



Clacton & District League: Panthers bid for awesome foursome

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This week the players of the Clacton & District League will be brushing off the summer cobwebs from their table tennis bats in preparation for the start of the 2015/16 season on September 21.

Reigning champions Nomads Panthers will be in no mood to relinquish the Division One trophy they have won for the last three years and they begin as strong favourites to join an elite band of teams to have won the title in four consecutive seasons.

With James Denyer unlikely to play as regularly this year, Gill Locke and Colin Webber are joined by Sam Hume and John Hatley from last season's runners-up, Nomads Lions. And, with reserves like Joe Andrews, John Monk and John Poysden waiting in the wings, it would be a brave punter who would bet against the Panthers taking that fourth title.

On paper, Walton A's unchanged line-up of Binns, Burrows, Dearman and Gowlett has the look of genuine title contenders but any meaningful challenge will depend on their ability to consistently turn out a full side.

A re-vamped Windsor Condors sees ex-Brotherhood players Elliott Attrill, Greg Green, Martyn Green and Oli Reynolds link up with Colin Stallwood and Annabelle Rodriguez to form a squad strong enough to fill a top-two position.

Mark Gale's Walton C and John Hobson's Windsor Eagles were separated by just two points in fourth and fifth positions last season and both stay unchanged to renew their rivalry.

Kevin James, George Kalli and Paul Woolnough are added to Walton B regulars Buxton, Newbould, Price and Rankin to form an overloaded squad likely to secure a top-half finish.

Windsor Hawks, who are unchanged for a third season running, always provide competitive opposition and they will be hoping to settle comfortably and securely in the middle of the table.

Sadly, the Brotherhood A side which won 11 titles and five runners-up trophies in an unprecedented 20-year period of achievement has disbanded but, in recognition of that past success, the Brotherhood club has, temporarily at least, retired the 'A' team name for this season.

So Cup-holders Brotherhood B are now the club's leading team and they keep faith with the squad that battled

hard to retain their top-flight status last year. And with both Gracie Edwards and David North capable of improvement, they should have no problems surviving this term.

Alan Burgess is the only player from the old Brotherhood A side who played in every one of their 20 successful seasons and he's loyally nailed his colours to the Brotherhood mast, this year replacing the absent Gary Stallwood for promoted Brotherhood C. It's a move which has strengthened the side, and his presence and influence will be crucial in their battle to avoid relegation.

Paul Hume, John Fenton, and Adam Wilkin of last year's runners-up Nomads Lions are joined by John Hockley and Brian Parish from the Ocelots' side which finished runners-up in Division Two. Their final League position will largely rest on Hume's availability during the season.

Windsor Kestrels, who were not relegated despite finishing one from the bottom last year, have added John Harvey to their squad. Although their season's experience in the top-flight should leave them better-equipped to fight relegation this year, their lack of a star player – none of their players averaged more than 33 per cent – leaves them vulnerable.

And it could be a torrid season for an unchanged Brotherhood D who were unexpectedly elevated to the heady heights of Division One, and they start as the pre-season favourites to fill the bottom spot.

* For the record, the three teams which have won the Division One title on four consecutive seasons are CYC Nomads (who won it five times between 1963 and 1967), Nico A (five times, 1974–78) and Brotherhood A (nine times, 1999–2007).

* A preview of Division Two and Division Three will appear next week.

* Players are reminded they must register with Table Tennis England in order to be eligible to play League table tennis. Any queries, contact League Secretary Lyn White on 01255 425292.

* The printing of league handbooks has been delayed but they should be available to Club Secretaries by the weekend. Full details of the handbook can be viewed on the League's website.

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