



Braintree League: Liberal take the title

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While not so dramatic as last season when the top two teams finished on the same number of points, this year's race for the Braintree Table Tennis League title remained open until the final match of the season.

Liberal A and Netts A were never more than a few points apart throughout the season but Liberal held their nerve to prevail in the end by nine points.

Reigning champions Netts A retained only Paul Davison from their 2015 line-up. Kevin Gowlett, who moved to Clacton, was the major loss – his 51 sets were instrumental in helping them lift the title – but they also lost Patrick Gilbert, who went to university, while John Cleasby, Nikki Davison and Andy Holmes broke off to form a new C team.

Alistair Hill and James Mullane were promoted from last year's B team to produce a three-man team in which Davison and Mullane played in every match while Hill missed only four.

Liberal A, on the other hand, had a squad of five, a nucleus of two and made full use of reserves. Simon Webber and Scott Dowsett missed three and five matches respectively while Peter Hayden played in nine, Ian Hayden five, Brandon Crouchman four and reserves were called upon nine times. In the end it was just enough.

Liberal started well, with nine wins in their first nine matches while Netts lost one and drew two of their first nine. That produced a gap of seven points which was to remain more or less through the season.

The new Netts C, where Maria Boulton joined Cleasby, Holmes and Nikki Davison, came close to causing an upset, finishing only three points behind their A team, a position that would probably have been reversed if they had not been forced to concede a match early in the season to Rayne B, a team they beat 9-1 second time round.

At the other end of the table, Sible Hedingham, promoted last season after finishing last in division one the previous three seasons, at last stayed up on their own merits, thanks in part to more regular appearances by Richard Jennings, finishing well clear of Rayne C, who lost all their matches.

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