



Braintree League: Rayne aim to reign

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Posted On: September 12, 2016

Rayne have had a record-equalling four teams in the first division of the Braintree Table Tennis League over the past three seasons, but their C team found it tough going last year and instead will start this season as one of the favourites for promotion from division two.

Now restyled the D team, they have lost the services of Keith Martin, who remains in division one, but Richard Whiteside and Nick Hasler will be joined by Rob Stannard, who returns after a year's absence, together with new signing Richard Pope.

Their most likely challengers will be Liberal C, runners-up last season, whose success may depend, as before, on how often Jon Fieldsend and Neil Freeman are able to turn out.

Rayne E, third last year, have the same team of Dave Miller, Dave Punt, Steve Siggs and Paul Wellington, while Black Notley C, who finished fourth as the B team, are boosted by new signing Andrew Pagett, also returning after a year's lay-off from the game.

Felsted RBL A have dropped out, with the Butler family having a crack at the Chelmsford League instead.

And that means a reprieve for bottom team Felsted B, although they will do well to avoid propping up the table again this year.

It was Felsted's C team who were promoted, and will now do battle as the new A team. The progress of 16-year-old Matthew Laws will be watched with interest, and they have also made a useful signing in Richard Upson.

One name that will not feature is that of Hedingham Lions, formerly White Lions, who have been priced out of their venue and joined Rayne. At least two-thirds of them have. Clare Johnson is taking a break while Adam Purslow and Steve Willis will be joined by Keith Flowers, moving across from Notley D, as Rayne's new G team.

Without a relegated team, promotion from division three is wide open, especially as last year's runners-up Notley E have effectively wound up.

Hannah Pitt is trying her hand at division one, while injuries look likely to force Helen Barnett out of the game.

Jill Canning is the sole survivor of the team and is joined by Diane Pitt, another player returning after a break, plus Alan Cook and Steve Rowe.

They are ranked by the club behind last year's I team, who now become E and will be endeavouring to improve on their third-place finish of last season. With 15-year-old Jamie Brooks continuing to improve – he and Matthew Laws won the Thursday summer league – that is not beyond the realms of possibility.

However, they will do well to finish above Rayne's H team, where Charles Wilkinson and Tim Gowers are joined by Peter Taylor and Brian How, both in division two last season, as well as new signing Dave Allinson.

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