

The position in the Braintree Table Tennis League first division took a major swing when Bocking, who once held a comfortable lead, could only find two players for their match against second-placed Black Notley A and were punished 8-2.

Nigel Hodder registered the two points with wins over Ian Hayden and Trevor Carter, but Peter Hayden dealt with him in three straight games.

Bocking also dropped points against Rayne A, Pillar House A and Liberal A, all of whom they beat 8-2.

Notley on the other hand took all ten points from Rayne C and with five matches to play – the top six end the season by playing each other for a third time – the champions' lead is down to just four points.

Netts A and Rayne A ended the first phase in equal third place, 21 points behind Notley.

They faced each other just before the split when, despite fielding only two players, Netts emerged with six points. Paul Davison was unbeaten and Philip Lawson won twice.

The other two places in the top six – who will go on to compete in the super league - have been taken by Liberal A and Notley B.

Notley secured their place with a 7-3 win over Liberal but the Coggeshall Road club had earned their own place the previous week with a win by the same score over Rayne B.

Rayne B, Pillar House A and Rayne C join the top four teams in division two in the play-off group one.

The league's general secretary Alan McEwan has been awarded this season's Martin Bawden Trophy for service or achievement.

Presenting him with the trophy, league chairman Ron Fosker said that last season McEwan had in effect held four jobs: assistant general secretary, as he took the minutes at meetings; assistant competition secretary as he was in charge of the handicap system; assistant press officer as he ran the website; and assistant coaching secretary as he ran the Sunday afternoon coaching sessions.

He has carried on with all those roles while taking on the general secretary's job this season and is also treasurer of the Black Notley Community Association club.

He is the second father to follow his son in winning the award after Andrew's triumph in 2008. Paul and Brian Davison were successful in 2005 and 2006.