

In the BEA, Enniscorthy have a fourth title in three seasons all but wrapped up, while their rivals are taking it in turns to drop spectacularly out of the promotion running.

After a slow start – “only” winning their opening two matches 3-2 – **Enniscorthy** have picked up steam since then, dropping as many points in winning their next six matches as they did in winning their first two. Four of their team are still in the running for a board prize – and Mercedes Plaza Reino is only missing out due to having missed one game. Their team – with three 1600s, based on September ratings – is daunting enough for opposing BEA teams, but live ratings add another 650 points across the five boards since the start of the season. And with the squad still rapidly improving – witness Dean Copeland’s excellent win over Tom O’Gorman in the recent Gonzaga Masters – and a high-flying Bodley team to cover the extra board required next season, it doesn’t seem premature to declare them favourites for the 2016/17 O’Hanlon.

But who’ll join them in the O’Hanlon in September? At Christmas, **Dublin** were second – but they’ve remarkably only picked up two points in three matches since then! They’ve a daunting home match against Enniscorthy in round 9, and are suddenly looking over their shoulders at the drop rather than targeting promotion.

Portmarnock whitewashed Dublin in the first match after Christmas to take over second spot – but then had a collapse of their own, picking up two points in their next two matches and now lie four points adrift.

So after round 8, it’s the turn of **St Benildus**, promoted alongside Enniscorthy last year, to be in the seemingly-cursed second-place spot – and they have an ominous couple of fixtures coming up, away to third-place **Naomh Barróg**, still unbeaten after beating Portmarnock 4-1 on Thursday, and then home to Portmarnock. Those are the first of six matches between the top five crammed into the last three rounds – as well as Naomh Barróg v St Benildus and St Benildus v Portmarnock, Naomh Barróg finish with games against Drogheda and Enniscorthy, while **Drogheda**’s last-round tie is against Portmarnock – the two sides are currently level in fourth place.

There’s just as much to play for at the bottom, where the bottom four – **Curragh**, **Phibsboro**, **Rathmines** and **Balbriggan** – are separated by 3½ points, but they’ve still to play four of the six matches scheduled between each other. And Balbriggan’s final day clash against St Benildus may well be between a side looking to avoid relegation and one looking to confirm promotion. It’s worth looking at the top and bottom of the league to see what a great job the fixture writer has done!

Pos	Team	MP	Pts	Enn	St B	Nao	Dro	Por
1	Enniscorthy	8	32	x	3-2	R 11	4-1	3-2
2	St Benildus	8	26	2-3	x	R 9	2-3	R 10
3	Naomh Barróg	8	24 1/2	R 11	R 9	x	R 10	4-1
4	Drogheda	8	22	1-4	3-2	R 10	x	R 11
5	Portmarnock	8	22	2-3	R 10	1-4	R 11	x

Pos	Team	MP	Pts	Cur	Phi	Rat	Bal
9	Curragh	8	15 1/2	x	R 10	R 11	3½-1½
10	Phibsboro	8	15	R 10	x	R 9	2½-2½
11	Rathmines	8	14 1/2	R 11	R 9	x	R 10
12	Balbriggan	8	12	1½-3½	2½-2½	R 10	x

Enniscorthy and Benildus dominate the top of the points table – for the Wexford side, **Dovydas Pocevicius** is on 7/8, **Dean Copeland** and **Agustin Plaza Reino** are on 6½/8 while **Robbie Kildea** is on 6/8, while for St Benildus, **Seán Devilly** and **William Kenny** are on 6½/7 and 6½/8 respectively.

Behind those, four different clubs have players on 5½/8 – Inchicore (**Martin Burns**), Drogheda (**Michael Johnston**), Portmarnock (**Brian McGrath**) and Balbriggan (**Peter Whearity**). Peter's defeat against Dovydas in November is so far the only defeat any of those four players have suffered.

In the Bodley, **Trinity College** are on course for a second title in a row, with the only question seeming to be whether they can finally pick up a 5-0 win before the season is out – four of their seven wins to date have been on 4½-½ scorelines. They were denied a whitewash against St Benildus only by one of the results of the season – 900-rated **Ben Coghlan** sacking a piece as white early on against 1760-rated John Kelly, and agreeing a draw a few moves later, with white more than having compensation.

Blanchardstown A have won 5-0 – against their Bs in the season opener – but were also on the receiving end of one of Trinity's 4½-½ wins. Nevertheless, they're best placed to join Trinity in the BEA next season – they're a half point behind **Enniscorthy** with a match in hand, and Enniscorthy have yet to play Trinity. The Enniscorthy team has a very familiar ring to it to those who've seen their first team rise through the divisions – four of their Bodley panel have a sibling on the BEA.

At the bottom, Blanch are on course to exit at both ends of the Bodley, though they're consistent at least, with each of their last five games ending in a 3-2 defeat! A final day match against Rathmines will either be crucial – or just a dead rubber, as Rathmines are themselves currently 5½ points adrift of safety. But they did recently record their first win of the season, 3-2 against 10th-placed Bray, with great wins for **Utkarsh Gupta** against Hieronymus van den Belt (399 points higher-rated) and **Pete Donlon** against W Hugh Taylor (369 points higher-rated)

Trinity's fragmented squad – nobody has played more than 5 of their 7 games to date – means that although the Students have six players on 100% records (**John Bethell**, **David Phillips**, **James Kong**, **John Shanley**, **Christopher Young** and **Diarmuid Reidy** have a combined 17/17), you have to look elsewhere for the top scorers in the Bodley. On 6/7 are **Christopher Cole** (Dún Laoghaire), **Jacob Flynn** of Malahide and Blanch A's **Robert McLoughlin**. **Suzanne Barry** of Naomh Barróg is unbeaten on 5½/7, while Inchicore's **Éamonn Connolly** is also in board prize territory with 5½/7.