

Match Secretary Report for the 2011 WDCL AGM

Well done to all the team captains, players and organisers of the Warrington and District Chess League.

Despite losing a team last year, and more problems in getting teams together generally, the league has continued to provide quality Chess for it's 200 or so members, and the website is still receiving plenty of hits, indicating a high level of interest.

Unfortunately, similar to last season, the poor weather meant that several matches were postponed. In addition, a few teams were stretched to their limits, which resulted in more defaults than we would like to see. However, some teams put in a great effort to get the matches played, even booking venues on a different night than usual in order to see their league programme completed.

This meant that the new rules surrounding match re-arrangements were tested to the full, and generally worked well. Thankfully, this year, no matches were defaulted due to having been left until it was too late in the season to attempt to re-arrange them.

Having said that, the total number of match re-arrangements was far higher than it should have been. A massive total of 13 out of the 42 division 1 games were re-arranged – just under a third of all the matches ! Divisions 2 and 3 were better with 6 and 7 respectively. The ironic thing is that division 4 had no re-arrangements, yet the teams in this division couldn't bring more than 2 players in players from other club teams !

The problems with re-arranging so many matches became apparent later on in the season, when some matches ended up being defaulted, as there were too many too close together, and virtually half of the division 1 season was squashed into the last 2 months ! The clubs that meet on a Monday were particularly affected, losing 2 Bank Holidays and 3 Mondays for first-round Cup matches.

The new default time control for the WDCL brought fewer problems than the old time control, and no games had to be adjourned and concluded at a later date.

Some problems still remain, with league officers having to deal with disputes surrounding the 10.2 rule, and unreliable equipment adding tension to time scrambles. Hence the AGM proposal for 6 digital clocks to be purchased for use at WDCL Cup finals.

Towards the end of the season, a big effort was made by Jonathan Smith and Steve Potter to produce a clear up-to-date version of the WDCL rules, which will be voted on at the AGM.

In addition, the WDCL IT system has been developed further to automatically produce the results in the precise format required for ECF grading.

Newcomers and Juniors

The number of games played by players either new or returning to Chess (estimated grades) this year was excellent – a massive **263** games.

This was composed of 167 (increase of 20 on last year) long play games, plus a further 96 rapidplay games played in the Fresher's League.

St Helens (77) , Ormskirk (61) and Wigan Knights (41) were the greatest contributors there, but also Culcheth-Lymm, Padgate and Penketh made significant contributions to the total.

Unfortunately, the league is likely to lose many of it's strong junior contingent next year as they move on to University and seek pastures new. We wish them all well for the future and hope that they will return to play in the league again before too long.

Good to see some of the younger juniors continue to improve – particularly George Fortune (Padgate), Tim Clays (Wigan Knights) and Matthew Fanning (Atherton), who all played well above their grade this season. Johann Power of Padgate played superbly at the England Trials to gain selection for the England Junior Chess Squad.

Whilst applauding every club in WDCL for their efforts over the season, I feel a special mention is appropriate for Ormskirk Chess Club. Last year, they increased their support for the league by adding an extra league team, and also a team in the Fresher's League. Despite the sad loss of the Ormskirk Chairman, Steve Jacquest, who I'm sure will be missed by all, they have continued to build and only defaulted one (bottom-board) game out of all the games that they played in the season. Well done Ormskirk.

Returning of Results

Many thanks to Neil Folland, Jonathan Smith, Keith Lyon, Mike Fleming , Martin Cooksey and Paul Talbot for returning their results so promptly. This is a real help, as it enables me to get the results onto the website promptly, and hence keep everyone informed.

Division 1

Last year's champions, Culcheth-Lymm A struggled to gain the consistency that they achieved in the 2009-10 season, and were unfortunate to come out on the wrong side of several 3.5-2.5 results. Central, Padgate and Northwich all struggled to find teams at various times and hence lost games due to defaults, and matches with them. So division 1 turned out to be a 3-horse race between Atherton, Widnes and St Helens.

Widnes narrowly beat St Helens 3.5-2.5 in the early encounter, and St Helens in turn edged out Atherton by the same score. In the second half of the season, Atherton then reversed their earlier result against St Helens, who also lost to Widnes. This left Atherton to play Widnes twice in the last week of the season to decide who wins the league. The first match was drawn, leaving Atherton needing a win in the final game to win the league. The decider was understandably tense, with the first 5 boards all drawn. Gareth Ellis, who's had an excellent season with 16 out of 19, won his board 6 game to claim the WDCL title for Widnes.

Default Statistics :

28 boards defaulted : Northwich A (16), Culcheth-Lymm (2), Central (8),
Padgate (2)

2 boards double-defaulted : Atherton (2), Central (1), Widnes (1)

30 out of **252** boards defaulted

2 boards were defaulted when lower boards played (both Culcheth-Lymm)

Division 2

A highly-contested division where sadly 5 complete matches were defaulted. Wigan Knights, St Helens B, Atherton B and Penketh all looked at one stage as if they could win it, with Wigan having the superior board difference after several resounding victories. Ormskirk A then made a late run and threatened to pip them all at the post. However, St Helens B held Ormskirk A off in their final game which gave Wigan Knights the Championship on board difference from St Helens B.

Well played to all.

Default Statistics :

36 boards defaulted : Northwich B (27), Penketh A (8), Winwick A (1)
0 boards double-defaulted

36 out of **252** boards defaulted

2 boards was defaulted when lower boards played (Penketh A, Northwich B)

Division 3

Another extremely close contest here, this time between Runcorn, Ormskirk B and Culcheth B.

Ormskirk B's narrow victory against Culcheth B left them needing 2 wins against Runcorn and Padgate B to win the league. Runcorn just required a draw or better.

As so often happens, the deciding match was very close, and the final result of 3-3 saw a return to division 2 for Runcorn on board difference from Culcheth B and Ormskirk B.

Default Statistics :

30 boards defaulted : Padgate B (16), Widnes B (9), Runcorn (2),
Culcheth B (1), Wigan Knights B (2).

0 boards double-defaulted

30 out of **180** boards defaulted (9%)

1 board was defaulted when lower boards played : Padgate B

Division 4

A close contest again, with no 5-0 results, and the bottom club St Helens C gaining a surprise win over the eventual winners Skelmersdale. The Skelmersdale team proved to be the most consistent side over the season, losing only one more game and winning all the others to end up worthy winners.

Division 4 was easily the most organised division, and was a pleasure to run. No re-arrangements, no disputes, no matches left un-reported and only 4 boards defaulted !

Especially good to see such a small number of defaulted matches in a division where you can't bring more than 2 players in from other teams.

Default Statistics :

4 boards defaulted : St Helens C (2), Ormskirk C (1), Winwick B (1)
0 boards double-defaulted

4 out of **100** boards defaulted

2 boards were defaulted when lower boards played : St Helens C

Total Defaults (all divisions) : **100** out of **784**

Fresher's League

Well done to all the teams taking part in this season's Fresher's League. Six teams ventured into the unknown at the start of the season, the new league being introduced to help clubs to bring new players in to league chess. The concept was a new one – 3 players in a team, all-play-all rapidplay, grading limit of 150, and a handicapping system to give all the teams a chance of winning.

The final play-offs took place at St Helens, and it all came down to a nailbiting finish !

Wigan Knights took the first round 6-5, then Winwick took the second round by the same score. It was all down to the last round, and, after Winwick edging the first game and Knights edging the second, it was then down to the last game with Winwick needing to win, Knights needing a draw. In the end, Colin Mather gained a win to ensure a tightly-contested battle was won by his team.

In the third/fourth play-off, Ormskirk got off to an excellent start by winning the first round 9-5, then built on it to take the second round by the same score. A good fightback by St Helens saw them draw the last round, but Ormskirk had already gained sufficient points to win the play-off and secure 3rd place in the league.

After the matches, there was a short presentation and a discussion about the league in general.

There were many positive comments, in particular that the handicapping system had worked well, and that the league had helped players who wouldn't normally have had so many games available to them, to gain more experience and to feel more involved with their club and league.

It was also noted that the league is titled as such not because teams are expected to be full of newcomers, but because it's a good place for newcomers to play, should a club have any at the start of a season, or acquire any during it.

There is no problem with teams consisting purely of long-standing members. Any team that competes in the Fresher's League helps the Warrington and District League's progress. In addition, the experienced players can help the newcomers along whilst also enjoying some variety, as the league encompasses a vast range of standards of player, and a more rapid style of play.

Summary

A good season again for WDCL, with close and competitive contests right the way through our divisions.

Like many leagues and congresses, it faces the challenge of maintaining or increasing the number of participants. The increase in popularity of internet chess, the recent hike in fuel prices, along with various social factors, all make this a difficult challenge.

For next season, we face a decision on the number of divisions, which at this stage looks like it will decrease from 4 to 3, with an increase in the number of teams in each division.

On the plus side, several clubs are working hard to include new or returning players. Good to see these players getting involved in the league, with the 500 league and Fresher's league available to the players that are new to Chess.

As the website continues to generate interest, and the league, by all accounts, maintains its reputation as a pleasant one in which to participate, there is every possibility that we can continue to deliver a league that caters for a wide range of standards for some time to come.

Well done to all the league's members on an enjoyable and successful season.

Judy Brown June 2011