

EAST DIVISION PREVIEW

The East Division is the only one to retain more than one team with Season 7's Divisional Winners The Ratmaninovs and the leading Casualty causers from season 7 (and current record-holders for most caused in a single regular season) in the ABBL, the Petty Hate Machines. The head-to-head record between these two is honours even so we'll all be eager to see how this pans out. Newcomers the Kirchenstein Templars have plenty to get their over-zealous and pious teeth in to while the Hel Fenn Harriers, their natural enemies will be eager to put them in their place! The two remaining teams are Elven in nature, one coming from the forest in the form of the Green Glade Packers, the other more from the dark side of Elvendom, Woods Wiccan Wonders. With such a variety of teams, the East is going to be hotly contested!

The Petty Hate Machines

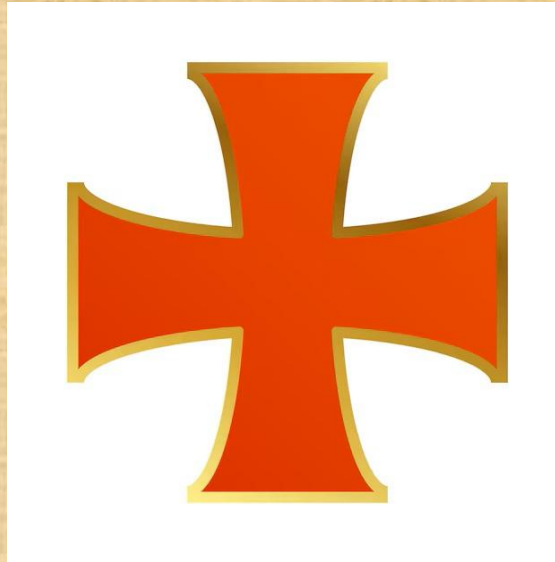


Now entering their 3rd and potentially final season, the Petty hate Machines do so having set two ABBL records. That of Most Casualties caused by a single team during the regular season (54) and the Individual Player record of Most Casualties caused in a single season (Vor-Or-Vor the Minotaur). However, the team entering Season 8 is a vastly different outfit that has seen this record-setting success. New technologies have allowed Jûlz Virn to experiment a little and as a result, he has reduced his stock line of Blockers to make room for something a little more... explosive that he's been working on in the off-season. Although characteristically tight-lipped about his creations until the big reveal, he has stated that it's going to "Set the ABBL alight!"

Whatever he has up his sleeve, it needs to be good as, despite the record-setting, the Machines have failed to advance beyond the first round of the Play-Offs at the last two times of asking and many fans of the team (well, we say fans, they're more made up of bad-tempered and impatient investors in all honesty!) are starting discontented grumblings, fuelled by the controversial decision to remove Vor-Or-Vor from the team and have him be out-sourced as a Mercenary For Hire, Jûlz Virn hoping to get some revenue flowing in while sales are still lacking.

Some fan favourites from Season 7 are still there to cause issues for opponents however: the two Bull Centaurs, Bo-Riz Ztrukat-Zki and Ar-Kay-De Ztrukat-Zki II are fearsome prospects for any team to face with the former focusing on speed and the latter on strength, the combination likely to bring success. Of the remaining Blockers, Stani-Zwav Lem is the stand-out star, expect to see him attempt to out-do Vor-Or-Vor in season 8!

Kirchenstein Templars



If there's one thing the ABBL has been missing over its history, it's a puritanical, fanatical team of zealots ready to stamp anyone who isn't them firmly in to the ground! The Templars have an agenda and they're not afraid to push it. From aggressive pre-match leafleting (well, they call it that, everyone else calls it coercion and bullying...) to open defamations of anyone that disagrees with them (so... all of their opponents then!), the Templars spread their message with ultra-aggressive tendencies, all to keep the faithful pure of course...

From their point of view, this team formed of Witch Hunters and their fanatical followers are out to save the soul of all humans and the only way to do this is to purge the heretic and destroy the mutant, as well as injecting a healthy dose of xenophobia in to the local populace on the way! No more apparent in this is the motto of Kirchenstein - Be pure, Be vigilant, Behave! Those who veer from this puritanical vision are faced with the most severe punishments, the most feared being banishment from the city. Honest... But, within their own strict guidelines, there are... oddities. Ogres can't be tolerated of course but the 'Goliaths' in their ranks bear more than a remarkable resemblance and Midgets, clearly unfortunately afflicted humans do seem to have a ravenous appetite only matched by those awful abhumans, the Halflings...

Players to watch out for are the enigmatic and stylish Captain of the team, Solomon Weisemann as cold and calculated with his passing as he is of his leadership of the team. Woe betide any player that fails to carry out his orders! The Goliath, Samson is frighteningly enthusiastic in carrying out 'Da Bossis' orders and is likely to leave a permanent reminder to any opponent why they should be wary of the Templars' righteous wrath. Finally, we have Obadiah the Zealot, a Catcher who usually utilises his speed to catch fleeing miscreants and heretics. In training, the Templars have covered the balls with anti-Sigmarite rhetoric and symbols, ensuring Obadiah pursues them with just as much zeal!

Ratmaninovs



The Ratmaninovs are now entering their 3rd season in the main ABBL League and many are tipping them as *the* team to watch. Despite only reaching the Play-Offs once at the last two times of asking, this team has a good chance of living up to those expectations, not least because they still have Season 7's top TD scorer (and current record-holder for most TD's scored in a single regular season) and GIT, Ava Puffski in their ranks. He's cost them a fortune mind and when you add the fact that they have retained the fearsome Rat Ogre, Brutus for an eye-wateringly expensive 350,000 Gold(!) it soon becomes apparent that the Ratmaninovs are putting all their eggs in two baskets.... But, if you're going to do this, there aren't too many baskets that you'd rather use!

Of course, their opposition is going to have something to do with keeping them from the fruition of their dreams. Old rivals from last season, the Petty Hate Machines are going to be aiming to edge ahead in their head-to-head which is currently at 1 a piece while Woods Wiccan Wonders will be looking to improve on their thrilling 3-3 Draw against the Rats in a pre-season friendly. The Green Glade Packers are going to give them a run for their money from a speed point of view while the Hel Fenn Harriers and Kirchenstein Templars are relative unknowns, so it's anyone's guess how the Skaven will deal with them. The fact that Ava Puffski will be missing the first game of the season due to an injury suffered in a pre-season friendly against a Gnome team (!) could well end up affecting the whole season for the Ratmaninovs so negotiating who to play in that first game could be crucial.

Other than Brutus and Ava Puffski, there is the Blitzzer, Lenin II who could end up making a name for himself and one other Gutter Runner that may be able to shine in the shadow of Puffski in the shape of Ava Go'Ski. But with a reduced team right from the off, will they be enough?

Hel Fenn Harriers

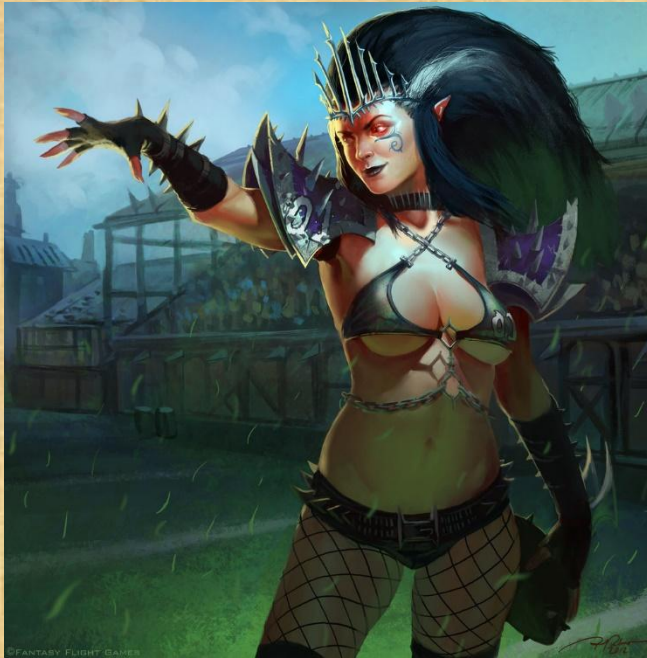


The Harriers had been languishing in the Conference for a while before making the move to the main League. This was mainly due to the conservative leadership of Duke Varkan who reasoned that success was far more likely and regular than committing to the main League and opening themselves up to socially-crippling defeat. But, after seeing the Middenheim Mindbreakers make the Play-Offs last season, the rest of the team decided there was no reason they couldn't do better (indeed, what right-minded Vampire ever considers other Vampires as able to achieve more than them!?) and swiftly deposed the Duke in favour of the far more driven Prince Vorschtang who immediately signed them up for Season 8!

As well as losing the Duke, they also said goodbye to their Vargheist (he smelt terrible...) and what emerged was a much leaner and meaner team. Pre-season was a mixed bag for the Harriers however as a game against the Dark Elves of Woods Wiccan Wonders ended in a 2-1 loss along with a dead Thrall (not that that matters really!) but they did manage a win against a Gnome team, not that they're bragging about it seeing as they still conceded 2 TD's in that game... But, the upshot of it is the fact that they were able to afford to flesh out their team a little and now feel ready for the challenge ahead.

Watch out for Duchess Varkan, able to give those Gutter Runners a good race, Lord Pompadou, a Blitzzer that just refuses to move away and surprisingly, a Thrall by the name of Saka Claret who has somehow managed to survive long enough to become a key member of the team. Surely Vampirism beckons?

Woods Wiccan Wonders

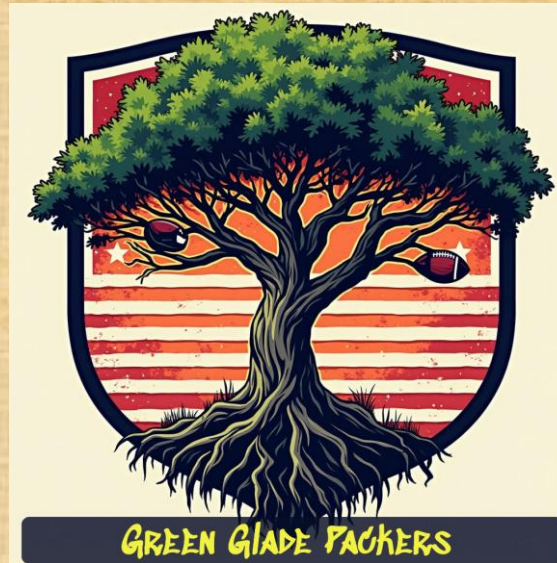


The Wonders are back! Last seen in the Main League back in Season 5 and Cup Finalists from the Conference from Season 6, they had a bit of a hiatus during Season 7, content to languish in the Conference while they re-imagined themselves (if retiring back to their ship and raiding coastal villages counts as re-imagining that is!) ready for their re-emergence for Season 8. Head Coach Seleneskova took some time out to coach the almost-successful Vivacious Vipers while the Dark Elves were off plundering and has brought many a thing she learnt from them with her to the Dark Elf team.

With just 14 games lost out of 45 played, they are definitely strong contenders in the East and seemed to be out to prove exactly that during their pre-season victory against the Hel Fenn Harriers. But the next 2 games saw them only manage draws, one of which being against their other fellow East Division team, the Ratmaninovs in a 3-3 thriller, a sign of games to come perhaps? The real issue for the start of the season however (and much like the Ratmaninovs) is the following 2-2 draw against the Khorne Conference team Goranitch Frenzy that saw 2 players out for the beginning of the season including key Witch Elf, Simone Slashakova. With just 10 players available for the first game, they will also need to be careful in choosing their first opponent if they're not to de-rail their chances right from the beginning.

They've lost a few good players since their last sojourn in the Big League and have had to make sacrifices to fit within the harsh restrictions of the ABBL redraft policy after coming back from the Conference. Despite this, they still have weapons in their arsenal, not least of which is Ralph Racine, an accomplished Runner looking to challenge for the Completions record with 8 in the pre-season friendlies alone! A strong up-and-coming Blitzzer by the name of Larente Lokovski is looking solid having scored 3 times and don't forget the wannabe Blitzzer, Anna Andoskova. She also has a knife...

Green Glade Packers



The Green Glade Packers are a team of Wood Elves that have spent a season in the Conference familiarising themselves with the ABBL before entering the Main League for Season 8. Coming from a region of the Loren Forest known as the Green Glade, the Packers were so named because of their role in packing bundles of arrows for the armies of the Forest. With the cessation of wars and the introduction of Blood Bowl as a replacement, demand for arrows dropped and the Packers found themselves without a cause. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they started to brush up on this Blood Bowl thing and soon established themselves as a strong contender amongst the Elven Leagues becoming the only team to hold on to the Loren Forest League 3 times in a row twice!

Their playstyle revolves around their Wardancers and the ability to score lightning-fast Touchdowns. Unfortunately for them, one of their most promising players was killed in the final game they played in the Conference, somewhat curtailing their ability to carry out they're tactics but Oakley Acorn Jr has taken the mantle of their father and has vowed to live up to his legacy! Results were mixed for the Wood Elves in the Conference but this may be partly down to the controversial inclusion of a Treeman in their ranks. Not many Wood Elf teams include one of these lumbering behemoths, preferring their speed and agility over muscle but The Faraway Tree has given them options, the main one being to allow their regular players freedom to operate on the pitch without having to give mobility up by taking on the opposition line of scrimmage.

Obviously, Oakley Acorn Jr is an exciting prospect, many are hoping that the youngster (Hah! He's 150 years old!) will live up to his father's name and pre-season training has certainly seemed to show promise with established Wardancer Basil Bramble taking him under his wing. Holly Ferngrove is turning in to a Thrower to be reckoned with. A born leader that never takes her eye off the ball, she has a wickedly powerful throwing arm to boot, probably as she was the Packer's main arrow-tester back in the day! Finally, Daisy Dewdrop has established herself as a consummate professional and often accompanies Holly in the backfield, feeding the ball to her after receiving the Kick Off or running down the pitch, whatever is necessary to get the job done!