

Clacton & District TTL New Year review

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PANTHERS ON COURSE FOR SECOND TITLE

As the Clacton and District League resumes its programme after the holiday break, Nomads Panthers are on course to take the Division One title for a second successive year.

With James Denyer still unbeaten, and both Gill Locke and Colin Webber in fine form, the Panthers enter 2014 with a healthy twelve-point lead over their nearest rivals.

Walton A are handily-placed behind the leaders and, if they can regularly field a full-strength team, are strong contenders for the runners-up berth along with Brotherhood A, now recovered from early-season player availability problems and experiencing a good run of results.

Colin Stallwood of Windsor Condors is the only other player in the Division with a hundred per cent record but the Condors may not have the strength in depth to repeat their second-place success of last season.

Newcomer Derek Willis has impressed for Walton C while Phil Smith's new lease of life for Windsor Eagles has seen both teams settled comfortably in the top-half of the table.

Windsor Hawks, led by the combative Andy Vincent and the still-improving Felipe Rodriguez, have enjoyed a more-than-satisfactory first-half season and now look an established Division One outfit.

Walton D have been beset by player problems and, although Paul Woolnough has fought hard through adversity, they have relied heavily on Kevin Gowlett to provide their healthy points tally.

The 'three Johns' who comprise Nomads Lions are proving solid citizens and have done well to be ahead of two long-standing top-flight sides, Brotherhood B and Walton B who, despite their unusual lowly positions, have enough experience to steer clear of the relegation places.

Brian Parish's injury problems have not helped Nomads Cougars' hopes of survival and, despite an impressive Division One debut from Sam Hume, the Cougars must be the current relegation favourites alongside the battling Brotherhood D quartet who lack the one star player who can guarantee two or three points each match.

In **Division Two** Graham Bunce, Dave Martin and Bob Sawyer of Windsor Kestrels occupy three of the top four places in the averages which makes them obvious favourites to finish the season in top spot.

Like the Kestrels, Windsor Ravens have yet to be beaten and, with Gary Stallwood a regular hat-trick taker and John Harvey back in form after injury, they have emerged as serious title contenders.

And don't rule out the promotion claims of Lawford who also have an outstanding player in Richard Spence, well-supported by a top-class number two in Paul Hewitt and a more than capable number three in the combative Ian Sherwood.

Nomads Ocelots have been the surprise team in the Division so far, with Peter Giles regularly contributing important points and Doug Green continuing to be an awkward and dogged opponent.

Elliott Attrill's improvement and Mark Beckham's good form have seen Brotherhood F establish a top-half position whilst Windsor Owls, led by Frank Burbidge and with fine support from Adam Jackson and Tricia Salter, have done better than they, or the pundits, expected.

With sixty-one points from twelve matches, Windsor Harriers are proving a typical mid-table outfit and although Brotherhood C occupy a similar position at present, they should surely improve on this in the New Year with skipper Kevin Pryor now back from injury.

The youngsters of Brotherhood J have taken time to adjust to this level but don't be surprised to see them win many more matches in the second half of the season.

Nomads Tigers are floating just above the relegation places but they should be able to avoid falling into the danger zone, currently occupied by Brotherhood I, Nomads Jaguars and Windsor Magpies. And with none of these three sides seemingly able to break clear and all fairly evenly-matched, it will be a fight to the finish to decide which two will suffer the drop at the end of April.

In **Division Three** Brotherhood E, who were relegated last season, are the only team in the League which has reached a hundred points and it would be a shock of seismic proportions to see them end the season other than as Divisional winners.

The race for the second promotion spot has crystallised over recent weeks and it now seems that Brotherhood H, led by Graham Parkes and Gerald Batt, and Brotherhood G, with Lee Allan and Pete Bloomfield to the fore, are the two sides likely to be involved in a shoot-out for the second promotion spot.

Ray Chillingworth's excellent form has seen Windsor Penguins rise to the upper reaches of the table, whilst fine performances from Brian Friday and Kevin Hume of Nomads Lynx, and from Morgan Harvey and Jonathan Found, have established both teams in the top six.

Nomads Pumas are a team of reliable, resolute players who have found a home in the middle of the table. But Windsor Swallows have been hindered by player availability which has marred their first-half season results whilst Nomads Leopards have suffered from three postponed matches and, with games in hand, will surely improve their current position.

Windsor Ospreys have relied on Lucy Burton for the majority of their points whilst only Hazel Blanche and Harry Barlow are familiar names from past seasons in the Nomads Wildcats' line-up, although all the new players from both sides have contributed to respectable first-half seasons.

After an uncertain start, the newcomers of Walton E are getting into the swing of things and improving match by match. And they could do worse than to take note of the Windsor Kites who have had a stunning four months by their own standards, winning three matches after spending four seasons without a sniff of success – living proof of the old adage that 'if at first you don't succeed, try, try again'.

* The first major New Year event for the Clacton and District League is the Handicapped Singles Tournament which takes place on Saturday 28th February at the Coastal Academy Sports Hall.

Full details will shortly be sent to Team Secretaries. Details will also appear on the League's website.

Tony Oswick (January 5, 2014)

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