

Rules of the Oxfordshire Chess Association League

(As amended by the AGM held on 18 September 2025)

1. Organisation of the OCA League

- 1.1 Subject to ratification or adjustment by the AGM in September (or, exceptionally, late adjustment by an EGM), the post-season Committee meeting will take a provisional decision on the composition of the league for the next season in the light of the information available to it in order to facilitate timely production of fixture lists.
- 1.2 In normal circumstances promotion and relegation of teams will be mandatory. However, it may be necessary for other teams to be promoted or relegated in the interest of the League.
- 1.3 No club may have more than two teams in one division.
- 1.4 A club entering more than one team shall identify its teams as 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc. When a club has two teams in the same division, matches between them must be scheduled as the first match of the new season, and the first match of the new cycle after Christmas. Where the University has two teams in the same division, they should be allowed to postpone their October match until a later date before Christmas if the League Secretary agrees.
- 1.5 Each team competing will play return fixtures with every other team in its division.
- 1.6 There will be six players in each team and one game on each board in a match for all divisions other than the lowest, which has four players in each team. In 2025-26, teams in Division Four will consist of four players.
- 1.7 Matches will be decided by the number of game points scored after Rule 2.5 has been taken into account, with one point for a win, half a point for a draw and no points for a loss.
- 1.8 League match points will be awarded with two points for a win, one point for a draw and no points for a loss.
- 1.9 A team with more match points at the end of the season than any other in their division will hold the title of champion of that division. If two or more teams in a division are tied on match points at the end of the season, the tie-break procedure set out in Rule 1.10 may be applied to determine the teams' relative positions.
- 1.10 Where teams in any division are tied on match points at the end of the season, they shall be placed higher to lower by descending order of their game point difference over the league season. Teams remaining tied on game point difference shall be placed higher to lower by successively applying the following criteria as required until no tie remains:
 - the greater number of matches won
 - the number of individual games won
 - the greater number of match points in the matches between the tied teams
 - the highest game-point difference in the matches between the tied teams
 - the lowest number of defaulted games.Should a tie still exist it shall be broken by a drawing of lots, to be organised by the League Secretary.
- 1.11 A new team entering the League will normally enter the lowest division.
- 1.12 Fixture lists will be produced by the Fixtures Secretary and sent to all clubs as early as possible before the AGM. After the AGM, changes to the Fixture List may only be made by the Fixtures Secretary. (Information, including results and tables, will be published on the OCA website.)

2. Eligibility of Players

- 2.1 Except as permitted by 2.2 below, no player may play for more than one club in a season.
- 2.2 A player may transfer from one club to another in the course of the season, but only with the written consent of the former club duly notified to the League Secretary.
- 2.3 **Starred players**
 - 2.3.1 Any club entering more than one team in the League must nominate or 'star' four players in each of its Division One and Division Two teams, while in lower divisions three players must be nominated. All teams require nominated players except a club's lowest. Starred players may not play for another team of that club either in the same or a lower division during a season.
 - 2.3.2 Each team required to 'star' players should notify the League Secretary of its nominations at the start of the season or as soon as possible thereafter. If such a team has not informed the League Secretary of its starred players by 1 November, the League Secretary will make the nominations. In this case the starred players will be those the League Secretary judges to be the four (or three as appropriate, according to Rule 2.3.1) strongest players likely to play the required number of games for that team over the season. The League Secretary will publish on the OCA website the lists of starred players for all the relevant teams by 8 November.
 - 2.3.3 If any player nominated by the club participates in fewer than four games for the team for which he is 'starred', then his/her club will be required to provide an explanation to the Committee. Any starred player not playing the required four league games may not be starred by that club the following season.
- 2.4 **Playing for more than one team**
 - 2.4.1 Except as permitted below, a player who has played four games for a particular team ceases to be eligible to play for any other team of that club in the same or a lower division for the remainder of the season.
 - 2.4.2 The restriction in 2.4.1 does not apply to players with an ECF standard-play rating (or an estimated rating) of 1640 or below at the start of the season. The start of the season is defined as 1 September.
 - 2.4.3 Moreover, (i) players with an ECF standard-play rating (or an estimated rating) between 1641 and 1750 at the start of the season may play in Divisions One and Two without affecting eligibility to play in lower divisions; and (ii) players with an ECF standard-play rating (or an estimated rating) between 1751 and 1825 at the start of the season may play in Division One without affecting eligibility to play in lower divisions.
 - 2.4.4 For the purposes of 2.4.2 and 2.4.3, clubs registering new players without an ECF standard-play rating must supply an estimated rating together with any known current or historical rating information about the player. The estimate presented will be subject to the approval of the OCA Ratings officer, who may, in the light of available evidence, overrule an estimate given by a club.
 - 2.4.5 For the purposes of the rating boundaries relating to player eligibility in Rules 2.4.1 to 2.4.3, if a player has no ECF rating but does have a FIDE rating the latter may be used, provided that FIDE rating includes at least ten FIDE-rated games in the three years preceding the start of the current OCA League season. If a player does not have a ECF or FIDE rating, but does have a national rating that may be used, after any appropriate conversion formula is applied, again provided at least 10 games rated by that national organisation have been played in the year preceding the start of the OCA League season. Otherwise the question should be referred to the OCA Ratings officer, who may assign an estimated rating to the player.
 - 2.4.6 No team other than a club's first team may field a player with an A or K ECF standard-play rating (or an estimated rating) that is more than 100 points above that of the team's starred

player with the highest A or K ECF standard-play rating (or an estimated rating) at the start of the season.

- 2.5 Any game played by an ineligible player will be deemed lost for the purposes of the match result — though the actual result of the game as played will stand for purposes of rating if the ineligibility of the player is not discovered until after the game has started. In addition, one match point will normally be deducted from the offending team.

However, if a listed member of a team fails to turn up and there is no available substitute before the 30-minute default time other than a player who, under the provisions of Rule 2.4, is not eligible to play for the team, then, provided that both players and both captains consent, that player may replace the absent player and play a rated game without the team losing the additional match point. This rated game will still be deemed lost for the purposes of the match result. In such a case, the team captains should notify the League Secretary of this agreement as soon as possible after the match. Such a game shall not count as a league game.

- 2.6 'Visiting players' are defined as players who are able to play for a short period of time only, such as university students able to play in vacation time only.

Visiting players with either an ECF rating of 2050 or above or a FIDE rating of 2050 or above may play only in Division One, or a club's first team or its equal.

Visiting Players with either an ECF rating of 1940 or above or a FIDE rating of 1940 or above may play only in Division Two or above, or a club's second team or its equal or above.

Visiting Players with an ECF rating below 1940 may play in any division for any team.

3. Postponements

- 3.1 Teams wishing to postpone a match must seek the approval of the League Secretary.
- 3.2 Postponements that are agreed by both teams will normally be approved, provided that a match scheduled in the first cycle of fixtures is not postponed into the second cycle. Requests for postponements by one team will only be approved for serious reasons, such as extreme weather conditions, the unavailability of a venue, widespread illness in the squad, etc. The inability to field the strongest team (or even a strong team) is not acceptable as a reason for postponement, but the inability to field a full team may be an acceptable reason if serious efforts have been made to use other available players in the club to assemble a full complement.
- 3.3 The responsibility for the rearrangement of a postponed match belongs to the League Secretary, who may either approve a date the two captains have agreed is mutually acceptable or choose to set a new date if it seems necessary in the interests of the competition.

4. Defaults

- 4.1 Any team failing to keep an engagement without giving a satisfactory explanation will be deemed to have lost the match 6-0, with all six games lost by default.
- 4.2 Any team defaulting more than one match in this way will be reported to the Committee and may be subject to disciplinary action (including having its record expunged and/or automatic demotion) at the Committee's discretion.
- 4.3 For every four games defaulted by a team in the league, that team will have one match point deducted from its total, unless a satisfactory explanation is offered.
- 4.4 If two teams (with the consent of the League Secretary) agree not to play a match, the match will be recorded as a 0-0 double default, with neither side scoring a match point but neither incurring defaults on the individual boards.
- 4.5 A team captain who is aware before the start of a match of being unable to field a full team may not name a missing player on the match card; any game or games defaulted must be from the bottom board upwards. In such a case the opposing captain should be informed as early as possible. A captain

who learns only at the venue immediately before the match that the opposing team is incomplete may adjust board order to take account of which players would otherwise be left without a game.

5. Disputes and Sanctions

- 5.1 Any claim or report relating to a dispute must be addressed to the League Secretary by email or in writing by either the team captain or the club secretary, with copies being sent to the secretaries and relevant team captains of all the clubs involved.
- 5.2 The League Secretary (or another officer or group of officers appointed to do so by the AGM) shall be authorised to settle a dispute.
- 5.3 In the event of either party in a dispute being unhappy with the decision, the matter will be referred to the Committee. All clubs involved in a dispute, or who are liable to disciplinary action, have a right to be represented at the Committee Meeting, whose decision will be binding.
- 5.4 If the Chairman and League Secretary have reason to believe that there have been serious or persistent offences against the League Rules or the spirit of fair play, they should call for an explanation from the captain of the appropriate team or teams. If they do not receive an explanation which they consider satisfactory, and the situation remains unresolved, they may refer the situation to the Committee to consider whether disciplinary sanctions might be appropriate. Any club or individual thus liable to disciplinary action has the right to be represented at the Committee Meeting, where the Committee's decision will be binding.

6. Trophies

- 6.1 All the divisional trophies and the Frank Wood Shield are the property of the League.
- 6.2 All these trophies and the Shield must be returned to the Treasurer not later than 30 April each season for engraving.
- 6.3 Trophies will be presented at the AGM or as otherwise specified by the Committee.
- 6.4 An individual trophy named the Arthur Mushens Trophy will be awarded to the player who scores the best game points percentage in Division One.
- 6.5 An individual trophy named the Bernard C Wyatt Memorial Trophy will be awarded to the player who scores the best game points percentage in Division Two.
- 6.6 An individual trophy named the David Del Nevo Trophy will be awarded to the player who scores the best game points percentage in Division Three.
- 6.7 An individual trophy named the Sam Phipps Trophy will be awarded to the player who scores the best game points percentage in Division Four.
- 6.8 An individual trophy named the Lester Millin Memorial Trophy will be awarded to the junior (under 18 on 1 September of the year in which the season starts) who scores the best game points percentage in any one Division of the League.
- 6.9 A player must compete (wins by default do not count) in more than 50% of the League Matches for a team in the relevant divisions in order to receive an individual trophy.

7. Match Rules - All Divisions

- 7.1 The home club is responsible for the venue and all match arrangements. In particular, the home club is to take account of the ECF's Guidelines on treatment of disabled chess players (<https://www.englishchess.org.uk/guidelines-on-treatment-of-chess-players-with-impairments/>) and make every reasonable effort to implement those of the guidelines that are applicable in the League.
- 7.2 Home clubs are expected to provide scoresheets, clocks, and sets and boards of a uniform, recognised pattern.

- 7.3 The use of digital clocks is compulsory. In the event of clock failure, a mobile phone app is an acceptable substitute. If a phone app is used, audible alerts for incoming calls and messages must be turned off.
- 7.4 Arrangements will be made for a minimum of three hours' play, except that, for Division Three and below, the playing session is 2½ hours.
- 7.5 **Time Limits**
- 7.5.1 In Divisions One and Two the time allowance will be 80 minutes plus 10 seconds per move from move 1.
- 7.5.2 The time limit in Divisions Three and below will be 65 minutes plus 10 seconds per move.
- 7.6 All matches will commence at 7.30 pm, except that for matches in Division Three and lower and those involving school teams, the home team may at the start of the season unilaterally specify an earlier start time for their matches, provided that this is not earlier than 7.15 pm. Any other change to the start time must be agreed between the captains of the teams involved in the fixture.
- 7.7 Clocks must be started promptly at the specified starting time and any time that is lost because the home club is not ready shall be deducted from that club's clocks before play begins.
- 7.8 The visiting team will have white on the odd boards.
- 7.9 Teams must be arranged at least approximately in descending order of playing strength. In particular, if the rating difference between any two players with current A or K ECF ratings at the time of a match is greater than 75 points, the higher-rated player must play on a higher board. (For example, a player rated 1775 may play below a player rated 1700, but not below one rated 1699.). For the purposes of this Rule, captains may use the published ECF ratings for either the month in which the match is played or the immediately preceding month.
- 7.9.1 For the purposes of ordering players in a team in a way corresponding to the above example, if a player who has no current A or K ECF rating has a FIDE or (failing that) national rating that includes at least ten rated games in the three years preceding the start of the current OCA League season, that rating may be used instead.
- 7.9.2 If a player has neither a current A or K ECF rating nor a FIDE or national rating as described in 7.9.1, but has an estimated rating assigned by the Ratings officer for the purpose of the Frank Wood Shield, that estimate will be used as a basis for the purpose of this Rule.
- 7.9.3 For players without any of the above specifications of playing strength, a captain should use a recent standard-play rating, or an official rapidplay rating. In the absence of all these, a captain should use his or her own best judgement as to a player's strength relative to the other players in the team.
- 7.9.4 If, when team lists are exchanged before the match in accordance with Rule 7.10 but before play starts, a team captain notices that the opposing team is in breach of this Rule, that captain may insist that the opposing team's board order is adjusted so as to comply with the Rule.
- 7.9.5 If a listed team member fails to turn up and the rating of the only available replacement before the 30-minute default time would breach the requirements of this board-order Rule by having too high a rating, those requirements may be waived only with the consent of the opposing team's captain. In such a case, the team captains are to make a note of this agreement when entering the result on the website.
- 7.9.6 Should Rule 7.9 be breached and not corrected through Rule 7.9.4, then there will be a deduction of a game point from the offending team's total for the match. The results of all games played will remain valid for rating purposes. *Cf.* Rule 5.4 for serious or persistent breaches of Rule 7.9.
- 7.10 Prior to the start of play, team lists will be exchanged. These lists will give the names and ratings of the players. For players without an A or K ECF rating, their actual or estimated rating should be given in accordance with Rules 7.9.1 to 7.9.3.

7.11 All games will be conducted in accordance with the FIDE Laws of Chess except as indicated here:

- 7.11.1 A player wins the game by default if he or she does not have an opponent within 30 minutes of the start of a match. (The place of an absent player may be taken by a substitute at any time within 30 minutes of the start of the match.)
- 7.11.2 Players may bring mobile phones into the playing area, provided that they are switched off for the duration of the playing session. Captains should ensure that a reminder to switch phones off is issued immediately before the start of the match. Should a mobile phone make a sound during the match, the player possessing this mobile phone will be defaulted. Should a player have a valid reason for keeping their mobile phone switched on, then they must make both captains and their opponent aware of this. By doing so, this exempts this player from a default where their mobile phone subsequently makes a sound. Sounds emitted by a chess clock app on a mobile phone that is being used as a replacement chess clock are to be disregarded under this Rule.
- 7.11.3 Players may record the moves of their games either in a recognized form of algebraic notation or in English descriptive notation.
- 7.11.4 The Association encourages but does not require players to record draw offers on the scoresheet.
- 7.11.5 For a first and a second illegal move of any kind by a player two minutes' extra time will be added to the opponent's clock. A third illegal move of any kind by the same player loses the game, unless the position is such that no possible sequence of legal moves can lead to the checkmating of that player's king.
- 7.11.6 The Association, in its capacity as the organizing body of the League, makes no claim to ownership of whatever scoresheets are used for recording games. Nor does it require the players to sign both scoresheets at the end of the game.
- 7.11.7 Since the FIDE Laws in general presuppose the presence of an authorized person acting as arbiter, and many of them refer to actions the arbiter may take, certain articles of the Laws cannot be followed to the strict letter in the OCA League. In the absence of arbiters, team captains are expected to take on those aspects of an arbiter's function which circumstances make it practical for them to perform, in cooperation or (where appropriate) individually. To help them carry out their responsibilities in this regard, captains should familiarize themselves with any relevant guidance issued by the Committee.

8. Results

- 8.1 The matches will be decided as stated in Rule 1.7.
- 8.2 Match results should be posted on the OCA website by either captain and confirmed by the other as soon as possible after the match. At the match venue, match cards should be filled in and signed by both captains and retained as evidence in case a dispute arises over the result as posted on the website. (If a captain does not have internet access, another team captain of that club or the club secretary may post the result. If this is not possible, the captain should post his copy of the match card to the League Secretary within three days of the match.)
- 8.3 The match card should show the following information: date, division, names of players and their scores. The match card should be signed by both team captains.
- 8.4 A home club which fails within seven days of the match to send the match result to the League Secretary or to submit it on the league website may lose the match by default.

9. Frank Wood Shield Rules

League Rules for Division One apply except where amended hereunder.

- 9.1 The Frank Wood Shield will be a knockout competition using a handicap system based on the difference between the average ratings of the two teams playing a match.
- 9.2 The first round of the competition will take place before the end of the University Michaelmas Term.
- 9.3 **Teams**
- 9.3.1 A club may enter for the Frank Wood Shield any number of teams not exceeding the number of teams it has in the League.
- 9.3.2 Each team entering the competition shall have a distinctive name. Entries shall be made by informing the League Secretary of the team's name and the contact details of its captain/manager no later than the date specified by the League Secretary or the AGM.
- 9.4 **Players' Eligibility**
- 9.4.1 A player is eligible to play for a team entered by a club in the Frank Wood Shield once he or she has legally played one game for that club in the league during the season; this restriction does not apply to the first match played by a team in the competition. In later rounds, a captain may apply in advance to the League Secretary for an exemption to this Rule where a player has strong ties to a club but would otherwise be ineligible.
- 9.4.2 No player may play for more than one team during the competition, except as permitted by Rule 9.4.3.
- 9.4.3 A player with a rating of 1300 or under at the time of a Frank Wood Shield match (i.e., an A or K rating published in the ECF rating list current at the time of the match or, otherwise, the estimated rating currently assigned to the player by the OCA Ratings officer for the competition) may play for any team of his or her club.
- 9.4.4 A team that fields an ineligible player in a Frank Wood Shield match loses that match.
- 9.5 Should a match (or a board) be defaulted by a team, the opponents must declare the team (or player) that would have played, and Rule 9.4.2 above will apply.
- 9.6 **Ratings**
- 9.6.1 If a player has an ECF A or K rating, this will be used.
- 9.6.2 If a player does not have an ECF A or K rating, the club or team captain wishing to play that player must contact the OCA Ratings officer at least a week before the player's first match in the competition, asking for an estimated rating to be assigned to the player for the purposes of the competition and providing the Ratings officer with any available evidence of the player's strength.
- 9.6.3 If the Ratings officer feels unable to assign an estimated rating, the player will be treated as though rated 1450.
- 9.6.4 The Ratings officer may give or alter an estimated rating at any later stage of the competition in the light of further information about a player's strength.
- 9.6.5 A player who has an ECF A or K rating of below 1075 will be treated as though rated 1075.
- 9.6.6 Average ratings, and the difference between them, shall be calculated to two decimal places.
- 9.7 **Results**
- 9.7.1 A team with an average rating at least 600 points higher than that of the opposing team must score 6-0 to win the match.
- 9.7.2 A team with an average rating at least 375 points higher but less than 600 points higher than that of the opposing team must score at least 5.5-0.5 to win the match.
- 9.7.3 A team with an average rating at least 263 points higher but less than 375 points higher than that of the opposing team must score at least 5-1 to win the match.

- 9.7.4 A team with an average rating at least 188 points higher but less than 263 points higher than that of the opposing team must score at least 4.5-1.5 to win the match.
- 9.7.5 A team with an average rating at least 113 points higher but less than 188 points higher than that of the opposing team must score at least 4-2 to win the match.
- 9.7.6 A team with an average rating at least 38 points higher but less than 113 points higher than that of the opposing team need only score 3.5-2.5 to win the match.
- 9.7.7 In all these cases, if the team with the higher average rating fails to reach the specified winning score, the team with the lower average rating wins the match.
- 9.7.8 In matches between teams differing in average rating by less than 38 points, a team scoring at least 3.5 points is the winner of the match. Should such a match be tied 3-3, board count will be used to decide the result. If the match is still tied, the result will be decided by eliminating the bottom board, then (if necessary) the fifth, etc. Should all the games in the match be drawn, the team with the lower average rating will win. If the average ratings of the teams are identical, the away team will win.

9.8 Match Rules

- 9.8.1 Team captains are to have their team order, each team member's (actual or estimated) rating, and the average rating of their team ready to exchange as soon as both captains are present. The home team must show this first to the away team. The captains will then work out the match handicap and announce it to both teams before play starts. If a default subsequently requires a change in the match handicap in accordance with Rule 9.8.3 (ii) below, the procedure laid down there will be followed.
- 9.8.2 Captains will toss for colours at each match after the exchange of teams.
- 9.8.3 (i) A team captain who, at the time when team details are exchanged with the opposing captain, is aware of being unable to field a full team may not name a missing player on the match card; any game or games defaulted must be from the bottom board upwards.

(ii) If, at the time when team details are exchanged with the opposing captain, a player is expected by his or her captain to be coming and is listed on the match card but fails to turn up and loses by default after 30 minutes, that team's average rating will then be determined by whichever measure yields the higher average: the original average rating as stated on the match card before the match starts and agreed by the captains, or the average rating of the players who actually play. In such a case, the captain of the incomplete team is responsible for correctly recalculating the average rating and (if necessary) the changed handicap as soon as possible after the default is confirmed and presenting it to the opposing captain. If a change in the handicap is required, the captains may ask players to pause or stop their clocks for the few seconds required to announce the new handicap.

10. Playing Matches Online

- 10.1 By default, matches in competitions organised by the OCA will be played over the board. However, a match may be played online if:
 - required by the League Secretary
 - captains of both teams request that the match be played online and the League Secretary agrees
 - the Rules governing the competition require it.
- 10.2 Online matches shall be played on a platform ('The Platform') specified by the League Secretary.
- 10.3 The Platform shall be specified by the Secretary by the end of the September within which is held the AGM.
- 10.4 As appropriate the same match Rules for the competition as played over the board shall apply, unless superseded in this section.

- 10.5 **Organisation of Matches:** The Online Chess Officer shall provide guidance to Captains on how to organise matches on The Platform as a document on the OCA website.
- 10.6 **Playing Games:** The Online Chess Officer shall provide guidance on how to initiate and play games on The Platform as a document on the OCA website.
- 10.7 **Fair Play:**
- 10.7.1 Matches played online will be the equivalent of ECF Tier 2 online events, and will follow the Rules and penalties as described in the most recent version of the ECF Online Fair play and Anti-Cheating Rules.
 - 10.7.2 Players are not allowed to use engines or any other external assistance during play, and must comply with the terms and conditions of The Platform.
 - 10.7.3 All games played in OCA competitions must be played as games rated by The Platform. This ensures that any anti-cheating software the The Platform deploys will be used to study the game, and so will be used to flag any irregularities.
 - 10.7.4 Team Captains will be expected to read the ECF Fair Play and Anti-Cheating Rules, and draw their team members attention to it when inviting them to play online.
 - 10.7.5 Infractions of the online Fair Play and Anti-Cheating Rules shall in the first instance be referred to the League Secretary, and shall be covered by Rules 5.1 and 5.2.
 - 10.7.6 Appeals against any decision of the Secretary will be heard by an OCA Appeals Committee following the mechanism described in the ECF Online Fair play and Anti-Cheating Rules, the process for the appeal being organised by the Online Chess Officer.
- 10.8 **Safeguarding:**
- 10.8.1 The OCA will follow the most recent safeguarding guidelines for ECF online events.
 - 10.8.2 Team captains should familiarise themselves with the guidance contained in the ECF Policy and any documents provided by the Online Chess Officer, and also ensure that players are aware of applicable guidance. Any issues which may arise must be reported by team captains to the League Secretary, and will be dealt with as described in Section 5.
 - 10.8.3 A team captain must be contactable by all members of their team during the match. They must also be contactable by the opposition team captain. A team captain may be non-playing. Methods of contact need not use The Platform. Email may be used, for instance.
 - 10.8.4 Individual players other than a team captain may take any measures they deem appropriate to avoid being contacted by any other user of The Platform, save for that which is required to play the game. The one exception is their own team captain, who must be able to contact all players in their team during the match. This is required should, for instance, the players start the game with the wrong colours, or other similar accidental infringements which can simply be resolved, in this case by restarting the game appropriately. Note the method of contact need not be via The Platform. Email might be used, for instance.
 - 10.8.5 The Online Chess Officer will provide guidance on good practice for online privacy as a document on the OCA website.
- 10.9 All results from online matches within the OCA will be made available for ECF online rating.