

Champions Netts A have entered the new year with a comfortable cushion at the top of the Braintree Table Tennis League and very little left to do to retain their title.

They have overcome the injury to Nikki Kennard that ruled her out of all but the first three matches by calling on their stand-by John Cleasby more than they intended.

And in times of difficulty they have been able to give 15-year-old Ben Page some experience of the top flight.

They did so in their last match against Rayne B and he showed his right to be there with wins over both Peter Hance and Paul Mitchell. He only slipped up against Brian Cook and helped his team to a 9-1 victory.

With injuries hitting Black Notley A hard, Rayne A are now favourites to take the runners-up spot. They also had a 9-1 victory, in their case over Liberal.

Liberal's point came from a first ever win for Mike Johnston over Ian Whiteside – at 12-10 in the decider.

Notley A meanwhile continued on their downward slope with an 8-2 defeat against their own B team for whom James Hicks and Steve Kerns were unbeaten. Adam Pitt, playing up from division two, scored an excellent win over Steve Buer.

At the other end of the table Rayne D eased slightly away from Sible Hedingham by beating them 6-4, their first win of the season at the 12th attempt.

Keith Martin's three singles plus a share in the doubles pushed them strongly in the right direction.

Division two leaders Black Notley C were surprisingly held to a draw by a Nomads side without Kevin Saunders.

Three wins from Garry Fryatt and one each from Barrie Applegate and Lorraine Burgess meant they could even afford to lose the doubles.

The five points actually strengthened Notley C's lead as second-placed Netts B, without Page, tumbled 7-3 at Rayne G.

The evening was a triumph for the venerable Shirley Carroll, Chelmsford ladies' singles champion way back in 1968, who showed her three teenage opponents how it's done.

Rayne E's 7-3 win over Notley E and Notley D's 9-1 against White Lions mean the four teams in second to fifth places are covered by just one point.

Mo Hardy and Keith Martin were unbeaten for Rayne E while White Lions' win was picked up by Steve Willis who just crept home 11-9 in the fifth against Lyndon Griffiths.

The teams at the top of division three found life difficult. Leaders Notley F just pulled through 6-4 against their own G team while second-placed Felsted RBL were held to a draw by a two-man Notley H.

The F team needed Chris Parr's usual three sets to survive.

The Notley H-Felsted encounter was a tight affair in which five of the seven sets played went the full five games.

For Notley Warren Baines won three and father Steve two. The younger Baines's 11-8, 11-3, 11-9 win over Ian Butler was only Butler's second defeat of the season, the first having been at the hands of the same opponent.

Rayne H took advantage of Felsted's difficulties to slip back into second place with a 10-0 win over Stebbing.

It was a good week for Rayne's Tim Townsend. He won his three singles to help Rayne J to a draw against Notley I then stepped up to the I team and led them to an 8-2 victory over Netts C with another three.

End of year tables:

DIVISION 1						
	P	W	D	L	A	P
Netts A	10	10	0	0	19	81
Rayne A	11	8	0	3	37	73
B Notley A	10	6	0	4	39	61
B Notley B	10	6	1	3	43	57
Liberal	12	5	2	5	64	56
Rayne C	10	5	1	4	46	54
Rayne B	11	3	1	7	68	42
Rayne D	12	1	2	9	87	33
Sible Hedingham	10	0	1	9	77	23

DIVISION 2

	P	W	D	L	A	P
B Notley C	12	9	2	1	38	82
Netts B	11	7	1	3	39	71
Rayne G	12	7	1	4	49	71
Rayne E	11	8	0	3	40	70
B Notley D	12	7	1	4	50	70
Nomads	12	3	3	6	68	52
Rayne F	11	2	3	6	70	40
B Notley E	11	2	1	8	72	38
White Lions	12	0	2	10	94	26

DIVISION 3

	P	W	D	L	A	P
B Notley F	13	11	2	0	36	93
Rayne H	13	10	0	3	41	89
Felsted RBL	13	8	3	2	45	85
B Notley H	13	8	3	2	50	80
B Notley G (6)	12	6	2	4	50	64
B Notley I	12	5	2	5	60	60
Rayne I	12	3	0	9	76	44
Rayne J	13	2	2	9	86	44
Netts C (3)	12	3	0	9	77	39
Stebbing	13	0	0	13	108	22

Figures in brackets indicate points lost for late scorecards