

League Controller's Report

Summary

- Aylesbury 1 County Champions.
- W&Hz 2 second division champions and replace Slough 1 who are relegated
- No proposed changes to league rules for 2010/11 season

Detail

The 2009/10 season was dominated by two clubs, Aylesbury and Wycombe and Hazlemere (W&Hz).

Although the final division one table shows Aylesbury as clear winners, the first division in the end came down to a handful of games, as Aylesbury recovered from an early defeat at home to W&Hz by winning the return and then negotiating all remaining obstacles, without major discomfort, thereby condemning W&Hz to the runners-up spot for the fourth consecutive season. Slough first team finished bottom of the first division and will therefore be replaced by W&Hz second team, who fought off a strong challenge from Aylesbury second team. Congratulations to both clubs.

Other matters of note

Player discipline

I have not been asked to deal with any formal complaints, which means I have not been required to take any formal action. I have, however, become aware of various incidents, some arising from the competitive nature of the occasion, others through ignorance of the laws of chess as applied in the Bucks League. These have been partly but not exclusively arising from quick-play finish rules. These have normally been dealt with on the night, but clubs are requested to ensure that all team members are reminded of the laws of the game and the appropriate behaviour at a match, to maintain a sporting but enjoyable contest. The League Controller is mindful that matches are not played in the presence of arbiters, and also that match captains cannot be assumed to understand all the subtleties of the laws, but does consider that match captains are responsible for the good conduct of their teams. I intend to issue a brief 'new players guide to match chess' in advance of the new season and would expect clubs to make this available to their players.

Junior players

It was encouraging to see an increase in the number of junior players participating in the adult league this season. Indeed every club except one fielded a junior player, several of them making a significant contribution to match results. In the vast majority of cases their conduct at the board was beyond reproach, in other cases a gentle word was generally sufficient to modify irritating behaviour, possibly attributable to nerves. The league controller is aware of isolated incidents where the adult opponent may have behaved in an inappropriate manner. He recognises that playing a junior is not everybody's cup of tea, but would ask people to seriously consider the example that we set, and behave in a courteous way..

Scheduling of fixtures

Preparation of the fixture list is a fiddly process, and one of the more time consuming jobs of any county officer. It has to take into account the distribution of teams across clubs and divisions, the club nights and size of venue. I was asked late in the season to consider adjusting the fixture list to ensure final round matches started simultaneously. I declined to do so.

Defaults

I have not done any specific analysis but sense there is an up-ward trend in the number of games being defaulted. Whilst league chess is obviously an attraction of club membership it does seem that some clubs are being overambitious about their ability to field teams, particularly away from home, and it may well be that they need to consider fielding fewer teams, and instead running a club championship to keep a reasonable level of competitive chess for members. One specific aspect of the defaults which might lead to disputes is the defaulting of boards towards the top of teams – this might be construed as gamesmanship.

Reporting of results

I am once again indebted to Dave Turner for his efforts as webmaster. I believe that timely reporting and posting of results adds interest to the club competition. Some progress has been made this year in increasing the number of teams who report results in an acceptable way, but there is still too much additional work needed by the league controller, in transcribing results and correcting spelling errors in player names etc, and by the grader when new players are introduced. I am reluctant to apply sanctions as would rather the league be decided over the board, but regard the casual attitude displayed by some match captains as discourteous to those of us who volunteer.

Rulings by League Controller

As League Controller I have a responsibility to ensure that both the letter and the spirit of the league rules are up-held. As an officer of a member club as well as the county I am wary of the need to be even-handed when exercising those powers. On occasion I will seek the views of others to assist. This section of the report advises on particularly notable decisions. These are for information only, and should not be regarded as setting a precedent for subsequent years.

New Players

A member club selected a new player for a second team match without taking reasonable steps to establish the full name of the player or the playing strength of that individual, the former being provided on a match card by the opposing club, the latter being established by the league controller in about ten minutes using a search engine. Although the league rules allow an overlap between team playing strengths, and this approach has been adopted by other clubs, the player's strength was clearly more appropriate to the first team of that club, and the league controller expressed that view to the club concerned. This guidance was very close to the limits of the discretionary powers available to the league controller and had reasonable attempts been taken to establish the playing strength beforehand, the response might have been different.

Upfloats

A player for a club second team became ineligible due to up-floats. The club, which was not in contention for the title – or playing any title contenders asked for this individual to be exempt from the up-float rules, to ensure that they had enough players to conclude their fixtures. After consultation, the league controller suggested that the player concerned could participate in the fixtures but that the game would be scored in favour of the opposition, and there would be no further penalty. It is very unlikely that the current League Controller would accept a request of this type again.