

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Warrington and District Chess League held on Tuesday 18th June 2024 at The Atherton Arms Public House, Atherton, Greater Manchester.

Attendance

Members from the following chess clubs attended the meeting:

Atherton – Mr Peter Mulleady (Chairman) and Mr Stephen Deakin (Secretary).

Ormskirk – Mr Gareth Dykes (Vice President) and Mr Sean Murphy (League Manager).

Skelmersdale – Mr Paul Stanley (Treasurer)

Winwick- Mr Bernard Bedworth, Mr Colin Mather and Mr Mike Fleming

Northwich- Mr Richard Betts and Mr Ingmar So

Culcheth – Mr Nick Burriss (League Development Officer), Mr Damian McCarthy (Tournament Manager), Mr Andy Coe and Mr Jonathan Miller

St Helens – Mr Keith Lyon and Mr Ray Smith

Lymm – Mr Bryan Slater and David Gilby

Eccles: Mrs Barbara Farrar

Welcome and Introduction

The meeting began at approximately 7.30pm with the President, Mr Mulleady, giving a warm welcome to all attendees and declaring the 2024 Annual General Meeting of the Warrington and District Chess League to be open.

1. Apologies for Absence

There was one apology in the form of the ECF representative, Mr John Reyes, who was unable to attend the meeting. In addition, some divisional ‘players of the year’ did not attend to collect their trophies in person. Apologies were given by their respective clubs. The President informed the meeting that it was hoped that a representative from Wigan chess club (which was not currently a member of the WDCL, but would be joining for the 2024 – 2025 season) would be attending the meeting at some point later in the evening.

2. Minutes of the 2023 AGM.

The 2023 minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Officers' Reports

a) Secretary's Report

Mr Deakin gave a brief report confirming the main administrative events of the year. In particular, he applauded the work done by Damian McCarthy and Peter Mulleady in organizing and running the second WDCL rapid-play tournament over the Spring Bank Holiday weekend, which had again been a big success and had raised a significant sum of money for the League. He stressed the time and effort involved in organizing such a tournament and his gratitude to everyone who had contributed to that successful enterprise.

b) Treasurer's Report

Mr Stanley gave his report and produced an income and expenditure statement showing a net surplus of £609.57 for the year. The surplus was generated mainly from the profit made by the Warrington Rapid-play tournament that had taken place in May 2024. This event had basically covered all the expenditure of the WDCL for the year and had produced the surplus referred to. The league bank balance had increased from approximately £1,500.00 to approximately £2,100.00 because of the aforesaid surplus. On the basis that the League had a healthy bank balance it was agreed by the meeting that there would be no league fees payable by clubs for the forthcoming 2024 -2025 season.

c) League Development Officer's Report

Mr Burris began on a positive note comparing the current state of chess in the WDCL with what existed only a year or two previously, following the detrimental effects of the Covid pandemic. He was pleased to report that a new club, namely Wigan Chess Club, was about to enter the WDCL and hopefully would be playing a full part in the fixtures next year. In addition, it was pleasing to note that a new Division 3 team, Stockton Heath Juniors, had triumphed in this year's Kalmar Shield competition. However, on a less optimistic note, he stated that there had been little progress in attracting other participants to the league. Urmston, Frodsham and the Ukrainian club had all declined to join. So, currently, with the exception of Wigan and Stockton

Heath, there was little scope for development of the league, although we would always remain positive in this regard.

There then followed a discussion about promoting the league through digital media, including a website and social media. Mr Dykes reminded the meeting that all clubs could use the WDCL domain name. The report concluded on a positive note with a plan to rejuvenate the WDCL website and for all clubs to collectively consider how better to promote the league via social media and other means.

Mr Burriss concluded by reminding the meeting that development of the league was a responsibility on every player and something that we should all be vigilant about. This point received universal approbation, and with that Mr Burriss brought his report to an end.

d) Tournament Manager's Report

Mr Damian McCarthy informed the meeting that WDCL had held two successful tournaments in the year since the last AGM. The first was a 960 tournament, which had not been particularly popular, but had been an interesting experiment. We had also held our second rapid-play event on the spring bank holiday weekend, as had already been discussed in the meeting. It had more or less sold out, had gone very well and once again had returned a reasonable profit for the league, in addition to paying all the league's yearly expenditure. We were blessed with three ECF arbiters in the league (himself, Mr Mulleady and Mr Deakin) and we had purchased our own Swiss Manager software (that enables us to run Swiss rapid-play tournaments).

Accordingly, Mr McCarthy was quite upbeat about the future. We were in a strong position to organize further tournaments. The rapid-play was now established and seemed to be popular in the chess community. We would propose to host another one on the Spring bank holiday next year, all being well. The next major project could possibly be to organize a long-play tournament over a weekend, and initial investigations into the feasibility of that were already underway.

e) ECF Representative's Report

Mr John Reyes was absent from the meeting and his report was read by the President, who provided an update on the membership structure of the ECF and the changes thereto that were being introduced. Essentially, the ECF had introduced a rolling membership system. A brief discussion followed and the general consensus was that the changes being introduced were a positive step.

f) League Manager's Report

Mr Sean Murphy reported to the meeting and stated his view that, on the whole, the fixtures this season had gone well. He repeated an oft made plea, that he must be notified by clubs if fixtures are re-arranged. He gave the league and competition results for the 23-24 season, which were as follows: -

Division 1 winners - Culcheth

Division 2 winners - St Helens

Division 3 winners - Eccles

Richard Furness League winners - Winwick

Peninsular Cup winners - Atherton

Kalmar Cup winners - Atherton

Kalmar Shield winners - Stockton Heath Juniors

In addition:

Division 1 player of the year : Andy Coe (Culcheth)

Division 2 player of the year: Evan Scragg (Ormskirk)

Division 3 player of the year: Phil Dawson (Culcheth)

Richard Furness player of the year: Nigel Holland (Winwick)

Overall WDCL player of the year: Phil Dawson (Culcheth)

At the end of the report there was a heartfelt round of applause in recognition of the persistent hard work and commitment given by Mr Murphy in his role as league manager for the benefit of the league, its constituent clubs and its members.

g) Vice President's Report

Mr Dykes informed the meeting that his major role this year had been to locate any missing trophies and he was pleased to confirm that this process had now been exhausted. Only a matter of days ago one long-outstanding trophy had been found by a member and had actually been brought along to tonight's AGM. Mr McCarthy then informed the meeting that he had made enquiries regarding the cost of replacing the shields/trophies were necessary from the trophy shop in Warrington which had supplied the WDCL for donkey's years. After a brief discussion, it was agreed that

Mr McCarthy could purchase the necessary replacement trophies on behalf of the WDCL.

h) President's Report

The President of the WDCL, Mr Peter Mulleady, gave his personal overview and summary of the season just gone. As always, the President could be relied upon for his upbeat and positive assessment of the state of WDCL. He effused that it had been an excellent season with some great chess being played in the weekly games. It was good to see a diverse range of clubs and players winning the various leagues and cup competitions, and it was great to see the fledgling Development League had produced a winner of the Kalmar Shield.

He next informed the meeting of his efforts to promote chess in the local area. His conclusion was that public libraries were a good medium through which new players could be reached and recruited. He explained that he had established chess clubs at Leigh and Golborne libraries that had proved popular and, with support from CSC (Chess in Schools and the Community), had accessed free chess sets for use at the library venues. He was also in the process of starting a chess club at the Golborne Social and Community Centre. He had found the community response to be largely positive and enthusiastic and encouraged members to do the same in their localities as a means of promoting chess and reaching new players.

In addition, the two tournaments held by WDCL had been a rampant success, had put WDCL back in the regional chess-limelight and had put the bank account in a reasonably healthy position. He floated the idea that maybe in the future the WDCL could enter and fund a team to play in the 4NCL. He hoped we could now develop this further and move from strength to strength. He thanked each and every one of the league officers for their help and commitment to the cause.

At the close of his address to the meeting, he said that he had largely achieved the objectives which he had set for himself when he took on the position of President: namely that the Constitution and Rules of the WDCL had been revamped and modernized. Further, the league was now a vibrant place for the playing and promotion of chess and had largely recovered from the set-backs of Covid. Warrington had established a successful and popular May bank holiday rapid-play tournament. On that basis, he concluded that it was now time to pass the baton to another individual and informed the meeting that he would be stepping down as President forthwith and would not be standing for re-election as President for the forthcoming year.

4. Trophy Presentations

At this juncture, the various winners of the league and cup competitions were presented with their trophies and chess clocks. The winners were as follows: -

Division 1 winners – Culcheth

Division 1 player of the year – Andy Coe (who attended in person to collect his trophy).

Division 2 winners – St Helens

Division 2 player of the year – Evan Scragg

Richard Furness League winners – Winwick

Richard Furness player of the year – Nigel Holland

Division 3 winners - Eccles

Division 3 player of the year - Phil Dawson

Peninsular Cup winners – Atherton

Kalmar Cup winners – Atherton

Kalmar Shield winners – Stockton Heath Juniors

Overall player of the year – Phil Dawson

Not all people and players were present to collect their prizes in person, and in those instances arrangements were made for the appropriate prizes to be passed on to their rightful recipients.

Finally, after brief discussion, the meeting decided to re-name the Kalmar Shield as the George Davison Shield.

5. Election of Officers

The following good folks of the WDCL were elected to the positions set out below for the forthcoming season 2024 - 2025:

President – Mr Nicholas Burriss

Vice President – Mr Gareth Dykes

Secretary – Mr Stephen Deakin

Treasurer – Mr Paul Stanley

Auditor – Mr Elliot Barnett

League Manager – Mr Sean Murphy

Tournament Manager – Mr Damian McCarthy

League Development Manager – Mr Peter Mulleady

ECF Representative – Mrs Barbara Farrar

Archivist – Mrs Judy Brown

6. League Structure

At this part of the meeting representatives of constituent clubs took the opportunity to notify Mr Murphy regarding which league and cup competitions their respective clubs wished to participate in during the forthcoming season. There then followed a constructive discussion concerning the best way to organize the order of the league and cup games. Diverse and various opinions were promulgated.

Permission was granted for clubs to hold more than 1 chess match per night at their respective venues, on the condition that this did not render playing conditions unsuitable and unsatisfactory. Existing conventions were discussed and reaffirmed: in league matches the away team would have the white pieces on boards one, three and five; in cup games a coin toss at the start of proceedings would determine board colours.

7. Any Other Business

There were three written proposals before the meeting, which were discussed at length.

1. The first proposal from Mrs Farrar of Eccles chess club, postulated the imposition of 'local' estimated grades for new players who did not already have an accurate ECF grading. This was discussed but not passed by the meeting. The general view being that the league already had a system whereby new players were allowed to play in league games using estimated gradings and the current league and cup rules had detailed provisions regarding this point.

2. The second proposal from Mr Bernard Bedworth of Winwick Chess Club wanted to impose an upper limit of 1750 for the Richard Furness League. This was discussed by the meeting but not passed as the majority view was that the Richard Furness League was characterized by chess matches which allowed a mixture of the very strongest players playing alongside much lower rated players in the same team. We were also reminded that this was the stated intention of Richard Furness when he first created the league.
3. Thirdly, a proposal was submitted by Mr Sean Murphy of Ormskirk Chess Club. The proposal was in two parts, the first part relating to a modernization of the Peninsular Cup rules and the second part relating to the issue of grades for new players. The proposal was discussed and was passed. The first part of the proposal relating to the Peninsular Cup is set out below:-
 - a. All clubs entered in WDCL Cup Competitions are required to have a minimum of at least one team entered in any of the four league divisions (Divisions 1, 2, 3, and the Richard Furness league).
 - b. The drawn match rules for the Peninsular Cup are to be simplified in that, starting with board 5, a count-back is done and, if the scores still remain equal, the team playing black on board 1 wins the match.
 - c. Peninsular Cup teams are reduced to 5 players on each team.
 - d. Anyone playing for a club Peninsular Cup team in a semi final or final of the Peninsular Cup, must have played at least one league game for that same chess club at some time earlier in the season.
 - e. It is not automatic or compulsory for a chess club to enter a team in the Peninsular Cup. Should they wish to do so, they will notify the League Manager in the normal way.
 - f. The home/away rule will be determined in the same way as with league matches, with League Manager using a random and impartial means to determine each round separately.

The second part of Mr Murphy's proposal related to the thorny issue of provisional gradings for new or returning players to the league. The Proposal was:-

- a. Clubs are to set a minimum estimated local grade of 1400 for all new players who play league and cup matches. They may set a higher grade than 1400 if that is a more accurate representation of the new player's ability.
- b. This grading will be reviewed on the 1st January by member clubs and revised if necessary.
- c. The estimated local grading will be removed in the following season and their ECF rating will thereafter be used.
- d. In matches, it is already established practice that players are placed in playing strength order. In the case of new players, they can be placed on any board, based upon their respective team captain's assessment of their playing strength and this reasoning should be explained to the opposing captain.

The proposal was discussed and passed.

4. Mr Stanley referred back to a dispute earlier in the season that had occurred between two member clubs which had been regrettable and had taken an inordinate amount of time and effort to resolve. He wanted a simpler dispute resolution system in place and encouraged a discussion of the same.

The matter was duly discussed and it was ultimately decided that, as our league was blessed with having three ECF qualified arbiters (Mr Deakin and Mr Mulleady from Atherton and Mr McCarthy from Culcheth), any disputes from now on should first be referred to them as a panel for adjudication. Obviously, the said arbiters would absent themselves from any decisions on disputes involving their own respective clubs. If for whatever reason, the arbiters could not adjudicate on the matter, they would arrange an alternative dispute panel to decide upon the matter.

5. Finally, it was decided to change the default time at the start of games from 1 hour to 30 minutes.

8. Date for 2025 AGM

The date for the next AGM of the WDCL was not set but would be notified to the secretaries of constituent league clubs subsequently.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at approximately 11.20pm.