**High hopes and great expectations**

**Table tennis round-up by Chris Blake**

The north east has long been the hot bed of table tennis talent with many players competing in the Sunderland league playing in other local leagues as well as representing the City and Durham County in matches up and down the country.

A number of established players also play in the British Senior and British Vetts leagues. Furthermore, the league can also boast that three of its players regularly compete in the very strong Belgium league – watch this space for regular reports on their progress as the season unfolds.

Just as exciting is the new generation of emerging talent. Having dedicated time and effort through coaching sessions these players are now gaining valuable experience in league’s 2 and 3 and will hopefully have a long and successful future in the game.

The Sunderland league has grown from strong foundations laid down by a generation of players who continue to play both competitively and socially.

The future success and longevity of the league requires the right combination of dedication, experience, talent and its ability to attract new players to the sport.

Therefore, in addition to the weekly round-up’s of the league fixtures this column will also aim to promote the sport and attract new players to the game through regular coaching articles, video links and news of exciting developments.

I would like to thank **Kevin Wilson** (previous Press Officer) for his valuable contribution over the last 2 years and hope that the new column format over the coming weeks and months can build on this solid foundation and ensure it is both informative and inspiring to existing and potential new players.

So…hear goes, the **Sunderland & District Table Tennis league** is finally underway with hopes and expectations running high.



**Division 1**

The league is wide open with any one of a number of teams having a realistic chance of winning. Thompson Insurance ‘A’ winners for the past 6 seasons remain the team to beat. However, Silksworth I.M. ‘A’ if they can regularly play their strongest side of the Barella brothers and Ryan Richardson must be in with a shout. St. Chads ‘A’ have a very powerful and experienced side and on their day are more than capable of creating an upset and could mount a sustained challenge for the title.

**Week 1 results:**

Silksworth I.M. ‘A’ **10** vs. St. Gabriels ‘A’ **0** (**walkover**)

Thompson Ins ‘A’ vs. Redby CA ‘A’ (**still to play**)

Thompson Ins ‘B’ **10** vs. Durham CA **0**

West CA ‘A’ **3** vs. St. Chads **7**

Without doubt the game of the week was the match between West CA ‘A’ and St. Chads. With all players capable of beating each other it was no surprise 6 of the 10 sets went into either into 4 or 5 ends. Man of the Match was Steve Penman (but don’t tell him!) - Steve is a very talented player with an attacking style.

Steve was unbeaten in the match and just managed to beat Geoff Salter in an epic game which went to the deciding game. Brilliant attacking play from both players were the order of the day with Penman just pipping Salter at the post with an 11 – 9 victory.

Penman was well supported by his fellow team members Jimmy Scope (1 set) and Dave Bissett (2 sets). Penman and Scope beat Salter and Williamson in the only doubles game to win the match 7 sets to 3 ensuring maximum points to St. Chads for the victory.

**Division 2**

Just like Division 1 the potential winners could emerge from a number of teams. Critical to success will be the ability of teams to play their strongest sides on a consistent basis. The league winners could be decided on a number of key matches through the season when the fancied teams play against one another.

St Gabriel’s ‘B’, Redby CA, Sacriston St. Bedes ‘A and Silksworth I.M. ‘B’ are expected to be in the mix as the season unfolds. However, with many experienced players playing in this league there will no doubt be a number of upsets, twists and turns as the season progresses.

**Week 1 results:**

Mortimer CA **4** vs. Sacriston St. Bedes ‘A’ **6**

Redby CA **9** vs. West CA ‘B’ **1**

Sacriston St. Bedes ‘B’ **5** vs. Redby CA ‘B’ **5**

Silksworth I.M. ‘B’ vs St. Gabriels ‘B’ (**still to play**)

Watch this space for featured articles, photographs and match reports.

**Division 3**

Early favourites to take this year’s Division 3 title are St. Johns ‘A’ and ‘B’ teams together with Sacriston St. Bedes ‘C’ and ‘D’ teams. But of course St. Gabriel’s ‘C’, who can draw upon many, many years’ experience, could have a say on the eventual champions.

But of course let’s not forget that this division is blooding some new and emerging talent. Who knows as these young players gain valuable experience it would be no surprise if they achieved some key victories against more seasoned players – ***a warm welcome to all newcomers.***

**Week 1 results**

Lanchester CC **0** vs. St. John’s ‘A’ **10**

Sacriston St. Bedes ‘D’ **9** vs. St. John’s ‘C’ **1**

St. Gabriel’s ‘C’ **9** vs. Redby CA ‘C’ **1**

St. John’s ‘B’ vs. Sacriston St. Bedes ‘C’ (**still to play**)

There will be many twists and turns as the season unfolds – who will be victorious remains to be seen – **good luck everyone!!!**