

President's Report

Apologies for not attending the AGM as I have tested positive for covid19 this week and need to isolate.

I would like to provide a short written report which can be either read out and/or issued to the meeting.

The State of chess in Cumbria is of particular concern with the opening up of clubs following lockdown over the last two years.

We were under no illusions that this would be a gradual process and reflected in the new reality of less members and the flexible introduction of reduced player teams in the Cumbria Leagues. This alongside covid19 guidelines issued for OTB play.

Thanks to Jonathan and Dave Shaw for leading on this. And I say leading on this, as the NCCU took up Cumbria's guidelines for Northern County team competitions.

The season started on a promising note with some clubs experiencing new members due to playing on-line and watching the Queen's Gambit in lockdown. This was seen in a number of Counties in the North, notably Northumberland and Durham.

The unfinished 2019/20 season was completed and the 2021/22 season started. However with matches not being completed, the season seemed to stall. No doubt Dave Shaw and others will have a view on why this happened.

On a positive note, the Whitaker Cup Final between Carlisle and Barrow is being played today in Kendal.

It was encouraging recently to see junior chess making strides through the sterling efforts of John Lydon with the Long Marton school event. Hopefully the NCCU Pennine cup details will be confirmed soon and Cumbria able to field a team of juniors. Once I get the details I will let John know.

The long term future of chess belongs to juniors continuing to play and we can help with contacting schools and finding out what they need in terms of equipment and coaching. A noticeable gap is the transition from school to club chess and making clubs attractive to juniors.

I hope John and others can help in this and I will be contacting John on how we see the best way to do it.

Even more pressing of course is the immediate future of chess in Cumbria. It is in the hands of us all and we need to focus efforts in getting players into clubs and taking part in Cumbria competitions.

This is not an easy problem to solve as chess players in clubs are getting older and covid19 has resulted in a reluctance to play OTB chess. We need to keep this in mind as it is understandable given the pandemic is not over and the risks to the vulnerable still substantial.

This season's flexibility for 3 rather than 4 players in a team has in my view been a positive and the Open league fixtures were in the main fulfilled.

The Southern League suffered in particular from the Ulverston club not being able to fulfil its fixtures, but perhaps this was out of their control.

Dave Shaw has some proposals alluding to this, but if the problems stem from a lack of venue then maybe we can offer solutions by different clubs sharing a venue? (Barrow for example would welcome Ulverston players to use the Barrow British Legion). All suggestions are welcome and Cumbria is always ready to assist clubs in promoting and publicising chess.

(Note we agreed a £250 fund in 2019 for clubs to publicise chess, but this was never used).

I don't know if anyone has reached out to Keswick and/or SASRA if they can are up and running, but this will help.

It is disappointing the Cumbria Individuals has not taken place; but if there is an appetite within Cumbria, Barrow club are ready to host and arrange it for autumn 2022 and again in 2023.

On chess matters regionally, the next NCCU meeting is on the 13th August to which myself and George will be attending (hopefully!) where the main issues will be on how we promote Club and County chess, along with ECF current issues especially on finance. On the agenda for the NCCU meeting is yet another proposal to admit Greater Manchester into the NCCU. This will prove contentious and is already causing anger from Lancashire. Watch this space!

Of note:

- ECF Membership fees for 2022/23 are due to remain the same as this season.
- Of note is that in the National County Finals two Northern Counties played each other in the Open final. Northumberland drew 8-8 against Yorkshire, but won the title on Board count.
- There was a plea from the NCCU President for Counties to look out for Ukrainian refugees living nearby and enticing them to clubs.

I would also like to mention the 2022 South Lakes Congress held in Barrow in June. We had just over 100 entries, of which 99 actually played. Players came from various places including Southern Ireland and South Africa. We made a loss of £500, but still hope to hold the 25th South Lakes in Barrow next year with increased prize money and trophies to reflect the Silver anniversary.

The majority of players really liked the venue and we hope for an increased entry in 2023. I would urge Cumbria clubs and players to take part.

On a personal note, I am still not back at my best (not covid19, but a few heart ops over the last two years have taken their toll) and with my intention to retire from work sometime next year it is probably best for me to stand down as President. I will continue into 2023 if re-elected, but happy to stand aside after nearly 30 years in the post. Time for someone new to take the County forward I think.

Finally I would like to thank all Cumbria officials and club secretaries for their work in keeping chess going in Cumbria and a special note of thanks to Dave Shaw for the Cumbria website which is still the best in the country bar none!

All the best to everyone.

Regards

Dave Cole