

The two main challengers for this year's Braintree Table Tennis League title were pitted together in the first week of the new season. And it was champions Netts A who took a big stride towards retaining their title with a 7-3 win over last year's runners-up Black Notley A.

None of the Netts players could find a way past men's singles champion Peter Hayden, but Paul Davison, Kevin Gowlett and Nikki Kennard all overcame Ian Hayden and Trevor Carter with Davison and Gowlett adding the doubles.

Two sets were vital. An Ian Hayden in top form might have hoped for success against Kennard but she dealt with him relatively comfortably in the first set of the evening.

And in the doubles the Haydens led Davison and Gowlett, the current Braintree champions, 1-0 and 2-1 but scores of 11-9 and 11-7 against them in the last two games took it away from them.

Elsewhere in division one, newcomers Sible Hedingham were given a taste of life at the top when they failed to take a set against Liberal A. Roy Hooper and Graham Cannon both stretched Frank Neill to 11-5 in the fifth game but that was the closest they came.

Black Notley B beat Rayne's second string 7-3 with the help of three sets from James Hicks while Rayne C beat their own D team by the same score. Jon Hill was undefeated for the C team.

In division two Rayne E, one of the promotion favourites, had to work hard for a 6-4 victory over Nomads. Kevin Saunders won two for the Great Cornard side, but neither he nor anyone else could overcome Mo Hardy.

There were wins for two of Notley's teams in this division. The C team got the better of Rayne F 7-3, with Gordon Fairchild undefeated, while the D team had the upper hand against Rayne G, who had to call in a reserve.

Fourteen-year-old Ryan Sanderson impressed in his first outing at this level by taking Rayne G's two singles.

Division three was beset by eligibility and availability problems. Two teams lost points by turning out an unsigned player while two others faced each other a player short.

The latter match resulted in a 7-2 win for Notley F when Matt and Ian Wallace won all they could.

Rayne H saw a 7-2 win over Notley I turn into a 5-4 defeat after the league rules were applied while Felsted RBL's 8-2 victory over Rayne J became 10-0 under the same circumstances.

There were three wins each for Keir Hughes and John Breen in Notley G's 7-3 win over Rayne I.