

Leicester League: Northwood join the Village people

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All is set for the start of the Leicester Table Tennis League season this week.

Northwood is a club that has been associated with the Leicester Table Tennis League for many years but, this coming season, they have been absorbed into the Desford Village fold in Division Two as the village team's second string.

The squad includes the Division's top graded player, Richard Hayes, while the remainder of the team incorporates players from both clubs, not least of all Allan Crowson, who has been a Northwood member virtually from the beginning.

When averaging the overall gradings in this second tier of the League it appears to be a little weaker than normal, with three teams having been promoted to Division One. This, however, should give the prospect of a very competitive group of teams with many of those in the middle reaches being in the running for both promotion and relegation for a large part of the season.

Vishal Parmar is graded just below Hayes and spearheads the Abbots Road second team challenge along with two juniors in Bradley Gannon and 14-year-old Shreya Mehta, of whom much is expected and who is currently ranked at 21 in the English Cadets.

This step from Division Four to Two is a very big one but many feel she has the potential for further improvement, having been the biggest upward-mover in the gradings last season.

Another player under the spotlight will be Leicester Electricity's Tomas Oravec. He topped the Division Three averages last term when the club's third team gained promotion, alongside Shokat Makhani and Chris Woodward. Can he continue his improvement?

Many of the teams in this division look really well balanced in depth and should provide some exciting tussles, and this also applies to Division Three which, in comparison, appears stronger than previous years, obviously below the strength of the division above, but not by all that much.

The most interesting team here is surely Unicorn seconds, promoted two divisions having run away with Division Five last term. Much depends upon which students are available but it appears that those from the successful side are still around: Shane Gales, John Genovese, David Green and John Loan-Clarke.

The two teams down from Division Two last season, Goons and Arnesby II, are strong in depth and will be vying for promotion back up again after losing out after a very close run thing among several teams at the bottom of the second division.

Goons have John Jacques and Barry Robinson, who can both more than hold their own in Division Three, with good support from Dave Tanner. Arnesby, meanwhile, are similarly blessed, with Dave Small and Dave Wagstaffe spearheading and their support coming from a capable Nile Lovett.

Gales, who heads Unicorn, is the highest-graded player in the division but Bruce Johnson of Leicester Taxes runs him close and is always at or near the top of the individual averages, only just lacking enough support for team promotion so far. Steve Andrews of the promoted Nomads second team will also be under the spotlight, having topped the Division Four averages last season.

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