



Braintree League: Liberal take charge of title race

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Liberal A took a major stride towards retaining their Braintree Table Tennis League title when they scored a resounding victory over their nearest rivals.

Rayne A, who had beaten Liberal first time round, were never allowed into the game and it was only their stalwart Steve Pennell who prevented a whitewash.

Pennell scored the tightest of wins over Simon Webber in one of those ultra-rare sets where every game was decided by two points: 16-14, 11-13, 9-11 12-10, 13-11.

He then took away Peter Hayden's unbeaten record that stood at 22 sets. That was a bit more straightforward at 12-10, 11-9, 11-5.

But that was it. Pennell could do little about Brandon Crouchman and his team-mates Adam Buxton and Lee McHugh were unable to add to their team's tally. McHugh stretched Webber to 11-8 in the fifth game while Buxton came even closer to Crouchman, taking the first two games before losing the next three 11-4, 11-9, 11-8.

Liberal's 8-2 victory gives them a Liverpool-like lead at the top of the table that leaves Rayne requiring something drastic and unexpected to overturn.

Paul Davison was another player living on a knife edge in Netts A's 9-1 win over Netts C. He lost the first two games to Patrick Gilbert and only just scraped home at 12-10 in the next two, before taking the set at 11-5 in the fifth.

The match between the teams in third and fourth place, Netts B and Liberal B, resulted in a win for the latter. Andrew Huckson, Mike Johnston and Adrian Pitt all won twice for Liberal while Jon Hill did likewise for Netts.

There was a similar configuration in Rayne C's 6-4 win over Black Notley A. John Andrews, Matthew Brown and

Hector Rogers all won twice for Rayne with Victor Chan picking up two sets for Notley.

Ryan Pitt was unbeaten in Rayne B's 7-3's win over Notley B.

In division two, leaders Rayne E tumbled to their second defeat in three matches after winning their first 13.

Nomads are always formidable opposition when Ken Lewis is in the side but they also added two wins from Kevin Saunders and a Lewis/Saunders doubles win to see them to 6-4.

Liberal C included Gareth Davies for only his sixth appearance of the season and he obliged by taking his three sets in the 7-3 win over Felsted RBL.

With neither Gordon Fairchild nor Peter Pond available, Notley F were not at full strength against Notley D and it was the D team who emerged 8-2 better off.

The evening was a tough one for Elliot Game, who missed out at deuce in the fifth game against both the Clift brothers, Sean and Adam.

Netts D went down 9-1 to Notley E, with Clive Forster claiming their one win.

But there was frustration for Peter Lewis. With only four wins behind him this season, he had a cracking game with Takunda Nerutanga (41 wins out of 48 so far) before succumbing 11-9 in the fifth game.

Notley G were the major winners in division three, leapfrogging Rayne G into second place by beating them 8-2. They had to call on reserve Jonny Evans but he did not let them down, winning his three singles alongside captain Matt Brooks.

Leaders Rayne F had their work cut out to overcome Netts E 6-4. Jimmy Calisin became only the sixth player in 53 sets to beat Dave Allinson, but he lost to Ted Sims, who had earlier lost to Jack Cains.

Paul Downes, in his full first season in the game, illustrated his improvement over the season by notching up his first hat-trick in Notley H's 6-4 win over Notley I while Alex Morgan and Scott Whiteside for Rayne J and Yasunori Aoyagi and Paul Martin for Liberal D all won twice in the draw between the teams.

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