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table tennis

Despite losing their unbeaten record with only three matches of the campaign left, Rayne E have been crowned champions of division two in the Braintree Table Tennis League.

And with a match to spare, White Lions B have clinched the title in division three.

In both cases the league winners are decided after the first phase of matches and before the league splits into its play-off sections for the second phase which begins on March 14.

Rayne E's defeat came at the hands of Sible Hedingham who went on to beat Rayne's D team to stand themselves in good stead for the runners-up medals in the division. A draw in their match with Liberal B on Tuesday will be enough.

Liberal were also looking for points to secure their spot in section two of the play-offs. They currently lead Black Notley C, who play Netts B on Thursday, by five points.

Whatever the mathematics, there is no doubt that Hedingham's was the performance of the week.

With 13 wins out of 13, Rayne E had looked like running through all 16 without defeat. But Hedingham were having none of that and in a fluctuating match, came back from 4-3 down to inflict their first defeat of the season.

Graham Cannon was their rock. He won two sets in three straight games and the other in four.

The last time the two teams met, with the same six players, victory went to Rayne E by 7-3.

And the turnaround against Rayne D was even greater. That finished 2-8 first time round, but in the return, Hedingham changed that to 7-3 in their favour.

Roy Hooper was the man in charge this time and the only one to beat Paul Wellington.

Their closeness in the table was reflected in the score when Liberal B and Notley C met. They remained inseparable on 5-5, with Liberal's cause greatly advanced by Trevor Laird's three singles.

Liberal fared less well against Netts B, where they tumbled 6-4 and Notley did their cause no help with an 8-2 defeat at Rayne D.

White Lions B clinched the division three title with a 10-0 win over Notley G while their A team lead Pillar House B by two points going into the final match. Lions A have the slightly more difficult task: they face Notley F on Thursday while Pillar House play Notley G on Wednesday.

Four dropped points against Notley H (they all lost to John Breen) pulled Lions A back while Pillar House ended their run of four consecutive draws with a 10-0 win over Rayne H.

The last of those draws was against Notley F for whom Mike Pitt was unbeaten.

Both White Lions teams have won their way through to the quarter final of the handicap cup, along with Nomads, three teams from Rayne and two from Black Notley.

Lions A, who have had an excellent record in the cup over the past few seasons while at Notley, had an up-and-down match with Notley B. Notley pulled back leads of 2-0 and 4-2 but Adam Purslow's third win of the evening in the final set took Lions through.

The B team settled their tie with Rayne D one set earlier when Steve Ascott got the better of Tony Hammond. Stuart Ascott won both sets he played.

Notley F's passage past Rayne G was a tight-looking 5-4 but they had clinched the match at 5-2. Warren Baines was unbeaten.

The remaining matches were more comfortable. Notley C and Rayne E had 8-1 wins over Liberal A and Pillar House B respectively while Rayne A declared at 5-1 against Notley D and Nomads at 5-0 against Hedingham.

Netts have been crowned division three champions of the British Women's League.

Braintree League players Nikki Kennard and Kelly Skeggs, plus Cherith Graham, were in good form during the competition's second weekend and three 5-1 wins and a draw gave them the title.

Kennard was the club's leading player with 15 wins out of 18 for the season.

The women's success followed a good weekend for the men's team who are tied for the top spot in division three south of the senior British League.

Their team of Braintree League players Paul Davison and Nigel Hodder plus Kevin Read and former Braintree champion Neil Charles won both their matches 7-1.

The Braintree League's individual championships take place this weekend at Black Notley Community Association with the finals at the same venue the following Thursday.