



## Saints and PPong on top at VBL

**Author:** Paul Stimpson

**Posted On:** March 16, 2020

Briar St Neots Saints and PPong women took the Premier Division titles at the Veterans' British League.

**Pictures by Melvyn Lovegrove** – [click here to see more on our Flickr page](#)

St Neots won back the men's Premier Division title they had lost to Musketeers last season, though the margin of victory was only one point as both they and PPong Vets remained unbeaten over the two weekends.

Neither were unduly troubled on the Saturday, though Saints did need a Chris Rogers win over Lee Neil in the final tie to confirm a 4-2 win over The Rams.

The key moments came on the Sunday, when The Rams took a point off PPong in Round 9, three times taking the lead, while Saints saw off Musketeers 5-1.

That gave Saints a one-point lead and needing only to avoid defeat in their final match against their closest challengers if they were to regain the title.

From PPong's point of view, it was the reverse of the match against The Rams as they took the lead three times themselves, with Neil Charles notching a double, against Jason Ramage (in five) and Ian Musk (in four). Simon Pugh also beat Musk, but one for Ramage and Rogers' double – including the crucial sixth tie against Pugh – saw St Neots home with 17 points in total for seven wins and three draws, as against PPong's 6-4 record.

Ramage topped the averages with 18 wins out of 20 for 90%, two wins ahead of Kevin Dolder, whose form could not lift defending champions Musketeers above fifth place.

In the Women's Premier, PPong had a three-point lead going into Weekend 2 and they held that to finish ahead of Briar Knighton Park.

KP raised their own hopes in beating PPong 4-2 in the first match of the weekend, Teresa Bennett winning twice, but it was win after win for PPong from that point, spearheaded by Sara Williams who topped the averages with 15/16 for a 93% record.

KP actually had the weekend's best record, only dropping one point through a 3-3 draw with Bribar Failand Round 7, all of which was enough to secure second place.



Premier Division champions PPong

Ellenborough won Women's Division 1, though they were thankful for having a two-point lead over Foresters Ladies as the eight-team division split in two after Round 7.

Foresters beat Ellenborough 4-2 in the final round, Susie Hughes and Julie Byrne both winning in five in the final two ties of the match. Hughes' win over Rebecca Hurrell was a particularly close 3-2 (11-13, 11-8, 11-13, 14-12, 12-10).

However, it was not enough to get above Ellenborough in the table – Foresters' 3-3 draw with Ashford Ladies in Round 8 had seen to that.

In the averages, Jane Ji of Ellenborough had a maximum 100% from 18 matches.





Ellenborough

Division 2 was a thriller as Sutton at Hone came from third place at the split to win the title on countback. Northern Belles had 12pts from the first seven matches, one ahead of HEL Ladies and Sutton, but it all changed as the top-half teams met each other.

HEL and Belles drew 3-3, while Sutton beat Billswood in the final match of Saturday. Round 9 then saw Belles surprisingly lost 4-2 to Billswood and Sutton defeat HEL by the same score.

The final round results were a 4-2 win for HEL over Billswood, but Belles' 5-1 victory over Sutton at Hone was not quite enough to get above them. With 15pts each and identical match difference of 42-18, it came down to sets difference, which was in Sutton's favour bt 145-82 as against 140-82.

Sutton's Angie Bristow was peerless in the averages with 18 wins from 18.



Wolves Vets

Back in the men's league Wolves Vets won the Division 1A title, with the crucial step being taken in the first round when they beat Team Ecosse – who actually turned out to be their closest rivals come the end of the season.

Ecosse won their final four matches to overhaul Football Wise on match-difference, while Wolves had enough of a buffer that two draws in their final three matches did not derail their title push.

Wolves had the top two in the averages in the shape of Jason Thompson and Darren Griffin, both of whom won 16 out of 18 for an 88% hit-rate.





Topspin Fusion

Topspin Fusion were the winners in Division 1B, though they were denied a 100% record in the final match by closest rivals Foresters, who held them to a 3-3 draw.

It was a dramatic draw as well, Foresters recovering a 3-0 deficit and completing the comeback when Paul Carter defeated Mark Wicker 3-1 (11-7, 11-7, 3-11, 11-6).

Fusion's Ademola Bamiduro topped the averages with 18 victories out of 20, for an average of 90%, one win ahead of Foresters' Ritchie Venner – who beat Bamiduro to kick-start that final-match comeback.



Draycott III

Draycott III were already champions going into their final match in Division 2A, but they lost their unbeaten record as runners-up Wirepoint Bulldogs won 4-2 to end up a point behind them.

Bulldogs recovered from losing the first match to open an unassailable 4-1 lead, helped in match 3 by Duncan Taylor coming from 2-0 down to beat Tim Sheppard 3-2 (8-11, 5-11, 11-3, 11-6, 11-7).

Draycott had dropped a point in a 3-3 draw with Norton Commandos in round 7, but victories in rounds 8 and 9 meant that final defeat was not costly.

The top player was the champions' Mark Romano, who was three wins clear of anyone else with a final average of 85% from 17 wins out of 20.





A Cippenham player receives his medal

Cippenham completed a dominant show in Division 2B, racking up a perfect 10 victories and losing only six individual matches along the way – four of them on weekend 2.

Their closest match was their last, against nearest challengers Foresters D, who ended six points in arrears of the champions. The meeting ended 4-2 in favour of Cippenham – Jack Boulton beating Samson Bekele in match 3 and Phillip Smith overcoming the same opponent in match 6.

Martin Adams of Cippenham finished top of the averages with just the one defeat from 20 matches, one better than his team-mate Hari Gehlot.



Whitworth Academy

Also perfect were both division three champions. In Division 3A it was Whitworth Academy, who won the division by an eight-point margin. They were not quite as dominant as Cippenham in the individual fixtures, though, with a number of 4-2 victories on their scoresheet.

Twice on weekend 2, they relied on Anthony Bates to win the final match to seal a 4-2 win rather than a 3-3 draw – seeing off Stuart Laws of Corby Smash and Tony Smith of Draycott IV, both in three straight.

Those wins in part ensured Bates topped the individual averages with a win rate of 19/20 (95%).

In 3B, Nailsworth Phoenix won by a colossal 10-point margin from runners-up St George's II as no other club lost fewer than four matches.

Nailsworth did not have things all their own way, though, with four out of five matches on weekend 2 won by a 4-2 margin. In three of those, they relied on David Hadley or Liwu Wei to win the final match to avoid a draw.

However, neither of those players were top of the averages, having to give that accolade to Richard Lightowler of SycamoreZigabyte, who won 17 out of 20 for an 85% ratio.

In Division 4, the two leagues comprised eight teams and therefore split in top and bottom halves after round 7.





#### 4A winners Foresters E

In Division 4A, Border Reivers qualified in top place at the split with 11 points, but they were overhauled by Foresters E, who were a point behind. Foresters actually slipped two points behind after Round 9, having come from 3-1 down to tie with Crusaders.

But a 4-2 win for Foresters over the leaders in the final round meant they overhauled Border Reivers on countback by the tightest margin of 42-18 to 41-19. Richard Hazell struck the final blow for Foresters with a 3-1 (6-11, 11-5, 11-2, 11-4) win over Paul Stead in the final match. Border's Geoff Salter topped the averages with 16 wins.

In 4B, Joola Plymouth were a point ahead of Halton at the split and that is how they finished. Having matched each other's results in round 8 and 9, the two drew 3-3 in a match which Plymouth led 3-1 thanks to Paul Giles' double, which meant Halton's victories in the final two matches were for little more than pride.

Giles won all six matches after the split to take his record to 18-2 for a 90% average.

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