



Braintree League: Liberal lead looking healthy

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Posted On: January 03, 2017

While the first division has turned into something of a progression, the battles for the other two divisions of the Braintree Table Tennis League have the potential to go all the way.

As the league emerges from its Christmas/New Year break, Liberal A are perched imperiously at the top of the tree. They have won all their matches and lead second-placed Rayne A by 25 points.

Last season, although they won the title by a fairly comfortable nine points in the end, Liberal did not have things all their own way.

The difference this time is that they have persuaded Brandon Crouchman, who played only four matches last season, to turn out regularly for them. He has missed only three out of their 13 matches and remains unbeaten.

With Simon Webber and Scott Dowsett also in regular attendance, they have only had to call on Peter Hayden five times and Ian Hayden once.

Netts A, second last year, have not quite hit the same consistency, enabling the tried and tested regulars of Rayne A – with the addition of Ryan Pitt – to slip into second place.

Relegation fears still haunt at least four teams although realistically it looks like a three-way fight between Sible Hedingham and the two Black Notley teams.

Not only have divisions two and three been more keenly contested, they have also been almost carbon copies of each other.

One team started off well, were caught by a second team, only for a third to come along to challenge both of them.

Notley C's healthy start in division two had much to do with their judicious use of strong reserves. By the time they reached match six Liberal C had caught them up – and then Rayne E took over.

Liberal's challenge has owed much to the improved form of Garry Fryatt, who has lost only four out of 30, but it may need more regular appearances from Gareth Davies, who has played only four times and now lives on Mersea Island, to maintain the momentum.

Rayne E, who finished 11 points behind Liberal C last year, have kept the same team of Dave Miller, Dave Punt, Steve Siggs and Paul Wellington, and currently look the team to beat.

In division three, it was Notley E who stormed into the lead, dropping only eight sets in their first six matches. An 8-2 defeat by Rayne H at that point set in train something of a downward spiral and Rayne subsequently moved ahead.

But their defeat by Netts C in the final match of 2016 left the two in close proximity at the top with an exciting race to the line in prospect.

Joe Belsom, Max Plumridge, both 15, and Kierlan Richards, 16, have added greater consistency over the past year and could just have the staying power to give themselves a crack at division two next season.

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Division 1

	P	W	D	L	A	P
Liberal A	13	13	0	0	18	112
Rayne A	13	10	1	2	43	87
<u>Netts B</u>	13	8	1	4	49	81
Rayne B	13	8	3	2	53	77
Netts A	12	6	2	4	46	74
Liberal B	13	2	3	8	76	54
Rayne C	13	4	1	8	86	44
Black <u>Notley A</u>	13	0	2	11	94	36
Sible Hedingham	12	3	1	8	85	35
Black <u>Notley B</u>	11	1	2	8	80	30

Division 2

	P	W	D	L	A	P
Rayne E	12	7	4	1	38	82
Black <u>Notley C</u>	13	9	1	3	48	82
Rayne F	13	6	3	4	58	72
Nomads	13	6	1	6	61	69
Liberal C	10	7	1	2	34	66
Rayne G	11	5	3	3	54	56
<u>Felsted RBL A</u>	12	5	2	5	68	52
Rayne D	12	3	3	6	71	49
Black <u>Notley D</u>	13	0	3	10	85	45
<u>Felsted RBL B</u>	13	2	1	10	93	37

Division 3

	P	W	D	L	A	P
Rayne H	13	10	2	1	36	94
<u>Netts C</u>	12	9	2	1	32	88
Black <u>Notley E</u>	12	9	0	3	38	82
Black Notley I (3)	13	7	3	3	55	74
Black <u>Notley F</u>	13	5	2	6	64	66
Rayne I	12	4	0	8	68	52
Black <u>Notley H</u>	12	5	2	5	71	49
Netts D	13	3	0	10	85	45
Rayne J (3)	11	3	1	7	62	47
Black <u>Notley G</u>	11	0	0	11	98	12

Figures in brackets indicate points lost for late scorecards

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