



Braintree League: Liberal go for historic fourth

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Liberal A will set out this week to become the first side for nearly 30 years to win the Braintree Table Tennis League for more than three times in succession.

They will again be spearheaded by Brandon Crouchman, top of the individual averages for the past two seasons, and Simon Webber, whose form jumped up a notch last season when he won 59 of his 70 singles.

Scott Dowsett is still recuperating after a second knee operation but is expected to be able to play in a few weeks.

In the meantime they can again turn to Peter Hayden, whose chronic wrist injury is again likely to limit the number of his appearances.

Rayne A, who finished 22 points behind last season, have promoted Lee McHugh to the first team.

McHugh had an average of 76 per cent last season and reached the men's singles semi-final. He will join Alan Burgess, Adam Buxton and Steve Pennell in a team that will be hoping to mount a stronger challenge for the title, which they last won in 2005.

Only Pennell remains from that team, which also included Dean Andrews, Steve Elmes and Ian Whiteside.

Whiteside will again be in Rayne's B team, who finished below Netts' A and B teams last season and may well do again this year but much depends on which of the galaxy of players turn out for Netts.

They have registered six players for both the A and B teams, with men's singles champion Paul Davison in the B team and expected to play only around 25 per cent of his team's matches.

The A team will again have Andy Holmes, Antonio Beckles and Rob Wood, plus James Hicks, Steve Buer and Chris Buer all promoted from the B team.

The B team will be led by Fred Evans, who was a member of the Colne A team that won the title five times in a row from 1987 to 1991, the last team to win it more than three times in succession.

He played very little after that before making his comeback in division two 12 months ago.

He will be joined by Davison, new signing Graham Playle, a Harlow premier division player, Maria Boulton, Gary Cattermole and Colin Bennett.

Rayne have dropped a team, which means a reprieve for their D team, who found life tough after promotion the previous year.

They are likely to be joined in the relegation battle by division two winners Black Notley B and also by Notley's A team who may find life less comfortable after losing Lucy Wang.

But the return of four times men's singles champion Steve Kerns, albeit only for a handful of matches, should enable them to keep their heads above water.

I will look at divisions two and three next week.

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