**Table tennis by Chris Blake - www.tabletennis365.com/Sunderland**

With the second half of the Sunderland & District table tennis season well underway the games have been coming in thick and fast.

Reigning 1st Division champions Thompson Insurance A wasted no time in picking up where they left off with 3 excellent wins over their nearest rivals picking up a maximum 12 points out of 12 for their efforts.

Two 8 – 2 wins over 2nd placed St Chads and a 10 – 0 win over 3rd placed Durham have helped Thompsons open up a commanding 17 point lead over St Chads. Thompsons play last year’s runners up Silksworth IM A this week which promises to be a very close and entertaining match. Both teams hope to play their strongest teams – the outcome of this match will have a huge say on the eventual 1st division champions.

Thompsons have a very strong squad with strength in depth and have been able to call upon the services of Andy Wilkinson, Darren McVitie, Marc Cotton (who has been in outstanding form) and Chris Blake and rotate their squad accordingly to accommodate different playing styles. With manager Allan Thompson, Jake McVitie and Diane Cartmell also available for selection Thompsons should have a strong chance of retaining their title for 8th consecutive season.

2nd placed St Chads rallied following their two defeats to Thompsons with an excellent 6 – 4 win over Silksworth IM A despite Barry Cuthbertson having to concede his final set against Bernie Morris.

This was a real team effort from St Chads – Keith Weatherby (2), Dave Bissett (2), Cuthbertson (1) with Weatherby and Cuthbertson combining well to win the doubles against Anthony Barella and Morris.

Barella was voted man of the match with an excellent display throughout which included a fine 3 – 1 win over Weatherby.

Bottom placed Mortimer CA lost valuable ground following 2 defeats against their nearest rivals 3 – 7 and 4 – 6 to Thompson Insurance B and Sacriston St Bedes A respectively.

In Division 2 leaders North East Bed Centre took advantage of 2nd placed Sacriston St Bedes B surprise 6 – 4 defeat to lowly St Johns A with a maximum points 9 – 1 victory over St Gabriels B.

The final score was very harsh on St Gabriels who played excellently throughout. Mark Burton performed valiantly despite returning to play following broken ribs. The defeat sees St Gabriels firmly rooted at the bottom of the league. Relegation is a real possibility but with nearly half of the season yet to play for the saints can still avoid the drop.

In Division 3 Redby CA B and St Gabriels C remain in first and second place following recent victories. Redby had two 8 – 2 wins over 3rd placed West CA B and St Johns B whilst St Gabriels had 8 – 2 and 7 – 3 wins over Sacriston St Bedes D and West CA B respectively.

West CA B recovered from their 2 earlier defeats to beat Sacriston St Bedes C 6 – 4 in a very entertaining game. Sacriston’s fast improving Dan Hutchinson won 2 his 3 sets which included an excellent 14 – 12 win in the 5th and deciding end over experienced Alan Whitwham. Hutchinson was well supported by Ian McPherson (2). West’s sets were won by Whitwham (2), Vic Austin (1) and Tommy Turner (2) with the former combining to take the only doubles set.

Sacriston St Bedes C followed up their narrow defeat with an excellent 10 – 0 win over rivals Lanchester CC. Dan Hutchinson again played very well and was voted man of the match – he was well supported by Colin Pritchard and Ian McPherson who both finished the night undefeated.

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