



## Braintree League: Relegation scrap is tight

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The fight to avoid relegation from division two of the Braintree Table Tennis League is turning into one of the tightest battles for many years with six of the 11 teams in the division separated by just 10 points.

The fate of the teams involved is complicated by the need to rebalance the divisions at the end of the season with two teams likely to go down rather than the usual one.

All five matches in the most recent set of results involved teams caught up in the struggle. They all lost, but some, inevitably, will be happier than others.

The two teams who fared best – Black Notley D and Netts E both lost 6-4 – have contrasting records. Notley currently stand four points better off but have won only one and drawn one of their 11 matches, whereas Netts have won three and drawn two out of 10.

Notley D had the good fortune earlier in the season to run across a Notley C team shorn of their two main point scorers Tim Huxtable and Glen Laing, but it is also the fact that they have run most of their opponents close that has kept their heads above water.

Their latest reverse is their sixth 6-4 defeat of the season, including their last four matches.

Nomads got the better of them this time, thanks largely to an unbeaten evening by Kevin Saunders. Sean Clift had a good win over Richard Kemp, but all three Notley D players contributed, as has often been the case this season.

Netts E's result also had a familiar ring to it. Apart from one set gained by Graham Farmer in the opening match of the season, all Netts' points have come from Fred Evans and Joe Meleschko, and they were at it again against Rayne F.

Both won two sets and both came close to making it three. Against Dave Marsh, Evans was two games to one up and Meleschko 2-0 up but Marsh got there in the end.

And new signing Tony Smith, returning to the game after 50 years, gave a possible glimpse of things to come when he fully stretched Keith Flowers, a player who went into the match with a 60 per cent win record, before going down 3-2 (8-11, 12-10, 11-7, 11-13, 11-7).

Netts D came off worst but they were playing a strong Notley B side of Gordon Fairchild, Steve Noble and Mick Richardson, so a 10-0 defeat was always on the cards.

Rayne G were facing an equally strong-looking Rayne E team, for whom Dean Andrews was unbeaten, but Steve Siggs' two wins could yet prove vital.

Bottom team Notley C's fortunes could be on the up if, as expected, Laing makes more appearances in the second half of the season. In the meantime wins by Huxtable and Leon Hewitt over Dave Hardy gave them a useful two points against Liberal C.

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