Oxfordshire Open Team 2018-19 season

Following the unsuccessful foray into Jamboree-style fixtures in 2017-18, the Chiltern Chess League (CCL) Open team county competition reverted to home and away fixtures, albeit with 16 boards. The CCL AGM thought that the reduction in boards would reduce the number of defaults. This did indeed prove to be the case – only one county defaulted a board against Oxfordshire, for which they incurred the cost of the Oxfordshire player’s match fee under the CCL Rules.

It is worth noting in passing that some other counties did mutually agree reduced numbers of boards below 16 in some matches with no penalty to either side. However, since Oxfordshire were always able to announce a full 16 boards about 2 weeks before the fixture then we were not approached for this (and I would have refused such a request, at least on the basis that the CCL Rules offer no formal scope for reduction of the number of boards below 16).

Looking at the grades of the Open teams, Oxfordshire is fortunate to have a good pool of club players such that we can always field a team of players above 140, with usually only one or two players below 150. This is in marked contrast to the other counties who usually have a long ‘tail’ of players whose grades indicates that they would play only at the lower end of Oxfordshire’s Under-150 team! On the other hand, other counties are generally more successful in having a few 190+ players who are prepared to play county chess. So, although we often lose the battle over the top 5 boards, it is the Oxfordshire middle and lower order who swing the matches in our favour.

This season we have again won the Open team competition by a clear margin of 4 match points (2 points for a win, 1 point for a draw). However, our 100% winning record under my management took a blow when I had to play myself following a late withdrawal due to illness, and we narrowly lost the match. That was the first match we have lost in my 3 years at the helm.

The Open team no longer used the premises at Rose Hill after the change last season to the hall being unavailable for the full 2pm-6pm match time. (The Under-150 team has accepted the earlier 1.30pm start time for Rose Hill.) The first Open team match was at Didcot – which was more expensive than Rose Hill, but necessary due to non-availablity of other venues. This specific additional expenditure was approved at last year’s OCA AGM. Our other home matches have been at Cumnor (which actually costs less than Rose Hill) – and I have received unanimous praise for Cumnor as a venue. We shall be at Cumnor for all matches next season, and for the foreseeable future.

Rod Langham