

Sycamore prepare for title defence

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Last year's champions Sycamore receive the trophy from Table Tennis England's Keith Thomas

After a glorious summer of domestic table tennis, the British League leaps to the forefront this weekend.

As always, it is the Premier British League that gets the festivities going. This season's calendar begins at the venue that witnessed the unforgettable ending to last year's Premier British League, Ormesby TTC.

With a major influx of world class talent joining the eight teams in the competition, this season could well be the most competitive and exciting in a very long time.

One team that has a familiar feel is reigning champions, Nottingham Sycamore. The quintet of Chris Doran, Matt Ware, Paul McCreery, Sean Cullen and Commonwealth Games medallist Kelly Sibley clinched last year's crown in dramatic fashion after an epic draw with runners-up Urban, who sadly won't make their mark this time around.

Whilst Sycamore will undoubtedly have their say in the title race, they will be up against a number of teams with credible title credentials.

Drumchapel, who narrowly avoided relegation last season, have pulled off a triple coup in the shape of Chinese powerhouses. Xu Ruifeng, Hui Hui and Sung Meng Chen will join forces with the Scottish players in their search to conquer the senior British League.

A raft of international talent has also joined recently promoted London Academy. International player Dexter St Louis joins a Swedish contingent including the exceptional Elias Ranefur, and with the likes of Adam Nutland, Gabriel Achampong and Omar Khassal waiting in the wings should their chance come, they have the depth to be a threat.

As ever, Ormesby will fancy their chances. The departure of the illustrious Ryan Jenkins will inevitably be a huge dent to their chances, yet the arrivals of Portugese star Enio Mendes and Darius Knight more than fill the void, and if Ormesby can have a better start than their disastrous opening to last year's campaign, they will have every chance of success.

Premier British League mainstays Fusion also take their place once more. The experienced quartet of Michael O'Driscoll, Kaseem Adeleke, Okmar Torgalkar and Lorestas Trumpauskas had a successful season last year, and will be hopeful of maintaining a comfortable position once again.

A steady season for Cambrian's Barrow would suggest they have what it takes to mix it up with the powerhouses in the division. The signing of Gavin Evans is a bold sign of intent from the Tornadoes, and with Sean Doherty, Commonwealth Games gold medallist Joanna Drinkhall and hotshot Danny Lawrence in their ranks, all signs point to a promising season.

It would be naive to shrug off the capabilities of two of last year's promoted sides, though. Bournemouth Sports will experience their first season in the promised land and will be keen to prove they have what it takes to cement their status in the division.

Meanwhile, Kingfisher responded impeccably to relegation two seasons ago by returning to the Premier Division at the first time of asking. The arrival of Tom Maynard gives them some vital experience at the top level, and the young duo of Liam McTiernan and Marcus Giles will only improve their chance of picking up results.

As ever, the British League press and publicity team shall be making the trip to Cleveland to provide the best coverage possible.

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