



Braintree League: Top five show strength

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In a week where the top five teams were playing the bottom five teams, there was an air of predictability in the Braintree Table Tennis League first division.

The top five all came out on top, and comfortably. There were two wins of 8-2, two 9-1s and a 10-0.

Leaders Liberal A were one of the 9-1 winners, capturing most of the sets against Netts C in straight games. Patrick Gilbert was the only player to disturb them. He had an excellent win over Simon Webber and stretched Terry Dowsett to five games. Peter Hayden was the only Liberal player not to drop a game.

Second-placed Rayne A also won 9-1, in their case against their own B team. Alan Burgess and Steve Pennell were undefeated.

They had a further 9-1 win in a rearranged fixture against Black Notley A. Pennell dropped the one set this time, losing out to Steve Kerns, but Kerns was unable to find a way past last season's men's singles finalists Lee McHugh and Adam Buxton.

Netts A, who are third, had a 10-0 win over Notley B followed by a 9-1 win over Rayne C. Maria Boulton and Colin Bennett won six out of six.

Netts B also got the better of Notley A. Nikki Davison and Jon Hill were unbeaten in their 8-2 win.

In the other match in the division, Liberal B beat Rayne C 8-2, with Andrew Huckson and Adrian Pitt unbeaten.

Liberal A will not be repeating their league and cup double of the last two years after conceding their quarter-final knockout cup match to Netts B.

Rayne A could replace them as double winners after winning their quarter-final against Rayne B 5-0.

Netts C had a comfortable passage, 9-0 over second division Rayne D.

The only close match of the round featured Notley D and Liberal C. Liberal, with the unusual line-up of Dave Hardy, Frank Neill and Robin Armstrong, raced into a 3-1 lead. They lost the first doubles but then each of them won a singles.

Notley hit back to win the second doubles and then a win for Sean Clift over Neill took them level. Armstrong's win over Adam Clift put Liberal back in the lead but an unexpected win for Bruce Wickham – league average 27.8 – over Hardy – averaging 42.0 – brought the scores level again to leave the final doubles to decide the match.

The Clift brothers dug in to overcome Armstrong and Neill 3-1 (11-6, 12-14, 11-5, 11-8) to take their place in the semi-final.

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