

OCA Junior Report 2013–14

Andrew Varney, 18 September 2014

Schools League

The Oxon schools league suffered slightly from the lack of the old regulars OHS, Headington and St Andrews. Despite this the U9 section still had a respectable seven teams playing. MCS won the league, but it was by no means a walkover with William Fletcher taking them right to the line and both Dragon and newcomers Chandlings biting at their heels. The U11 section once again had two pools in each age group, a seven and a six. This section *was* definitely dominated by MCS, with three teams all of whom made it to the semi-final play-offs!

While the issue of secondary school participation remains an issue, there were encouraging signs. Still no matches were played between the three teams who entered the U18 section, but the U13 section had five schools, two of which were newcomers to the league. There appears to be interest from still more school chess clubs for the forthcoming season. As per last year's note, any offers of help or encouragement available from the OCA clubs in their local area, especially at secondary school level, would be much appreciated.

MCS were the winners in all three sections where matches were played (i.e. U9, U11 and U13). Runners-up were William Fletcher (U9), MCS B (U11) and Cherwell (U13).

School and Club Teams

MCS continued to have success as a school at national level as well as dominating locally. The ECF regional U11 team tournament was hosted by MCS. There were about twelve teams from Oxford, including five from MCS alone! MCS A was one of the top two teams at the event and at the finals they finished in fifth place.

MCS also hosted the EPSCA zonals. From this zonal MCS A, MCS B, MCS C and William Fletcher proceeded to the national semi-finals. MCS A finished second, qualifying for the finals for the last eight teams, from which they finished in fifth place.

The MCS U18s also reached the finals of the ECF Secondary Schools Championships, after qualifying as winners at the zonal held at Radley School. They finished seventh in what was an incredibly strong final of twelve teams.

Abingdon School and Radley College were also active in national junior team competitions.

Junior participation in the OCA League continues to be significant. MCS/Blackbirds, Abingdon School/City, Cumnor and St Clare's, while the junior membership has expanded at Witney and Cowley to the point where a 5th team in each case can be sustained specifically for some of these juniors.

EPSCA Inter-Association Competitions

Trials for the U9 and U11 EPSCA county teams were as usual held in January, split over two days. Both tournaments were hard-fought featuring many games of a high standard. Luke Eadie of Summerfields School won the title of U11 county champion and Vinson Pang of New College School was the U9 county champion.

The U9s had something of a mixed time in the qualifying round for the final, but this turned around in the final. Having come fourteenth in both 2012 and 2013, finishing in joint sixth place this year was something of a victory. If the team can maintain that level of improvement, then who knows what might be possible in 2015.

The U11 team likewise climbed up from last year's fifteenth place to ninth overall. No doubt part of this success is due to the new Oxfordshire Junior Squad club (see below).

Oxfordshire hosted the U11 girls' final. This was held at Didcot Girls School in March. The team worked hard, both players and organisers! Oxfordshire finished seventh, down slightly from the previous year. The tournament itself was a great success, despite the manifold logistic and equipment issues faced on the day. The EPSCA organisers are hoping to re-use the venue for at least one event in the coming year.

SCCU U14/U130

Last year's success at the U14 level continued, with another strong win over Surrey in the final after Oxfordshire dominated the zonal tournament once again.

It is probably no coincidence that Oxfordshire also won the Chiltern League U125 trophy for the second year in a row.

ECF U13/U18

Unfortunately Oxfordshire were not able to enter either the ECF or the SCCU U13/U18 tournaments this year due to nobody to manage the team. I am pleased to state that this situation has now been rectified (thanks to Marcus Idle for agreeing to take this on), and we should be in a good position to be able to field teams in such events this season.

Delancey UK Chess Challenge

A record 246 children took part in the Oxfordshire Megafinal at Oxford Spires Academy this year! This entailed having an additional room as well as the main hall. As usual, it was ably managed by Priscilla Morris, with an army of helpers on the day. The number of schools taking part this year in the UK Chess Challenge was even higher than suggested by the Megafinal entries, since a number of schools did not pursue the competition to the later stages.

Of the Oxfordshire Megafinalists, once again twelve players qualified for the Terafinal or Challengers in Loughborough. The headline was that Marcus Harvey not only achieved first place netting £2000 and the title of Strat, but he did so with a perfect score. The other players in the Terafinal itself were Chantelle Foster, Anna Wang, Zoe Varney, Oscar Idle and Maria Wang.

The controversy over the old county boundaries used to define allegiance in this competition came to a head this season. With many of the Oxfordshire Supremas and Supremos being at school "South of the River," there was a significant number of re-allocations of titles to those living in the "Old Oxfordshire" boundary. The fall-out from this is that Priscilla is going to stand down from running the Oxon Megafinal. Reasonably productive discussions are underway to hold an additional Megafinal in the Abingdon/Didcot area to cater for those in the disputed territory, although if it does go ahead, it would be known as an additional Berkshire Megafinal.

Other Oxon Tournaments/Events

The Witney Junior Rapidplay in September last season was split into two sections – Major and Minor (under 50 ECF grade). This had the desired effect of attracting back more relative beginners who had been put off by the exceptionally strong tournament the previous season. The formula is being repeated this year.

The annual Oxfordshire Junior Chess tournament is a one-day rapidplay tournament listed as a qualifier for the London Junior Chess Championships as well as incorporating the Oxfordshire U13, U15 and U18 junior cups. Last season it was held at MCS in November. There were 82 entries, many from outside Oxfordshire joining the county regulars as well as some new names from within the county boundaries. The winners of the Oxfordshire junior trophies were Pavel Asenov (U13), Zoe Varney, Daniel D'Souza-Eva & Henry Gardner-Roberts (U15) and James Cole (U18). The tradition of awarding a chess clock to the school with the top-scoring players was resurrected. Chess clocks were presented to Summerfields for the Primary School (U11) age group and Oxford Spires for top Secondary School. (MCS were top for the older section but the convention is that no school wins the same prize on two consecutive occasions.) The event is currently in doubt this year due to a lack of venue; if one is not confirmed by Thursday 25th September, the event will have to be cancelled.

As in previous years, Wantage Chess Club held their annual tournament for players from primary schools in their locality with prizes provided by Wantage Rotary Club.

During several of the school holidays there was informal chess training for juniors held at St Giles church, Oxford, run by Rod Nixon of Cowley Chess Club. This also now offers the chance for players to take the ECF Certificate of Excellence.

A new “Oxfordshire Junior Squad” chess club (“Ojays”) started quite strongly in September and has grown month by month since. This is a club for juniors that is by invitation only, concentrating on those of county team standard. By the end of the season it boasted about forty members, with typically more than twenty attendees each club night. A typical evening includes forty-five minutes of chess playing and an hour of targeted coaching. The highlight of the season was a simul against Marcus Harvey in the summer, which was an inspiration for all twenty-nine children taking part.

Just this month another new junior club has started, run by members of Bicester chess club, for beginners upwards.

4NCL

A number of Oxfordshire juniors played in various divisions of the 4NCL. As well as some juniors playing in the Oxford teams and a few other last-minute opportunities for 1st and 2nd division appearance, it was notable that Witney fielded a mostly junior team in the third division.

Witney also entered a team in the Junior 4NCL, and the all-girls' Beethoven's Vth, more than half made up of Oxfordshire juniors, achieved particularly well, winning third place for the season (as well as the girls' team prize by default!)

Individuals

This year was particularly rich for Oxfordshire junior players on the national and international stage. Marcus Harvey, of course, continued to shine (not least in the UKCC Terafinal mentioned above).

The 2013 World Schools tournament featured three Witney juniors – Jakob Holton and Isabel and Marianne Hauer. Marianne was also one of three Oxfordshire girls representing England in Greece in the 2014 European Schools Championships. The other two were Elizaveta Sheremetyeva and Zoe Varney, who won a sixth place medal in the U15 girls' section. Zoe also won British female champion

title at the British Chess Championships in Aberystwyth and was the top girl in the U15 English Youth Grand Prix.

In the next few months, the World Schools, European Youth and World Youth tournaments will be taking place. Oxfordshire juniors will again have representation on the English junior chess teams for these events, with Pavel Asenov having his first chance to wear the England shirt. Others representing England in these events include Jakob Holton, Zoe Varney and Chantelle Foster.

The National Chess Junior Squad, which provides international training opportunities for those who qualify by achieving good results in a series of national junior tournaments, saw new members from Oxfordshire this year, many of whom have already been mentioned: Jakob Holton, Oscar Idle, Elizaveta Sheremetyeva, Daniel Varney and Zoe Varney. (Most of the other juniors mentioned previously were already members!)