

For the first time in many years the Braintree Table Tennis League has increased in size this year, from 24 to 27.

An extra team for each division has meant an unexpected promotion for Rayne C (last year's D team), which has left the second division more open than it might have been.

One of the new teams, Netts B, could well be one of those in contention for the title if they put out their best team.

With ex-first division player James Mullane and former Sudbury division one player Peter Abbot in their ranks, they have the potential. But they also intend to give a number of juniors league experience so a balance will have to be struck.

Relegated Rayne D (last year's C team of Cec Butcher, Tony Hammond, Paul Wellington and Mo Hardy) are always a threat at this level and Black Notley C can be expected to be up there somewhere.

Rayne have been able to add another team to their ranks this season partly as a result of players returning to the game.

Their new F team is one to watch. Malcolm Wehmeyer, out of the game for some time, and Brian How, out for considerably longer, join Ted Sims, who returned last season after a break. It will be interesting to see how quickly they can shake off the cobwebs.

Former ladies' singles champion Helen Barnett is another one picking her bat up again – she replaces the currently injured Ron Fosker at Notley D – while Martin Wells, a leading junior in the mid-seventies, makes a comeback at Liberal B.

Last season's comeback kings were Graham Cannon and Roy Hooper at Sible Hedingham. Having swept all before them in division three, they and teammate Mark Brown will find life more difficult at the higher level, but expect them to put quite a few notches on their bat handles.

Who will be this year's Hedingham in division three?

Contenders would appear to be White Lions A, a new club with a collection of familiar names, Pillar House B, who as Crossing C just missed out on promotion last season, and the new Notley E team.

White Lions are last season's Notley F – Clare Johnson, Adam Purslow and Steve Willis – but they finished one point behind Cressing C who as Pillar House B have been strengthened this season by the return of Steve Cliff and the re-registering of Bob Keefe from the second division.

Ron Celiz, new to the league but a player of considerable experience, has chosen to play in division three to help his son Warren. But he could play at a much higher level – and may even give Tom Elder something to think about this year.

He joins Will Jackson, who took great strides forward last season, in a Notley E team that will lose few matches when the two of them are firing together.