CCL Open Teams 2017-18 season

My report last year indicated that the CCL Open team competition was in difficulties, and in particular we had two of our home matches defaulted by the opposition. I recommended that we make a final effort to rejuvenate the Open competition by reducing both the number of players per team and the number of fixtures.

Despite changing the format of the CCL Open teams competition for this season:

1. Halving the boards per team from 20 to 10
2. Reducing the number of fixtures per team from 6 to 4
3. Changing to a format of all-play-all Jamboree-style fixtures

the season has not been successful, although Oxon did retain the Open team trophy that it won last year. Bucks were unable to field a team for two of these matches, and all other counties (including ourselves) needed to use significant numbers of players who were also eligible for the Under-160 team in order to field a team of just 10 players. This shows that there is a core of stalwart intermediate players who are playing at both Open and U-160 level.

Behind the scenes there have been many difficult and argumentative emails to me as the organiser of this year’s competition in its new Jamboree-style format. As during last season, several Oxon players have again continued to express doubts about the viability of the Open team competition and have indicated that in its absence they would play in more 4NCL matches.

We have considered the future of the CCL Open team competition, and at present I’m still not sure that it has one as a stand-alone competition. My recommendation to the CCL AGM was that the Open and Under-160 teams be merged into a single team – with some kind of grading restriction at the top end. However, this proposal to the CCL AGM was not favoured by the other counties, and it was decided that the Open team competition will revert to the previous format of home and away matches over 16 boards. This will aided by reducing the grading limit for the county 2nd teams - reverting to the previous level of Under-150, thus lessening the demands on the aforementioned core of intermediate players. I also have an increased expectation that this will see fewer defaults since Bucks now have an experienced Open team captain.

By reverting to 16-board Open team matches, we would be increasing the average cost per player for the hire of Cowley church hall. I think that £3 (£2.50 hall hire + 50p refreshments) is an acceptable match fee for home fixtures, with no match fee for away fixtures - since players pay for their own travelling costs. If home fixtures are played at Cowley, I will therefore be seeking a subsidy of £10 per home match from OCA. However, as soon as I have the 2018-19 fixture list, I shall also investigate availability and costs of other venues which do not have the time restrictions that Cowley church hall now has on every Saturday afternoon. (Due to a regular Saturday evening church booking, we have to vacate the premises by 5.30pm which means starting home matches at 1.30pm. – which is rather early for Hampshire players coming from the south of their county.)

Rod Langham