



Braintree League: Dowsett and Wang add strength

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Posted On: September 11, 2017

Major last-minute signings have spiced up both the top and bottom of division one of the Braintree Table Tennis League.

Netts A have added former men's singles champion Terry Dowsett to their already formidable roster while Black Notley A have signed Lucy Wang, ladies' singles winner in 2000 and 2001.

Dowsett has had some time out of the game after a serious illness and may not be the player he was when he won the last of his six titles – a record no one has yet surpassed – in 1996.

But his average of 56 per cent in the Chelmsford first division in 2015-16 was just one per cent off that of Steve Kerns, the Braintree men's singles winner in 2015.

And he quickly got back into the groove in his first match when he helped Netts beat Rayne C 8-2. He and Andy Holmes both won three singles.

Wang's average was pretty close to Dowsett's in Chelmsford in 2016. In fact she finished just above Kerns, on 58 per cent. After Notley A finished second from bottom last season, her presence could be vital in staving off relegation.

She played her part in their first match, an 8-2 defeat against Netts B, by taking her two singles.

It was James Hicks who proved too much for her. His 3-1 (11-6, 5-11, 11-7, 11-6) win turned out to be more comfortable than his encounter with Victor Chan, where he teetered on the brink of defeat in both the third and fourth games before coming through 3-2 (8-11, 8-11, 12-10, 11-9, 11-1). Father and son combination Steve and Chris Buer both won twice for Netts.

Champions Liberal A came through unscathed both on the table and off it. They came close to missing the

deadline for registering with the league, which they finally managed with minutes to spare, but then dispatched newly promoted Rayne D 10-0.

Their usual trio of Brandon Crouchman, Scott Dowsett and Simon Webber were on duty.

And they could be joined during the season by a new-look Peter Hayden. After a painful exit from last season's men's singles, the man who shares Dowsett's record of six titles has finally abandoned his attempt to continue with his up-to-the-table fast-rubber blocking game and has been practising with an anti-loop bat.

He said: "I have given up playing with a 'normal' bat. It's just too painful. I have worked out a way of playing with the anti-loop that prevents me turning my wrist over. It's going all right. I expect to be able to compete against the division's middle-ranking players but I'll struggle to make an impact on the likes of Paul Davison."

Elsewhere the new-look Rayne A overcame the slightly new-look Liberal B 9-1. Alan Burgess and Hector Rogers were unbeaten for Rayne but Liberal's new signing Andrew Huckson overcame Matthew Brown for his side's only point.

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