



## Clacton & District: Panthers remain team to beat

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In the absence of Old Moore, Paul the Octopus and Madame Arcati, it's been left to the Clacton & District League's resident pundit and his trusty crystal ball to consider the possibilities for the new season which begins on Monday 18th September.

What appears abundantly clear is that Nomads Panthers start as favourites to retain their **Division One** title. The Panthers have reigned supreme for the past five seasons and, with an unchanged squad of James Denyer, John Hatley, Sam Hume, Gill Locke and Colin Webber, they have the players capable of making it a sixth success.

Windsor Condors pushed them all the way last year and their unchanged quintet headed by Colin Stallwood and Greg Green, and including Martin Hogg, Annabelle Rodriguez and Felipe Rodriguez, could again be their nearest challengers.

Just three points separated Windsor Eagles, Brotherhood B and Walton A last year and it may be as tight again this time.

The Eagles have been the most consistent league team over the last two decades and their unchanged side, which includes Gary Cattermole, John Patrick and Phil Smith, has always proved an ultra-competitive outfit.

Brotherhood B are also unchanged but, with the ever-improving Gracie Edwards and the well-travelled Andy Warner in their line-up, they might well go one better than last year's fourth place.

The Walton Club has revamped their sides and their trimmed-down Walton A team of Kevin James, Gavin Price, Paul Woolnough and Gary Young has the class to challenge for one of the top places – although their final position will depend on the regularity with which they can turn out a full team.

Brotherhood C have strengthened their side, with newcomer Abhi Peshkar lining up alongside regulars Alan Burgess, Kevin Gowlett, Oli Reynolds and Kevin Pryor, and they could spring a surprise or two before the season is

over.

Walton B, again captained by Mark Gale, retain the same squad which averaged five points per match to finish in seventh place last season. They have the identikit look of a mid-table team so expect nothing better or worse from them this term.

Much interest will surround the progress of Nomads Lions who, without Adam Wilkin, have promoted Ethan Lloyd and Jason Lloyd from the Division Two Nomads Bobcats' team which finished a strong third last season. They join Adam Cuthbert, Roger Hance and Paul Hume in what has the makings of an impressive-looking side.

Walton's additional team this season will play as Walton C and includes half their former 'A' team – David Binns, Peter Burrows, Graham Buxton, Paul Newbould and John Rankin. Any success they have will be conditional on being able to play a full team and to retain fitness. Otherwise, they could struggle.

Andy Vincent was one of the most improved players last season and his continued good form will be an important factor in ensuring Windsor Hawks, who finished ninth last year, maintain respectability and safety.

There's a welcome return to local table tennis for Bob Sawyer with Windsor Kestrels, who also have captain Graham Bunce back after an injury-hit twelve months. But, unless the Kestrels can pull several rabbits out of the hat, they look likely to be one of the teams struggling in the relegation zone.

Promoted Brotherhood D are the other side who could find themselves in a battle for survival. Their squad is an amalgam of the cream of last season's Division Two Brotherhood players – Russell Hillier and Lee Harvey (from the 'D' team), Grant Sharpe (from the 'H' team) and Scott Campbell (from the 'I' team) – and they will need to hit the ground running if they are to avoid a quick return to the Second Division.

\* There is still a handful of players who have not yet registered with Table Tennis England. They are reminded they must do so before they are eligible to play League table tennis. Any queries, contact League Secretary Lyn White on 01255 425292.

\* League Handbooks should be available this week and Club Secretaries will be contacted about collection arrangements. Full details of the Handbook can be viewed on the League's website. As in previous seasons, each team will be issued with a box of six table tennis balls.

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