



Clacton & District: Panthers under pressure

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In each of the past seven seasons, Nomads Panthers have won the **Division One** title of the Clacton & District League by a canter, their final winning margin ranging from a massive 40 points to a still-comfortable 21 points.

But this year the Panthers are facing their stiffest challenge yet, with just six points currently covering the top three teams and only five League matches remaining.

This week, the Panthers registered an 8-2 win over Walton C, Paul Hume staying unbeaten. There were a couple each for John Hatley and Liam Harris, although Hatley struggled against the evergreen John Rankin before winning 11-7 in the fifth. Peter Burrows won the two Walton points with a 3-0 (11-8, 12-10, 12-10) victory against Hatley and a 3-1 (11-6, 11-6, 12-14, 9-11, 11-9) success against Harris.

But Walton A kept up the pressure with a predictable 10-0 win over Brotherhood B, Daniel Young, Gary Young and Gavin Price all staying undefeated, and leaving Walton in second place, a single point behind the Panthers.

Brotherhood A, who still harbour title hopes, also won 10-0, this against Walton B. Kevin Gowlett, Alan Burgess and Martin Edwards all finished unbeaten but all three had tough five-setters against Jason Gale – Burgess winning 11-5 in the decider, Gowlett winning 11-8 in the decider and Edwards scraping through 12-10, 7-11, 10-12, 13-11, 11-6 against the unfortunate Gale. The result leaves the Brotherhood side third, six points behind the Panthers.

Elsewhere, Windsor Eagles were 9-1 winners against Nomads Lions, Phil Smith and Gary Cattermole recording hat-tricks. Mel Rampton won a couple but went down to Ethan Lloyd. The closest tussle was the doubles, Cattermole and Smith edging past Ethan Lloyd and Jason Lloyd 11-6 in the decider.

The result drops the Lions into the relegation zone, having been overtaken by Walton E, despite Walton losing 6-4 to Windsor Hawks. Andy Vincent was the Hawks' unbeaten hero, his closest match an 11-6 in the fifth win against Mark Gale. Felipe Rodriguez won two, as did Walton's on-song Gale. Walton's two Marks, Gale and Ratcliffe, took the doubles 11-5 in the decider against Vincent and Rodriguez.

So if it's tight at the top, it's also close at the bottom for, although Brotherhood B are beached at the foot of the table, only five points separate the four teams – Walton B, Walton C, Walton E and Nomads Lions – immediately above them.

It looks like a two-horse race between Brotherhood D and Brotherhood C for the **Division Two** title.

This week, leaders Brotherhood D were held to a draw by a spirited Windsor Buzzards team. No-one stayed unbeaten, Lee Allen and Martin Scarfe winning two each for Brotherhood, as did Pete Bloomfield and John Harvey for the Buzzards. Somewhat unusually for a draw, none of the individual matches went the distance, with eight settled in three-straight.

Second-placed Brotherhood C gained ground by beating Windsor Harriers 7-3 and are now only three points off the top. Russell Hillier and Mark Salter remained unbeaten for the winners whilst there was one each for Ferdy Rodriguez, Isabel Barton and Jenny Higgins for the losers. Rodriguez defeated Tricia Salter 11-8 in the decider in the only match which went to five.

The Harriers are one of four teams struggling at the foot of the Division and, in their second match of the week, they were involved in a battle with one of their relegation rivals, Brotherhood G. Appropriately, honours ended even with the two teams sharing the points. Paul Metcalf starred for Brotherhood to stay unbeaten and, with Mark Beckham, won the doubles 11-5 in the fifth against Ferdy Rodriguez and Isabel Barton. For the Harriers, there were two each for Rodriguez and Barton, although it was a close call for Rodriguez against Beckham, scraping through 3-2 (8-11, 11-7, 11-8, 12-14, 11-9).

But the future's looking bleak for Windsor Magpies who lost 7-3 to Windsor Kestrels, the victory improving the Kestrels' own survival chances. Graham Bunce's maximum for the winners included an 11-4 in the fifth win over Dave Martin. Colin Beaumont, making a rare but welcome appearance for the Kestrels, won a couple and took Martin close before losing 11-9 in the decider. Martin won two for the Kestrels whose position – now fifteen points adrift at the bottom with just five matches to play – looks perilous in the extreme.

The third drawn match of the week in this Division, between Brotherhood E and Nomads Bobcats, involved two teams hovering in the middle of the table, just above the relegation scrap. Kevin Pryor recorded a maximum for Brotherhood but it was a close 11-5 in the decider against Eric Lemke and an even tighter 3-2 (14-12, 6-11, 11-8, 10-12, 11-8) against David North. Pryor was also involved in a close doubles, paired with Rodney Betts, beating North and Lemke 11-9 in the fifth. North and Mike Wellum each won two for the Bobcats, whilst Lemke won one, which turned out to be the hardest-fought of the evening, 3-2 (10-12, 11-6, 11-9, 10-12, 15-13) against Betts.

Division Three leaders Nomads Jaguars were given a stern test by Walton D before eventually emerging 7-3 victors, a repeat of their early-season score. Every player picked up a point, Mike Vilka winning three, Kevin Hume two and Harry Hawkes one for the Jaguars, with Tony Sharman, Maggie Earle and Lynette Sparks each winning one for Walton. The only match which went the distance saw Sparks edge past Hawkes 11-8 in the fifth.

Although the Jaguars are 17 points clear at the top, the race for the runners-up spot between Windsor Penguins and Nomads Pumas continues to be a neck-and-neck affair.

This week, the Penguins enjoyed a convincing 9-1 victory against Brotherhood F. Allen Denyer and Paul Dale remained unbeaten, and whilst Alan Charman took two, he lost out to Harley Wood who took the Brotherhood point 3-0 (11-9, 11-7, 11-9).

But with the Pumas' trio of Alan Dockerill, Lionel Goddard and John Bowers easing to a 10-0 victory against a two-man Nomads Lynx, the Penguins and Pumas are now locked together in second place on 88 points.

Nomads Leopards were 8-2 victors against Windsor Merlins. There were three for Stuart Wilkinson, and a couple each for Bob Jillins and Dave Wright, but both Jillins and Wright went down to Sharon Gowlett who took the two Merlins' points. The Leopards are now in a strong fourth position but still eight points behind the Penguins and Pumas.

Windsor Robins could only put out two players against Nomads Ocelots but three from Bob Bales and two from Mick Coker gave them a share of the spoils. Bales had a good singles win over Arthur Wells-Garrett, but Wells-

Garrett and Barbara Rhodes combined well to take a surprise 3-0 (11-7, 12-10, 11-9) doubles victory over Bales and Coker.

* Information and entry forms about the Closed Championships have been sent to all players. The Championships, sponsored this season for the first time by The Survey Initiative, courtesy of Gary Cattermole, take place at the Coastal Academy Sports Hall over the weekend of 18th and 19th April. Entries can be made on-line or sent by post to Tony Oswick. Full details are on the League's website.

RESULTS

Division 1

Windsor Eagles 9 Nomads Lions 1
Walton A 10 Brotherhood B 0
Walton E 4 Windsor Hawks 6
Brotherhood A 10 Walton B 0
Nomads Panthers 8 Walton C 2

Division 2

Windsor Buzzards 5 Brotherhood D 5
Windsor Magpies 3 Windsor Kestrels 7
Brotherhood C 7 Windsor Harriers 3
Brotherhood G 5 Windsor Harriers 5
Brotherhood E 5 Nomads Bobcats 5

Division 3

Nomads Ocelots 5 Windsor Robins 5
Walton D 3 Nomads Jaguars 7
Brotherhood F 1 Windsor Penguins 9
Nomads Pumas 10 Nomads Lynx 0
Windsor Merlins 2 Nomads Leopards 8

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