

For the first time in its history, the Braintree Table Tennis League has been able to run an over 80s singles.

As part of its individual championships, three of the league's most venerable talents gathered for a special round robin event to mark the milestone.

Ray Fairless, the most recent of the three to pass the 80 mark, came out on top with victories over Harold Jones, 83, and Tony Murray, 81. Jones beat Murray for second place.

The three players are pictured alongside the finalists in the cadets (under 15) singles, Warren Baines, 14, and Oliver Hicks, 12.

League secretary Alan McEwan said: "We think it's wonderful that people can carry on playing the game to such an advanced age. It's a great tribute to their fitness, and their keenness.

"We couldn't resist photographing them alongside the cadets to show that table tennis really is a game for all ages."

Fairless, Jones and Murray have between them more than a century of experience of playing in the Braintree League and they all agreed on one thing: they have no intention of giving up yet.

The picture shows, left to right, Tony Murray, Warren Baines, Harold Jones, Oliver Hicks, Ray Fairless.

New club White Lions, who have already made their mark on the league by winning division three, now have cause for a double celebration. Both their teams have made their way through to the handicap cup final.

Their B team, the third division winners, had comfortable wins in both quarter final and semi final, conceding only one set in each.

Steve and Stuart Ascott were unbeaten as they beat Rayne E 5-1 and in the semi final Lions won the first eight sets against Black Notley C before Lyndon Griffiths' four-game win over Steve Ascott prevented a clean sweep.

Lions A's passage was more fortunate. Their toughest match came in the second round when they just scraped past Notley B 5-4.

They received a walkover in the quarter final and then were donated two sets in the semi final when Notley F's Andy Thompson had to leave early to attend to an emergency at home.

That meant they needed only three sets to progress and they duly arrived from the bats of Steve Willis (2) and Adam Purslow.

The final will be played, alongside the team and restricted finals, in the first week in May.

The team knockout cup final will be between Black Notley A and Rayne A, winners in 2005 and 2006 respectively.

Notley were surprisingly made to work hard by their own B team before coming through 5-4 in their semi final.

Peter Hayden's two singles held the A team together but the B team's James Hicks repeated his veterans' singles win over Ian Hayden and both Rob Stannard and Laurie Sapiano did well to beat Trevor Carter.

Rayne A had an easier passage against Notley C where Griffiths was again the only one to trouble the scorers. He had a good win over Dean Andrews but Jon Hill and Brian Riedling saw the division one side through to the final.

HOLDERS Sible Hedingham will defend the restricted cup final against Nomads, winners, under the name of Delphi, in 2005.

Hedingham's triumvirate of Roy Hooper, Graham Cannon and Mark Brown was not stretched against Notley G where they won eight of the nine sets in straight games.

The exception was Brown's win against Warren Baines, the new cadets champion, who had a 2-1 lead but eventually succumbed in five.

White Lions B were still on course for a possible treble when they took on Nomads in the other semi final. But the Cornard team illustrated their second division pedigree with a 5-3 victory.

Lions' Stuart Ascott won his two singles, but it proved not to be enough.