



Braintree League: No happy ending for the Netts 'come-back kids'

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When Netts E lined up for their Braintree Table Tennis League handicap cup match against Black Notley F, they were carrying 95 years of inaction between them.

All three players had retired from the game but have recently taken it up again after a prolonged absence. Joe Meleschko took out his bat again last year after 25 years while Fred Evans made his comeback at the start of this season after 20 years. But their absence was a mere blink of the eye compared with their new teammate. The match marked Tony Smith's return to the game after 50 years. And he found that his knack had not deserted him as he took his three singles. There was to be no happy ending, however, as Notley took five of the other six to move into the next round. It was one of no fewer than six matches that was decided at 5-4, a tribute to the accuracy of the handicap system.

Black Notley teams were on the right end of two more of those, the G team beating Rayne G and the C team beating their own B team. Max King was unbeaten for the G team while Dave Parker won his three singles in vain for the B team.

Notley's H team will not be joining their clubmates in the next round after a tight match with Liberal B in which they twice lost at deuce in the third game. Robin Armstrong won both of those and took his other set at 12-21, 25-23, 21-17 to help his side through.

Netts F suffered a similar fate to their E team when Felsted RBL A came back from 3-1 down to clinch victory in the final set, Haydn Upson's second win of the night to go alongside Richard Baxter's three.

Rayne E were the other team to record a 5-4 win, in their case against their own A team. Their victory was a complete turnaround. At 4-0 down, the E team looked to be on their way out of the competition when in the next set Steve Pennell clawed back his 10-point handicap against Richard Whiteside to reach deuce in the third game. But it was Whiteside who hung on to claim it at 23-21. They were nearly out again two sets later when

Dean Andrews also found himself at 20-20 with Pennell, but he too pulled through – 25-23 in his case.

In other matches, Netts D beat Rayne F 6-1, Notley A beat Rayne B 5-2 – Lucy Wang unbeaten – Rayne J beat their own H team 7-2 – Chris High unbeaten – and Nomads beat Rayne C 5-2.

In the league division one, Dave Punt scored one of the wins of his career when he got the better of Peter Hayden in Rayne D's 7-3 defeat by Liberal A. It was the first time Rayne D had scored more than two sets in an evening, but neither Rayne A nor Netts A were able to take advantage as both dropped four points.

Netts beat Rayne C, with Andy Holmes unbeaten, while Adrian Pitt took his three singles for Liberal B against Rayne A.

Netts B also had a 6-4 win against Notley A, for whom Lucy Wang was unbeaten, while Rayne B took all ten against Netts C.

In rearranged matches, Netts A beat Netts C 6-4 – Holmes again unbeaten – while Rayne B beat Rayne D 8-2.

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