



Braintree League: James adds spice

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No Steve Kerns, not much Paul Davison or Peter Hayden, but possibly a little bit of Rik James.

It is the latter that could add a little spice to this season's Braintree Table Tennis League, which begins this week.

James, a past Chelmsford League champion and eight times winner of the Colchester League men's singles, has recently moved to Hedingham and has offered to turn out for the local team when needed.

Apart from adding interest to the league programme, James's presence will threaten the monopoly that Kerns, Davison and Hayden have had in the men's singles over the past 10 years.

Kerns is taking a year out from the league this year, Davison expects to cut down on his matches and Hayden will continue to ration his appearances to avoid further damage to his wrist.

The team battle, though, looks likely to be a repeat of last year, with Hayden's Liberal A chased to the finishing line by Davison's Netts A.

Netts C, an unexpected third last season, have amalgamated with the club's B team to produce a sizeable but something of an unpredictable collection of players.

If John Cleasby, who has moved to Thorpe-le-Soken, continues to make the journey to Earls Colne, he, Andy Holmes, James Hicks and Maria Boulton will offer a firm challenge. Nikki Davison may return to the side after Davison junior number two arrives at the end of the year.

Rayne A have had a consistent top-half place for many years and that is unlikely to change. They have promoted Ryan Pitt, from their B team, to join the regulars.

Without Kerns, Black Notley A's position in division one will be in some jeopardy. His 23 wins last season was almost exactly the distance between his team and second from bottom Sible Hedingham.

But Notley A could be saved from the drop by their own B team. Promoted last year with the help of 38 wins by Gary Jackson and 18 out of 18 at the end of the season from Remy De Lynen, they will probably have to cope without either of them this year.

De Lynen is moving to Hertfordshire while Jackson's leg injury, sustained towards the end of the season, threatens to end his table tennis career. They welcome back Victor Chan, after a season with Rayne, and have promoted Hannah Pitt from division three, where she was unbeaten last season.

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