



Clacton & District League: Three-way promotion battle looks likely

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As the 2015/16 Clacton & District League season gets under way this week, and the resident pundits consult their crystal balls and tea leaves, the signs are that it will be a three-horse race in the battle for honours in **Division Two**.

With three teams promoted to – and no teams relegated from – Division One, last season's fourth-placed side Lawford start as one of the favourites, regulars Ian Sherwood, Richard Spence and Paul Hewitt always a formidable combination.

Windsor Owls have assembled a strong line-up with Mark Salter and Woo Dy joining Frank Burbidge and Tricia Salter, and they won't be far off the top come next April.

The new-look Nomads Tigers are the third of the likely title contenders, with John Bonner, Peter Giles and Roger Hance linking up with last year's Tigers, John Marshall and Darryl Lott, to form an impressive five-man squad.

Windsor Harriers and Brotherhood F both retain the quartets that saw them finish in the middle of the table last year and, with the probability that none of their players will show either dramatic improvement or deterioration, don't be surprised if they end this season in similar positions.

James Smith-Daye, Grant Sharpe, Graham Parkes and John Wrigley are this year's Brotherhood H and, with Sharpe expected to be one of the division's top players, they will be disappointed with anything less than a top-half finish.

On paper, there seems little to separate Brotherhood I, Windsor Buzzards and Brotherhood E, who will all be aiming for mid-table respectability.

There's no Kelvin Olano in the Brotherhood I line-up where Mark Beckham, Jonathan Found and Tom Wilkin are joined by Mo Hardy, an experienced player new to Clacton League whose form could be the crucial factor determining the team's final position.

Windsor Buzzards have added Angela Barratt as permanent back-up to the squad that won the Division Three title last season to produce a quintet of highly-competent players capable of holding their own at this level.

Brotherhood E side field the same foursome for the fourth consecutive season and, as always, will provide competitive, companionable opposition.

Both Nomads Jaguars, who add Cris Edwards to their squad, and an unchanged Windsor Magpies were spared relegation last season but both may be involved in a similar survival battle this year.

And they may be joined by the Nomads Bobcats' side comprising Harry Beezer, Tony Beezer, Jill Canning, Doug Green, Vic Little and Tony Robinson, the probable absence of injured skipper Green for much of the season likely to be critical.

With 19 players playing Clacton League table tennis for the first time, and four teams comprising mainly new players, accurate predictions for **Division Three** are difficult – if not impossible.

However, the Nomads Pumas' side of John Bowers, Andrew Cousins, Alan Dockerill and Lionel Goddard, supplemented by Eric Lemke in place of John Houghton, looks by far the strongest of the 12 teams.

Ron Dacey and Harry Barlow, players of some considerable experience, are included in a Windsor Penguins' squad that may well find themselves higher in the table than they expect.

Walton D, with two seasons' experience behind them, have Division Three Singles champion Rivhu Khan in their team and, supported by regular reserve John Long, they're another side capable of a better-than- anticipated finish.

Nomads Wildcats' Andrew Cawley, Hazel Blanche and Martin Cunningham are joined by new junior Jordan Webb and ex-Lynx player Brian Friday and they could produce a surprise or two this season.

Another team which will provide resilient opposition is Windsor Ospreys, who include Maci Harvey and Viv Rodriguez alongside the reliable Debra Found, the improving Millie Easton and the even-faster-improving Woody Fitzpatrick, of whom much is expected this season.

Nomads Leopards, captained this year by Norman Jacobs and who include Chris Gibbons, Roger McNaughton and Stuart Wilkinson, will be hoping Tony Rayner can find full fitness to earn the essential points for a top-half finish.

Kayley Lamb leads the all-female Windsor Swallows side of stalwart Iris Howlett, Sue Chillingworth, Vicki Edwards, Diane Self and newcomer Kayleigh Stratford.

Windsor Kites, now in their sixth season in the League, have become popular figures on the local table tennis scene and, with new-signing Jack Haylett and the increasingly-impressive Chris Simson, they will be hoping for a best-ever League season.

Rob Bright makes a welcome return to local table tennis but he is the only familiar name in the Brotherhood G team, as are the names of Tom Collins and Paul Dale for Nomads Ocelots.

Old-hand John Houghton lends his experience to lead a Nomads Lynx side of otherwise new players, whilst Mike Hillier has the pleasure of captaining a Nomads Cougars' team of four women players, of whom only ex-Windsor Zoe Strange played last year.

Although it is the nature of sport that only a few can be successful, the Management Committee hopes all players, new and old, will have an enjoyable and personally-satisfying season.

* Players are reminded they must register with Table Tennis England to be eligible to play in the League. Any player who is not registered by September 30 will have their matches considered void.

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