

Clacton & District League: Holders Hawks brought down to earth

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No team has successfully retained the Clacton & District League's Handicap Knockout Cup since 1991 – and that's not about to change this season, with the 2014 winners Windsor Hawks falling at the first hurdle in this year's competition.

Facing tough opposition in their Round Two match against fellow Division One side Windsor Eagles, the Hawks lost 5-2. In the only match that went to five, Mark Smith (-1) administered the last rites in match seven, defeating Felipe Rodriguez (+1) 11-9, 11-9, 8-11, 9-11, 11-8. Sue Welham was the Eagles' best player on the night, staying unbeaten in her two doubles and one singles.

In the first of three other all-First Division ties, the hotly-anticipated clash between Nomads Lions and Brotherhood A lived up to expectations, with the Lions snatching a last-gasp 5-4 victory. Four of the individual matches went the distance, the Lions taking three of them including the final doubles in which Paul Hume and Sam Hume (0) recovered from a bad start to beat Alan Burgess and Oli Reynolds (0) 7-11, 7-11, 11-5, 11-9, 11-7. It was the Lions' sole doubles success of the evening.

Walton C won the three closest matches of the evening to record an excellent 5-3 victory over Windsor Condors. Walton skipper Mark Gale was the only player to win both his singles, beating Paul Woolnough 3-1 (11-6, 5-11, 11-8, 14-12) and Annabelle Rodriguez 3-2 (7-11, 11-9, 9-11, 11-5, 11-5). Both matches were played off scratch.

Walton A's two-player team which faced Windsor Ravens had to win all five playable matches to take the tie – and they started in fine fashion, with Peter Burrows (-8) beating John Harvey (+1) 3-2 (6-11, 12-10, 11-9, 7-11, 11-5) and Colin Dearman (-8) defeating Windsor reserve Angela Barratt (+1) 3-2 (11-9, 12-14, 4-11, 11-5, 11-8). But that was the extent of their success, John Long (+2) convincingly defeating Burrows (-10) in four sets to send the Ravens into the next Round with a 5-2 win.

Two of the closest matches of the round involved encounters between teams from the Second and Third Divisions.

Brotherhood D of Division Two led Walton D of Division Three 4-2 but the Walton side fought back doggedly to take the match into a decider. But it proved a bridge too far for the Walton team, Lee Harvey and Russell Hillier (-8) scraping past Rivhu Khan and Lynette Sparks (+2) by the narrowest of margins in five (11-8, 8-11, 8-11, 10-12, 11-8). Four of the individual matches in the tie went to a fifth set, the most crucial being the 4-11, 11-7, 8-11, 11-7, 11-9 victory in match six for Harvey (-11) over Khan (+2). Harvey remained unbeaten on the night.

In another 5-4 scoreline it was Division Three which triumphed over Division Two, Windsor Ospreys edging it against Brotherhood I. Debra Found, Lucy Burton and Woody Fitzpatrick each won a singles for the Ospreys, with Found successful in both her doubles. Once again four matches went the distance including match nine, where Brotherhood's Mark Beckham and Tom Wilkin (-8) eventually ran out of steam against Found and Burton (+1) who took it 11-3, 5-11, 11-1, 6-11, 11-0. Tom Wilkin was Brotherhood's best player, winning his two singles and sharing a doubles victory with Jonathan Found.

With two all-Third Division ties, two more teams from the League's lowest division were guaranteed a place in the next round.

Nomads Leopards faced the division's top team Windsor Buzzards and, despite losing both doubles, took a competitive contest 5-3. Nomads' John Bonner (-1) beat Pete Bloomfield (+1) 3-2 (11-6, 11-13, 10-12, 11-6, 11-9), whilst his team-mate Harry Beezer (+1) just got the better of Dan Malinowski (-5) in five (7-11, 11-9, 12-14, 11-8,

11-9). But the tightest match of the evening – and of all the round two ties – involved the middle doubles, where Bloomfield and Alan Rutledge (-1) defeated Bonner and Beezer (+1) 3-2 (11-9, 14-16, 11-3, 8-11, 17-15).

It was somewhat more straightforward for Nomads Wildcats, who were 5-2 winners over Brotherhood G. Only two matches went to a fourth set whilst the remaining matches were settled in three-straight. Martin Cunningham was unbeaten in his two doubles and one singles for the Wildcats.

The first of three all-Division Two ties saw Windsor Owls overcome Brotherhood F 5-2. But it was knife-edge stuff, Frank Burbidge (-5) beating Lee Allen (+1) 3-2 (12-10, 9-11, 11-8, 7-11, 12-10) in match six and Adam Jackson (-1) defeating Barry Allen (+1) in five (11-5, 6-11, 11-8, 7-11, 12-10) in match seven. Sue Watson showed excellent form to share in two crucial doubles victories for the Owls

The handicaps scarcely affected the starting scores in the Brotherhood E v Nomads Jaguars encounter and a typical see-saw cup-tie ended 5-3 in favour of Brotherhood E. Despite Andrew North taking both his singles for the losers, Brotherhood crucially won both doubles, Duncan Dunne sharing these important victories with Tony Edmonds and Rodney Betts.

Despite the 5-2 scoreline, the all-Windsor clash between the Harriers and the Magpies was a tense affair with the Harriers taking the final two matches close in five, including Isabel Barton's 8-11, 11-4, 6-11, 11-5, 11-8 victory over Dave Sweetland in a scratch-match.

However, three sides from Division Two all lost heavily to sides from Division One.

Last season's cup runners-up Walton B started their campaign this year with a 5-0 win over Brotherhood H. The last two matches of the evening were both decided in five, the crucial match seeing Gavin Price and John Rankin (-6) beat Grant Sharpe and Rowan Cottee (+1) 12-14, 9-11, 11-7, 11-9, 11-8.

But it was plain sailing for Windsor Kestrels against Brotherhood C, where none of the matches went to a fifth set, as it was for Brotherhood B against a two-player Nomads Tigers. Both matches ended 5-0.

Round Three of the cup will be played during week beginning February 2. The draw will be made on January 16 and circulated to team secretaries by Tuesday January 20.

For the record, the last team to successfully retain the Cup was Windsor Eagles. As Windsor A, Steven Higgins, John Hobson and Jim Pallett won the 1990 final 5-4 against Great Holland A. The following year (the year when the Windsor club adopted names for their teams rather than letters) the same three players, as Windsor Eagles, beat Thorpe B 5-3 to retain the trophy.

* The only League match played was in Division Two where Brotherhood H defeated Nomads Tigers 7-3. An unbeaten Grant Sharpe again led the way for Brotherhood, with Rowan Cottee and James Smith-Daye each winning twice. John Marshall got two points for the Tigers whilst Eric Lemke was unlucky to go down 11-5 in the fifth to Cottee and 11-7 in the fifth to Smith-Daye. But Lemke and Marshall combined to share an unexpectedly easy 3-0 (11-4, 11-6, 11-4) doubles win against Sharpe and Cottee.

Despite the defeat, the result lifts the Tigers off the bottom of the table, and they are now just one point ahead of new bottom side Nomads Jaguars. And with only seven points separating the bottom four teams, the new year promises to be a tense relegation struggle for the Tigers, Jaguars, Brotherhood E and Windsor Magpies, a struggle that may not be settled until the final weeks of the season.

[Click here to view league tables](#)

* The Handicapped Singles Tournament, originally scheduled for last November, will now take place on Saturday February 7 at the Windsor Club's St James Hall venue. As play will only be on four tables, the tournament will be run on a straight knockout basis, with a consolation doubles for first-round losers.

Entries should be sent by email (to Peter White) or post (to Tony Oswick). The entry fee is £3 and the closing date is Monday February 2. Players who put in entries for the November tournament are reminded they will need to make a new entry. Full details are with team secretaries and are on the League's website.

RESULTS

Knockout Cup: Round 2

Windsor Buzzards 3 Nomads Leopards 5

Brotherhood B 5 Nomads Tigers 0

Windsor Hawks 2 Windsor Eagles 5

Nomads Lions 5 Brotherhood A 4

Windsor Ravens 5 Walton A 2

Brotherhood E 5 Nomads Jaguars 3

Brotherhood C 0 Windsor Kestrels 5

Walton B 5 Brotherhood H 0

Walton D 4 Brotherhood D 5

Windsor Harriers 5 Windsor Magpies 2

Brotherhood F 2 Windsor Owls 5

Brotherhood I 4 Windsor Ospreys 5

Nomads Wildcats 5 Brotherhood G 2

Windsor Condors 3 Walton C 5

Lawford w/o v Nomads Panthers

League: Division 2

Nomads Tigers 3 Brotherhood H 7

Tony Oswick

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