

Black Notley A put themselves in pole position to regain the Braintree Table Tennis League championship last week when they overcame Bocking 7-3.

It was a defeat that left the champions 11 points adrift with three matches to play and only one match in hand.

Neither side were able to put out their recognised first team but at least they each managed to get out three players in contrast to their first two meetings.

For the first fixture Notley got their dates confused and had to concede the match while in the second Bocking had only two players and lost 8-2.

This time Notley were without their No.1 Peter Hayden as well as Trevor Carter, while Bocking were unable to call on either Gary Young or Nigel Hodder.

Responsibility fell on the shoulders of Ian Hayden to steer Notley home and he responded with his three singles, including a vital win over Kevin Gowlett.

He was unbeaten too in Notley's earlier 9-1 win over their own B team, Graham Farmer's win over Trevor Carter being the only one mark against them.

Notley B also lost 8-2 to Rayne A. James Hicks notched up wins over Jon Hill and Steve Pennell but could not get the better of Andrew McEwan, making a rare appearance during his university vacation.

In play-off group one, Rayne B raised no eyebrows with two convincing wins, 8-2 over Pillar House A and 9-1 over Liberal B.

Duncan Elloy took two singles for Pillar House – Brian Riedling was the one to elude him – while Dave Hardy scored a creditable win over Peter Hance for Liberal B.

Liberal B also lost 6-4 to Sible Hedingham despite three wins from Trevor Laird.

The aim in play-off group two is to avoid the bottom two positions and a place in next season's division three and a number of teams will be encouraged by their results this week.

Pillar House B have had availability problems and have virtually resigned themselves to their fate by conceding two matches but Rayne F, Black Notley D, Netts B and White Lions A have all been picking up useful points.

Netts B and Lions A both scored three points against Nomads.

Lions' defeat included an excellent win for Stuart Ascott over Kevin Saunders while Ben Page registered two wins for a two-person Netts B. Lorraine Burgess won both her singles for Nomads.

Rayne F were another team to pick up three points, in their case against the section leaders Notley C for whom Lyndon Griffiths was unbeaten.

Notley D meanwhile scored a vital 6-4 win over Lions A. Keith Flowers took his three singles for Notley and joined Bruce Wickham to win the doubles.

The seven teams in the final group will all play in division three next year, but they have a trophy to play for – and White Lions B continue to look the most likely to win it.

They had only two players to face their main rivals, Rayne G, but came away with a 6-4 win, a match in which Steve Willis and Adam Purslow let the doubles slip away but won all their singles.

With a full squad they took eight points off Notley E who themselves were a player short. Twelve-year-old Oliver Hicks had an encouraging league debut with a five-game win over Willis.

Notley F joined the list of teams with only two players and were held to a draw by their own G team. Andy Thompson and Mike Smith won two each for the F team but neither could overcome Ian Wallace.

Thirteen-year-old Ryan Sanderson won his three singles for Rayne H against Notley H, and included new league cadets champion Warren Baines among his victims.

Rayne H drew with Notley G while John Breen's three singles were not enough to prevent Notley H's 6-4 defeat by Rayne G.