



Clacton & District: Condors seek to dethrone Panthers

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With the 2016/17 Clacton & District League season now at its halfway stage, there's strong competition for honours in all three divisions.

Current leaders Nomads Panthers are aiming to take a fifth consecutive **Division One** crown and, although they remain favourites, second-placed Windsor Condors – only eight points behind – are mounting a significant challenge. As the fortune of the fixture list would have it, the two teams are scheduled to meet in the final week of the season in what could be a mouth-watering winner-takes-all encounter.

Windsor Eagles, led by top player Gary Cattermole and with the ever-consistent Phil Smith and the returning John Patrick in fine form, are currently in third place.

But there's little to separate them from three other teams – Brotherhood B, strengthened this season by Andy Warner and John Cleasby, Walton A, for whom Gavin Price has been in impressive form, and Walton B where Colin Dearman and Jason Gale have given solid support to regulars Paul Meikle and Derek Willis.

Brotherhood C and Nomads Lions are both able to call on top players to secure points – Alan Burgess and Kevin Gowlett for Brotherhood, and Paul Hume and Adam Cuthbert for the Lions – and both sit comfortably mid-table. Windsor Hawks, without Felipe Rodriguez this year, cannot expect to hit last year's heights but Andy Vincent's good form guarantees them a position of safety.

John Harvey has enjoyed a good first half-season for Windsor Kestrels who have enough overall firepower to keep clear of the relegation places. Which means the two promoted sides, Lawford and Windsor Owls, are likely to face the drop – and, considering last year they were separated by just three points at the top of Division Two, they could well become involved in another private battle, this time to avoid the ignominy of finishing with the wooden spoon.

The top of **Division Two** is as congested as a Department Store in the New Year sales with only 10 points separating the top five teams, four of them from the Brotherhood Club.

Brotherhood H are the current leaders and, in Stewart Murray, Graham Parkes and Grant Sharpe, they have three seasoned campaigners who will ensure the team is there or thereabouts at the end of the season.

Newcomer Kris Stefanov of Brotherhood I has established himself as the outstanding player in the division but his side's success has been a genuine team effort. Mark Ratcliffe, making a welcome return to local table tennis, and juniors Scott Campbell and Woody Fitzpatrick in their first season at this level, have all contributed valuable points.

Brotherhood F have been boosted this year by new signing Lawrence Torr and the improved form of Lee Allen. And they, together with Nomads Tigers and relegated Brotherhood D, both solid all-round sides, will feel they are in with a shout of a top-two place come the end of April.

Nomads Bobcats, the surprise team of the season thanks to the excellent form of Jason Lloyd and Ethan Lloyd, sit comfortably in sixth place ahead of Windsor Harriers, a traditional mid-table team, and Windsor Buzzards, now well-established in their second season at this level.

Of the bottom five teams, the presence of Rivhu Khan and John Long in the Walton C line-up should ensure they don't suffer relegation worries.

But Brotherhood E and Nomads Jaguars, although cushioned from the relegation places by nine and 11 points respectively, will surely spend the second-half season looking over their shoulders to see whether Windsor Magpies can make up ground.

Alas for the plucky Nomads Pumas, it looks as though their sojourn in Division Two will be a brief one.

Division Three has seen two class teams draw away at the top in what's becoming a two-way shoot-out for the title. Walton D, who include excellent youngsters Jared Chelski and Daniel Young, currently hold a six-point half-way lead over the older heads and legs of Mike Hillier, Doug Green and Mike Wellum, the backbone of Nomads Wildcats.

Three Windsor teams are involved in the fight to establish who is the best of the rest. The Penguins, with Debra Found, Jackie Bunce and Alan Charman to the fore, are currently in third place ahead of the Swallows, captained for a thirteenth consecutive season by the indomitable Iris Howlett, and the Kites who, with Chris Simson prominent, are enjoying their best-ever League season.

Robbie Strutt and Jordan Webb have been impressive for Windsor Ospreys, as have Dave Harris and Liam Harris for Nomads Lynx. Both teams sit satisfyingly mid-table, ahead of Nomads Caracals who, when Chris Jones and Denise Thompson are available, are a match for any team in the division.

Nomads Leopards, headed by Dave Wright and Tom Collins, are proving hardy battlers whilst Arthur Wells-Garrett's first foray into competitive League table tennis has helped Nomads Ocelots into a position of respectability.

Brotherhood G's team problems have not helped their League position but Paul Metcalf has once again shown he can hold his own at this level. And although the new Brotherhood J side look favourites to finish bottom, they have shown encouraging improvement during the first half-season.

* The first of the League's Tournaments, the Handicapped Singles, takes place Saturday February 4 at Windsor's St James Hall. Full details will shortly be sent to all players.



Brian Parish

* Members of the League will be saddened to learn of the death of Brian Parish, aged 79 years. He had been a League member continuously since 2004, and played two matches at the start of this season for Nomads Tigers before illness took hold.

During his comparatively short time in the Clacton and District League, where he played in both the First and Second Divisions, Brian became a respected and well-liked player. For eight years, he was Club Secretary of the Nomads Club, only relinquishing the post in June last year. He was a more-than-capable operative on the table, finishing as runner-up to Mark Lewis in the Closed Championships Division Two Singles final in 2005. He also picked up Second Division runners-up League medals in 2008 and 2015, and last year was in the losing Nomads Lions' side in the Knock-Out Cup Final.

But Brian's best playing years were behind him when he joined the Clacton League, having played good-quality table tennis in Metropolitan Essex Leagues for many years before moving to North Essex. In his time, he was a good enough player to win County titles, being the Essex Over- 40s champion in both 1983 and 1984.

Brian was pleasant, amiable company on and off the table, and many current and former players who knew him – both in Clacton and elsewhere in Essex – will miss his friendly smile and cheery conversation. The League sends it sincere condolences to Brian's family.

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