

Badminton League Preview

After four months without any competitive badminton, the Southend and District 2017/18 season returns at the end of September with B & BP kickstarting against Eastwood in the Mixed first division.

There are three new teams entering the league and two are from East Thurrock. Their mixed team have already stormed through the divisions and into the Prem, and their ladies will be competing in the top division this year. However the men will have to negotiate the first division this season. Fitzwimarc will have a third mixed side entering in the bottom division. Sadly five teams have had to withdraw. Two have withdrawn from the Masters division (Wii Not Fit and Westcliff Seconds), two from the Men's (SLH Rayleigh Seconds and Highlands) and one from the ladies in Westcliff Thirds.

The Ladies Premier division has traditionally been a fight between Leighway and Eastwood and the former will be looking to make it six straight titles this year. Chelmsford Casuals and Westcliff were both comfortably mid-table last season and are unlikely to be involved in a relegation scrap. East Thurrock are an unknown quantity at this level and could be in for a long season against the other more established teams.

In the division below, Westcliff Seconds elected not to go up despite not losing a game last season but will face stronger opposition this year with relegated Fitzwimarc and SLH Rayleigh. B & BP and Eastwood Seconds finished level on points in second and third and will look to challenge at the top again. Meanwhile Fitzwimarc Seconds and Greensward will seek to avoid the wooden spoon.

The Men's Premier division was extremely tight last year with Eastwood narrowly taking the title from Leighway and both sides look set to compete for the honour again. Westcliff and Powerplay finished third and fourth respectively and are likely to finish in similar positions again. Down the bottom Fitzwimarc and newly promoted Powerplay Seconds are likely to be fighting to avoid the drop.

There will be extra games for teams in the Men's First division after it expanded from five to seven teams. Fitzwimarc Seconds, SLH Rayleigh and Eastwood Seconds will all go again at this level. The four new teams are Southend (relegated from the Prem last year), B & BP (champions of the second division), Westcliff Seconds (runners-up in the second division) and new team, East Thurrock. With such a shake-up it's hard to predict who will go well and who will struggle but it's likely to be a very close and competitive division this season.

The Second division has also undergone a transformation as it has combined with the third division, meaning there will also be seven teams competing here. Chase will look to bounce back after relegation from the first division and will compete for the title with David Lloyd and Fitzwimarc Thirds. The other four teams all competed in the disbanded Third division last year and champions David Lloyd Seconds will look to do well again. Hawkwell were only

eight points further adrift while Greensward and Fitzwimarc Fourths could struggle in the revamped league.

Just like the Men's and Women's Premier divisions, the Mixed Premier looks likely to be a battle between Leighway and Eastwood again. Newly promoted East Thurrock could challenge the traditional top two though after successive title wins and only one league defeat in two years. Westcliff and Fitzwimarc are the two most likely to be in trouble.

B & BP came down from the Premier division without a win last season but are one of the favourites for the promotion along with Westcliff Seconds and Greensward. Westcliff Thirds and Eastwood Seconds avoided the drop by a point and matches won respectively last season and could be in a relegation battle again this time with division two champions Fitzwimarc Seconds.

The bottom tier is set to be two horse race between SLH Rayleigh and Greensward but with a young and improving team, Highlands are outsiders for the title. Hawkwell will look to improve after a disappointing season last term and new side Fitzwimarc Thirds will look for a strong first season.

The Masters Premier division has been dominated by Fitzwimarc in recent years but increased handicaps could give Westcliff a chance of the title. The two Greensward teams and Fitzwimarc Seconds will look to avoid relegation in a smaller division.

Finally, the Masters First division has just four teams after the withdrawal of both Wii Not Fit and Westcliff Seconds. However it is set to be one of the most exciting divisions again. There were only 11 points separating the entire league last year meaning it's anybody's guess as to who will be champions.