



Clacton & District: Tigers face Brotherhood challenge

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The 2016/17 season of the Clacton & District League begins on September 12 – and the battle at the top of **Division Two** looks like being as close as it was last year when the final placings weren't decided until the last week of the season.

Nomads Tigers missed out on promotion by just three points last year but they've assembled a strong squad in their quest for promotion this time around. John Hockley, Brian Parish, Tony Robinson and Tom Wilkin join Tigers' regulars Daryl Lott and John Marshall to form a formidable combination of talents, young and old.

But the unchanged Brotherhood D side of Paul Alden, Shaun Beckham, Lee Harvey and Russell Hillier, relegated last year after just one season in the top flight, oozes quality and they start as marginal pre-season title favourites.

Brotherhood H will surely be the third side in the mix, Graham Parkes, Grant Sharpe and John Wrigley welcoming back two popular former players, Paul Bellinger and Stewart Murray, in a side definitely capable of challenging at the top.

And if you're looking for a dark horse, cast an eye over Brotherhood F, the ever-consistent Barry Allen, Lee Allen and Sandie Isaac supplemented this season by the Laurence Torr, back in table tennis action after a year's absence.

Elsewhere in the division, Windsor Harriers are unchanged for a fourth year and, having finished eighth, sixth and sixth in the previous three seasons, will probably be expecting a similar mid-table position this time.

Windsor Buzzards enjoyed an excellent first season in Division Two in 2015/16 and, with the exception of Angela Barratt who has moved down a division, are unchanged. They will also be aiming for a place around the middle of the table.

Promoted Walton C, who will be hoping to emulate the Buzzards and enjoy a debut season of consolidation, have recruited John Bonner to play alongside their regular quartet which includes Rhivu Khan and John Long.

And the same thoughts of consolidation will be going through the heads of the new-look Nomads Bobcats, formed from the top players of the teams which finished in third and fourth positions in Division Three last season – Andrew Cawley and Brian Friday formerly of the Wildcats, and Ethan Lloyd and Jason Lloyd formerly of the Leopards.

Brotherhood I is a nearly-new team, with only Mark Beckham surviving from last year's 'I' side, but they could be the surprise package of the Division. Beckham links up with two talented youngsters in Scott Campbell and Woody Fitzpatrick who are both given a chance to shine at this level, former stalwart League player Mark Ratcliff who makes a welcome return to local table tennis, and a gifted newcomer Kris Stefanov.

Nomads Jaguars battled hard to avoid relegation last season and they will need to fight just as hard this year, despite the addition of Harry Beezer and Tony Beezer to their squad. And it could be an equally tough season for the likeable Brotherhood E team, reprieved from relegation last season, who replace Gary Bayliss with Cris Edwards.

Kayley Rodriguez steps up a level in place of Dan Wright in the Windsor Magpies' line-up but it could be that the Magpies, who finished bottom last season but were not relegated, might again find themselves in a battle at the bottom, this time with Lionel Goddard's unchanged Nomads Pumas, last season's Division Three runners-up who may find the going tough in at this level.

With no teams relegated, significant changes in personnel and a host of new players, sensible predictions for **Division Three** are impossible.

However, three teams stand out as possible title candidates – although all three will need to ensure they consistently put out a settled side if they are to succeed.

On paper, the Nomads Wildcats' trio of Doug Green, Mike Hillier and Mike Wellum looks the team to beat whilst Nomads Cougars, who include Colchester regulars Gill Canning and Roy Cole alongside Vic Little, have the experience and know-how to do well.

But the new Walton D team of Jared Chelski, Maggie Earle, Daniel Young and Jane Young could be the team to watch.

Harry Barlow, one of the League's senior players, has taken a well-earned table tennis retirement but the Windsor Penguins' team, who have Debra Found and Zoe Strange linking up with Jackie Bunce, Alan Charman and Mike Monschau, form a squad that should comfortably finish in the top half of the table.

And the same should be true of Windsor Swallows, captained once again by the ever-green Iris Howlett, and including Angela Barratt, Sue Chillingworth and Paul Dale in their line-up.

Dave Wright takes the reins as captain of Nomads Leopards alongside the familiar names of Tom Collins, Norman Jacobs, Roger McNaughton and Stuart Wilkinson and, like the unchanged Brotherhood G team who performed so capably last year in the first League season, have the look of solid mid-table units.

Maci Harvey, Kayleigh Stratford and Jordan Webb form the backbone of Windsor Ospreys this year and there's little to choose between them and the unchanged and slowly-improving Windsor Kites who will aiming to better last year's tenth position, their highest-ever in their six seasons in the League.

Sue Lee leads a Nomads Ocelots' team which includes Martin Cunningham and Barbara Rogers, Nomads Lynx are captained by Dave Harris in a side where Cameron Cini and Liam Harris will be crucial players, whilst Hazel Blanche and Denise Thompson are the only recognisable names in the exotically-named Nomads Caracals.

Finally, Brotherhood J is a team of four new players but, encouragingly, contains three up-and-coming talented juniors, Georgia Ayton, Brayden Saward and Harley Wood. And who knows – perhaps the 2016/17 season will see the start of the table tennis career of a future Clacton League champion?

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