

ESSEX CHESS ASSOCIATION

Founded 1898

Minutes of the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 22 May 2012 at Brentwood Baptist Church, 91 King's Road, Brentwood, Essex CM14 4TJ, starting at 8.00 p.m.

Present: Bryan Gaze (in the chair), John Chapman, Alistair Clark, Geoff Cooper, Malcolm Crane, Dave Hawkins, Ian Hunnabe, David Millward, Jef Page, John Philpott, Joe Rosenberg, Barry Sheppard, Robin Slade, David Smith, Ivor Smith, Philip Staniland, Gavin Strachan and Stephen Wedlock.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Steve Abbott.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2011

These were approved as drafted subject to:

- The substitution of Roman numerals for Arabic numerals to refer to teams.
- The correction of a typographical error in the last paragraph of item 4 – “based” should be “base”.

3. Matters arising from these minutes

Item 4 – Malcolm Crane would organise a new base for the Silver Rook.

4. League review for 2011/12

David Millward reported that for its 100th season, the League had gained three teams: Basildon II, Ilford III, and Upminster V. After waiting sixteen years until 2010/11 for a season with no defaulted matches, he had only a year to wait for the second. Most of the 2010/11 promotions and relegations were reversed.

The fourth division started the season with nine teams, one from each club except Writtle, but quickly gained another, Upminster V. One of the new teams, Basildon II topped the division after dropping just one draw; the team that been relegated, Roding & Loughton II, finished sixth.

The third division was won by Thurrock I with Upminster III bottom, so that both teams will return to their 2010/11 divisions.

The second division was won by Ilford I with Barking II bottom, so that both teams will also return to their 2010/11 divisions.

In the first division, Writtle won the Silver Rook for a record-breaking seventh consecutive season, but failed to achieve a perfect season after drawing its last match against the runner-up, Barking I. Southend I finished bottom to return to the second division.

In response to a question, David indicated that there had been eleven late result fines.

Steve Wedlock asked that a question about incremental mode be added to the club information letter sent out at the start of the season.

5. Proposed League Rule changes

A separate paper had been circulated setting out the proposed changes. The relevant proposers were invited to introduce each item.

(a) Structure of League (proposed by Gavin Strachan)

Gavin Strachan had intended his proposal to be for the League to consist of divisions of 10, contested on a single round basis, although the paper circulated had referred to divisions of 9. He considered that there were several reasons why such a structure would be preferable: in particular there was too little variety of opposition in the double round events, strong players in division 2 did not encounter strong opponents regularly and there were too many defaults in division 4.

David Millward indicated that the League Management Committee was divided on this issue, although he was personally opposed. The proposal would represent a reversion to the “bad old days” when teams had to be persuaded to accept promotion, while he regarded the double round basis as inherently fairer. Bryan Gaze pointed out that the defaults in the bottom division were largely attributable to exceptional problems encountered by Upminster V.

After discussion the meeting concluded that it would be inappropriate to proceed with such a change.

(b) Reference in rules to ECF Game Fee scheme (proposal by John Philpott)

It was agreed to defer consideration of this until item 8.

(c) Multiple teams from a club in the same division (proposal by David Millward)

David Millward indicated that the idea of requiring only the first match between teams from a club in the same double round division to be played at the start of the season had been mooted a couple of years ago but had been forgotten. Nobody present objected to a relaxation of the rules requiring the second match to be played before any team from a different club was played for a second time (which seemed more appropriate than the Southend & District League approach of requiring the second match to be played by 31 January): the Rules Committee will devise a wording to give effect to this principle.

(d) Mobile phones (proposals by Thurrock Chess Club and Basildon Chess Club)

Malcolm Crane proposed on behalf of Thurrock that the rules, which currently meant that the first ring of a mobile phone resulted in the loss of a game should be relaxed and brought into line with the SCCU County match rules, so that the first ring gave rise to a warning and only the second to the loss of the game. Basildon had made a similar proposal: David Millward drew attention to the additional provision inadvertently omitted from the meeting papers to credit two minutes to the clock of the non-offending player on the first ring. The meeting did not support the additional provision as it was recognised that everybody in the playing room was potentially affected by the phone ringing, but supported the basic relaxation by 11 votes to 3, with the number of occasions on which a phone rang to be monitored and reported to the League Secretary. It was agreed that it was appropriate to retain the current dispensation for match captains.

(e) Barring (proposal by Gavin Strachan)

Gavin Strachan proposed that the barring list should be updated to reflect the January list once this was published (perhaps allowing a couple of weeks grace). Although the January 2012 list was considered to have limited value as it excluded results from the London League and North Circular League, it was understood that the London League would be included in future years. There was some support for the proposal, but it was recognised that the grading list provided a measure of form rather than of playing strength, and that it was undesirable to make changes in the course of a competition. The meeting did not favour automatic changes, but agreed that the League Secretary should have discretion to deal with anomalies.

(f) Fixed colours (proposal by Thurrock Chess Club)

Barry Sheppard put forward the case for the away team automatically having the White pieces on the odd-numbered boards. It seemed desirable for players to have a similar number of Whites and Blacks during the season: after a long run of Blacks on Board 1, John Anderson had stopped playing in the Essex League a few years previously. This would also provide more opportunity to prepare for games.

Various objections were pointed out: there were some players who only turned out for home matches, while team captains rarely fielded the same team in every match. Although there were some clubs in favour of the proposal, overall it was not supported.

6. Knockout competition

Ian Hunnoble reported that the 2011 event had been well supported with 10 entries, including two from Barking but none from Basildon. In the finals played on 28 September 2011, Barking I had won the competition on tie break from Writtle and Thurrock (who would receive free entry in 2012) defeated Ilford 5½ - 2½ in the Plate. He had originally hoped to close entries tonight, but there had been a delay in finalising rule changes. David Millward indicated that games played in June could be included in the July grading list.

7. Tournaments for 2012/13

Ivor Smith would be running the Team Blitz and Individual Lightning events at Ilford Chess Club on 24 June. The event was being sponsored by King & King. Ivor circulated entry forms and indicated that he would accept entries by e-mail, with payment to be made on the day.

Gavin Strachan was running the Individual Rapidplay event at the Bardeswell Social Club, Brentwood on 15 July. There would be four sections rather than five, and an incremental time limit of 20 minutes + 10 seconds per move. He expressed his gratitude to the David Wood Memorial Trust for providing a junior prize and to Bryan Lee for a donation which had enabled junior entry fees to be discounted. The previous year's event had attracted 65 entries and produced a small surplus. There would be a new website for the 2012 event: <http://www.straxartsproductions.com/essexrapid2012.html>

Ivor Smith indicated that he did not currently think that it was advisable to seek to revive the Congress.

8. ECF funding changes and the implications of these for the ECA

John Philpott had provided a paper on this topic which he briefly spoke to. John indicated that in a sense matters were coming full circle as when he had become ECA Treasurer in the 1980s, the funding of the then-BCF through the Counties levy had been based on a membership concept. For a significant more recent period, the primary driver of funding had been Game Fee, where it was the half game of chess rather than the individual player that had represented the unit of taxation. The ECA had leveraged off this by covering some of its costs by loading the Game Fee charged to clubs. However, Game Fee suffered from a number of problems: it had been set too low in the first place, there were too many variations and exceptions, and it had to co-exist with a direct membership system, under which membership organisations operated in various parts of the country. After an extended debate the ECA had decided to base its future funding on a membership model from 1 September 2012. There would still be a mixed system, as there was a residual Game Fee/pay to play fee for games (at a relatively penal rate) played by non-members. The time for debate as to the design of the new system was past, and the ECA had to decide how it was going to proceed.

David Millward provided some statistics about the season just finished. 230¹ players had participated in the League, playing an average of 7.8 games. Of the 230 players, 22% were already ECF members and accounted for 24% of the games. 105 of the 230 players had played 6 or fewer games (which is an important benchmark, as for 7 or more games it would be cheaper to take bronze membership than to pay Game Fee): however, the 105 fell to 43²

¹ At the meeting, David compared this figure to 299 registered players, although he has subsequently advised that the correct number of registered players was 308.

² Following additional analysis by David, the figure of 43 has subsequently fallen further to 37.

if games from all competitions other than the League for which David had information were factored in.

Joe Rosenberg commented that it was necessary to consider the wider picture, and that the impact on, for example, the County Championship would need to be considered. Of the approaches suggested by the paper, he regarded excluding the League from grading as a non-starter and (b) and (c) (urging clubs to join but not making membership mandatory and a laissez fair approach) as equivalent to each other. His personal preference would be to adopt (a) and make ECF membership compulsory in order to participate in any of the Association's activities, but with concessions for individuals who were not expected to play too many games. A show of hands indicated 17 in favour of compulsory membership with none against and 1 abstention: the meeting was not persuaded of the need for concessions.

The Association should abandon the concept of a Game Fee loading and cover its costs through an individual subscription, which would inevitably be higher than the current rates.

A sub-committee comprising Bryan Gaze (Chairman), John Chapman, David Millward, John Philpott, Joe Rosenberg and David Smith was appointed to develop detailed proposals for consideration at the AGM and (if necessary) at a further GPC meeting.

9. Officers for 2012/13

John Philpott had indicated that he did not intend to seek election as General Secretary. The Executive had appointed John Chapman to fill the vacant position of Assistant General Secretary, and Bryan Gaze would be proposing John as General Secretary at the AGM. It was noted that a further vacancy for Assistant General Secretary would then arise.

None of the other elected Officers present indicated an intention not to seek re-election.

10. Any other business

None.

The meeting closed at 10.03 pm.

Minutes taken by John Philpott, General Secretary