Johnston has outscored his colleagues twice, while Armstrong and Pritchard have done so once each. On the other occasion, there was no argument. They lost 10-0.

It has all added up to a middle-table placing and a promise of more to come next year.

In the matches affecting the top and bottom of the table, little has changed.

Leaders Liberal A registered a comfortable 9-1 win over Sible Hedingham where a good win for Richard Jennings over Scott Dowsett prevented the whitewash.

Rayne A climbed back into second place with a 9-1 win over Rayne D while Netts Argyle, who had overtaken them the previous week, could only manage 7-3 against Netts Phoenix.

Rayne C remain rooted to the bottom after their 8-2 defeat by Rayne B.

There was little change either in division two where the top three had comfortable wins.

Felsted RBL A's 9-1 victory over Rayne G was notable only for the fact that Rayne's single win came from reserve Steve Siggs and also that Felsted did not play their recognised doubles pairing of Ian Butler and Gareth Joice for the first time.

After their long unbeaten run came to an end the previous week, Joice stepped down to allow Ashley Butler to join his father and the new partnership duly won.

Second-placed Liberal C also dropped only one set – Ted Sims’ win over Martin Wells – in beating Rayne F, while third-placed Rayne E slipped up twice against Notley C. Mo Hardy and Paul Wellington won all their singles for Rayne but missed out on the doubles.

The other two fixtures in the division both ended in draws. Andrew Huckson was unbeaten for Notley E against the club’s D team while Kevin Saunders took his three singles for Nomads against Notley B.

The one division where life at the top is getting more interesting is division three.

White Lions still rule the roost – they beat Rayne H 7-3 with Rayne’s three wins all coming from Siggs – but it was the match between the teams in second and third places that has livened things up.

Felsted B started seven points ahead of Netts Jetts, but the Earls Colne side reduced that gap to one with an 8-2 victory over their rivals.

Joe Nourse was undefeated while Sam Johnson and Chris Hillman lost only to Chris Butler.

Notley’s I and H teams drew 5-5.

Rayne C have climbed away from the bottom of division one of the Braintree Table Tennis League after overcoming a team who beat them 8-2 in the first part of the season.

The same six players were in action when Rayne took on Black Notley A, yet the turnaround in form was remarkable.

Simon Fleming, who had lost all three singles in the first meeting, was in outstanding form. He recorded his first unbeaten evening of the season, indeed the first time he had won more than one.

Richard Whiteside beat Laurie Sapiano, who had got the better of him first time around, while Keith Martin beat Sapiano and Chris Parr.

Parr, who won all three last time, won only one and was outscored for only the third time this season by teammate Gordon Fairchild, who won twice.

Whiteside and Martin completed the picture with a win in the doubles to produce a 7-3 scoreline that takes them three points clear of Sible Hedingham.

At the top of the table leaders Liberal A were forced to bring in a reserve against Netts Phoenix, but still came away with a 6-4 win, the same score by which Netts Argyle beat Liberal B.

Rayne A advanced a couple of points closer by beating their own B team 8-2.

Hector Rogers was called up from the D team to help them out and did more than that. He won his three singles while regulars Jon Hill and Steve Pennell lost to Ryan Pitt.

Rayne remain 23 points behind Liberal with only five matches to play.

Rayne E and Liberal C, the two likely challengers for the runners-up spot in division two, came head-to-head and shared the points between them.

It ended a run of four successive wins for Rayne and was Liberal's third draw in four matches.

Mo Hardy was unbeaten for Rayne.

Andrew Huckson ended Dave Marsh's winning run of 15 sets in Notley E's 7-3 win over Rayne F.

It was revenge for Huckson, who had lost to Marsh on the previous two occasions they had met. But he had to work hard before winning 5-11, 11-9, 3-11, 14-12, 11-4.

Notley's C and B teams remain locked together in mid table and it was the C team who came out on top when the two met for the third time with one win each behind them.

They won 6-4 but none of their players could do anything about a top-form Victor Chan, arguably the most improved player of the season.

Notley's D team ended a run of three consecutive draws by carrying on to seven against Rayne G. Sean Clift was unbeaten.

After doggedly climbing the table following an unexpectedly poor start, Netts Jetts have at last made it to second place in division three.

They had climbed to within a point of Felsted RBL B by beating them 8-2 the previous week, but this time moved above them after another 8-2 win, this time over Notley G.

It was their third successive 8-2 win and each time a different member of their team has remained unbeaten. This time it was the turn of Sam Johnson.

Felsted found Gary Jackson an impossible hurdle against Notley I and were only able to draw.

Leaders White Lions sailed on serenely with an 8-2 win over lowly Rayne I but received a jolt when Steve Willis, eighth in the division's individual averages, could not find a way past Roger Hasler, a player with only five wins behind him all season.

Hasler triumphed 11-9, 11-8, 7-11, 10-12, 11-9.

Two teams from Black Notley and one each from Rayne and Felsted will contest the handicap cup semifinals.

The Notley A team that beat Felsted B bore little resemblance to the A team in the league. Only Gordon Fairchild remained, with backing from division three players Matt Brooks and Ranleigh Attwood.

Two singles each from Fairchild and Brooks and one from Attwood were enough to see them through.

Notley's C and E teams came up against each other and an unbeaten hand from Matt Wallace helped them to a 5-3 win.

Felsted A also promoted two of their third division players for their match against Rayne I, and both came up trumps. Trelawney Joice and Chris Butler were both unbeaten in the 7-2 win.

Rayne F make up the quartet after their 5-1 win over Liberal C.

Seventeen-year-old Matt Wallace turned in the performance of the week in the Braintree Table Tennis League when he took all three singles against division two leaders Felsted RBL A.

In his second season at this level, Wallace has had a mixed set of results so far, but showed his considerable promise on this occasion against some formidable opponents.

Unexpectedly, it was Ashley Butler, Felsted's No.3 player, who gave him the hardest time. He was leading two games to one before Wallace won the final two 11-5, 11-5.

Gareth Joice, a player with an 86 per cent win record, fell in four games while Ian Butler, with an average of 79, perished in three straight games 13-11, 11-7, 11-8.

Felsted's run towards the divisional title was only slightly dented, however, as they ran out 6-4 winners to add to their earlier 6-4 win over Nomads, where Joice won his three singles, including an excellent win over Aad Kwakkelstein.

Black Notley E moved back into second place after their 8-2 win over a two-person Liberal C, whom they leapfrogged as a result.

Rayne E were held up by Victor Chan in their push for the runners-up spot. Chan won his three singles to help Notley B to a draw.

Richard Kemp was unbeaten for Nomads against Notley D but Notley took six of the other seven sets to consign the Cornard side to their 11th successive match without a win.

Rayne F climbed above them as a result of their 9-1 win over a two-man Rayne G. Peter Taylor and Dave Marsh were unbeaten.

The main story of the week in division one was a success at last for Rob Stannard.

Stannard, who won 17 sets last season, has found things tough this season, but recorded his first win in his 16th match for Rayne D against Sible Hedingham.

He had to come back from two games to one down against Graham Cannon, but just crept over the line at 11-9 in the fifth.

Rayne won 8-2.

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Rayne won 8-2.

Another surprising blank spell came to an end when league champions Netts Phoenix ended a run of four matches without a win by beating Rayne D 8-2.

They were helped by the appearance of Kevin Gray for only the sixth time this season.

Three days after his performance against Felsted, Matt Wallace added another notch to his bat handle when he played up as a reserve for Notley A and recorded an excellent win over the wily Dean Andrews.

It was not enough to prevent a 7-3 win for Rayne B.

There were comfortable wins for the three top teams, Liberal A 8-2 over their own B team, Rayne A 8-2 against Sible Hedingham and Netts Argyle 9-1 over Rayne C.

In division three Netts Jetts recorded their fourth consecutive 8-2 win this time over Rayne H and to do that means someone has to beat the experienced Steve Siggs.

It was Chris Hillman who had that honour, and in straight games too.

Jetts' hold on second place was strengthened by Felsted B's inability to do more than draw against Notley F. Vernon King was unbeaten for Notley.

Notley I came up against a top-form Matt Carter in their match against Notley G. Carter won his three singles but the I team took the rest.

Rayne I played twice in two days and were on both ends of a 6-4 scoreline.

First they lost to Notley F, but the following day got the better of Notley H.

Tim Townsend won his three singles against the F team while Brian Dixon won one, but against Notley H it was the other way round.

After looking virtually impregnable all season, White Lions' storming run in division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League has at last come to a halt.

Netts Jetts became the first team to beat the three-strong pairing of Clare Johnson, Adam Purslow and Steve Willis – and they did so by a punishing 8-2.

Lions had won all their matches apart from one where they were only able to field two players.

Jetts on the other hand won only eight of their first 16 matches before they suddenly clicked into gear.

They have now won their last five – all 8-2.

Chris Hillman and Joe Nourse were both unbeaten in singles, and won the doubles between them, while Sam Johnson added the notable scalp of Adam Purslow, Lions' leading point scorer.

Jetts have left it too late to challenge for the title, but they are now nestled in nicely in second place, ahead of Felsted RBL B, who beat Black Notley H 7-3. Chris Butler was unbeaten for Felsted.

Notley's G and F teams drew with each other while their I team became only the second victims of Rayne H.

Ian Rubens, Chris High and Barry Mouser all won twice to lead them to a 6-4 victory.

Second division leaders Felsted A dismissed one of their closest challengers, Rayne E, 7-3, but what was most noteworthy was that the match represented the first time Ashley Butler has outscored his father Ian.

Ashley beat both Dave Miller and Mo Hardy while Ian won just once.

Notley E strengthened their hold on second place with a 9-1 win over Rayne G while Liberal C were the latest team to founder against Victor Chan, whose form goes from strength to strength.

He took his three singles for Notley B including a nailbiter against Gareth Davies in which he led 9-5 and 10-7 in the fifth game before being pegged back to deuce. Undeterred, he produced two further smashes to win the set.

Liberal won six of the other seven sets.

Oliver Hicks was unbeaten as Notley C beat their own D team 7-3

It was a notable match too for Bruce Wickham, who won two singles for the first time this season, including an excellent 11-6, 15-13, 11-4 win over Warren Baines.

Division one leaders Liberal A had to call on a reserve against Rayne C, but it did them little harm. Robin Armstrong, borrowed from the B team, lost to Richard Whiteside, but Liberal won the rest.

Second-placed Rayne A also had to bring in a reserve against Notley A, in their case from division three, and with Steve Kerns among the opposition, they probably did all they could in gaining a draw.

Ian Whiteside and Steve Pennell won two singles each and combined to beat Kerns and Chris Parr in the doubles at 12-10 in the fifth game.

Hector Rogers won his three singles in Rayne D's 6-4 defeat by Liberal B while Sible Hedingham put up strong resistance against a full-strength Netts Phoenix team before going down 6-4.

Netts Argyle's two-man team were held to a draw by Rayne B in a match that marked Kevin Gowlett's 18th unbeaten evening this season.

He needs to survive just two more to become the first person since Kerns in 2006 to go through the season unbeaten.

He will face his final test next week when Peter Hayden could be among the opposition.

Liberal A are the new Braintree Table Tennis League champions – for the first time in their 37-year history.

The squad of Ian and Peter Hayden, Scott Dowsett and Simon Webber now have 204 points, 28 points clear of their nearest rivals, with only 20 points still to play for.

Their total is already good enough to have won the title last year.

They moved out of reach of both Netts Argyle and Rayne A with a 9-1 win over a two-man Rayne B.

The B team's Robin Armstrong was again called into action and added a win over Dean Andrews to the double wins scored by Peter Hayden and Scott Dowsett.

Andrews almost had his moment of glory when he stretched Hayden to 11-9 in the fifth game.

Argyle and Rayne A are now level in second place on 176 points after Argyle's 10-0 win over Black Notley A and Rayne's 8-2 win over Netts Phoenix.

The battle to avoid relegation gets no clearer.

Rayne C still foot the table, but their 6-4 defeat by Rayne D brings them to within one point of Sible Hedingham, who lost 8-2 to Liberal B.

For Rayne C, Keith Martin won twice, Dave Moles once and they took the doubles between them.

Felsted RBL A continued their cruise towards the division two title with a 9-1 win over Notley B.

Victor Chan's recent run of wins – he has been undefeated in his last three matches – was brought to a halt by both Gareth Joice and Ian Butler.

Andrew Huckson's record also received an unexpected dent. He was unbeaten in four matches and has lost only once – to Butler – in his last ten.

Aad Kwakkelstein, with only three defeats behind him, may have been expected to give him some difficulty in Notley E's encounter with Nomads, but he survived that in straight games.

Instead it was Kevin Saunders, beaten by Huckson in this season's restricted singles final, who found a way past him with the curious scores 1-11, 12-10, 3-11, 15-13, 13-11.

So Huckson actually won 12 more points than Saunders – but not when it mattered.

Nomads won the match 8-2.

Rayne E played two matches in three days and did not help their chances of finishing second in either of them.

They drew with Notley D and then lost 7-3 to Notley C. Warren Baines, Matt Wallace and Oliver Hicks all won twice for Notley C and Paul Wellington twice for Rayne E.

Notley C were less successful the previous evening when they lost 8-2 to Rayne F. Dave Marsh and Ted Sims were unbeaten.

The third division title is still very much in White Lions' hands but it remains the closest of the three.

Lions added seven points to their total against Notley I, but the evening was a triumph for Notley's Jill Canning, who beat all three of them.

Felsted B's hopes of the runners-up medals suffered a serious blow when they lost 7-3 to Rayne I, for whom Tim Townsend was unbeaten.

The Notley H v G match was effectively H v H as two H players were playing up for the G team. The real H team won 7-3.

And at the bottom Rayne H are stirring. After only one win in their first 19 matches, they have now won two in a row. Notley F were their latest victims, by 6-4.

Felsted RBL A have clinched the division two title in the Braintree Table Tennis League – but not in the way they would have wished.

They secured the necessary points against Liberal C, the team most likely to finish second, but they were not able to celebrate with a win.

Liberal took the match 7-3, but the three points took Felsted beyond the reach of their opponents, as well as Black Notley E and Rayne E.

The match was a personal triumph for Garry Fryatt, who has been somewhat in the shadow of teammate Gareth Davies this season, but for the first time managed to outscore him.

Fryatt won all three singles – two in straight games and the other comfortably in four - while Davies lost to Gareth Joice.

Davies won his other two singles and Jon Fieldsend, called up for the first time this season, won once.

For Felsted, Joice won his other two singles. Ashley Butler beat Fieldsend but father Ian recorded his first blank of the season

But it was enough to give them the title after finishing third last season and third in division three the season before.

Second place remains up for grabs and Rayne E enhanced their chances of taking it with a 7-3 win over their own F team, thanks largely to three wins from Mo Hardy.

Notley E were forced to bring in a reserve for the second match in a row and fell 6-4 to their own C team.

The C team's Warren Baines was unbeaten, including wins over Andrew Huckson and Guy McKenzie, neither of whom are overcome easily.

Baines also played up for the B team against the D team on the same evening and remained undefeated there too. The match ended 5-5.

Down at the bottom Rayne G have stirred.

After 24 matches without a win, they ensured their season did not end without reward when they overcame Nomads 7-3.

They have reserve Steve Siggs to thank. Playing up from division three where he has been grazing quietly in his comeback year after a 30-year absence from the game, Siggs won his three singles.

The foot of the table also held the interest in division one where the bottom two met.

It was a must-win for Rayne C who started a point behind their opponents Sible Hedingham.

And win they did, 6-4, to move one point ahead.

That was despite the efforts of Hedingham's Mark Brown, who had one of his best evenings of the season in taking his three singles.

New champions Liberal A could only field two players and were held to a draw by Notley A while Rayne A went a long way towards claiming second place by beating Netts Argyle 7-3 after the two teams had started the match level on points.

The match marked a first defeat of the season for men's singles champion Paul Davison, whose run of 33 sets without defeat was ended by Kuan Lim 4-11, 13-11, 11-6, 3-11, 11-9.

Retiring champions Netts Phoenix turned out one of their strongest teams and took all ten sets off Liberal B, while Rayne B beat their own D team 8-2.

In division three White Lions continued their march to the title with an 8-2 win over Notley F while Netts Jetts broke their run of five 8-2 wins by winning the next one 10-0. Rayne I were the victims.

John Breen found the form that has largely been missing this season in taking his three singles to help Notley G to a 7-3 win over Felsted B.

The league's three cup finals – team, restricted and handicap – will be held at Black Notley Community Association on Thursday next week (May 8) at 7.30. Spectators are welcome.

Combatants are as yet unknown at the time of writing as the semi finals are being played this week.

The semi final line-up is:

Team: Rayne D v Liberal C; Rayne A v Netts Argyle.

Restricted: Nomads v Rayne G; Notley D v Notley F.

Handicap: Felsted A v Rayne F; Notley C v Notley A.

After leading the table from the start, White Lions have won division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

They put themselves out of reach of their pursuers with a draw in their final match against Black Notley H.

It was a low key ending, but they had done enough in their earlier matches in which they won 21 out of 23.

It means an immediate return to division two for the Hedingham-based team who were relegated last year.

They turned out a reserve for their final match and found Adam Clift in excellent form for their opponents. He won his three singles for Notley H, who also had a 7-3 win in a rearranged game against Notley I.

Netts Jetts finished with a flourish, a 9-1 win against Notley I – a good win for Matt Brooks over Sam Johnson preventing the whitewash - but they ended up 16 points short of the top spot.

Felsted RBL B also finished strongly, their 9-1 win over Rayne H ensuring third place. Chris Butler and Jenny Thomson were unbeaten and newcomer Arthur Geen started his league career with two wins.

Rayne I completed their season with a 7-3 win over Notley G where all three players, Tim Townsend, Brian Dixon and Roger Hasler, won twice.

The fight to avoid relegation from division one went to the wire and in the end it was Rayne's B team who did their C team a favour.

Rayne C lost their final match 6-3 to Netts Phoenix – both teams had two players – leaving Sible Hedingham needing to draw against Rayne B to stay up.

But Dean Andrews, Ryan Pitt and Peter Hance were in good form and allowed Hedingham only one set, a victory for Roy Hooper over Hance.

New league champions Liberal A may have set a new record. Have a title-winning team ever lost their final match 10-0?

It was a perfectly recognisable team too, with only Peter Hayden missing. But Scott Dowsett, Ian Hayden and Simon Webber could get nowhere against Netts Argyle.

But then had Argyle turned out Kevin Gowlett, John Cleasby and Paul Davison throughout the season, there is little doubt they would have lifted the trophy.

Webber came the closest to victory, stretching both Davison and Cleasby to 11-9 in the fifth game.

It was not enough to give Argyle the runners-up spot, which went to Rayne A after their 10-0 dismissal of Liberal B.

Notley A finished their season on a high. After six matches without a win, they were on the right side of a 7-3 scoreline against Rayne D. Chris Parr and Steve Kerns won the seven sets between them.

Division two champions Felsted A went out on a low. They turned out their reserve team for their final fixture and suffered 9-1 at the hands of Notley D.

Liberal C claimed the runners-up spot after catching up on their matches in hand.

They lost 7-3 to a strong Nomads team but then had wins of 10-0 over Rayne G and 9-1 against Rayne E to give themselves an eight-point cushion over Notley E, who beat Rayne E 7-3 to ensure third place.

Matt Wallace's three sets led Notley C to an 8-2 win over Rayne G and he was to the fore again playing for the B team against Rayne F, where he became only the fifth player to beat Dave Marsh, the division's top player.

Rayne F won the match 6-4.

Finally, congratulations:

- To Paul and Nikki Davison on the birth of a daughter, Olivia.
 - To Brian Davison, Netts' founder and English Table Tennis Association regional chairman, on receiving the ETTA's Ivor Montagu Award for services to the game.
 - To former ladies' singles champion Kelly Skeggs on being appointed a director of the ETTA
 - And to Bocking's Paul Davison, Kevin Gowlett and Jon Hill on winning the Chelmsford League title
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For the first time in their seven-year history, Nomads have gained one of the major pieces of silverware in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

They turned out their strongest team of Aad Kwakkelstein, Richard Kemp and Kevin Saunders in both the semi final and final of the restricted knockout cup and encountered cam comfortably through in both.

Rayne G fell 8-1 in the semi final – a win for Steve Siggs over Saunders at 11-9 in the fifth game preventing the perfect scoreline – and in the final they overcame a dogged Black Notley D side by the same score.

Sean Clift was the one who got in the way this time, but his win over Saunders was the only blot on Nomads' landscape.

Bruce Wickham stretched Kwakkelstein and Saunders to four ends and Keith Flowers took a game off Kemp, but Nomads took the rest in straight games.

By contrast, it is a familiar name that will adorn the team knockout cup, Rayne A emerging triumphant for the third year in a row and the ninth in all.

They had their toughest contest in the semi final when they faced Netts Argyle, the team that has pushed them all the way in the race for second place in the league.

Kevin Gowlett's illness meant that Argyle were denied the services of one of their key players but they were able to include John Cleasby, who had taken his three singles in the 10-0 win over new league champions Liberal A the previous week.

However, both Ian Whiteside and Steve Pennell rose to the occasion and beat Cleasby in straight games to give their side a 5-2 win.

In the final they faced their own D team, who had had a tough fight against Liberal C before coming through their semi final 5-4.

Hector Rogers' two singles and a doubles win with Rob Stannard with the score at 4-4 were instrumental in bringing them through that match, and Rogers came close to an upset in the final when he twice held match points against Whiteside. The opportunity evaporated, however, and Whiteside survived at 14-12 in the fifth game.

Rayne A won the first five sets to claim the trophy but Adam Buxton gained some consolation in beating Pennell to produce a final score of 6-1.

In the handicap cup, Felsted RBL B gained revenge for last season's defeat in the final by Notley E by beating Notley's C team – including two of last year's E team – 6-3 in the final.

Felsted's success showed the advances their players have made during the season and both Trelawney Joice and Arthur Geen, who have only recently started playing competitively, made their mark on the final in which Joice won two and Geen one.

But it was Chris Butler, one of their longer standing players, who played the major role in winning all his singles.

The same team had little difficulty coming past Rayne F 9-0 in the semi final, whereas Notley C had to fight hard against their A team to produce a 5-4 win.

The A team was actually a mix of A and I and it was the I team's Matt Brooks who was unbeaten.

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BADEN WOODS: OBITUARY

Baden Woods, a leading figure in Braintree table tennis in the 1950s and 1960s, has died at the age of 83.

Baden was the Braintree League general secretary for six years from 1953, the second longest spell in that office in the league's history.

He had an unspectacular but steady playing style, reliant on a strong backhand, and was one of the league's top players in its early years. He reached the men's singles semi finals on a number of occasions and won the men's doubles with Maurice Overall for three successive years from 1952.

His most recent appearances in the league were with Witham FC in the early eighties.

Ron Fosker
tennis

18.5.14

table

It was like turning the clock back. A team of Hayden-Hayden-Dowsett won the Braintree Table Tennis League for BUSC A from 1994 to 1996.

And it is the same combination that has brought a first title in their 37-year history to the Liberal Club this season.

Peter and Ian Hayden added another winner's medal to their collection, but it was not Terry Dowsett but his son Scott who joined them this year.

Along with support from Simon Webber, they finished 16 points clear of their nearest rivals Rayne A.

It may be Liberal's first title, but it is far from being the first for the Hayden brothers.

As well as their three years with BUSC A, they won again with Cressing A in 2007 – bringing another first title to a resurrected club that had disappeared from the league when it evolved into the Liberal Club in 1977 – and Black Notley A in 2010.

Peter was also in the Notley A team that won the title in 2006, the year before he persuaded his brother out of retirement.

It ended a run of success for Netts, who had won the title for the past three years, with their B team, Phoenix, last year and the A team the previous two years.

Argyle were the main challengers this year. They picked up when men's singles champion Paul Davison began to turn out regularly halfway through the season, but by then the gap was too big and Rayne A held them off to gain their first top-two placing since 2006.

The struggle at the bottom of the table was one of the more interesting of recent years, with Rayne C and Sible Hedingham swapping places regularly.

In the end it was Rayne C who just kept their heads above water by three points.

In division two, Felsted RBL A won their first three matches and from that point on they were never headed.

They turned out the same team of Ian and Ashley Butler and Gareth Joice in all but three matches and finished with an 11-point lead over Liberal C.

In division three White Lions won their first 16 matches and went on to lose only two, one when they had to field a reserve.

And it was a steady team effort. Unusually for title winners, they did not manage a single 10-0 or 9-1 win.

The only defeat Clare Johnson, Adam Purslow and Steve Willis suffered as a threesome was at the hands of runners-up Netts Jetts, who took time to get going and indeed were bottom of the table with only six points after three matches.

The team of Chris Hillman, Sam Johnson and Joe Nourse slowly made their way up the table and finished with a flourish of five 8-2 wins, one 9-1 and a 10-0.

Final tables:

DIVISION 1						
	P	W	D	L	A	P
Liberal A	27	24	1	2	61	209
Rayne A	27	21	1	5	77	193
Netts Argyle	27	22	1	4	81	189
Netts Phoenix	27	16	1	10	116	153
Rayne B (3)	27	10	6	11	143	124
Liberal B	27	10	2	15	158	112
B Notley A	27	7	4	16	164	106
Rayne D	27	7	4	16	165	105
Rayne C	27	4	0	23	190	79
Sible Hedingham	27	3	2	22	194	76

DIVISION 2						
	P	W	D	L	A	P
Felsted RBL A	27	22	1	4	94	176
Liberal C	27	15	6	6	105	165
B Notley E	27	15	4	8	113	157
Rayne E	27	13	6	8	123	147
B Notley C	27	13	5	9	128	142
B Notley B	27	9	6	12	143	127
B Notley D	27	7	8	12	146	124

Rayne F	27	8	6	13	147	123
Nomads	27	6	6	15	150	120
Rayne G	27	1	4	22	201	69

DIVISION 3

	P	W	D	L	A	P
White Lions	24	21	1	2	78	162
Netts Jetts	24	15	0	9	94	146
Felsted RBL B	24	14	4	6	104	136
B Notley H (3)	24	13	2	9	103	134
B Notley I	24	9	2	13	122	118
B Notley F	24	8	4	12	130	110
Rayne I	24	6	4	14	142	98
B Notley G (3)	24	5	6	13	145	92
Rayne H	24	4	3	17	162	78

Kevin Gowlett has become the first player for eight years to go through a Braintree Table Tennis League season unbeaten.

Gowlett played in 53 sets – and won them all.

He was taken the full five games only twice and on 34 occasions he won in three straight games, including 11 of his last 12 sets.

His closest encounters came early in the season when Barry Pritchard took him to 11-8 in the fifth game and then Richard Whiteside had the honour of stretching him further than anyone else when he succumbed only at 12-10 in the fifth.

Gowlett's Netts Argyle teammate Paul Davison lost only once, to Kuan Lim, while Davison's predecessor as men's singles champion Peter Hayden lost twice, to Gowlett, and in a lapse of concentration, to Robin Armstrong.

The top players in division two were less dominant. Dave Marsh finished top despite losing five sets while Gareth Joice tasted defeat ten times yet still finished second.

The tightness of the league table can be seen by the fact that there were players from seven different teams in the top ten, and from nine different teams in the top 13.

The fact that table tennis is a team game is neatly illustrated by the division three averages which are led by two players from Black Notley I, who finished fifth, while the division's champions White Lions have only one player in the top ten.

At the top is Gary Jackson, who quickly found his rhythm after 30 years out of the game and lost only once, to 13th placed Steve Willis.

And finally congratulations to Gordon Fairchild, Barry Evans, Steve Willis and Ian Rubens, who played in all their team's matches, and to Rayne I who turned out the same team of Tim Townsend, Roger Hasler and Brian Dixon in every match.

Final individual averages (qualification, one third of team's matches) are:

Division 1 (last season's position in brackets):

1(2) Kevin Gowlett 53 wins out of 53 sets = 100 per cent; 2 (-) Paul Davison 40-41 = 97.6; 3 (3) Peter Hayden 40-42 = 95.24; 4 (1) Steve Kerns 25-28 = 89.3; 5 (-) Scott Dowsett 53-65 = 81.5; 6 (7) Ian Whiteside 26-32 = 81.3; 7 (8) Jon Hill 38-48 = 79.2; 8 (6) James Hicks 41-52 = 78.8; 9 (9) Steve Pennell 51-66 = 77.3; 10 (5) Ian Hayden 44-60 = 73.3; 11 (13) John Cleasby 31-43 = 72.1; 12 (-) Maria Boulton 29-43 = 67.4; 13= (10) Ryan Pitt 44-66, Hector Rogers 42-63 = 66.7; 15 (-) Brian Riedling 14-26 = 53.8; 16 (-) Adam Buxton 35-67 = 52.2; 17 (-) Richard Jennings 17-33 = 51.5; 18 (14) Dean Andrews

25-51 = 49.0; 19 (11) Simon Webber 13-29 = 44.8; 20 (18) Mike Johnston 28-65 = 43.1.

Division 2: 1 Dave Marsh 39-44 = 88.6; 2 Gareth Joice 66-76 = 86.8; 3 Aad Kwakkelstein 28-33 = 84.9; 4 Andrew Huckson 58-71 = 81.7; 5 Richard Kemp 31-39 = 79.5; 6 Gareth Davies 57-72 = 79.2; 7 Ian Butler 55-73 = 75.3; 8 Sean Clift 45-60 = 75; 9 Warren Baines 33-45 = 73.3; 10 Guy McKenzie 47-65 = 72.3.

Division 3: 1 Gary Jackson 25-26 = 96.2; 2 Helen Barnett 32-38 = 84.2; 3 Ron Fosker 26-31 = 83.9; 4 Adam Purslow 50-64 = 78.1; 5 Vernon King 41-53 = 77.4; 6 Chris Hillman 44-60 = 73.3; 7 Joe Nourse 40-55 = 72.7; 8 Adam Clift 32-45 = 71.1; 9 Steve Siggs 22-31 = 70.9; 10 Jill Canning 29-41 = 70.7.
