

Bocking have reached the mid-season break point in the Braintree Table Tennis League looking pretty secure.

Not only do they have an 11-point lead over Black Notley A, but they also have a match in hand.

Having scored an average of almost nine points a match, they can afford a few slip-ups from now on and still hold on to their title.

But it is not all over. Bocking's position has been inflated by two teams' reluctance to play on a Sunday afternoon and a mix-up in the Notley ranks that led to only one player turning up for the fixture between the two teams.

Under the new league set-up, they have to face two more meetings with Notley and Rayne A and, owing to an earlier postponement, they have three meetings yet with Netts A.

Although Kevin Gowlett has played in all their matches, Nigel Hodder has only appeared three times so far and Gary Young twice. They will need at least two of them in the team if they are to remain in the driving seat.

The league splits into four sections after each team has played two matches and any two of Liberal A, Rayne B, Notley B and Pillar House A could join the top four for the final run-in.

Rayne C, while giving a good account of themselves after last season's unexpected promotion, have not picked up enough points to mount a challenge and will be looking forward to some winnable games in the season's final phase.

Four teams from division two will join the top flight's last three to contest final places 7-13 and the eight-point gap that has opened up between fourth and fifth could already be significant.

Rayne E's dominance at the top has been something of a surprise. Richard Whiteside, Phil Wade and Simon Fleming have always been competitive at this level but they have added a consistency this year that has brought them nine wins out of nine.

Under the new set-up, the division two trophy will be awarded after the first set of 16 matches and at the moment it looks like Rayne E's to lose.

The reliable and venerable Rayne D, after their flirtation with the first division last season, have adapted to life back in the middle rank but are being challenged by Sible Hedingham, who came from the other direction. Promoted after storming through division three last season, they have proved more than a match for most.

In a way division three has proved the most intriguing.

Last year's runners-up Pillar House B set the early pace and seemed to have stepped up a gear from last season, especially Adam Clift, who has gone through his first 20 sets unbeaten.

But an unfortunate transgression of the rules cost them ten points against White Lions A and a late run towards the end of the year has seen Lions' B team take over the top spot.

They started the season with only two players, Steve Ascott and son Stuart, but once the identity of the third member became known, it was clear they would be the team to beat.

Keith Perrins was a difficult opponent to beat in division two last season and has proved even more so at the lower level.

They have dropped only seven points in their last four matches, including an impressive 8-2 win over their own A team, and will have been looking forward to their next crack at Pillar House B due to be played last night (Jan 5).

Year-end league tables:

	DIVISION 1				
	P	W	D	L	P
Bocking	9	9	0	0	79
B Notley A	10	7	1	2	68
Rayne A	10	7	1	2	67
Netts A	9	7	1	1	62
Liberal A	10	3	0	7	39
Rayne B	10	3	0	7	39
B Notley B	9	2	1	6	33
Pillar House A	9	3	0	6	29
Rayne C	10	0	0	10	14

### DIVISION 2

	P	W	D	L	P
Rayne E	9	9	0	0	68
Rayne D	10	6	3	1	63
Hedingham	10	6	0	4	62
Liberal B	9	5	1	3	52
Nomads	9	2	3	4	44
B Notley C	9	4	2	3	42
Rayne F	10	1	1	8	39
Netts B	10	3	1	6	36
B Notley D	10	1	1	8	24

### DIVISION 3

	P	W	D	L	P
White Lion B	10	8	0	2	71
Pillar House B	9	8	0	1	61
Rayne G	10	7	1	2	59
White Lion A	10	4	1	5	59
B Notley E	9	3	3	3	45
Rayne H	9	4	1	4	44
B Notley F	9	2	1	6	31
B Notley G	10	1	1	8	30
B Notley H	10	2	0	8	30