

Oxfordshire Chess Association
May Committee Meeting
Held at Rose Hill Methodist Church
7.30pm, Thursday 25 May 2023

Abbreviations used: OCA = Oxfordshire Chess Association, ECF = English Chess Federation, FWS = Frank Wood Shield

Present: Nigel Moyse (Chair), James Cole (Secretary), Roger Thetford (Webmaster), Priscilla Morris (President), Will Burt (Minutes Secretary), Tom O’Gorman (Oxford University), Mike Turan (ECF Representative)

1. Apologies for Absence: Sara Sengenberger (Treasurer), Peter Hemmings (Grading Officer), Andrew Varney (Junior Liaison Officer), Kevin Henbest (Oxford University Representative and Vice-Chair).

2. Minutes of the May 2022 Committee Meeting: these were accepted as the record of last year’s meeting.

3. Secretary’s Report and Allocation of Prizes

A list of prize winners will be posted on the OCA website tomorrow; the winner of the Ray Starkie prize is yet to be decided. In the league there was a significant increase in defaulted games and some fixtures did not take place. Cumnor’s ‘Six Horsemen of the Apocalypse’ won the FWS. The FWS had low entry numbers with some defaulted matches.

4. County Team Captain’s Report on the Chiltern Cup Season

Nigel Moyse reported that, despite beating Hampshire twice, Oxfordshire finished second to them. Our squad size increased but costs at our home venue (Cumnor Old School) rose significantly, so Nigel stopped hiring the kitchen area. Possible alternative venues were briefly discussed.

5. Election of County Captain

Nigel Moyse is standing down so the position is now vacant. Nigel said he was willing to assist any new captain. There was a vote of thanks to Nigel.

6. University Representative: Kevin Henbest remains in this post.

7. Formation of the League 2023/24

James Cole described likely numbers: Magdalen College School (MCS) plan to return with two teams (one of Division I strength), while Cowley intends to add a fourth team. This would give 25 teams, which James proposed to arrange in a 9/8/8 structure. No team would be relegated

from Division I, the seven existing teams joined by promoted Didcot 1 and MCS 1. An extra team (Cumnor 2) would be promoted to Division II, which would also include MCS 2. Cowley 4 would be added to Division III. This gives the following structure:

- Division I: Oxford University 1, Oxford University 2, Oxford City 1, Cowley 1, Witney 1, Banbury 1, Cumnor 1, Didcot 1, MCS 1
- Division II: Cowley 2, Wantage 1, Witney 2, Oxford City 2, Didcot 2, Abingdon School, Cumnor 2, MCS 2
- Division III: Oxford University 3, Banbury 2, Cowley 3, Wantage 2, Oxford City 3, Didcot 3, Witney 3, Cowley 4

There was a vote of thanks to Asif Hameed, who will be stepping down after several years as Fixtures Secretary. Roger Thetford is willing to stand for this role at the AGM.

8. Potential Rule Changes for the 2023/24 Season

James Cole outlined the areas in which he envisaged proposing changes. Some updates are required to accommodate the new ‘P’ and ‘K’ ECF rating categories. He also wanted measures to detect illegal board orders in advance. This would involve captains declaring teams online in advance (but not visible to the opposing captain). There should be a clear penalty structure and right of appeal.

Discussion noted that penalties be sufficient to discourage sharp practice: for example a system just defaulting the offending board could be gamed by deliberately playing a weak top board. When a listed player does not show up, the game is a default for match purposes but it is common practice to allow a fill-in to provide a competitive game—should we allow the option to refuse to play such a late substitute?

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, eligibility and starring rules were temporarily weakened. It is intended that these rules be reinstated from next season.

It is recommended that the FWS start earlier, with entries by the end of September and the draw early in November. This will require the removal of the eligibility rule that participants must have played at least two league games for their club. This rule could be retained for later stages of the competition.

Following these recommendations, there was further lively discussion of the current rules and guidance. Where a club chooses to field genuine higher and lower teams in the same division, does there need to be a rating cap for the weaker team based on its starred players? Mike Truran pointed out that the 4NCL has rules for this contingency which we could adapt.

Tom O’Gorman raised concerns from his detailed reading of the

rules and guidance. The guidance deprecates “a sudden influx of higher-rated players just before the end of the season for a crucial match or matches”, which Tom took issue with. (*Note: I consulted with Gerard O’Reilly who wrote the guidance, who explained that it was only intended to refer to deliberately recruiting players from outside the club*). Tom also opined that our mobile phone rules, which currently allow one strike before a default is enforced, are weak as an anti-cheating measure.

Fixture rearrangements were discussed, following the controversy over the match at Cumnor against Oxford University 1, where the visiting team’s captain relied on a fixtures list which was later superseded. Discussion highlighted the need for clarity over the fixtures list and how teams are informed of changes. Also mentioned was who should have discretion to rearrange a match: can captains simply agree between themselves, or should this be arranged by the League Secretary?

9. Transitional Planning of Committee Roles

Several roles are or will become vacant, requiring replacement and transitional planning. As well as those already mentioned, Ian Bush has already stepped down as Online Chess Officer and County Individual Championship Organiser. At the AGM the following will also leave their posts: Nigel Moyse (Chair), James Cole (League Secretary), Andrew Varney (Junior Liaison Office). Andrew hopes to be able to find his successor. A vote of thanks was given to all these individuals for their many contributions while on the committee. Possible replacements for the key roles of Chair and League Secretary were discussed.

10. Any Other Business

James Cole said we hope to present trophies at the Cowley Summer Blitz on Monday 26 June, should engraving be done in time.

There was discussion of the £1,800 earmarked for development. The secretary should send possible ideas to the clubs. It was asked if the association needed to continue to charge its modest affiliation fees for league teams.

Priscilla Morris asked about the age profiles of clubs and whether it would be worth asking clubs to submit relevant information.

The meeting closed at 9.09pm

Will Burt (Minutes Secretary)
23 July 2023