

## Junior Inter-League Report – Ron Fosker

Braintree's junior table tennis team have been crowned champions of Essex – and the men's team have finished runners-up.

Beaten by the narrowest of margins by Colchester last season, Braintree gained revenge on their rivals after a closely fought match in the all-day session at Harlow. They then went on to register comfortable victories over the remaining teams to give them the title.

The juniors, all from the Black Notley club, got off to an excellent start by winning the first two sets against strong opponents.

Andrew McEwan, ranked 13 in Essex, put the first win on the board when he beat his Notley B teammate Greg Green, ranked six places above him. The first three games were tight, 14-12, 9-11, 13-11, but McEwan got off to a good start in the fourth to take the set.

Brad Hudgell, ranked sixth in Essex, then overcame the county No.8 Mike Shore in four games 11-13, 11-3, 12-10, 11-9 to make it 2-0.

County No.2 junior girl Holly Stubbings pulled one back with a five-game victory over Philip Lawson but Stevie Pell restored the two-set advantage with a win over Colchester No.4 Andrew Harvey.

Colchester had high hopes in the doubles where they were fielding the national college doubles champions Shore and Green and a win looked likely when they led by one game and 10-5.

But McEwan and Hudgell took the next seven points to get back in the match and eventually won another tight set that went the full distance.

Colchester pegged one back in the doubles but then came the closest one of all, a vital 18-16 win in the fifth end for Hudgell over Green. McEwan and Shore also stretched their set to five games but again it was the Braintree player who came out on top.

With a defeat for Pell at the hands of Stubbings and a win for Lawson over Harvey, Braintree ended up with a 7-3 win.

They followed that with wins of 8-2 over Ilford, 9-1 over Clacton and 10-0 over Brentwood. McEwan and Hudgell stayed unbeaten all weekend.

McEwan found himself doubling up in the men's team at one point in the day when they found themselves a man short.

And he responded with possibly the win of the day, a victory over Colin Stallwood, who in the same match beat present and past Braintree men's champions Paul Davison and Steve Kerns.

That helped Braintree to an 8-2 win over the seashiders but it was the next match, against favourites Ilford, that proved the stumbling block.

Braintree moved into a 4-2 lead with two wins from Davison and one each from Kerns and Andy Doshier. But that was where it dried up and Ilford took the rest for a 6-4 win.

Victories over Southend and Harlow followed but the damage was done and Ilford took the title, just ahead of Braintree.