

OCA Junior Report 2014–15

Andrew Varney, September 2015

Schools League

The news from the Oxon schools league this last season was mixed. There were newcomers to the league in all sections:

- U18 – Oxford Spires, Leckford Place
- U13 – Summer Fields (strictly speaking a *re*-entry after some decades)
- U11 – Botley, Larkrise, St Aloysius
- U9 – Christ Church Cathedral School

On the other hand, no teams were entered by some schools that were previously regulars, and there were defaulted matches in some of the sections, which over all means fewer inter-school league matches were played than in previous two seasons.

The U18 section made another small step to viability, in that some matches were arranged between the participating schools. However, the dates fell through and were not able to be rescheduled in time, so in the end no matches were played. The U13 section also suffered from one of the teams pulling out after some of their matches had already been scheduled.

MCS again dominated the league over all, but surprise winners in the U9s were newcomers Christ Church, with a particularly strong team. The podium places in summary were:

- U13 winners = MCS A
 - runners-up = MCS B
- U11 winners = MCS A
 - runners-up = MCS C
 - 3rd = MCS B (pool B runners-up)
 - 4th = SS Mary & John (pool A runners-up)
- U9 – winners = Christ Church
 - runners-up = MCS

A full break-down of results of all matches can be found on the OCA website.

School and Club Teams

MCS continued to host the zonal stages of many national level schools tournaments.

- ECF U11 - was attended by several local schools as well as those further afield. MCS won the regional, and proceeded to the national finals at Uppingham where they finished a very close 2nd behind The Hall, Middlesex.
- The ECF will be running a pilot U13 event for teams of four in 2015-2016: MCS will be hosting a regional on Monday, December 7th, 5pm - 7.30pm.
- EPSCA U9 & U11: William Fletcher, MCS A, B and C teams all qualified for the national semi-finals in Bristol from the MCS-hosted zonal.
- National Secondary Schools Tournament: teams from Radley, Abingdon and Guildford attended. MCS qualified for the national finals in London, finishing 7th.

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

Junior participation in the OCA League continues to be significant. The regular junior teams of

MCS/Blackbirds, Abingdon School/City, Cumnor, St Clare's, Witney and Cowley all continued to play, with junior players also in some of the other teams such as Bicester.

Bicester Junior Chess Club has been going for a year now, and saw significant success in the Oxfordshire Megafinal, with several children qualifying for the Gigafinal from various age groups. The Wantage Junior section, started around the same time, is now going from strength to strength to strength. During the last year attendance crept up to an average of 6-7 children each week, but at the beginning of this new season it got even better, with an attendance of up to 13.

The Oxfordshire Junior Squad club ("Ojays") continued to meet weekly during term time, with professional coaching most weeks. Although it is by invitation only, since it is intended only for county-level players, membership grew during the year, with typical around 6 to 12 in the autumn term, up to around 20 on some weeks in the summer term.

EPSCA Inter-Association Competitions

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SCCU U14/U130

After the withdrawal of Hampshire, Oxon lost to Berks and won against Bucks, so did not make this year's SCCU final. For the 2015-2016 season, Oxon will field two teams (of twelve players).

ECF U13/U18

Under Marcus Idle's management, Oxfordshire entered both the ECF and the SCCU U14/U18 1-day tournaments. There was unfortunately not much commitment from most of the very strongest juniors in the county, but there were still some reasonably strong players who took part and they offered an opportunity for some who do not get many chances to play at this level otherwise. Hence for the SCCU there were two teams in the U18 Minor and one in the U14 Major, while for the ECF junior county finals in Grantham Oxfordshire only fielded an U13 team of six players, finishing 5th out of 9 teams.

Delancey UK Chess Challenge

The number of players taking part in the Oxfordshire Megafinal at Oxford Spires Academy this year was down significantly compared to last year's record. This was mostly due to a number of schools not participating in the UK Chess Challenge this year. Most notable was the absence of MCS, since it was unclear until late on whether the Oxon Megafinal would happen at all due to Priscilla Morris's retirement from running it. In the end I (Andrew Varney) took over the running of it, with the usual army of helpers on the day.

The controversy over the old county boundaries used to define allegiance in this competition remains an issue, and as well as over 60 players qualifying for the Southern Gigafinal from the Oxfordshire Megafinal, there were a number of Oxon players qualifying from other Megafinals. Despite this, many did not take up their places and, of those who did, the number of Oxon players getting all the way to the Terafinal was reduced significantly compared to recent years. In the event only Chantelle Foster and Zoe Varney competed in the main Terafinal in Loughborough, the two favourites for top girl prize

in the absence of British women's champion Akshaya Kalaiyalahan. A last round defeat for Zoe settled the result in Chantelle's favour (as joint winner).

Other Oxon Tournaments/Events

The Oxfordshire Junior Chess tournament was held on Sunday 2 November as a qualifier for the London Junior Chess Championships. Due to non-availability of a suitable venue on the set date, it was only possible to fulfil our commitment to the LJCC with Under 8, Under 10 and Under 12 age-group sections. The older age groups, featuring the annual competition for the Oxfordshire Under 13, Under 15 and Under 18 trophies had to be cancelled. Nevertheless, there was a healthy number of entries, 62 in total, over one third of these from players outside of the county (many from the London area and from counties southwest of Oxfordshire). The event this year is due to take place on 29 November, but like last year we are still trying to find a suitable venue. Since the number of age group sections were reduced, trophies were awarded to top girl and top boy in each section. The hosts, William Fletcher, won the engraved chess clock (Primary School) prize with the top score from 4 players.

For the ninth year running, Wantage Chess Club held their annual tournament for players from primary schools in their locality with prizes provided by Wantage Rotary Club. 35 young people took part, representing over 12 different schools.

A 3-day Chess Camp was held for junior players with ECF grades between 50 and 150 during August with professional coaching by Andrew Varney and David Zakarian.

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Individuals

A fair number of Oxfordshire juniors took part in the British Chess Championships in Warwick in July and August. Mostly this was in the relevant age-group sections, but a notable exception was Pavel Asenov, who finished an exceptional season (which included winning at least one Open tournament) with a score of 5.5/11 in the main Championship. Junior championship titles awarded to Oxfordshire players were the U14 (Jake Holton) and U16 Girl (Zoe Varney).

Zoe Varney also won U16 English girls' champion and English Youth 16-year-old Girls' Champion titles. The 14-year-old Girls' Champion title was awarded to another Oxon player, Elizaveta Sheremetyeva. Chantelle Foster jointly won the top girl's prize at the UK Chess Challenge Terafinal (see above).

During the 2014-15 season, Oxfordshire players that represented England in various international junior events included Pavel Asenov, Jake Holton, Zoe Varney and Chantelle Foster. As we start the new (2015-16) season, I am writing this report from Croatia where the European Youth Chess Championships have been taking place, for which the England squad includes Elizaveta Sheremetyeva and Zoe Varney.

<http://www.oxfordfusion.com/oca/Juniors.cfm?Org=1>

<http://www.oxon-junior-chess-squad.org.uk/>