



Braintree League: Reduced majority but Liberal still win

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It was not quite the 45-point margin that gave them the title last time, but Liberal A stamped their authority on the Braintree Table Tennis League again this season and despite one surprise defeat – only their second in three seasons – they ended up comfortable winners of the title.

It was their third successive success and as in previous years, it was largely the work of Brandon Crouchman, Simon Webber, Scott Dowsett and Peter Hayden.

Crouchman, beaten only once in the previous two seasons, was less consistent but still lost only three times, twice to Victor Chan and once to Hector Rogers – as well as bowing out of the men's singles to Hayden.

Hayden, despite changing to an anti-loop bat (until the individual championships), still outfoxed more than two-thirds of his opponents while Dowsett finished sixth in the individual averages.

The revelation was Webber who maintained a very consistent run until a slight dip at the end of the season. His win average rose from 76 per cent to 84.

Rayne A dogged Liberal for most of the season but were never quite in touch and the title was out of reach before the final match of the season in which Crouchman, Webber and Dowsett beat them 10-0.

This was a different Rayne A from the one that finished second last season. Only Steve Pennell remained, to be joined by Adam Buxton – fifth in the averages – Rogers and Alan Burgess. They halved the gap between them and Liberal to 22 points.

Netts A brought off the surprise of the season, a 9-1 win over Liberal A, but lacked the strength in depth to make a challenge and finished another 21 points further back.

Rayne D suffered the fate familiar to promoted teams in finding the step up too much and although they picked

up some useful individual successes, they could never quite put it all together to avoid defeat.

In division two, the spearhead of Gordon Fairchild and Dave Parker, mainstays of different Black Notley teams over recent years, finally reached the top spot. With different backing each time, they had finished in the top four for the past three seasons, but this time were the team to beat right from the beginning.

With reserves of the calibre of Steve Noble, Mick Richardson, Patrice Elonge, Neil Freeman and Paul Nicol to call on, they maintained a steady pace and were beaten only once, by Nomads.

Liberal C moved up from fourth to second while a Rayne E team strengthened by the inclusion of former division one player Dean Andrews and new signing Kelly Yuenyongpknan, started strongly but fell away to finish third.

With a reorganisation of the league planned for next season, two teams are likely to be relegated from division two and there was a considerable scrap to avoid those places.

Netts D failed to follow the normal trend of junior teams gaining promotion and rising to the top half of the next division the following season. They had a reasonable start to their division two life but slipped down to finish at the foot of the table, just one point behind Rayne G.

Notley C – bottom at the halfway stage – Netts E and Notley D all had their periods of difficulty but did enough to keep their heads above water.

Division three was a procession almost from the word go. After finding they had not enough for three teams, Felsted RBL pulled out their second division team which left an already strong looking C team almost invincible at the lower level.

They started with a surprise draw against Rayne H – a top-form Peter Taylor was the main stumbling block – but then won the remaining 23 matches, 11 of them by 10-0 and another eight by 9-1. Ashley Butler was unbeaten and Dean Wood lost only one.

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