

All three of last season's title challengers have undergone changes as the Braintree Table Tennis League opens this week.

But it is champions Bocking who look the most stable. They have lost Paul Davison but have an almost like-for-like replacement in Gary Young, who moves across from Black Notley to join fellow Ipswichian Nigel Hodder and Kevin Gowlett to form a strong three-pronged attack.

As last year, Richard Jennings, David Edwards and Garry Fryatt will also be on hand but there is no reason why they cannot shuffle their hand as they did before to retain their title.

Young is not the only Notley player to leave the club. Steve Kerns, Ian Brown and Ken Lewis are also missing with only Graham Farmer left from last year's second-placed team.

He will line up in this year's B team, alongside James Hicks, Laurie Sapiano, Rob Stannard and the returning Bryan Speller, while the A team berth is taken up by the former Cressing team, who move en bloc after a price rise at their old home.

Their title challenge fell away last year when injury cost them the services of Peter Hayden and they will have to start this season without him as well as he recovers from both knee and arm injuries.

Ian Hayden, Terry Dowsett, Trevor Carter and Scott Dowsett will hold the team together in the meantime.

Davison will once again be turning out for Netts A, who return to the league after a six-year absence.

He and his partner Nikki Kennard, ranked 62 in England, will be backed by the also returning Larte Lawson and son Philip, the new Essex cadets champion.

It is a team with clear championship potential but all its members have multiple commitments and availability could be a problem.

Below them Rayne A, Liberal A and Rayne B are unchanged while the division is made up with two promoted teams, Pillar House A (last year's Cressing B) and Rayne C, last year's D team.

That means a welcome first crack at the top division for Sean Cliff and a return there for old hands Duncan Elloy, Dave Punt and Keith Martin.

A preview of divisions two and three will follow next week.

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For the first time in many years the Braintree Table Tennis League has increased in size this year, from 24 to 27.

An extra team for each division has meant an unexpected promotion for Rayne C (last year's D team), which has left the second division more open than it might have been.

One of the new teams, Netts B, could well be one of those in contention for the title if they put out their best team.

With ex-first division player James Mullane and former Sudbury division one player Peter Abbot in their ranks, they have the potential. But they also intend to give a number of juniors league experience so a balance will have to be struck.

Relegated Rayne D (last year's C team of Cec Butcher, Tony Hammond, Paul Wellington and Mo Hardy) are always a threat at this level and Black Notley C can be expected to be up there somewhere.

Rayne have been able to add another team to their ranks this season partly as a result of players returning to the game.

Their new F team is one to watch. Malcolm Wehmeyer, out of the game for some time, and Brian How, out for considerably longer, join Ted Sims, who returned last season after a break. It will be interesting to see how quickly they can shake off the cobwebs.

Former ladies' singles champion Helen Barnett is another one picking her bat up again – she replaces the currently injured Ron Fosker at Notley D – while Martin Wells, a leading junior in the mid-seventies, makes a comeback at Liberal B.

Last season's comeback kings were Graham Cannon and Roy Hooper at Sible Hedingham. Having swept all before them in division three, they and teammate Mark Brown will find life more difficult at the higher level, but expect them to put quite a few notches on their bat handles.

Who will be this year's Hedingham in division three?

Contenders would appear to be White Lions A, a new club with a collection of familiar names, Pillar House B, who as Cressing C just missed out on promotion last season, and the new Notley E team.

White Lions are last season's Notley F – Clare Johnson, Adam Purslow and Steve Willis – but they finished one point behind Cressing C who as Pillar House B have been strengthened this season by the return of Steve Cliff and the re-registering of Bob Keefe from the second division.

Ron Celiz, new to the league but a player of considerable experience, has chosen to play in division three to help his son Warren. But he could play at a much higher level – and may even given Tom Elder something to think about this year.

He joins Will Jackson, who took great strides forward last season, in a Notley E team that will lose few matches when the two of them are firing together.

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James Hicks and Scott Dowsett in division one, Cec Butcher in division two and newcomer Ian Wallace in division three all made their mark in the first week of this season's Braintree Table Tennis League competition.

Hicks's win over Kevin Gowlett, second in last year's individual averages, was probably the pick of the week. He had to come from two games down, was stretched to deuce in the third and fourth, but hung on to win the decider at 11-7.

Hicks, of Black Notley B, also got the better of David Edwards, as did Rob Stannard, but Nigel Hodder won all three singles in straight games to give champions Bocking a 7-3 victory.

Netts A are expected to be one of the teams to challenge Bocking for this year's title and Bocking's former star Paul Davison got them off to a 6-4 start with his three singles against Black Notley A. But 14-year-old Scott Dowsett will be pleased with his win over England No.62 Nikki Kennard.

Rayne A lead the putative table after one week as a result of their 9-1 win over Liberal A. Ian Whiteside and Steve Pennell were undefeated while Barry Pritchard's win over Jon Hill gave Liberal their point.

The other two Rayne teams in the division had a close tussle, the B team just coming out on top by winning the final two sets.

Dean Andrews, having a temporary sojourn in the B team, won his three singles but it could be said that the excellent win by reserve Peter Taylor – in division three last year – over Alastair Brown clinched the victory.

Cec Butcher did not enjoy too profitable a time in his unexpected season in division one last year – not surprising as he passed his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday during the season – and he found life much more comfortable back in the gentler waters of division two.

He won his three singles to give Rayne D a 6-4 victory over Nomads.

The season may only just have started, but this match has already set the benchmark for the tightest set. Paul Wellington just outlasted Lorraine Burgess 20-18 in the final game – and the other four games were all decided by two points.

There was also Rayne v Rayne battle in this division and the E team had no mercy on their colleagues one place lower in the alphabet.

The 10-0 scoreline, however, hides three sets decided at deuce in the fifth game.

Brian How, making his comeback to the game this season after a long lay-off, was involved in all of them, two singles and the doubles. To get to deuce in the fifth with both Richard Whiteside and Dave Moles suggests How has pretty quickly got back into his stride.

Pillar House B can expect to be at the top end of division three while Notley H have a set of largely untried players. No surprise then that the home side took all ten.

Much of Notley's G team do not have a great deal of experience either but new signing Ian Wallace has played the game before as he proved in taking his three singles against Rayne G, including a tight 13-11-in-the-fifth win over Charles Wilkinson.

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The natural order was in evidence in the second week of the Braintree Table Tennis League division one programme.

The teams expected to form the top four all registered comfortable wins.

Both Bocking and Black Notley A returned unblemished accounts, while Netts A and Rayne A dropped only one set each.

Only two sets were stretched to four games in Bocking's win over Rayne B while Notley A won six of theirs in straight games. Terry Dowsett's win over Duncan Elloy was the only one that went the full distance.

Rayne A also had six 3-0 scorelines against their C team but Steve Pennell twice went the full distance, scraping home 14-12 in the fifth against Dave Moles but losing out 12-10 in the decider against Keith Martin.

The doubles was the one to elude Netts, Barry Pritchard and Mike Johnston surprisingly beating Nikki Kennard and Larte Lawson in three straight. The singles, on the other hand, were a different matter.

An 8-2 win for Liberal B over Nomads in division two does not look a surprising score on paper, but Nomads' two wins came from an unexpected source.

Not Kevin Saunders, as one might expect, but Arthur Wilson, not their most prolific scorer in the past but on top form here with wins over both Trevor Laird and Diane Garner. Only Paul Lombardi got the better of him.

Fourteen-year-old Luke Tarrant started his league career in excellent style with three straight-game wins in Netts B's 6-4 defeat at Notley D. Bruce Wickham and Keith Flowers won two each for Notley.

Notley H's John Breen was another player to make an encouraging debut. He won two singles in his team's 6-4 defeat to Rayne G but, like his teammates, was unable to find a way past Barry Mouser.

Steve Ascott and Adam Purslow won two each for newcomers White Lions A against Rayne H but it was not enough to prevent Rayne taking a 6-4 win.

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Divisional runners-up last season, Rayne E are the only team to have won three out of three in the Braintree Table Tennis League division two this year.

They followed their opening 10-0 win over their own F team with victories of 9-1 over Black Notley D and 7-3 over Netts B.

Dave Moles, only an occasional player last season, has played all three so far and won eight out of nine. Netts B's Luke Tarrant was the only one to better him.

Rayne's D team are on the heels of their clubmates. They drew their first match but two wins since then have put them in second place.

They beat their own F team 6-4 and Notley D 8-2.

Paul Wellington was unbeaten against Notley D and won two against Rayne F.

The one in which he failed was a replay of the 1973 junior boys' singles final against Malcolm Wehmeyer. Wellington won 36 years ago. Wehmeyer got his revenge this time.

Fourteen-year-old Tarrant remains unbeaten after nine sets, but he had his work cut out against Sible Hedingham. He needed five games to dispose of both Mark Brown and Roy Hooper, his success against Hooper coming only at 13-11 in the decider.

Larte Lawson, returning to the league after a year's absence, was also unbeaten as Netts registered a 6-4 victory.

Diane Garner was unbeaten as Liberal B clocked up a 6-4 win over Rayne F.

The set of the evening was between Ted Sims and Trevor Laird, two players who had a lengthy break from the game and took it up again when they joined the league last year. They battled all the way to deuce in the fifth before Sims got the vital last two points.

Worryingly, White Lions B have so far only managed to turn out two players on both their appearances in division three. Maybe it was doubts over the third berth that led them to rank themselves below their A team but they proved the masters when the two came into contact.

Stuart Ascott won his three singles and father Steve two, then the two combined to take the doubles and ensure a 6-4 victory.

Black Notley G's new signing Ian Wallace maintained his unbeaten record in his team's 6-4 win against the club's E team.

The E team only had two players but wins over Will Jackson and Mike Smith do not come easily.

Philip Lawson is ranked at ten in the Essex junior ranking list published this week. Notley A's Scott Dowsett is at 13 and at No.6 in the under 15 list.

Notley C's Stevie Pell is at No.7 on the girls' list.

Among the under 15s, Luke Tarrant is ranked at 14 with his Netts B teammates Ben Page at 18 and Patrick Gilbert at 21.

Notley's Warren Baines is at 23 and Matthew Wallace 24 while on the under 13 list Oliver Hicks is at 11 and George Wallace at 12.

Netts' Rebecca Lockwood is at 21 in the under 18 section and 14 at under 15 level.

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Just as in division two, it is last year's runners-up who are making the running in the third division of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Pillar House B have won their first three matches, as have Rayne G, but the former Cressing C team lead at this stage by one point.

After a 10-0 win in their first match, they dealt with Black Notley F and White Lions B 6-4 and 7-3 respectively.

Adam Clift was unbeaten in both matches.

Steve Clift marked his return to action with two wins over Notley F but was unable to get past Mike Pitt.

Rayne G have opened their programme with matches against three Notley teams and recorded their best win, 9-1, against the highest ranked of them, although Notley F only had two players.

But the match was more notable for setting a new benchmark for the tightest set of the season.

Just a couple of weeks after Paul Wellington and Lorraine Burgess had finished at 20-18 in the fifth game, Barry Mouser pushed the mark two points forward by beating Andy Thompson 22-20 in the final end.

Two of Notley's teams played each other - E getting the better of H 9-1 – while the G team suffered 8-2 at the hands of Rayne H where Matt Millbank joined Tom Elder in the unbeaten enclosure.

In division one, Philip Lawson illustrated the improvement in his game since he last played in the league 18 months ago by winning all his singles against Pillar House A while his father Larte was beaten twice.

Chris Ciniglio and Ryan Pitt were the players Lawson senior foundered against as Netts A racked up an 8-2 win.

Rayne A's healthy start to the season – two 9-1 wins – came to an abrupt halt against champions Bocking.

The result was 9-1 the other way this time although not before Ian Whiteside had recorded an excellent win over veterans' singles champion Nigel Hodder 12-10, 9-11, 6-11, 11-7, 11-6.

Liberal A took on a Rayne C side consisting of two reserves and a blank space. Not surprisingly they took all the sets available.

Lorraine Burgess was in excellent form for Nomads in division two. She won all three singles in straight games against Notley C.

Two from Kevin Saunders and one from Arthur Wilson gave the Great Cornard team a 6-4 win.

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It was a good week for some of the newer players in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Patrick Gilbert picked up his first win of the season in division one while Ben Page, with only one win in nine sets so far, won twice.

Keir Hughes and Leon Hewitt matched them in division three. Hughes scored his first wins and Hewitt, also with one win in nine so far, won two.

Gilbert and Page, both 13, will be particularly pleased as they were both playing up a division. Their games so far have been in division two, but they were called into action for Netts A against Rayne C in division one, and rose to the occasion.

Both conquered the unorthodox and confusing style of Alastair Brown while Page went one better and beat the stylish Dave Punt.

Larte Lawson added his three singles to give Netts a 6-4 win.

Black Notley H's Hughes and Hewitt meanwhile have been learning their trade in division three.

Hewitt, 18, failed to win any sets last year but broke his duck in the second match of this season but Hughes had yet to score. Against Rayne H, they both notched up two wins to help their team to an 8-2 win.

Netts A's four dropped points in division one eased them off the top of the table.

Notley A crept one point ahead after their 7-3 win over Rayne B and a 9-1 win over their own B team.

Promoted Pillar House A have set out to ensure they do not follow the familiar pattern of teams going down immediately after going up. They scored an excellent 8-2 win over Notley B with three wins from the in-form Chris Ciniglio and two each from Ryan Pitt and Duncan Elloy.

The top two teams came face to face in division two and it was Rayne E who upset pre-season calculations by beating their own D team 6-4. Richard Whiteside was unbeaten for the third time out of three.

There was a tight match too at Notley C, who held off Rayne F by the same score. It was Notley's first win of the season and Rayne's third successive 6-4 defeat.

Gordon Fairchild and Stevie Pell for Notley and Malcolm Wehmeyer for Rayne won two each in a match in which no one won all three or lost all three.

Sible Hedingham's match against Nomads was similarly hard fought. They came back from 3-1 down to win 7-3.

Roy Hooper, Graham Cannon and Mark Brown all won twice for Hedingham while Nomads rotated their top scorer once again.

Kevin Saunders, Arthur Wilson and Lorraine Burgess have taken it in turns to win most singles in their three matches so far. This time it was Saunders' turn to win twice while Wilson had an excellent win over Cannon.

Pillar House B's encounter with White Lions A was a coming together of the two teams who finished within a point of each other in second and third places in last season's division three. Pillar House had the upper hand again to record a 6-4 win.

Adam Clift retained his unbeaten record which now stands at 11 singles.

White Lions' B team have persuaded Keith Perrins out of a short-lived retirement and he quickly got into his stride in his team's 6-4 win against Rayne G. He won twice and stretched Charles Wilkinson, who took his three, to 14-12 in the fifth game.

It was Rayne G's first defeat of the season.

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The unsung Pillar House B side have been setting the pace in division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League, but they came up against their biggest challenge last week.

They faced their closest rivals Rayne G, and had to do so with only two players.

Adam Clift has been in excellent form this season and duly won his three singles, but it was Ash White who produced the form of his life to equal his captain's performance and bring his side an excellent win. White has been somewhat in the shadow of Clift and Matt Shelley over the years but his form has gradually improved and against Rayne he showed his grit and determination as he won all three singles in five games.

In each case he had to come back from two games to one down but in the end he had final game wins of 11-7 over Geoff Long and 11-4 over both Tim Gowers and Charles Wilkinson, the first time he has ever got the better of the consistent Wilkinson.

The only blot on the team's landscape was that they managed to lose the doubles.

Ron Celiz will not lose many in division three and led his Notley E team to a 6-4 win over Notley F. Celiz's main test could come at the end of this month when his team are due to meet Rayne H, led by the so far all-conquering Tom Elder.

Elder's side drew with Notley F for whom Andy Thompson and Alan Cook took two singles each.

Bocking moved to the top of division one with a 7-3 win over Liberal A. With neither Gary Young nor Nigel Hodder in their ranks, it is a result they will be comfortable with. Kevin Gowlett won his three singles, Richard Jennings two and David Edwards one. Barry Pritchard won twice for Liberal.

Liberal's B team are looking good in division two. Their 9-1 win over Black Notley D was their third out of three.

Trevor Laird and Diane Garner were unbeaten and Dave Hardy marked his return to the league with two wins, narrowly missing out on a clean sheet when Keith Flowers just got the better of him at 11-9 in the third game.

Notley D also suffered at the hands of their own C team who triumphed 8-2. Tim Huxtable was unbeaten.

The young Netts B team found the experienced hands of Rayne D too much for them. The visitors took all ten sets.

In the first round of the team knock out cup, Pillar House A were only able to field two players against Rayne D.

Wins for Paul Wellington over Sean Clift and Wellington and Tony Hammond in the doubles were enough to take Rayne through.

Rayne A had too much firepower for their own E team and did not drop a set.

The tightest match in the restricted knock out cup was Notley D's 6-3 win over Rayne G.

Rayne's Tim Gowers beat Bruce Wickham and they took two doubles. Peter Foster and Keith Flowers were unbeaten for Notley.

Pillar House B were unable to take their league success into the cup. They were found wanting against second division Rayne F who won 9-0.

Adam Clift came closest to breaking the duck with a 14-12-in-the-fifth defeat by Peter Taylor.

White Lions B dropped only one set in coming past Notley F, Alan Cook beating Steve Ascott. Stuart Ascott and Adam Purslow were unbeaten.

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In many ways Rayne E were the surprise team of last season's Braintree Table Tennis League when they rose above their D team to finish second in division two.

That was largely put down to the introduction of former first division player Paul Whybrow after illness ruled out Simon Fleming for the season.

But this year, without Whybrow, they are at the top of the division by their own efforts.

Happily Fleming is now back in action and he, Richard Whiteside, Phil Wade and Dave Moles have so far taken all before them – a record of seven wins out of seven.

Whiteside began the season with nine straight wins and although pegged back at Liberal B, he returned to winning form in the next two matches to give him seven out of the next nine.

Wade also won seven in their last three matches and Fleming six.

Against Liberal, it was Diane Garner who took away Whiteside's unbeaten record. He went on to lose also to Paul Lombardi, but Wade was at his best and won all three. Fleming won twice to give the team a 6-4 win.

They followed that with a 9-1 win over Black Notley C in which Gordon Fairchild's 15-13-in-the-fifth-game win over Wade was the home side's only success.

In their next match they dealt with the challenge of Sible Hedingham by 7-3. Roy Hooper got the better of Wade while Graham Cannon and Mark Brown beat Fleming.

It was only the second defeat for the newly promoted Hedingham.

In their previous two matches they had wins over Rayne F (8-2) and Notley D (10-0).

Ted Sims won the two sets for Rayne F but found Hooper too much for him.

Second-placed Rayne D were held to a draw by Liberal B for whom Trevor Laird was unbeaten.

In division one Notley A returned to the top (although Bocking have a match in hand) with a 6-4 win over Rayne A.

Peter Hayden was unbeaten for Notley while Jon Hill and Steve Pennell won twice each for Rayne.

Rayne B could only muster two players for their match at Pillar House A. Brian Riedling did all he could with three wins and the doubles with Paul Mitchell, but Mitchell was unable to get anywhere in the singles and Pillar House ended up 6-4 winners.

In division three White Lions A notched up their first win after losing their first three matches 6-4. They overcame Notley G 8-2, with the help of three wins from Adam Purslow, but in their next match they reverted to type and lost 6-4 again, this time to Rayne G.

In the Essex League, Braintree veterans' B and C teams both faced tough opposition in their first matches of the season after promotion last year.

The B team lost 6-3 to West Essex A in division three. Mike Johnston took two singles.

In division four, the C team lost 7-2 to Waltham Forest A. Dean Andrews won one singles.

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Black Notley F chalked up their first win in division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League last week.

Their H team meanwhile scored their second win but remain at the bottom of the table.

It is the point-per-set scoring system, now in its third season, that anchors Notley H to the bottom. Under the previous 4-3-2-1 system, or indeed if two points were awarded for a win and one for a draw, they would be two places higher.

As it is they trail their G team by one point and the F team by two.

Their win came over the G team by 6-4. John Breen won his three singles and Keir Hughes won two, just missing out on the hat-trick at 11-9 in the fifth game against Steve Baines.

The F team have been kept afloat by a draw and two 6-4 defeats but they too got the better of the G team to record their first win.

Andy Thompson, Mike Smith and Mike Pitt all won twice in their 7-3 victory. Ian Wallace was the hurdle they could not overcome.

Notley E are one place above the F team, a position they enhanced with a 7-3 win over third-placed White Lions B. Will Jackson and Ron Celiz were unbeaten.

But without Celiz, they tumbled to a 9-1 defeat against leaders Pillar House B. Jackson's last-gasp win at 11-9 in the fifth against Matt Shelley prevented the whitewash but neither he nor his teammates could find a way to deal with Steve and Adam Clift.

White Lions B stay above their A team after a 9-1 win over Rayne H.

Rayne D remain in second place in division two, but were held to a draw by Notley C.

In fact the visitors were unlucky not to snatch a win after losing three sets by two points in the final game.

Paul Wellington was on the right side of two of those cliff-hangers but won his other set in straight games (albeit with two deuces) to register his third unbeaten evening of the season.

At the other end of the table, Rayne's F team avoided defeat for the first time and rise up a place as a result.

They drew with Nomads after an excellent team performance in which Peter Taylor won two singles while Brian How and Ted Sims won one each. But Sims and How teamed up to take the doubles.

Black Notley A maintained their challenge at the top of division one with an 8-2 win over Liberal A but Liberal were on the right side of a 9-1 scoreline against Pillar House A. Robin Armstrong and Barry Pritchard were unbeaten.

Rayne A racked up the same scoreline against Pillar House, Duncan Elloy blotting their copybook as he had Liberal's.

Brian Riedling won his three singles for the second successive match for Rayne B in their 8-2 win over Notley B.

He was the only one to get the better of James Hicks.

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Netts A have emerged as champions Bocking's closest challengers in the Braintree Table Tennis League after two 8-2 wins pushed them up the league table.

But Black Notley A's challenge dissipated after an administrative mix-up meant they sent only one player to face the champions.

Netts' victories came over Rayne B and Black Notley B. Nikki Kennard played in both and won four out of the six while Philip Lawson was unbeaten against Rayne and Paul Davison against Notley.

Notley's two successes came from James Hicks while it was Peter Hance who took two for Rayne.

Trevor Carter's lone trek to Bocking for Notley A was in vain when no one turned up to join him. One-man teams are not allowed under league rules although he dutifully played, and lost, his three singles.

Notley did manage a 10-0 win against bottom team Rayne C but they have now dropped 19 more points than Bocking and that is a lot to make up.

Black Notley B did well to share the points with Rayne A. Wins for Graham Farmer over Steve Pennell, Rob Stannard over Dean Andrews and Laurie Sapiano over Jon Hill all come into the unexpected category.

Ten days after his eightieth birthday, Ray Fairless picked up his first win for nearly two years in Liberal B's match against Netts B in division two.

The venerable Fairless did not play last season but is back in action this time and had to work hard for his win over Patrick Gilbert, 67 years his junior, losing the first two games before showing his staying power and emerging triumphant in five.

Trevor Laird added his three singles and Paul Lombardi two to give Liberal a 7-3 win.

It was not only Notley A who suffered off the table this week. Division three leaders Pillar House B also had an administrative lapse and were forced to concede their match against Rayne H.

As a result Rayne G rise to the top after a draw with Notley E and a 6-4 win over Rayne H – but Pillar House still have a match in hand.

The division's top two players, Ron Celiz of Notley E and Tom Elder of Rayne H, both remained undefeated but there were two wins for Tim Gowers and Barry Mouser against Notley and Charles Wilkinson and Mouser against Rayne H.

White Lions A's slow start to the season has been one of the surprises of the division, but they began to set things right with a 10-0 win over Notley H.

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After failing to win any of their first six matches in division one of the Braintree Table Tennis League, Black Notley B have sprung to life and won two in a row.

As a result they have more than doubled their points tally and jumped up from eighth to joint sixth.

Graham Farmer and James Hicks were the men behind the victories, both remaining unbeaten in the matches against Liberal A and Rayne C.

Rob Stannard picked up the scalp of Robin Armstrong in the Liberal match to give his team a 7-3 win while against Rayne C, Keith Martin's victory over Laurie Sapiano was the only blemish.

Pillar House A also had a substantial win over Rayne C, Ryan Pitt taking his three singles in the 8-2 victory.

Rayne A could muster only two players but that was just enough for a 6-4 win over their own B team.

Jon Hill was unbeaten and Dean Andrews took two, losing out in four games to Brian Riedling.

The week belonged to Ben Page in division two.

The 13-year-old Netts B player had won only twice in his first 15 sets but abruptly moved on to a new plane in his matches against Rayne F and Black Notley C where he won six out of six.

There was a second win of the season too for his teammate Patrick Gilbert against Rayne F while Luke Tarrant, Netts' star up to now, was put in the shade somewhat with only three wins out of six.

As a result, Netts beat Rayne F 7-3 and drew with Notley C.

In the match between the teams in second and third place, it was Rayne D who triumphed with a convincing 8-2 win over Sible Hedingham.

Roy Hooper won the two for Hedingham but Paul Wellington commanded the evening for Rayne.

All three Notley C players won twice in their 7-3 victory over Liberal B. Tim Huxtable and Gordon Fairchild lost to Trevor Laird but it was Dave Hardy who got the better of Lyndon Griffiths.

Black Notley D ended a run of five consecutive defeats with a fighting draw at Nomads.

They had to come back from 5-1 with the tight finishes that had denied them at the beginning going their way in the final run-in.

They had lost three games close in the fifth game at the start of the evening but finished with wins in the final game of 14-12, 11-6 and 14-12 again.

Lorraine Burgess and Arthur Wilson won two singles for Nomads while Keith Flowers did likewise for Notley.

Wilson was made to work the hardest. He played a total of 296 points – only four points short of an average of every game finishing 11-9.

Black Notley F's performances in division three have mirrored their B team in division one. They followed up their first win of the season the previous week by winning again last week, this time 6-4 over their own H team. John Breen took his three singles for the H team.

Will Jackson did likewise for Notley E in their draw with White Lions A.

Holders Sible Hedingham have won through to the semi final of the restricted knockout cup after overcoming Rayne F 8-1. It was not quite so overwhelming as the score suggests. Four sets went the full distance but Hedingham won them all. Rayne's consolation was a Peter Taylor win over Mark Brown.

Their semi final opponents will be Notley G who beat their own H team 6-3. Ian Wallace won his two singles for the G team and Keir Hughes followed suit for the H team.

In what was almost a repeat of their league match, Nomads knocked out Notley D 5-3. This again was the tightest of tight matches, no fewer than six of the eight sets going to five games.

Notley came back from 4-1 down to 4-3 but Lorraine Burgess's win over Bruce Wickham at 11-7 in the fifth took them through.

They will play White Lions B who beat Notley E 5-3.

Keith Perrins was unbeaten for Lions.

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New signing Nikki Kennard was the star of last week's action in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

The England No.59 went through a high-class Rayne A line-up of Steve Pennell, Jon Hill and Ian Whiteside, respectively men's singles winner, runner-up and semi-finalist in recent years.

All perished in four games.

Larte Lawson added a win over Pennell but with Philip Lawson out of sorts – he had won nine out of nine up to that point – Netts A could get no further and a 6-4 defeat put a large dent in their challenge for the title.

Instead Bocking strengthened their position with an 8-2 win over Pillar House A.

They now lead Netts by 12 points and also have a seven-point advantage on Black Notley A who have played a match more.

Garry Fryatt turned out for the first time this season and did not let the side down. He won twice, as did Richard Jennings while Kevin Gowlett took all his singles.

Ryan Pitt won the two for Pillar House.

Liberal A picked up a useful 6-4 win at Rayne B. Mike Johnston won three and Barry Pritchard two, but in tandem they managed to lose out in the doubles to Brian Riedling and Peter Hance. Hance won two for Rayne.

Rayne F have recorded their first win in division two. And there were no half measures – a 10-0 thumping of Notley D.

Ted Sims, Malcolm Wehmeyer and Brian How were the men involved.

Liberal B and Sible Hedingham were entangled in a close encounter before Hedingham came through 6-4 to the good.

No one remained unbeaten but Paul Lombardi and Dave Hardy for Liberal and Graham Cannon and Roy Hooper for Hedingham won two. The surprise, perhaps, was that the normally reliable Trevor Laird missed out altogether.

Pillar House B returned to the top of division three when they played their match in hand to take over from Rayne G.

Their 9-1 demolition of Notley G all came via the singles, the doubles somehow eluding them in three straight games.

Adam Clift remains unbeaten but he was given his closest shave yet by Ian Wallace who stretched him to 12-10 in the fifth game.

White Lions B moved to within one point of Rayne G with a match in hand after a 9-1 win over Notley H.

John Breen took Notley's one with a five-game win over Steve Ascott but Stuart Ascott and Keith Perrins were untroubled.

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The structure of this year's Braintree Table Tennis League has meant a scramble for places in the top six where four teams are currently fighting for two places.

The league splits after teams have played each other twice with the top six contesting the league championship while the remaining three teams play off against the top four teams in division two for the next set of places.

Bocking, Netts A, Black Notley A and Rayne A are all well clear of any such concerns while Rayne C have virtually booked their place in the lower section.

That has left Rayne B, Notley B, Pillar House A and Liberal A vying for the final two places in the upper stratum.

And it was Rayne B who pulled ahead of the rest last week when they took eight points off their own C team.

Brian Riedling and Peter Hance were unbeaten while Keith Martin's win over Paul Mitchell was the only singles to get away.

Neither Liberal A nor Notley B fared so well. Both were playing a team from the upper echelon and were at the wrong end of an 8-2 scoreline.

Liberal were at Rayne A where Steve Elmes was making his first appearance of the season. He and Ian Whiteside won their three singles.

Notley B entertained Bocking where Kevin Gowlett and Gary Young were unbeaten. And for Gowlett that meant revenge over James Hicks for his only defeat this season.

There was revenge of sorts too for Rayne D in division two. They were held to a draw in their first meeting with Nomads, but in their second encounter they sneaked home 6-4.

If Cec Butcher had not just crept over the line 12-10 in the fifth end against Arthur Wilson, the match would have finished all square again.

Rayne will point out, however, that they were not the only ones to win a tight set. Kevin Saunders, who won his three singles for Nomads, had two close five-game wins of his own, 11-9 against Butcher and 12-10 over Paul Wellington.

Black Notley F started the evening well against White Lions A in division three when Alan Cook beat Steve Willis in three straight games. It was downhill from there, however, as Lions took the remaining nine sets with three each from Clare Johnson and Adam Purslow.

Andy Thompson almost got there. He lost by two points in the fifth game to both Willis and Johnson.

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# LEAGUE NEWSLETTER – 21.12.2009

## **QUIZ NIGHT, SATURDAY 30 JANUARY, 2010**

The Braintree Table Tennis League is planning to run its annual quiz evening on Saturday 30 January.

It will be held at Rayne Village Hall and start at 7.30pm.

**You are invited to enter one or more teams.**

Teams can consist of a strict maximum of six people and the entry fee is £2.50 a person to be paid at the door. In view of the limited space in the hall, teams must be entered in advance. Ian Whiteside will be running the quiz this year, but entries should still come to me. To enter, please contact me on **01376 512582** or e-mail me on [ron.fosker@talktalk.net](mailto:ron.fosker@talktalk.net).

If you are unable to raise a team but would like to take part, let me know and I will try to fix you up with others in a similar position.

For those of you who have not been to a quiz evening, the questions are all written and answered as a team. No one is put on the spot. Questions will be on a wide variety of subjects.

### **Alcohol**

**A condition of the licence is that no one may bring in their own alcohol.**

The bar will operate as usual with very reasonable prices so I hope no one will be inconvenienced. We do have to take this seriously so we will have to ask anyone bringing alcohol to leave it outside.

### **Prize**

The prize will again be a case of wine for the winners. Second and third places will be unrewarded.

### **Raffle**

There will as usual be a raffle and as always I would be grateful if people could rummage among their unwanted Christmas gifts or wherever and bring along a prize. So that we know how many others to buy it would be helpful if you could let me know in advance if you are able to do this.

## **LEAGUE TITLES**

As this is the first time we've run the current end-of-season split, it is probably worth re-stating the way league titles will be awarded.

The division one trophy will not be decided until after the final stage when the top six teams all play each other.

The division two and three trophies will be awarded to the teams who finish top after the first session (ie after they have all played each other twice).

A new consolation trophy will be given to the team that finishes top of the seven teams in the fourth section in the final phase of the season.

## **POSTPONEMENTS**

There have been a couple of hiccups on the postponement front this year. Teams are reminded that matches can only be postponed if permission has been received from the fixtures secretary. Inability to field the strongest team is not an excuse for a postponement. Teams are expected to use players from lower-ranked teams if they are available.

## **INDIVIDUAL TOURNAMENT**

The closing date for entries to the individuals is 7 February. Entries should go to Tim Huxtable by that date, please.

## **POSTING CARDS**

Ian Whiteside has asked me to pass on his thanks to everyone responsible for getting the scorecards to him. Not one team has yet infringed the seven-day rule. Can we make it for a whole season?

## **DOUBLES**

It may be a minor point, but it is useful to know who played in the doubles. A number of captains are forgetting to put in the details on the scorecards. For one thing, it can occasionally give me something to put in the weekly press report, and, secondly, it enables Ian Whiteside to enter the result electronically: the programme will not allow that section to be left blank.

## **ROY HOOPER: EMAIL**

Sible Hedingham secretary Roy Hooper's email address is now [Royhooper@mypostoffice.co.uk](mailto:Royhooper@mypostoffice.co.uk) and not as shown in the handbook.

## **WEBSITE**

The website is updated regularly and continues to be full of useful information. Players may not be aware, for instance, that it is possible to download both registration forms and result sheets for all three cup competitions.

I hope you have a good Christmas.

Ron Fosker  
Chairman

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Rayne and Notley both have five teams in the second round of the Braintree Table Tennis League handicap cup.

In a series of tight matches, Rayne teams won three of the five first round matches while Notley teams won the other two.

The closest encounter was between two Rayne teams.

After leading 2-0, 3-1 and 4-2 the C team were pegged back to 4-4 by the H team.

The final match between Matt Millbank and Keith Martin went the full distance before Martin held on for an 11-8 victory in the final game to drag the C team through.

Although he finished on the losing side, Jason Hearn had an evening to remember for the H team.

He won his three singles very comfortably in three straight games, including a crushing victory over Martin who was twice left on minus five when Hearn clinched the set. In effect that meant that Hearn, a player from the lower end of division three, was twice leading a first division player 5-2.

Rayne's E and G teams were the others to win through the first round.

The E team had to come behind to progress against Notley G. They were 2-1 and 3-2 down before winning the last four sets to take the match 6-3.

Simon Fleming was Rayne's mainstay. He won all three singles but it was his second win of the evening that was pivotal. Giving away 11 points to Harold Jones, he crept home at 13-11 in the fifth game to prevent his team going 3-1 behind.

Rayne G only had two players to face but they were not given an easy ride.

Notley H's Matt Ward won two and Keir Hughes one but two out of two from Tim Gowers led them to safety.

Despite having the toughest handicap in his team, it was Will Jackson who led the way for Notley E against Rayne F. He won all three, including a victory over Peter Taylor off scratch.

Gordon Fairchild was similarly impressive in Notley C's 6-3 win over Liberal B. He gave away a small start to Dave Hardy and Martin Wells and received one from Trevor Laird but they all came the same to him and he won his three singles, two in three games and one in four.

Rayne A reached the final of the team knock out cup with a victory over second division Notley C.

It was a fairly straightforward evening, but Lyndon Griffiths made it an uncomfortable one for Dean Andrews with a creditable 10-12, 11-9, 5-11, 13-11, 11-7 win.

In the league division two leaders Rayne E repeated their first half win over their own F team, but the F team improved by three sets on their first performance, a 10-0 defeat.

This time Ted Sims and Malcolm Wehmeyer won one each and they combined to take the doubles. Richard Whiteside and Phil Wade were unbeaten for the E team.

Black Notley C's season started slowly after they had to concede their opening match to Sible Hedingham when they got the dates mixed up.

They started the second half started in happier fashion by beating Hedingham 6-4. But they had a struggle and a half to do so.

In one of the closest matches the season is likely to see, seven of the ten sets went to five games, and Notley won six of them.

What made the evening even more interesting was that the wins on both sides did not come from the expected quarters. Adam Pitt won his three singles for the first time this season for Notley and for the first time since they entered the league last season, Mark Brown was Hedingham's leading scorer with two wins.

White Lions A started the season with a surprise 6-4 defeat to Rayne H, but they remedied that at the start of the second half with a resounding 9-1 win.

Rayne H's new signing Ryan Sanderson, 13, made a promising debut and took his side's sole victory, an impressive one over the experienced Steve Willis.

Lions A are now only four points behind leaders Pillar House B who beat Notley H 8-2.

John Breen took the two for Notley H but could not trouble Matt Shelley.

Rayne G and White Lions B remain in the hunt. Rayne had a 6-4 win over Notley G, despite three wins from Notley's Ian Wallace, while Lions B's two-man team Steve and Stuart Ascott won all seven against Notley F.

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Bocking's hold on the Braintree Table Tennis League title is looking even stronger this week after their two closest rivals cancelled each other out.

Netts A and Black Notley A fought out a draw in which both the Hayden brothers lost their unbeaten records to town champion Paul Davison.

Ian took him the closest, losing out only at 12-10 in the fifth game, while Peter, with a run of 17 wins behind him, had his chance to win in four games but perished 11-9, 5-11, 6-11, 12-10, 11-5.

The Haydens also lost a tight doubles set at 11-9 in the fifth.

Both teams picked up a more substantial haul of points in their next matches.

Netts beat Liberal A 8-2, losing out only in the doubles and Larte Lawson's defeat by Mike Johnston.

Notley went one better, a 9-1 win over Pillar House A where Ryan Pitt was the one to spoil the clean sheet with a win over Trevor Carter.

Rayne A continue to challenge them for the runners-up berth after a 10-0 win over their own C team.

Rayne E extended their lead at the top of division two after a 7-3 win over Notley D despite having to field a reserve. Simon Fleming and Phil Wade accounted for all seven wins.

Second-placed Rayne D had to work harder for their six points against their own F team. Mo Hardy turned out for the second time this season and for the second time this season won his three singles.

Sible Hedingham moved to within one point of Rayne D after an 8-2 win over Netts B. Roy Hooper and Mark Brown were undefeated.

But Netts B managed to get the better of Notley D thanks largely to three wins from Ben Page.

Liberal B could only rustle up two players to take the trip to Great Cornard but between them Trevor Laird and Dave Hardy had too much for Nomads. Barrie Applegate's win over Hardy produced a 6-4 scoreline.

White Lions B turned the division three title race on its head when they racked up an impressive 8-2 win over their own A team.

For the first time this season, Steve Ascott had a better evening than son Stuart, taking his three singles while Stuart and Keith Perrins won twice.

Rayne G could not capitalise against a two-person Notley H. John Breen won his three singles for Notley and took the doubles with Keir Hughes to reduce Rayne's win to 6-4.

Notley E also had only two players to face their own G team but three wins from Will Jackson led them to a draw.

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Bocking have reached the mid-season break point in the Braintree Table Tennis League looking pretty secure.

Not only do they have an 11-point lead over Black Notley A, but they also have a match in hand.

Having scored an average of almost nine points a match, they can afford a few slip-ups from now on and still hold on to their title.

But it is not all over. Bocking's position has been inflated by two teams' reluctance to play on a Sunday afternoon and a mix-up in the Notley ranks that led to only one player turning up for the fixture between the two teams.

Under the new league set-up, they have to face two more meetings with Notley and Rayne A and, owing to an earlier postponement, they have three meetings yet with Netts A.

Although Kevin Gowlett has played in all their matches, Nigel Hodder has only appeared three times so far and Gary Young twice. They will need at least two of them in the team if they are to remain in the driving seat.

The league splits into four sections after each team has played two matches and any two of Liberal A, Rayne B, Notley B and Pillar House A could join the top four for the final run-in.

Rayne C, while giving a good account of themselves after last season's unexpected promotion, have not picked up enough points to mount a challenge and will be looking forward to some winnable games in the season's final phase.

Four teams from division two will join the top flight's last three to contest final places 7-13 and the eight-point gap that has opened up between fourth and fifth could already be significant.

Rayne E's dominance at the top has been something of a surprise. Richard Whiteside, Phil Wade and Simon Fleming have always been competitive at this level but they have added a consistency this year that has brought them nine wins out of nine.

Under the new set-up, the division two trophy will be awarded after the first set of 16 matches and at the moment it looks like Rayne E's to lose.

The reliable and venerable Rayne D, after their flirtation with the first division last season, have adapted to life back in the middle rank but are being challenged by Sible Hedingham, who came from the other direction. Promoted after storming through division three last season, they have proved more than a match for most.

In a way division three has proved the most intriguing.

Last year's runners-up Pillar House B set the early pace and seemed to have stepped up a gear from last season, especially Adam Clift, who has gone through his first 20 sets unbeaten.

But an unfortunate transgression of the rules cost them ten points against White Lions A and a late run towards the end of the year has seen Lions' B team take over the top spot.

They started the season with only two players, Steve Ascott and son Stuart, but once the identity of the third member became known, it was clear they would be the team to beat.

Keith Perrins was a difficult opponent to beat in division two last season and has proved even more so at the lower level.

They have dropped only seven points in their last four matches, including an impressive 8-2 win over their own A team, and will have been looking forward to their next crack at Pillar House B due to be played last night (Jan 5).

Year-end league tables:

DIVISION 1

	P	W	D	L	P
Bocking	9	9	0	0	79
B Notley A	10	7	1	2	68
Rayne A	10	7	1	2	67
Netts A	9	7	1	1	62
Liberal A	10	3	0	7	39
Rayne B	10	3	0	7	39
B Notley B	9	2	1	6	33
Pillar House A	9	3	0	6	29
Rayne C	10	0	0	10	14

DIVISION 2

	P	W	D	L	P
Rayne E	9	9	0	0	68
Rayne D	10	6	3	1	63
Hedingham	10	6	0	4	62
Liberal B	9	5	1	3	52
Nomads	9	2	3	4	44
B Notley C	9	4	2	3	42
Rayne F	10	1	1	8	39
Netts B	10	3	1	6	36
B Notley D	10	1	1	8	24

DIVISION 3

	P	W	D	L	P
White Lion B	10	8	0	2	71
Pillar House B	9	8	0	1	61
Rayne G	10	7	1	2	59
White Lion A	10	4	1	5	59
B Notley E	9	3	3	3	45
Rayne H	9	4	1	4	44
B Notley F	9	2	1	6	31
B Notley G	10	1	1	8	30
B Notley H	10	2	0	8	30

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Men's singles champion Paul Davison in division one and no fewer than three players in division three enter 2010 unbeaten in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Davison held on to his hundred per cent record with narrow wins over both Peter and Ian Hayden in the Netts A-Notley A match shortly before Christmas, defeats which represented the Haydens' only setbacks so far.

Kevin Gowlett has also lost only once, to James Hicks, as have Terry Dowsett, to Davison, and Nigel Hodder, to Ian Whiteside.

Rayne E's dominance of division two is represented by three of their players at the head of the chart for that division and another at No.6.

Richard Whiteside leads the way with only two defeats, to Liberal B's Diane Garner and Paul Lombardi, both of whom, curiously, were beaten by his teammates.

The leading players in division three have so far managed to avoid playing each other which allows Adam Clift, Tom Elder and Ron Celiz all to boast unbeaten records.

Elder's and Celiz's records are not unexpected, but Clift's represents a great advance as he finished only tenth in last season's averages.

Individual averages on January 1 (qualification, one-third of team's matches):

### **Division 1**

1 Paul Davison 18 wins in 18 sets, average 100 per cent; 2 Peter Hayden 20-21, 95.2; 3 Kevin Gowlett 16-17, 94.1; 4= Terry Dowsett, Ian Hayden 11-12, 91.7; 6 Nigel Hodder 7-8, 87.5; 7 Ian Whiteside 12-15, 80; 8 Dean Andrews 13-18, 72.2; 9 Nikki Kennard 15-21, 71.4; 10 Jon Hill 17-24, 70.8; 11= James Hicks 14-21, Graham Farmer 12-18, Peter Hance 10-15, 66.7; 14 Brian Riedling 15-23, 65.2; 15 Steve Pennell 12-19, 63.2; 16 Philip Lawson 9-15, 60; 17 Ryan Pitt 10-17, 58.8; 18= Trevor Carter, Larte Lawson 8-15, 53.3; 20= Mike Johnston 10-20, David Edwards 6-12, 50.

### **Division 2**

1 Richard Whiteside 19-21, 90.5; 2 Dave Moles 8-9, 88.9; 3 Phil Wade 20-24, 83.3; 4 Paul Wellington 21-27, 77.8; 5 Trevor Laird 18-24, 75; 6= Simon Fleming 18-27, Roy Hooper 18-27, Kevin Saunders 12-18, Paul Lombardi 8-12, 66.7; 10 Luke Tarrant 17-27, 62.9.

### **Division 3**

1= Adam Clift 20-20, Tom Elder 16-16, Ron Celiz 12-12, 100; 4 Steve Clift 10-12, 83.3; 5 Stuart Ascott 18-23, 78.3; 6= Adam Purslow 21-28, John Breen 18-24, 75; 8 Will Jackson 20-27, 74.1; 9= Derek Agent, Keith Perrins, Matt Shelley 10-14, 71.4.

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The past decade was not a particularly healthy one for table tennis and table tennis in Braintree was no exception.

When this column reviewed the 1990s, the Braintree League had 36 teams. Last season it was down to 24.

All rather different from the late 70s when the league boasted 60 teams.

But there have been signs of a recovery this season when the numbers have risen to 27.

The central concern is how sustainable that rise will turn out to be.

The worrying trend, outlined here ten years ago, of the ever growing average age of the league players, has not been reversed.

In fact the percentage of over 40s in the first division has risen from 63 per cent (22 out of 35) in 2000 to 75 per cent (30 out of 40) today.

The first division of ten years ago had two players over 60. Today there are ten.

While it is encouraging that players are prolonging their careers much more these days (over 60s were pretty rare in the league 30 or 40 years ago and only exceptions, Charlie Wheeler for instance, played at the top level), it is not a good basis on which to plan for the future.

The good news is that there are two teenagers playing in division one and a clutch further down the league and coaching sessions at Netts and Black Notley continue to bring in new players. Whether it is enough to sustain the league for another ten years is another matter.

At an individual level, there have been some notable achievements during the decade.

Sarra Wang, who took her early steps in the league, won the England under 15 singles title and went on to reach the semi final of the ladies' singles in the English closed.

Mark Palmer also became a national champion, in his case in the wheelchair category.

Off the table there was further recognition at national level when Steve Kerns, Braintree League general secretary for nine years, became the press officer for the British League, and Netts supremo Brian Davison took on the role of the English Table Tennis Association's regional chairman.

Kerns also made his mark on the table when he remained unbeaten in the league for seven years and after 15 semi finals and six runners-up medals finally became men's singles champion in 2002.

There were seven men's singles champions in all during the decade, only Kerns and Paul Davison winning it more than once.

On a team front, Black Notley A and Rayne A won the first division title three times, Netts A twice and Cressing and Bocking once each.

One of the saddest aspects of the past few years has been the decline in the number of women playing the game, so much so that it has not been possible to run a ladies' singles for the past three years.

Hopefully the introduction of Nikki Kennard and return of Kelly Skeggs and Helen Barnett could mean the end of that drought this year.

Also sad has been the disappearance of two of the league's leading clubs, Colne, whose first team won the division one title a record 13 times, and Witham FC, league winners themselves six times and a club that once had four teams in the top five.

Finchingfield, Feering, Panfield and Maycast Nokes have also departed while Cressing and Braintree Tennis Club came and went and Lucas changed their name to Delphi and then to Nomads. Sible Hedingham, now in their second season, are the latest club to join the league.

Netts came and went and came back again, but the club continues to have a major impact away from the league with its coaching programmes and British League sides.

It was in conjunction with Netts that the league ran a two-a-side league for three years.

Two-a-side is seen by some as the future of the game, but it has not proved universally popular. But neither are matches that finish after 10.30 popular with younger teenagers, or particularly their parents.

Playing the game up to 11 points, introduced during the decade, was not universally popular either, but has now been accepted by most players, and preferred to 21-up by many.

What changes 2010-2019 have in store remains to be seen.

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**Players are reminded that entries for the individual championships must be with competition secretary Tim Huxtable by February 7.**

After a slow start to the season, White Lions B have hit the home straight with an important win in division three of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Their victory over erstwhile leaders Pillar House B took them 12 points clear at the top and although Pillar House have a match in hand they will have their work cut out to claw the lead back in their last six matches.

It was Pillar House's first defeat of the season, apart from a match awarded against them for an administrative slip-up, and it also marked the end of Adam Clift's long unbeaten run.

Clift won all 20 sets up to Christmas but the new year did not start well for him when he encountered both Steve Ascott and Keith Perrins in good form.

He was, however, the only one of his team to beat Stuart Ascott.

Derek Agent won two singles for Pillar House but two each for the Ascotts led Lions to a 6-4 victory.

At the other end of the table Black Notley G and Rayne H played out a draw. Ian Wallace was unbeaten for Notley.

In division two, it was Richard Whiteside's record that took a dent. Beaten only twice before Christmas and top of the individual ratings, he found 13-year-old Ben Page too much for him in Rayne E's 8-2 win over Netts B.

As the scoreline indicates, Page did not have it all his own way. For the second time this season, he could not find a way through Phil Wade's defences.

Second-placed Rayne D moved a point closer after a 9-1 win over Black Notley D whose consolation was a good win for Helen Barnett over Cec Butcher.

Three wins each for Trevor Laird and Paul Lombardi led Liberal B to an 8-2 win over Rayne F.

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Looking good at Christmas, Bocking have stumbled unconvincingly into the new year in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Having won their first nine matches, the league champions suffered their first defeat against a full-strength Netts A and then struggled to a draw with bottom team Rayne C who had lost all their previous 12 matches.

Kevin Gowlett, with only one defeat behind him, fell to men's singles champion Paul Davison and more surprisingly also to Nikki Kennard.

Gary Young, in only his third appearance of the season, also found Davison too much for him – by a convincing 11-7, 11-8, 12-10 – although he was able to get the better of Kennard and Kelly Skeggs.

Skeggs's defeat of Richard Jennings racked up six wins for the visitors.

Without Young, Jennings or Nigel Hodder, Bocking's encounter with Rayne C always had the potential to be a difficult one, and so it proved. Gowlett won his three singles and took the doubles with David Edwards, whose win over Dave Punt earned them a share of the points.

Keith Martin and Dave Moles won two each for Rayne.

The encouraging news for Bocking is that their rivals for the title are also dropping points. Black Notley A conceded three sets when they could only field two players against their own B team while Netts dropped four points at Pillar House A and three against Rayne C.

Rayne C were less successful against Liberal A who took all ten sets, but only after a struggle. They won two sets at deuce in the fifth game and Mike Johnston's win over Keith Martin came only after he lost the first two games and was taken to 15-13 in the third.

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In the days when table tennis games were played up to 21, scores of 25-23 or something similar were fairly familiar.

That is not the case now that 11 is the required target to win a game, yet twice in the space of days players in the Braintree Table Tennis League have produced scorelines that look as if they belong in the past.

Ian Rubens and Keir Hughes started the trend in the division three match between Rayne H and Black Notley H.

After sharing the first two games, they set off on a marathon in game three which went all the way to 24-23 – that's 14 deuces – before Rubens got the next point and the game.

After all that effort, he lost the next game, but rallied to win the fifth to make it worthwhile.

And it was a decisive set: Rayne won the match 6-4.

Just a few days later Liberal B's Trevor Laird and Rayne D's Cec Butcher got in on the act in division two – and took it further. Laird finally overcame his opponent's stubborn resistance at 27-25.

In his case, he had already won the first two games so he could sit down and relax for a bit.

Again it was a vital win as the match finished in a draw.

It was a match that featured the first defeats of the year for Mo Hardy. He was bettered by both Laird and Di Garner.

It was a result that did little to improve Rayne D's already distant hopes of the top spot.

They added a 9-1 win over Netts B but Rayne E's wins of 9-1 over Liberal B and 7-3 over Black Notley C took them further away at the top.

Sible Hedingham's chances of pinching second place off Rayne D were dented when they lost 6-4 to Nomads and then struggled to beat Rayne F by the same score. Roy Hooper was unbeaten against Rayne F and came within a whisker of repeating the feat at Nomads, denied only at 12-10 in the fifth game by Kevin Saunders.

The division also threw up two other curios – two matches in which one team won all nine singles yet failed to win the doubles. Rayne F's Brian How and Ted Sims were successful against Notley C and Notley D's Keith Flowers and Bruce Wickham against Liberal B.

In division one, Bocking saw their position at the top look even more secure without lifting a bat.

Their two main challengers Black Notley A and Netts A both dropped points they can ill afford if they are to wrest the title from the champions.

Notley beat Rayne A 7-3 and Rayne B 9-1 while Netts dropped four points at Notley B.

Pillar House A were involved in two close matches. They just sneaked home 6-4 against Notley B, who had James Hicks to thank for three of those sets, then they shared the points with Rayne B, for whom Brian Riedling was unbeaten.

In division three, White Lions A's draw with second-placed Pillar House B leaves their own B team even better placed at the top.

After losing his unbeaten record in the previous match, Adam Clift rediscovered his form and took his three singles, all tight ones decided in five games.

Charles Wilkinson was undefeated in Rayne G's 7-3 win over Notley F while it was Simon Pohl who had a rush of form for Notley E against their own F team.

With only one win in his previous six attempts, he took all three, one of them by the curious scores 11-8, 0-11, 10-12, 11-3, 11-5.

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Men's singles champion Paul Davison has suffered his first defeat of the season, just weeks before the annual individual championships begin in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Davison was downed by old rival Kevin Gowlett after a seesawing set in the match between Netts A and champions Bocking. Davison won the first two games, but Gowlett hit back to take the third fairly comfortably 11-6 before winning the next two by a whisker 11-9, 11-9.

It helped Bocking, who turned out their recognised first team for the first time this season, to a 7-3 win. Davison won his other two singles and Nikki Kennard had a good win over Gary Young.

Nigel Hodder won two for Bocking and narrowly lost to Davison in five games.

Black Notley moved one set closer at the top after an 8-2 win over Liberal A.

Notley's B team avenged an earlier 8-2 defeat at the hands of Rayne B by winning the return 6-4. They are now one point ahead of their opponents as a result. Graham Farmer was unbeaten for Notley.

Ryan Pitt scored an excellent win over former men's singles finalist Jon Hill in Pillar House A's 7-3 defeat by Rayne A. Steve Pennell was unbeaten for Rayne.

After a slow start to the season, Notley C have begun to run up some points in division two.

After scoring 19 points in their first five matches, they have accumulated 36 from the return fixtures, the latest a 10-0 thrashing of Nomads who beat them 6-4 first time round.

And they had the same set of players on duty. This time Gordon Fairchild, Lyndon Griffiths and Adam Pitt could do little wrong.

Notley also repeated the first half's 8-2 win over their own D team. Griffiths was again unbeaten but there were wins for Peter Foster over Pitt and Helen Barnett over Fairchild.

Notley D fared less well against Sible Hedingham where they lost all ten sets while Nomads and Netts B fought out the first 2 v 2 match of the season.

Netts B won three of the five sets available – Luke Tarrant won both his singles – and so emerged with a 5-4 win.

After their soaraway start to the season in which they won their first eight matches, Pillar House B continue to stumble in division three.

They drew with both Rayne G and Notley E and have now gone four matches without a win.

Barry Mouser was unbeaten for Rayne G while Adam Clift held Pillar House together in the encounter with Notley E.

Leaders White Lions B also caught the bug and drew their match with Rayne H. Tom Elder won his inevitable three for Rayne and new signing John Sanderson joined in with two. Surprisingly the two of them lost the doubles.

It ended a run of nine consecutive wins for Lions B.

Lions' A team have now overtaken Pillar House and moved into second place, two points ahead from the same number of matches.

They beat Notley G 10-0 and Rayne G 8-2. Steve Ascott, playing up from the B team, was the only one to beat Charles Wilkinson in the Rayne encounter.

Fourteen-year-old Warren Baines won his first sets in his second match in league table tennis when he took two for Notley H against their own G team. And one of those wins was against his father, Steve.

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Despite losing their unbeaten record with only three matches of the campaign left, Rayne E have been crowned champions of division two in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

And with a match to spare, White Lions B have clinched the title in division three.

In both cases the league winners are decided after the first phase of matches and before the league splits into its play-off sections for the second phase which begins on March 14.

Rayne E's defeat came at the hands of Sible Hedingham who went on to beat Rayne's D team to stand themselves in good stead for the runners-up medals in the division. A draw in their match with Liberal B on Tuesday will be enough.

Liberal were also looking for points to secure their spot in section two of the play-offs. They currently lead Black Notley C, who play Netts B on Thursday, by five points.

Whatever the mathematics, there is no doubt that Hedingham's was the performance of the week.

With 13 wins out of 13, Rayne E had looked like running through all 16 without defeat. But Hedingham were having none of that and in a fluctuating match, came back from 4-3 down to inflict their first defeat of the season.

Graham Cannon was their rock. He won two sets in three straight games and the other in four.

The last time the two teams met, with the same six players, victory went to Rayne E by 7-3.

And the turnaround against Rayne D was even greater. That finished 2-8 first time round, but in the return, Hedingham changed that to 7-3 in their favour.

Roy Hooper was the man in charge this time and the only one to beat Paul Wellington.

Their closeness in the table was reflected in the score when Liberal B and Notley C met. They remained inseparable on 5-5, with Liberal's cause greatly advanced by Trevor Laird's three singles.

Liberal fared less well against Netts B, where they tumbled 6-4 and Notley did their cause no help with an 8-2 defeat at Rayne D.

White Lions B clinched the division three title with a 10-0 win over Notley G while their A team lead Pillar House B by two points going into the final match. Lions A have the slightly more difficult task: they face Notley F on Thursday while Pillar House play Notley G on Wednesday.

Four dropped points against Notley H (they all lost to John Breen) pulled Lions A back while Pillar House ended their run of four consecutive draws with a 10-0 win over Rayne H.

The last of those draws was against Notley F for whom Mike Pitt was unbeaten.

Both White Lions teams have won their way through to the quarter final of the handicap cup, along with Nomads, three teams from Rayne and two from Black Notley.

Lions A, who have had an excellent record in the cup over the past few seasons while at Notley, had an up-and-down match with Notley B. Notley pulled back leads of 2-0 and 4-2 but Adam Purslow's third win of the evening in the final set took Lions through.

The B team settled their tie with Rayne D one set earlier when Steve Ascott got the better of Tony Hammond. Stuart Ascott won both sets he played.

Notley F's passage past Rayne G was a tight-looking 5-4 but they had clinched the match at 5-2. Warren Baines was unbeaten.

The remaining matches were more comfortable. Notley C and Rayne E had 8-1 wins over Liberal A and Pillar House B respectively while Rayne A declared at 5-1 against Notley D and Nomads at 5-0 against Hedingham.

Netts have been crowned division three champions of the British Women's League.

Braintree League players Nikki Kennard and Kelly Skeggs, plus Cherith Graham, were in good form during the competition's second weekend and three 5-1 wins and a draw gave them the title.

Kennard was the club's leading player with 15 wins out of 18 for the season.

The women's success followed a good weekend for the men's team who are tied for the top spot in division three south of the senior British League.

Their team of Braintree League players Paul Davison and Nigel Hodder plus Kevin Read and former Braintree champion Neil Charles won both their matches 7-1.

The Braintree League's individual championships take place this weekend at Black Notley Community Association with the finals at the same venue the following Thursday.

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James Hicks and Ian Whiteside sprang the surprises at Braintree Table Tennis League's annual individual tournament – and both were at the expense of the higher ranked Ian Hayden.

Hayden was seeded to appear in both the men's singles semi finals and the veterans' singles final at tomorrow (Thu) evening's finals night, but fell short on both counts.

Hayden was seeded equal third in the men's singles and seemed to be on the way to his third semi final in four years when he led Whiteside by two games to one in their quarter final.

But Whiteside's renowned fighting spirit took over and he knuckled down to take the fourth game 11-9.

Hayden was still well placed when he changed ends in the final game only 5-4 down, but he failed to gain another point, leaving Whiteside to take his place in his sixth semi final and his first for ten years.

His reward will be a meeting with the younger Hayden, No.2 seed Peter, who made his way to the last four with a series of relatively straightforward victories.

In the other half, reigning champion Paul Davison secured his semi final place with a four-game win over Larte Lawson.

The remaining quarter final brought together equal No.3 seed Kevin Gowlett and his surprise conqueror of last season, Trevor Carter. But there was to be no repeat this time, Gowlett easing through in three straight games.

Ian Hayden's defeat in the veterans' singles was part of a superb run by the unseeded Hicks who also knocked out No.3 seed Steve Pennell. Hayden was dispatched 12-14, 11-6, 11-3, 11-9 while Pennell fell 11-3, 9-11, 11-5, 11-8.

Like Whiteside, Hicks's finals night appearance will also be against the other Hayden who came through all three opponents in straight games.

The one event where Ian Hayden got it right was in the men's doubles where he made it to the final with the help of his brother.

The Haydens, winners of the event in 2007, came past Larte and Philip Lawson in straight games and in the final will face last year's winners Davison and Gowlett who beat Carter and Scott Dowsett also in straight games.

Carter's moment of triumph came on the Friday night when he won the first individual trophy in his 38 years in the game.

After a back-to-the-wall performance he took the over 50s title with a five-game win over Pennell.

After losing the first game, he was 7-1 down in the second and 10-6 down in the third but clambered back to win both. He lost the fourth but held on to take the final end at 11-7.

Players at the other end of the age scale impressed in the handicap singles where Warren Baines, 14, beat 12-year-old Oliver Hicks in the final, both players playing off the same handicap.

The two will face each other again on finals night in the cadets' singles.

Baines also secured the handicap doubles where he and Sean Clift beat Stuart Ascott and Tim Huxtable in three straight games in the final.

The restricted singles and divisional singles will all be played out on finals night and Sible Hedingham players will feature in two of them.

Curiously Roy Hooper and Graham Cannon both lost to their teammate Mark Brown in the restricted but Hooper came through as runner-up in his group and went on to beat No.1 seed Tom Elder, probably worn out after his five-game marathon against Cannon in his group, and Huxtable in the semi final.

Brown beat Cannon at the other end of the draw but went on to lose to Nomads' Kevin Saunders who will face Hooper in the final.

Cannon makes his appearance in the division two final, a year after reaching the division three final.

He wore down Saunders in the semi final and will face Adam Pitt, winner over Notley C teammate Lyndon Griffiths in a fluctuating semi final 11-5, 7-11, 11-7, 11-13, 11-9.

Given his form in the veterans' singles, it was perhaps no surprise to see James Hicks come through to the division one singles final.

He came past Laurie Sapiano, Elder and Carter, all in straight games, and faces last year's restricted singles winner Ryan Pitt in the final. Pitt had an 11-8, 11-7, 11-9 win over Larte Lawson in his semi final.

Two former division four finalists will contest the division three singles. Stuart Ascott, who won in 2004, came past Mike Pitt to face Adam Clift, runner-up in 2008, who beat Steve Ascott in his semi final.

Last year's runner-up Adam Pitt went one better this time in the boys' singles where he won a round robin against Baines and Hicks.

The consolation singles was won by Gordon Fairchild who beat Cannon 11-8 in the fifth in the final.

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With a stunning display of power, speed and accuracy, Paul Davison scored his third successive men's singles win in the Braintree Table Tennis League individual championships on Thursday.

Neither Kevin Gowlett in the semi final nor Peter Hayden in the final found the form of which they are capable, but that is partly because Davison did not let them.

He launched strong attacks on both wings that left his more static opponents standing.

Gowlett, who had beaten Davison in the league only a few weeks earlier, never got going. Very little he tried came off and his all-action opponent surged through 11-6, 11-7, 11-6.

In the final, Hayden, who also beat Davison recently, tried to equalise the speed of movement on the other side of the net with his own speed of thought and reaction. But he found Davison matching him in those departments too.

After a brief lapse in the third game, when he let a lead slip away, Davison refocused and stormed through the fourth 11-5 to become only the fifth person to win the title three years in a row.

He also added the men's doubles title, as last year, when he teamed up with Gowlett to overcome Peter and Ian Hayden.

He was again the dominant force in the only set of the evening that went the full five games.

Gowlett showed glimpses of his real self in this match and he and Davison looked comfortable as they won the first game 11-4. When they pulled back a deficit in the second game to win at 11-8, it looked all over, but the Haydens began to find their touch and took the next two games to level.

That was as far as they got, however, as the holders opened with renewed determination in the fifth end and took it comfortably at 11-5.

The writing was on the wall for Peter Hayden in his earlier appearances when he did not appear his usual fluent self in either his semi final against Ian Whiteside (11-9, 11-8, 11-5) or in the veterans' singles final against James Hicks.

Hicks, in his first finals night appearance, zipped around the table in an attempt to get his attack in first and after a slow start gave the No.1 seed much to think about.

He took the second game and came close to stretching it to five but a relieved Hayden just held on to win the fourth at 12-10.

Hicks did not go home empty handed. He brought his current league form (a 75 per cent average compared with 52 last season) into the division one singles final against Ryan Pitt, another player with a good record in his first season in division one.

In an entertaining and open game, with both players exhibiting power and control on the backhand, Pitt hit back after losing the opening game to win the second 11-5. Had he gone on to win the third it may have been a different story, but Hicks held on to take that at 11-9 and eased home 11-5 in the fourth.

The division two singles final represented success for patience and steadiness over youthful exuberance.

Graham Cannon, whose finals night debut last season ended in defeat at 11-9 in the fifth, gained solace with a victory over 18-year-old Adam Pitt.

Pitt relies on a sharp flat hit to win most of his points but frequently chose the wrong one to hit and Cannon's refusal to be ruffled stood him in good stead for a comfortable win.

Adam Clift was making his first appearance on finals night and stretched Stuart Ascott in the division three singles but fell tantalisingly short.

Ascott is another player who likes to thump the ball hard whereas Clift, who beat him recently in the league, is more circumspect and willing to mix it a little.

After losing the first, he took the next two to deuce but Ascott was not to be denied and held on to win 11-5, 13-11, 13-11.

It was Roy Hooper who recorded that 11-9-in-the-fifth win over Cannon last year and he was back to take a second trophy this season when he overcame Kevin Saunders to win the restricted singles.

Saunders, making his first finals night appearance more than 30 years after his debut in the league, had beaten Hooper twice in the league but he was another one to find that playing on finals night is an entirely different experience.

He seldom displayed the attacking part of his game and it was the more adventurous Hooper who held sway. He attacked early with a strong, if slightly unorthodox topspin that often flatfooted his opponent.

The evening opened with two of the league's promising young talents, Warren Baines and Oliver Hicks in the cadets' singles final.

Fourteen-year-old Baines had earned a psychological advantage on his opponent with wins over him in the junior boys' singles and handicap singles the previous weekend and he illustrated that confidence in a mature display in which he refused to be ruffled by Hicks's heavy forehands.

He was comfortable playing back from the table and showed a calmness in adversity often missing in players of his age.

Hicks was always in the hunt, missing out at deuce in both the first two games and taking the third, but he was not able to string together a long enough winning streak and it was the older player who took the prize.

And finally one curio: All ten events were won by the player or players whose name came first in the alphabet, a 1,023-1 chance.

Umpires were Arthur Clark and Graham Farmer.

**Results:**

Men's singles final: Paul Davison beat Peter Hayden 11-9, 11-4, 7-11, 11-5.

Semi finals: Davison beat Kevin Gowlett 11-6, 11-7, 11-6;  
Hayden beat Ian Whiteside 11-9, 11-8, 11-5.

Men's doubles: Davison and Gowlett beat Ian and Peter Hayden 11-4, 11-8, 9-11, 8-11, 11-5.

Veterans' singles: Peter Hayden beat James Hicks 11-3, 10-12, 11-7, 12-10.

Cadets' singles: Warren Baines beat Oliver Hicks 13-11, 15-13, 4-11, 11-6.

Restricted singles: Roy Hooper beat Kevin Saunders 11-4, 14-12, 6-11, 11-3.

Division one singles: James Hicks beat Ryan Pitt 11-8, 5-11, 11-9, 11-5.

Division two singles: Graham Cannon beat Adam Pitt 11-5, 11-2, 11-5.

Division three singles: Stuart Ascott beat Adam Clift 11-5, 13-11, 13-11.

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For the first time in its history, the Braintree Table Tennis League has been able to run an over 80s singles.

As part of its individual championships, three of the league's most venerable talents gathered for a special round robin event to mark the milestone.

Ray Fairless, the most recent of the three to pass the 80 mark, came out on top with victories over Harold Jones, 83, and Tony Murray, 81. Jones beat Murray for second place.

The three players are pictured alongside the finalists in the cadets (under 15) singles, Warren Baines, 14, and Oliver Hicks, 12.

League secretary Alan McEwan said: "We think it's wonderful that people can carry on playing the game to such an advanced age. It's a great tribute to their fitness, and their keenness.

"We couldn't resist photographing them alongside the cadets to show that table tennis really is a game for all ages."

Fairless, Jones and Murray have between them more than a century of experience of playing in the Braintree League and they all agreed on one thing: they have no intention of giving up yet.

The picture shows, left to right, Tony Murray, Warren Baines, Harold Jones, Oliver Hicks, Ray Fairless.

In the league, the winners and runners-up of divisions two and three and the final placings for the play-off phase have been settled.

Sible Hedingham grabbed second place behind champions Rayne E in division two after a late run of four unbeaten matches.

After beating Rayne D, their main rivals for the runners-up berth, they needed only a draw against Liberal B to pip Rayne D for second place – and that was what they achieved.

It was an up and down encounter in which no one remained unbeaten and it was only in the final set, Roy Hooper's win over Trevor Laird, that they grabbed the final point they needed.

They take second place on matches won, having finished level on points with Rayne D.

It was almost as close in division three where White Lions A went into their final match needing a 9-1 win to deny Pillar House B not only the runners-up medals but also the chance to play in play-off group two against teams from the lower half of division two.

But their 7-3 win against Black Notley F was not enough. John Breen, playing up from the H team, won once in that match, but it was he who had done much to deny the Lions when he took all three singles in their earlier match against the H team.

Other results: Division 2: Rayne E 8 Nomads 2; Black Notley D 3 Nomads 7; Nomads 3 Rayne E 7; Rayne F 4 Notley D 6 (three for Keith Flowers and Notley's first win since the opening week); Notley C 7 Netts B 3 (three for Luke Tarrant); Nomads 5 Rayne F 5.

Division 3: Notley F 6 Notley G 4 (three for Warren Baines); Notley G 0 White Lions B 10; Rayne H 4 Rayne G 6 (Barry Mouser 3); Notley H 4 Notley F 6 (Mike Pitt 3); White Lions A 9 Notley E 1; Notley H 1 Notley E 9; Notley E 5 Rayne H 5; White Lions B 9 Notley H 1; Notley H 4 White Lions A 6.

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New club White Lions, who have already made their mark on the league by winning division three, now have cause for a double celebration. Both their teams have made their way through to the handicap cup final.

Their B team, the third division winners, had comfortable wins in both quarter final and semi final, conceding only one set in each. Steve and Stuart Ascott were unbeaten as they beat Rayne E 5-1 and in the semi final Lions won the first eight sets against Black Notley C before Lyndon Griffiths' four-game win over Steve Ascott prevented a clean sweep.

Lions A's passage was more fortunate. Their toughest match came in the second round when they just scraped past Notley B 5-4.

They received a walkover in the quarter final and then were donated two sets in the semi final when Notley F's Andy Thompson had to leave early to attend to an emergency at home.

That meant they needed only three sets to progress and they duly arrived from the bats of Steve Willis (2) and Adam Purslow.

The final will be played, alongside the team and restricted finals, in the first week in May.

The team knockout cup final will be between Black Notley A and Rayne A, winners in 2005 and 2006 respectively.

Notley were surprisingly made to work hard by their own B team before coming through 5-4 in their semi final.

Peter Hayden's two singles held the A team together but the B team's James Hicks repeated his veterans' singles win over Ian Hayden and both Rob Stannard and Laurie Sapiano did well to beat Trevor Carter.

Rayne A had an easier passage against Notley C where Griffiths was again the only one to trouble the scorers. He had a good win over Dean Andrews but Jon Hill and Brian Riedling saw the division one side through to the final.

Holders Sible Hedingham will defend the restricted cup final against Nomads, winners, under the name of Delphi, in 2005.

Hedingham's triumvirate of Roy Hooper, Graham Cannon and Mark Brown was not stretched against Notley G where they won eight of the nine sets in straight games.

The exception was Brown's win against Warren Baines, the new cadets champion, who had a 2-1 lead but eventually succumbed in five.

White Lions B were still on course for a possible treble when they took on Nomads in the other semi final. But the Cornard team illustrated their second division pedigree with a 5-3 victory.

Lions' Stuart Ascott won his two singles, but it proved not to be enough.

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The position in the Braintree Table Tennis League first division took a major swing when Bocking, who once held a comfortable lead, could only find two players for their match against second-placed Black Notley A and were punished 8-2.

Nigel Hodder registered the two points with wins over Ian Hayden and Trevor Carter, but Peter Hayden dealt with him in three straight games.

Bocking also dropped points against Rayne A, Pillar House A and Liberal A, all of whom they beat 8-2.

Notley on the other hand took all ten points from Rayne C and with five matches to play – the top six end the season by playing each other for a third time – the champions' lead is down to just four points.

Netts A and Rayne A ended the first phase in equal third place, 21 points behind Notley.

They faced each other just before the split when, despite fielding only two players, Netts emerged with six points. Paul Davison was unbeaten and Philip Lawson won twice.

The other two places in the top six – who will go on to compete in the super league - have been taken by Liberal A and Notley B.

Notley secured their place with a 7-3 win over Liberal but the Coggeshall Road club had earned their own place the previous week with a win by the same score over Rayne B.

Rayne B, Pillar House A and Rayne C join the top four teams in division two in the play-off group one.

The league's general secretary Alan McEwan has been awarded this season's Martin Bawden Trophy for service or achievement.

Presenting him with the trophy, league chairman Ron Fosker said that last season McEwan had in effect held four jobs: assistant general secretary, as he took the minutes at meetings; assistant competition secretary as he was in charge of the handicap system; assistant press officer as he ran the website; and assistant coaching secretary as he ran the Sunday afternoon coaching sessions.

He has carried on with all those roles while taking on the general secretary's job this season and is also treasurer of the Black Notley Community Association club.

He is the second father to follow his son in winning the award after Andrew's triumph in 2008. Paul and Brian Davison were successful in 2005 and 2006.

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Champions Bocking's lead at the top of the Braintree Table Tennis League, down to four points at the beginning of the league's final phase, has dwindled even further.

Black Notley A's 9-1 win over Liberal A, coupled with Bocking's three dropped points against Notley's B team, means the gap is now down to two points as the two teams prepare to go head to head next week.

There are no easy matches in the final run-in as the top six peel off to play each other for a final time. Although Liberal A and Notley B are at the opposite end of the top six, they still presented a challenge to the top two.

Liberal's Barry Pritchard scored his side's point with a win over Trevor Carter, and he came mightily close to getting a second against Ian Hayden, but the Notley player just held on at 11-9 in the final game.

Kevin Gowlett and Nigel Hodder remained unbeaten for Bocking but all three Notley B players overcame Garry Fryatt even though, in Laurie Sapiano's case, success did not arrive until 11-9 in the fifth.

Netts A and Rayne A ended the first part of the season equal on points in third place but Netts pulled ahead when they faced each other in the first match of the new section.

Nikki Kennard and Paul Davison remained unbeaten in their 7-3 win.

They dropped three points against Liberal A in their next game, however, while Rayne won 8-2 against the same opponents the following day.

The first week of matches in play-off group 1 enabled two teams from the first division to put two second division teams in their place.

Rayne B beat Sible Hedingham 10-0 while Pillar House A's four points dropped against Rayne D included three sets conceded plus a failure in the doubles. Duncan Elloy and Chris Ciniglio were untroubled.

The new division two champions Rayne E carried on where they left off with an 8-2 win over Liberal B in which Richard Whiteside was unbeaten.

Play-off group two features five teams from division two and the top two from division three and the two former division three teams came up against each other in the first week.

Divisional champions White Lions A (formerly B) stormed to an 8-2 win, despite being 2-1 down. Stuart Ascott was unbeaten.

Luke Tarrant was unbeaten as Netts B beat Rayne F 7-3 and Lyndon Griffiths' record was similarly unsullied in Notley C's win by the same score against Nomads.

In the consolation trophy, White Lions B (formerly A), who only narrowly missed out on promotion, started with a 7-3 win over Notley F. Alan Cook won twice for Notley but he was unable to overcome former clubmate Adam Purslow.

A two-man Notley E won all they could against their own G team while Rayne G dealt comfortably with their own H team. Charles Wilkinson won his three singles in the 7-3 victory.

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Rayne E's impressive run to the division two championship of the Braintree Table Tennis League has clearly inspired them with confidence as they face the task of claiming a place in next year's top division via the play-offs.

Assuming the league format stays the same, the top three teams in play-off group one will be in division one next season and Rayne E's start to the end-of-season campaign suggests they intend to be one of those three.

They followed their initial 8-2 win over Liberal B with a promising performance against Pillar House A, one of three teams battling to save their first division place.

Then they thumped their own D team 10-0.

Simon Fleming continued his good run of form against Pillar House where he picked up excellent wins over Chris Ciniglio and Sean Clift but Ryan Pitt's three singles saw the visitors through to a 6-4 win.

There was no stopping them against their D team whom they had beaten 6-4 and 7-3 earlier in the season. This time the alphabet made no sense at all as the D team failed to stretch even one set to five games.

Rayne's C team, the most vulnerable of the ex-division one trio, started with a not unexpected 9-1 defeat against their own B team – Dave Punt pinching the one with a creditable win over Brian Riedling – but followed up with an unconvincing 6-4 win over Sible Hedingham.

Punt and reserve Roger Warren won twice while Graham Cannon won two for Hedingham.

Rayne D also beat Hedingham 6-4 but the visitors had only two players. Roy Hooper won all his singles for Hedingham.

Keith Perrins was on fire for White Lion A in their play-off group two match against Netts B. He won all three but his teammates surprisingly failed to follow his example and lost all theirs. A win in the doubles restricted Netts to a 6-4 win.

Nomads had a comfortable 9-1 win over Pillar House B while Black Notley C, with a reserve, beat their own D team 7-3.

Gordon Fairchild's three wins included one in which he lost the first game 11-0. He gradually wound up from there, losing the second 11-6 before scraping home 15-13 in the third and finally getting it right 11-8, 11-6 in the last two. His opponent Keith Flowers must still be scratching his head.

In the consolation trophy White Lion B made life difficult for themselves by fielding only two players against a Rayne H team that included both John and Ryan Sanderson. Sanderson junior won both his singles while his father had a good win over Adam Purslow to bring up a 6-4 victory.

A full house from Barry Mouser helped Rayne G to a draw against Notley E.

And just to prove that Rayne are not the only club having problems with the alphabet, Notley H had a 6-4 win over their own F team. Two singles from league cadets' champion Warren Baines added to three from the reliable John Breen did the damage.

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Black Notley A put themselves in pole position to regain the Braintree Table Tennis League championship last week when they overcame Bocking 7-3.

It was a defeat that left the champions 11 points adrift with three matches to play and only one match in hand.

Neither side were able to put out their recognised first team but at least they each managed to get out three players in contrast to their first two meetings.

For the first fixture Notley got their dates confused and had to concede the match while in the second Bocking had only two players and lost 8-2.

This time Notley were without their No.1 Peter Hayden as well as Trevor Carter, while Bocking were unable to call on either Gary Young or Nigel Hodder.

Responsibility fell on the shoulders of Ian Hayden to steer Notley home and he responded with his three singles, including a vital win over Kevin Gowlett.

He was unbeaten too in Notley's earlier 9-1 win over their own B team, Graham Farmer's win over Trevor Carter being the only one mark against them.

Notley B also lost 8-2 to Rayne A. James Hicks notched up wins over Jon Hill and Steve Pennell but could not get the better of Andrew McEwan, making a rare appearance during his university vacation.

In play-off group one, Rayne B raised no eyebrows with two convincing wins, 8-2 over Pillar House A and 9-1 over Liberal B.

Duncan Elloy took two singles for Pillar House – Brian Riedling was the one to elude him – while Dave Hardy scored a creditable win over Peter Hance for Liberal B.

Liberal B also lost 6-4 to Sible Hedingham despite three wins from Trevor Laird.

The aim in play-off group two is to avoid the bottom two positions and a place in next season's division three and a number of teams will be encouraged by their results this week.

Pillar House B have had availability problems and have virtually resigned themselves to their fate by conceding two matches but Rayne F, Black Notley D, Netts B and White Lions A have all been picking up useful points.

Netts B and Lions A both scored three points against Nomads.

Lions' defeat included an excellent win for Stuart Ascott over Kevin Saunders while Ben Page registered two wins for a two-person Netts B. Lorraine Burgess won both her singles for Nomads.

Rayne F were another team to pick up three points, in their case against the section leaders Notley C for whom Lyndon Griffiths was unbeaten.

Notley D meanwhile scored a vital 6-4 win over Lions A. Keith Flowers took his three singles for Notley and joined Bruce Wickham to win the doubles.

The seven teams in the final group will all play in division three next year, but they have a trophy to play for – and White Lions B continue to look the most likely to win it.

They had only two players to face their main rivals, Rayne G, but came away with a 6-4 win, a match in which Steve Willis and Adam Purslow let the doubles slip away but won all their singles.

With a full squad they took eight points off Notley E who themselves were a player short. Twelve-year-old Oliver Hicks had an encouraging league debut with a five-game win over Willis.

Notley F joined the list of teams with only two players and were held to a draw by their own G team. Andy Thompson and Mike Smith won two each for the F team but neither could overcome Ian Wallace.

Thirteen-year-old Ryan Sanderson won his three singles for Rayne H against Notley H, and included new league cadets champion Warren Baines among his victims.

Rayne H drew with Notley G while John Breen's three singles were not enough to prevent Notley H's 6-4 defeat by Rayne G.

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A series of tight results in the Braintree Table Tennis League has left the final placings in the play-off groups very much in doubt.

Particularly close is the position at the foot of play-off group 2 where the top five will play in division two next year and the remaining two in division three.

Black Notley C and Nomads are ensconced safely at the top while Pillar House B are detached at the bottom. But none of the other four want to join them. All are bunched in a heap behind the top two.

Two of them, Rayne F and White Lions A, drew with each other, while Netts B picked up a useful three points from Notley C and Notley D grabbed four points from Nomads.

Stuart Ascott took his three singles for Lions while Patrick Gilbert, in the shadow of his teammates at Netts B so far, was the only one to get the better of Notley C's Lyndon Griffiths.

Ben Page beat Tim Huxtable and the two of them took the doubles, but no one could deal with Gordon Fairchild.

Notley D's Bruce Wickham had a good win over Barrie Applegate then scored one of the wins of the season when he overcame Kevin Saunders.

In play-off group 1, the main question is who finishes third behind Rayne B and Pillar House A who already look certain to maintain their first division status.

With two matches to play, Rayne C trail their own E team by four points and could probably have done with more than six points against Liberal B whom the E team beat 8-2.

Instead they encountered a top-form Paul Lombardi who took his three singles for Liberal.

Rayne E made little progress against their B team who beat them 9-1. But they took five sets the full distance and Simon Fleming can be particularly pleased with his straight-games win over Brian Cook.

Pillar House A secured a similar scoreline against Sible Hedingham but again there were some close games and Mark Brown illustrated his continuing improvement with an excellent win over Duncan Elloy.

Rayne G kept up their quest for the consolation trophy with an 8-2 win over Notley G. Warren Baines took the two for Notley but he had the same difficulty as his teammates when it came to bettering Charles Wilkinson.

For Notley E, Baines, Simon Pohl and Ian Wallace all registered twice as they beat their own G team 7-3. Mike Pitt also took two for the losers.

In division one, Graham Farmer won his three singles, plus the doubles with Rob Stannard, but his Notley B teammates could add no more and Liberal A took away a 6-4 win.

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Braintree veterans' B team have pulled off a dramatic success in the Essex Table Tennis League.

The table was so close that they went into their final match with Southend B knowing that defeat would cost them relegation from the five-team division three, but that a good enough win could give them the title.

With a strong team of Steve Pennell, Jon Hill and Ian Whiteside, they dominated the opposition to such an extent that only the final doubles eluded them.

By then they had scored enough to give themselves the title, two points clear of both West Essex A and Basildon A, with Basildon B just a point further behind.

All three players won their two singles while Whiteside was on the winning side in both his doubles sets, one in straight games but the other, with Pennell, at 12-10 in the fifth game.

The veterans' first team, with availability problems, were less successful and found themselves relegated from division one.

The men's team, however, also with a number of players missing, finished fifth out of six in their division.

In the Braintree League, Bocking fell even further adrift of the title when they were beaten 7-3 by Rayne A. Kevin Gowlett won his three singles but that was it.

Black Notley A left the door open for them by dropping five points in a draw with Netts A. Netts only had two players but three wins from Paul Davison and two from Nikki Kennard were enough to give them a share of them points.

In play-off group one, Sible Hedingham's Mark Brown's run of form continued when he took his three singles in a 6-4 win over Rayne E, a match that finished at midnight.

Elloy was undefeated in Pillar House's next match, a draw with Rayne C.

Play-off group two leaders Notley C ended a run of four successive 7-3 wins by taking all ten from Pillar House B while second-placed Nomads were held to a draw by Rayne F.

Netts B put an end to any relegation worries with a crushing 10-0 win over Notley D.

White Lions B are still the team to beat in the consolation trophy, and they racked up a 7-3 win over Notley H. Keir Hughes can be particularly pleased with a win over Steve Willis.

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Black Notley A have regained the Braintree Table Tennis League title after their main rivals Bocking ran out of steam.

Bocking needed convincing wins in their last two matches to stand any chance of keeping the title on their shelf but dropped three points against Liberal A and ended with a crushing 8-2 defeat at Netts A.

The Netts defeat was irrelevant to the title as Notley had clinched it two days earlier when they took the seven points they needed from Rayne A.

Steve Pennell scored a good win over Ian Hayden and Jon Hill an even better one over Peter Hayden but it was not enough to stop them lifting the title.

Kelly Skeggs turned out for Netts for only the fourth time this season and after a surprise defeat by Richard Jennings, went on to take the scalp of Nigel Hodder.

Hodder also found Liberal's Barry Pritchard too much for him.

Earlier Netts had drawn with Notley B for whom James Hicks was unbeaten.

In play-off group one, Rayne E have earned the right to a place in next season's top division after just edging out their own C team.

The C team needed a 7-3 win to edge out their clubmates, but ended just one set short despite three wins from Dave Moles.

The final league table shows that it is not just the Westminster voting system that can throw up curious results. Because of the point-per-set system, Rayne E, who lost four out of six, finish ahead of their C team, who won four out of six.

Rayne B and Pillar House A had already maintained their first division status and finished in some style, Rayne with a 10-0 win over their own D team and Pillar House with an 8-2 win over Liberal B. Trevor Laird took the two points for Liberal.

It was Liberal's Dave Hardy who was in form in their 6-4 defeat by Rayne D. He won all three plus the doubles with Diane Garner to complete an excellent comeback season after many years out of the league.

The fight for the final place in next season's division two went to the wire.

Black Notley D looked in danger of losing their place as they went into the final week two points behind White Lions A but their four points from Rayne F coupled with Lions' 10-0 defeat by Notley C saved their status.

Ted Sims was unbeaten for Rayne F.

The destination of the consolation trophy also depended on the final week's results.

White Lions B had hoped to wrap the title up in their fixture against Notley G but they reckoned without cadet Warren Baines, who won all his singles to restrict them to a 6-4 victory.

That left Rayne G in with a chance of pinching the title if they could beat Notley F 9-1.

But that proved a step too far. Despite three wins by Charles Wilkinson, they could only register a 7-3 win and so finished one point behind their rivals.

Elsewhere Tom Elder returned to Rayne H's ranks and helped them to four points against both Notley F and Notley E, Notley H beat their G team 9-1 and Will Jackson was undefeated as Notley E beat the H team 7-3.

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A stunning and totally unexpected victory by 15-year-old Scott Dowsett turned this year's Braintree Table Tennis League team knock out cup final on its head and brought the cup back to Black Notley A when all seemed lost.

Dowsett had only been drafted in to the team at the last minute when Ian Hayden became unavailable.

He joined Peter Hayden and Trevor Carter against a Rayne A line-up of John Andrews, Jon Hill and Steve Pennell.

It produced what looked a very evenly matched event on paper. And so it proved.

To win Notley calculated that they would probably need to win at least two of the three doubles sets.

Agonisingly, they lost the first one – Dowsett and Hayden against Hill and Andrews – at 17-15 in the final game.

Then with the score at 2-2, Andrews and Pennell repeated the dose against Carter and Dowsett, this time at 11-9 in the fifth.

In between Hayden had scored an expected win over Andrews and Hill had dealt comfortably with Dowsett 11-5, 11-3, 11-6.

And in what turned out to be a vital win, Carter had got the better of Steve Pennell.

But after the doubles defeat Hill's victory over Carter at 11-7 in the fifth looked to have tipped the match decisively Rayne's way.

They needed only one of the final three sets to lift the cup and with Andrews, a player of vast experience, still to face Dowsett, victory looked assured.

Pennell almost clinched it himself in the next set when he stretched Hayden to five games.

But when Dowsett took to the table against Andrews he clearly had not read the script. He set out to dominate from the off and the former Clacton champion found himself floundering.

There were one or two wobbly moments and had Andrews managed to take an end, he may well have gone on to take two more, but his younger opponent stuck to his game to take it 11-9, 11-6, 11-8.

That left the match score at 4-4 with Hayden and Carter to face Hill and Pennell and initially it looked as though Dowsett's sterling efforts were to be for nothing as the Rayne pair took the first game.

But Hayden and Carter settled down and reeled off the next three to round off an evening of intriguing table tennis.

The restricted cup final followed a similar up and down path as Sible Hedingham strove to become the first team for ten years to retain the title.

They led Nomads 1-0 and 3-1 but were pegged back on both occasions. They dug in, though, and took the final three sets to lift the trophy.

Roy Hooper and Graham Cannon took the opening doubles before Kevin Saunders' victory over Mark Brown brought the scores level.

Cannon then scored a narrow 11-8-in-the-fifth win over Lorraine Burgess and Hooper beat Barrie Applegate to bring the score to 3-1.

A five-game victory for Saunders and Burgess in the doubles followed by another five-game win for Saunders against Cannon and the scores were level again.

This was where Hedingham got stuck in, however, and straight-game wins for Brown over Applegate and Hooper over Burgess brought them the trophy.

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A season of much fluctuation ended with the league title returning to Black Notley A, who won it in 2008. Or more accurately returning to the Hayden-Hayden-Carter combination, who won it in 2007.

Peter and Ian Hayden and Trevor Carter moved from Cressing, their home for three years, to Notley after the BNCA team who had won the title in 2008 (Ian Brown, Steve Kerns, Ken Lewis and Gary Young) departed en bloc at the end of last season.

They were augmented, as last year, by Terry and Scott Dowsett, a squad that eventually proved strong and consistent enough to wrest the title from last year's winners Bocking.

Not that it looked likely at one time.

After nine matches, Bocking had a lead of 20 points and were in the driving seat.

But their position was not as comfortable as it looked.

It was boosted by a walkover awarded against Notley who got their dates mixed up and had only one player available.

And Bocking had yet to face Netts A, who had taken 11 points from their two matches against Notley.

Their season unravelled further when Nigel Hodder became unavailable for a lengthy period.

After nine wins out of nine, Bocking lost to Netts A 6-4 and then, in perhaps the most surprising result of the season, were held to a draw by bottom team Rayne C.

Then came their second match against Notley when it was their turn to suffer from availability difficulties. It was the first match their leading player Kevin Gowlett had missed all season and they tackled their rivals with only two players.

Their 8-2 defeat brought the two teams within a few points of each other and a 7-3 Notley win in their third encounter more or less settled the issue.

Final tables:-

### Division 1

		<b>P</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>Pts</b>
B Notley	A	21	17	2	2	154
Bocking		21	15	1	5	143
Netts	A	21	15	3	3	128
Rayne	A	21	13	1	7	125
Liberal	A	21	7	0	14	86
B Notley	B	21	5	2	14	82

Only one team was promoted and one relegated under the new structure in this season's Braintree Table Tennis League – and that meant two teams within the same club swapping places.

Under the new system, the top six continued into a third phase while the other three teams joined the remaining 18 teams in a separate play-off section to determine next season's line-up.

Rayne B and Pillar House A retained their first division status without difficulty but the final place became a straight fight between Rayne's C and E teams.

The E team had already proved themselves superior to their own D team by taking the second division title in some comfort. They then set about upsetting the alphabet again in the final phase by rising above their C team to claim the final division one place.

If there was such an award, they could lay a serious claim to being the team of the year.

No eyebrows were raised when they were ranked below the D team at the start of the season. The last time the two teams had been in the same division, in 2007, the D team had finished comfortably ahead.

But Richard Whiteside and Phil Wade had tasted success last season when they earned the second division runners-up spot in the company of ex-first division player Paul Whybrow.

That seemed to give them fresh impetus and the returning Simon Fleming, back after missing most of the previous season through illness, also added extra bite to his game.

As a result they have earned the right to a crack at the higher sphere.

They were chased home in the first phase of the season by Sible Hedingham, who performed the rare feat of gaining the runners-up medals only a year after gaining promotion.

The third division title went, in some comfort, to new club White Lions who, like Rayne, suffered alphabetical embarrassment when it was their B team who took the honours ahead of their A team.

That was largely down to the fact that the B team managed to persuade Keith Perrins not to hang up his bat, as had been his intention at the end of last season, and join Steve and Stuart Ascott in a line-up that rarely faltered.

Unlike Rayne E, though, they could not make it stick and in the play-off stages just missed out on a place in next year's division two.

Instead, Black Notley D, who under the old system would have been relegated, proved their right to remain in division two by finishing above them.

### **Play off group 1**

	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	Points
Rayne B	6	6	0	0	55
Pillar House A	6	4	1	1	36
Rayne E	6	2	0	4	31
Rayne C	6	4	1	1	30
Sible Hedingham	6	2	0	4	21
Rayne D	6	2	0	4	20
Liberal B	6	0	0	6	17

### **Play-off group 2**

	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	Points
BNCA TTC C	5	5	0	0	38
Nomads	5	3	1	1	28
Rayne F	5	1	2	2	22
NETTS B	5	2	0	2	18
BNCA TTC D	5	1	0	4	18
White Lions A	5	0	1	4	16

### **Consolation trophy**

	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	Points
White Lions B	6	5	0	1	38
Rayne G	6	4	1	1	37
BNCA TTC E	6	4	1	1	34
BNCA TTC H	6	3	0	3	31
Rayne H	6	1	1	4	26
BNCA TTC F	6	1	1	4	24
BNCA TTC G	6	0	2	4	20

Players will be asked to consider a return to the old scoring system at the league's AGM tomorrow (Thursday) to be held at the Liberal Club, Braintree, at 7.45.

The current system of a point per set has been used for the past three seasons, but the AGM will be asked to consider a proposal to revert to the system of four points for an 8-2 win or better, three for 6-4 or 7-3, two for 5-5 and one for 4-6 or 3-7.

To take account of the new requirement by the English Table Tennis Association for individual registration, the league is also proposing to change the system of payment.

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Former men's singles champion Steve Kerns has been awarded life membership of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Kerns, 46, who was given the award at the league's AGM on Thursday, has been honoured more for his work off the table than his prowess on it.

He served on the league's management committee for 21 years, for nine years as inter league secretary, nine years as general secretary – the two posts overlapping for five years – and six years as vice chairman.

He was praised in the citation not only for his length of service but for his efficiency and dedication in all roles.

He becomes only the sixth person in the league's history to receive the honour.

As well as his work in Braintree, Kerns is also press officer for the British League, the Essex county association and the Chelmsford League as well as a former general secretary of Essex.

The league AGM rejected a proposal to return to the former scoring system of four points for a win, but agreed to a new system of collecting fees in view of the English Table Tennis Association's new individual registration scheme.

Officers elected at the AGM were: President, Len Woolmer; chairman, Ron Fosker; general secretary, Lyndon Griffiths; treasurer, Kevin Saunders; fixtures secretary, Ian Whiteside; competition secretary, Tim Huxtable; development officer, Brian Davison; coaching secretary, Robin Armstrong; inter-league secretary, Peter Hayden; press officer, Ron Fosker; child protection officer, Clare Johnson; committee, Steve Ascott, Roy Hooper, Keith Martin, Alan McEwan.

The new White Lions club have landed their third trophy of the season after their two teams faced each other in the final of the handicap cup.

The club's teams won division three and the consolation trophy between them and faced each other in the final of the cup.

And it was the team of Clare Johnson, Adam Purslow and Steve Willis, runners-up for the past two years in Black Notley's colours, who were successful.

They were at one stage 2-1 behind and went into the final phase of sets at 3-3, but victories for Johnson over Steve Ascott and Purslow over Keith Perrins were enough to give them victory.

It was Willis who was the star. He won both the singles he played: 11-4, 11-6, 11-6 over Perrins and 11-7, 11-9, 9-11, 11-7 off scratch against Steve Ascott.

Stuart Ascott won the two singles he played for the opposition.

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Paul Davison proved himself as the top player in this season's Braintree Table Tennis League by not only winning the men's singles, but also finishing with the best average in league matches.

He lost only once, to Kevin Gowlett, in his 36 sets, to edge out Peter Hayden, the man he beat in this year's singles final.

He also beat Hayden in their only encounter in the league, but that was Hayden's only defeat until his final match when he went down surprisingly to Jon Hill. But for that defeat he would have finished in the No.1 position.

The most significant rise in the table is that of James Hicks from 19 to 8, a reflection of his increased stature during his two seasons in the league.

Division two champions Rayne E have their three players all in the top six while division three champions White Lions B have theirs in the top nine.

The division one averages contain only those players who played in the division for the whole of the season

Qualification for divisions one, two and three is two-thirds of the team's matches, while for the second phase of the season it is one-half.

**Division 1:** 1 (4) Paul Davison 35 wins in 36 sets, average 97.2; 2 (6) Peter Hayden 42-44, 95.4; 3 (2) Kevin Gowlett 42-46, 91.3; 4 (5) Ian Hayden 33-37, 89.2; 5 (3) Nigel Hodder 23-29, 79.3; 6 (10) Ian Whiteside 21-27, 77.8; 7 (-) Nikki Kennard 38-51, 74.5; 8 (19) James Hicks 31-42, 73.8; 9 (13) Graham Farmer 33-50, 66; 10 (16) Steve Pennell 29-46, 63.0; 11 (7) Jon Hill 34-56, 60.7; 12 (18) Trevor Carter 22-37, 59.5; 13 (-) Philip Lawson 20-36, 55.6; 14 (20) Barry Pritchard 30-58, 51.7; 15 (-) Larte Lawson 16-33, 48.5; 16 (23) Mike Johnston 24-50, 48; 17 (27) Scott Dowsett 15-32, 46.9; 18 (21) David Edwards 8-24, 33.3; 19 (24) Robin Armstrong 19-59, 32.2; 20 (14) Richard Jennings 7-24, 29.2; 21 (30) Laurie Sapiano 7-37, 18.9; 22 (31) Rob Stannard 6-37, 16.2.

**Division 2:** 1 Richard Whiteside 36-42, 85.7; 2 Paul Wellington 33-41, 80.5; 3 Trevor Laird 32-42, 76.2; 4 Phil Wade 34-45, 75.5; 5 Roy Hooper 33-45, 73.3; 6 Simon Fleming 31-48, 64.6; 7 Luke Tarrant 28-44, 63.6; 8 Kevin Saunders 22-36, 61.1; 9 Lyndon Griffiths 21-36, 58.3; 10 Gordon Fairchild 19-33, 57.6.

**Division 3:** 1 Tom Elder 19-19, 100; 2 Adam Clift 31-37, 83.8; 3 Stuart Ascott 31-38, 81.6; 4= Adam Purslow 35-45, Steve Clift 14-18, 77.8; 6 Keith Perrins 21-29, 72.4; 7 Will Jackson 25-35, 71.4; 8 John Breen 28-41, 68.3; 9 Steve Ascott 29-44, 65.9; 10 Mike Pitt 19-29, 65.5.

**Play-off group 1:** 1 Paul Mitchell 15-15, 100; 2 Brian Riedling 14-15, 93.3; 3 Peter Hance 16-18, 88.9; 4 Duncan Elloy 13-15, 86.7; 5 Ryan Pitt 6-9, 66.7.

**Play-off group 2:** 1 Gordon Fairchild 13-14, 92.9; 2 Lyndon Griffiths 13-15, 86.7; 3 Tim Huxtable 10-13, 76.9; 4 Malcolm Wehmeyer 6-8, 75; 5 Kevin Saunders 10-14, 71.4.

**Consolation trophy:** 1 Tom Elder 9-9, 100; 2 Adam Purslow 13-16, 81.3; 3 Clare Johnson 8-10, 80; 4 Charles Wilkinson 11-14, 78.6; 5 John Breen 14-18, 77.8.

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