



Clacton & District: Panthers have X-Factor

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As the nights start to draw in, and the thoughts of many North Essex residents turn to the fortunes of the contestants of *Strictly Come Dancing* and *The X Factor*, the thoughts of local table tennis players turn to far loftier and more important matters – the new Clacton & District Table Tennis League season which begins on September 12.

For the last four years, Nomads Panthers have reigned supreme in **Division One**, in each of those seasons taking the title by a margin of 25 points or more.

They retain the victorious line-up that did them proud last year – James Denyer, John Hatley, Sam Hume, Gill Locke and Colin Webber – and it would take a braver man than the Clacton League's resident pundit to predict anything other than a fifth Panthers' triumph in 2017.

If there is to be a significant title challenge, the likeliest source is the Windsor Condors' side of Greg Green, Martin Hogg and Colin Stallwood strengthened by the addition of Felipe Rodriguez, who links up with sister Annabelle after a four-year gap.

Windsor Eagles are the most consistent team of all the top-flight sides, having finished in the top six every season since they were formed in 1991. They are also unchanged and, although a repeat of last season's runners-up position might be beyond them this year, a top-four finish is well within their capabilities.

However, don't overlook the claims of Walton A who have amassed – on paper – a strong-looking squad which includes Kevin James, Gavin Price and Gary Young alongside Paul Woolnough and John Rankin, a team capable of taking on any of the top teams in the division.

Colin Dearman and David Binns are added to Walton B regulars Mark Gale, Jason Gale, Paul Meikle and Derek Willis to form a solid and competitive mid-table side, a description that also seems likely to apply to last year's third-placed team Windsor Hawks who, without Felipe Rodriguez and despite the inclusion of Elliott Attrill and Colchester League stalwart George Berry, may have to settle for less heady heights this term.

Last year, Brotherhood B, Brotherhood C and Nomads Lions were separated by just three points in sixth, seventh and eighth positions and there could be equally-tight competition between the three teams this season.

Brotherhood C retain heavyweights Kevin Gowlett and Alan Burgess alongside Kevin Pryor and Fred Gallone, whilst Brotherhood B, without David North this year, will be looking to Gracie Edwards to continue her steady improvement. And although the Lions' line-up has not been finalised, the Nomads Club seem likely to promote Roger Hance to join Paul Hume, Adam Wilkin and Adam Cuthbert in a team which has the makings of a combative side.

Of the remaining three teams, Windsor Kestrels – who have been reprieved from relegation for the last two seasons despite finishing one-from-bottom on both occasions – look best-equipped to survive, despite the absence of Bob Sawyer from their squad.

So, as is often the case, life looks likely to be a struggle for the two promoted teams.

Dan Wright is given an opportunity to test himself at this level in the Windsor Owls' team with Frank Burbidge, Mark Salter and Tricia Salter, whilst Lawford retain the familiar threesome of Paul Hewitt, Ian Sherwood and Richard Spence who finished runners-up in Division Two just three points behind the Owls last year. This season, both teams could find themselves locked in a battle to avoid taking the wooden-spoon.

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

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

* League Handbooks are now available from Club Secretaries. Full details of the Handbook can be viewed on the League's website. In accordance with usual practice the League will supply each team with a set of six balls for the season.

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