Oxfordshire Open Team 2019-20 season

This season we would have likely again won the Open team competition, even though our winning record under my management took a blow again when I had to play myself following a late withdrawal due to illness, and we only drew the match. That was similar to our only loss in the previous 3 years when I also had to play myself! There is a clear message there! With 2 matches left to play we were in a strong position, but the season was curtailed due to the outbreak of Covid10 and the ECF’s advice to suspend OTB chess. So far as I know, the CCL Open team competition for 2019-20 is rendered incomplete – therefore in effect we retain the trophy for another year!

I would like the OCA to consider how county chess might be played next season. The following is the significant part of an email that I have recently sent to all Chiltern League captains and officials, in order to get initiate a discussion among the Chiltern League counties as to how they think next season might work.

*“Oxfordshire have a significant number of county players who, by dint of their age at least, are in a high risk category – and I count myself in that group. Some players also have medical conditions or partners with medical conditions which makes them at even higher risk – again, I count myself in that group (my wife has high blood pressure, probably exacerbated by many years of living with me!) What I have read of HMG’s scientific and medical advice is that such a vaccine is unlikely to be available sooner than 12-18 months, and that social distancing will continue to be recommended for those in the older age group. This makes it difficult to envisage how to conduct our usual OTB county chess matches next season before a vaccine like the annual flu-vaccine is available – as it’s simply not possible to have social distancing across a chess board! I shall not be asking Oxfordshire’s county players to put themselves at increased risk for a game of amusement.*

*My recommendation to Oxfordshire is that we do not play OTB county matches at all next season, given the obvious and insurmountable risks they pose to all. If the CCL competition goes ahead with OTB matches then my recommendation is that we withdraw from next season. Whatever the decision of Oxfordshire, I personally will not be prepared to ask players to put themselves at increased risk for something as trivial as a game of chess.* ***If, however, Oxfordshire do decide to continue with OTB county matches next season, then the Oxfordshire Open team will need to be under new captaincy.”***

The ECF has already organised an online county championship for this 2019-20 season, for which Oxfordshire has entered a team under the management of Steve Rumsby. If the ECF organises a similar online county competition for 2020-21, my recommendation is that Oxfordshire joins that competition – perhaps with one team in the U-150 section and another team in the U-180 section (or whatever the grading limits are set for next season). In that case I would be quite happy to continue in my present role, organising the higher team and playing for the lower team.

Rod Langham

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