

AS AT 3 MARCH 2024

| | P | W | D | F | A | B | P |
|------------|----|---|---|----|----|----|-----|
| CASTAWAYS | 14 | 9 | 4 | 94 | 46 | 42 | 136 |
| COMETS A | 12 | 7 | 3 | 88 | 32 | 36 | 124 |
| COMETS B | 12 | 9 | 3 | 81 | 39 | 33 | 114 |
| NAT WEST | 13 | 5 | 4 | 70 | 60 | 39 | 109 |
| MORPETH A | 11 | 4 | 2 | 54 | 56 | 33 | 87 |
| PRO | 12 | 2 | 3 | 41 | 79 | 36 | 77 |
| NORDWEST | 12 | 2 | 0 | 35 | 85 | 36 | 71 |
| GOOD KARMA | 12 | 1 | 1 | 27 | 93 | 36 | 63 |

Bonus points shown in penultimate column. Ultimate column shows total points from sets won and bonuses

THINGS TO NOTE

- Individual match details can be found on the website at

https://www.tabletennis365.com/LondonBanksAndCivilService/Fixtures/Active_Season_23-24/Division_One

- Check out the photos on the front page of the website under Featured Photos. Is your team there?

COMMENTARY

Week 20

Feels like a long time since Morpeth played a match but this week they return to face title chasers Comets B. Morpeth's team includes Duncan Brown and Oleg Blyuss, joined by Kimmy Pui Lai-Brown for only the second time this season. Comets B continue with Jamie Mullineaux and Allam Bhangoo but bring in Tai Lu in place of David Adesanya. Mullineaux is looking for a maximum here and he quickly demonstrated that with a three-straight demolition of Duncan Brown. Next came one of the best sets of the match. Lai-Brown and Lu were one end apiece before a marathon end finished at 13-11 in Lu's favour. Lai-Brown promptly fires back with a 11-6 win in the fourth. We're all square and the players couldn't be separated at 9-9 in the decider. A make-or-break moment for both players. Who came out in front? It was Tai Lu, taking the final end 11-9. 100 points played in a tight contest and an outstanding win for Tai. That's 2-0 to Comets. Next up, Oleg Blyuss faces Allam Bhangoo. Blyuss settles into the contest the quicker, taking the first end 11-7. Bhangoo fights back and slowly gains a grip on the set by winning the next two ends. Like the previous set, we reach a 9-9 moment in the fourth. It's Bhangoo who takes the next two points to bag the win. Morpeth are on the scoreboard! Set four and Lai-Brown and Mullineaux are even after two ends. The third end was a long one – eventually concluding in Lai-Brown's favour. That puts Kimmy in front and this is proving to be more of a contest than I expected. Things reach a crucial moment at deuce in the fourth end and Jamie's hopes are hanging by a thread. But Jamie holds his nerve to edge home 13-11. Final end and as the set goes down to the wire it's Lai-Brown who wins it 11-8! That's a really good win for Kimmy! Kimmy would be more than a match for most players in this division but last time they played Jamie won three straight. 103 points in that set. Three three-straight sets followed. All of which went to Morpeth. First, Duncan Brown scored an important win over Bhangoo. Second, Blyuss had an equally important win over Luu. And Lai-Brown completed the trio, defeating Bhangoo. Taking stock of the match so far, Comets had led 3-0 but now Morpeth leads 4-3! That good run was broken in the next set as a fine effort from Blyuss was not enough to beat Mullineaux. Two sets left and it's 4-4. Up steps Duncan Brown to see if he can match Blyuss's win over Tai Luu. It's looking good after two ends which Duncan wins comfortably. Two close and tense ends followed, both of which Tai narrowly wins 11-9. That comeback seemed to propel Tai ahead in the fifth, he's soon in front and completes the come-from-behind win 11-6. That could have gone either way but crucially for Comets they lead going into the doubles. Morpeth start the brighter, taking the first end 11-5. But slowly Comets gained the upper hand, reeling Morpeth in over the next three ends to snatch the key victory and a 6-4 win. Altogether a very good contest to which all six players contributed. It is the only match this

season where all six players won at least one set! A win for Comets but vital sets dropped in the race for the top three.

The next match sees the luckless Karma take on Nat West. Karma's team comprises their stalwart Xavier Zhao plus two players we've not seen much of this season Ben Link and Wouter Mayeur. Nat West include Adam Johnson, Gareth Jones and Chris Penrose. This looks an uphill battle for Karma. The first two sets don't take much time. Johnson and Penrose winning against Link and Mayeur respectively, both three straight. The Zhao / Jones contest followed and the first two ends were both won at deuce and both by Xavier Zhao. A good start for Xavier! Things then took a sharp turn in Nat West's direction as Gareth dominated the third and fourth ends to level the set. Into the fifth and can Xavier get himself back into it and break Gareth's domination? At this point, I wonder if both players remembered their first half encounter. That followed the same pattern. First two ends to Xavier and next two ends to Gareth. The fifth ended at 11-8 and a win for Xavier. It was one of the longest sets of the season. Will this go the same way? The answer was it did not, as Gareth continued to steamroller through the end winning 11-6. A good fight from both players! Adam Johnson then continued his winning way, beating Mayeur three straight. Ben Link and Gareth Jones have played each other three times over the last two seasons and Ben leads 2-1. So, might this be Karma's first win of the match? It's certainly looking that way as Ben takes the first two ends. Gareth's not done yet and fights back to win the third end. Unfortunately, he just couldn't keep that up and went down 11-7 in the fourth. Karma have their first win! That turned out to be their only win as Nat West raced through the remaining sets, the only pause being when Zhao took an end off Johnson. So, 9-1 win for Nat West who, with that win and one match to go, have secured a fourth-place finish for the season.

And so to the big one! It's Castaways against Comets A. First against second! This was a drawn match in the first half. Today, both teams are looking for a convincing win to keep their title hopes alive. Let's look at team compositions. Comets are unchanged from last week's loss to their B team. It's Persaud, Francis and Cain Fagan. Castaways put out LeMilliere and Loveder but swap Johnny Bispham for Terry McKee. Looking at the match from Castaway's viewpoint, their strategy has to ensure Francis stays winless, they win the doubles and they take three or better from the other two. A tall order! You can read Neil LeMilliere's blow-by-blow account of how things unfolded [here](#). I'll just pick out the highlights. Loveder gave Castaways the start they wanted as he beat Francis in four games. Bispham then takes on Fagan. If Castaways win this set, they're well on their way! But, putting aside a few wobbles, Fagan has been impressive this season and was Comets' star last week. Cain came racing out of the starting blocks and rattled through the first two ends comfortably. On the backfoot, Bispham was now fighting for his life. To his credit, he won the third end at deuce but that just postponed the Fagan win as he won the fourth 11-6. The third set – LeMilliere against Persaud – was always likely to go Comets' way and so it did. The match score moved to 3-3 as Bispham beat Francis in four. This brings us to a "must win" set for Castaways: Loveder against Persaud. Last time they played it was mighty close but Laikram just pinched it. It turned out to be as seesaw affair. Loveder wins the first two ends and is well on his way to victory. Persaud wins the third and produces a miracle recovery to snatch the fourth end from a losing position! This looks like a deuce in the fifth result is in prospect. Loveder gets behind in the fifth but claws his way back to reach the winning post 11-7! That's a crucial win for Castaways. Can they now accelerate away from here? Afraid not, as Fagan comfortably beat LeMilliere. Another "must win: set next. It's Bispham against Persaud. Now, Bispham is one of the few players in this division who troubles Persaud. True to form, Bispham came through with lots to spare, three straight. Castaways lead 4-3 but I can't see either team achieving a runaway victory from here. The next set lasted a marathon 109 points. Both players had match points. It ended at 16-14 in the fifth. The player who won their first half encounter lost this one. It involved LeMilliere and Francis. Who won? The hero was Neil LeMilliere for Castaways who used up almost all of his nine lives in so doing! Next, Loveder faced Fagan. Could Mike pull off a win against the odds? Cain takes the first two ends. Loveder comes back to take the third. But the fourth was a bridge too far for Mike, Cain winning 11-9. Castaways lead 5-4. Sometimes the doubles is a "dead rubber" but not here. This set might yet matter. Both pairings are unbeaten thus far. It was Castaways who remained unbeaten, winning in four. So, a 6-4 win for Castaways – it's been two years since they've beaten Comets. What does that do to the title race? A number of statistical possibilities exist but it looks as if Comets and Castaways did enough tonight to secure first and second places respectively, with Comets A third.

RICHARD CAMPBELL
DIVISIONAL SECRETARY

AVERAGES (Qualification: ≥ 15 sets played)

| Player | Team | Sets Won | Sets Played | Average (%) |
|---------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Yi | MORPETH A | 15 | 15 | 100.0 |
| Johnson | NAT WEST | 19 | 21 | 90.5 |
| Fang | COMETS B | 15 | 18 | 83.3 |
| Adesanya | COMETS B | 17 | 21 | 81.0 |
| Luu | COMETS B | 12 | 15 | 80.0 |
| C Fagan | COMETS A | 21 | 27 | 77.8 |
| Mullineaux | COMETS B | 14 | 18 | 77.8 |
| Persaud | COMETS A | 23 | 30 | 76.7 |
| Bispham | CASTAWAYS | 25 | 33 | 75.8 |
| S Fagan | COMETS A | 13 | 18 | 72.2 |
| LeMilliere | CASTAWAYS | 28 | 42 | 66.7 |
| Loveder | CASTAWAYS | 12 | 18 | 66.7 |
| Francis | COMETS A | 13 | 21 | 61.9 |
| McKee | CASTAWAYS | 10 | 18 | 55.6 |
| Crawford | PRO | 18 | 33 | 54.5 |
| Herbert | NAT WEST | 13 | 24 | 54.2 |
| Nelson | NORDWEST | 18 | 36 | 50.0 |
| Turner | PRO | 14 | 30 | 46.7 |
| To | MORPETH A | 8 | 18 | 44.4 |
| Alnak | MORPETH A | 10 | 24 | 41.7 |
| Brown | MORPETH A | 10 | 24 | 41.7 |
| Bhangoo | COMETS B | 5 | 12 | 41.7 |
| Samuels | NAT WEST | 7 | 18 | 38.9 |
| Schmidt | GOOD KARMA | 9 | 24 | 37.5 |
| Sanders | GOOD KARMA | 6 | 18 | 33.3 |
| Francis | NORDWEST | 11 | 36 | 30.6 |
| Jones | NAT WEST | 8 | 30 | 26.7 |
| Miller | GOOD KARMA | 4 | 21 | 19.0 |
| Zhao | GOOD KARMA | 2 | 21 | 9.5 |
| Stair | NORDWEST | 2 | 27 | 7.4 |