Southampton Chess League Rules (Revised 5 July 2025)

Main revisions:

- Constitution - inclusion of ECF guidelines on treatment of disabled players, safeguarding, and fair play.
- Amendment of Rule 5e(iii) on player eligibility.
- Rules on authorised and prohibited use of electronic devices (e.g. phones, watches) revised (see Rule 9).

1. CONSTITUTION

The league shall be called the Southampton Chess League (SCL), membership of which shall be open to clubs in Southampton and its neighbourhood whose applications for admission to the league have been accepted. Every club intending to compete shall notify the League Secretary by the Annual General Meeting, which shall normally be held not later than the 30th June each season.

The aims of the SCL are to:

- organise a competitive league structure bringing together teams of broadly similar playing standards, open to all players and aiming to give each team around ten matches per season with at least four players in a team
- To provide additional opportunities for play (e.g. cup, individual and rapidplay competitions)
- To encourage as many teams/players to participate
- To foster friendly, fair and sporting play

All clubs and their players are expected to follow the league's 'Code of Conduct', which is available as a separate document, and to comply with the following English Chess Federation (ECF) guidelines:

- **Treatment of disabled players** - https://www.englishchess.org.uk/guidelines-on-treatment-of-chess-players-withimpairments/

- **Safeguarding**: https://www.englishchess.org.uk/safeguarding-and-the-ecf/

- **Fair play**: https://www.englishchess.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Anti-Cheating-Document.pdf

2. ENTRY FEES

Each club entering the league shall pay a fee for each team entered. This fee shall be determined at the Annual General Meeting each year. The fee for the current season is £15 per team and should be paid to the League Treasurer by the 1st December.

3. DIVISIONS

a. Each division shall consist of six teams playing each other team home and away apart from the lowest two divisions which shall consist of between 5 and 9 teams playing double or single rounds at the discretion of the league committee.

b. A won match shall count two points, a drawn match one point and a lost match no points. The team scoring the highest number of points shall be the winners for the year in each division, the winners of the first division to be the league champions. In the event of a tie in the number of points gained, the winners shall be the team with the highest number of game points. In the event of a further tie, the trophy shall be shared, although where promotion or relegation is at stake, a play-off may be arranged.

c. Promotion and relegation between divisions is to be compulsory except where this results in three teams from the same club being in the same division. However, if a club feels that relegation would seriously weaken that club due to loss of players, it may present its case at the League AGM for an exemption against relegation. However, a club cannot appeal against promotion if it will not have a team in the division it is being promoted to. In the case of a team being ineligible for promotion then the next available team shall take their place. One team is to be promoted / relegated between all divisions. A team can only be promoted or relegated by one division in any season. Teams of a new club joining the league will be placed in an appropriate division, excluding divisions one and two.

4. CONDUCT of MATCHES and NOTIFICATION of RESULTS

a. Matches will be played over 5 boards in the top three divisions and over 4 boards in the bottom two divisions, with all games played at the same time and place. Each club shall place its team in order of playing strength with the strongest player on board 1 and so on, and the opposing teams shall be paired in that order [see notes below]. Each player shall play one game with his/her opponent. A won game shall score 1, a drawn game ½ and a lost game 0. The match shall be won by the side having the higher aggregate score. The away side shall have white on the odd-numbered boards and black on the even-numbered boards.

[Notes on playing strength:

(i) Current (start of month) ratings should be used when determining board order. [Note: Some leniency may be allowed, at the discretion of the League Committee, where an older or newer rating is used mistakenly.]

(ii) If a player does not have an ECF rating or only an ECF P rating (i.e. one based on fewer than 10 games), then any other current rating (e.g. FIDE), former grade or recent results should be used to estimate their strength. Team captains are expected to estimate playing strength fairly and consistently between matches, although a player's estimated strength may be re-evaluated as the season progresses.

(iii) Where two players have a rating difference of 100 points or less their order may be interchanged without question. A player rated more than 100 points lower than another player cannot play above them except for the cases of a weaker substitute being required (see rule 7b)

(iv) If a club feels that the rating of one of their players does not reflect their true strength then the club may submit evidence to the League Secretary (in writing) to have the player's rating downgraded or upgraded. If the League committee agrees to a new 'League rating' for a player then this rating remains in force until a new rating list is published and a review has taken place. Permission to play out of normal rating order, in this way, must be gained in advance of any match. If any club plays out of board order before permission has been granted they will be penalised (see rule 16a).]

b. Two match cards, one for each team, should be completed for every match. Match cards should be written out in advance and exchanged simultaneously to avoid any manipulation of pairings.

c. Ratings should be written alongside player names on all match cards. If a player has been assigned a 'League rating' (rule 4a - note 4) then the League rating should be written down as L1800, for example. If a player does not have an ECF rating or a League rating then an estimated rating should be written down as E1500, for example. The aim of this rule is to avoid infractions of the playing order rules.

d. Match cards should be completed in full at the end of the playing session.

e. The detailed result of all matches should be sent by both team captains to the Results Secretary within two days after the day on which the match is played. The preferred way of

doing this is via the League Management System (LMS), hosted by the ECF on behalf of the SCL (https://ecflms.org.uk/lms/node/140736/home). Otherwise, results can be sent by email or posted to the Results Secretary. If not posted, the match card should be retained by the team captain until the end of season in case of any disputes. [Note: the LMS replaces the former recording of results on the SCL website http://www.sotonchessleague.org.uk).]

5. CLUB TEAMS, NOMINATED PLAYERS and PLAYER ELIGIBILITY

a. **Club teams:** Any club entering more than one team in the league shall indicate their order of strength by naming them "A", "B" etc.

b. If a club considers it has insufficient members to meet all its league commitments, it can delete its lowest rated team(s), but the remaining team(s) must continue with their fixtures, irrespective of the strength of the remaining members.

c. No player may play for more than one club in the Southampton League competitions in any given season, except:

   i. If a club withdraws a team from the league before 1st January, the players of that team shall be permitted to play for any other club after 1st January.

   ii. A player belonging to two clubs may play for one club in the league and another club in the Robertson Cup or Plate. (Note: separate eligibility rules for the Robertson Cup and Plate competitions are laid out in Rule 20).

d. **Nominated players:** for each higher team the club must nominate the two strongest players. This list must be submitted to the league at least three days before any of the club's league fixtures. Player nominations are not required for teams in the lowest division.

   i. Nominated players are not eligible to play for a lower team.

   ii. If, for any reason, a nominated player does not play for the team during the first half of the season (i.e. before January 1st) then another player must be added to the list of nominated players before the team's next match. (Note: No penalties apply to a newly nominated player who has previously played for a lower team.)

e. **Player eligibility:** for each player, the following eligibility conditions apply:

   i. Any player rated more than 100 points higher than a nominated player at the start of the season may not play for a lower team than that of the nominated player.

   ii. Any player after playing four games for any of the top two boards of a team is ineligible to play for a lower team (unless Rule 5.e.v. applies)

   iii. Once a player has played a total of four games in a division (or higher division) they cannot play for a team two or more divisions lower, unless the club has no teams in the intervening division(s). [Example: if someone played 3 games for a club's B team in Div 2 and a game for their A team (in Div 1 or 2) they would become ineligible to play for a D team in Div 4 or 5].

   iv. Where a club has two teams in the same division a player having played for one team shall be ineligible to play for the other team (unless Rule 5.e.v. applies)

   v. Sharing of players between teams from the same club in the lowest division is permitted but each player is limited to playing a predefined maximum number of matches for those teams. This predefined maximum is set at the total number of league matches played by one team in the lowest division.

Note: Rule 5.e.v. takes precedence over Rules 5.e.ii., and 5.e.iv.

f. Any team fielding an ineligible player will be penalised (see Rule 16b).

6. MATCH FIXTURES

a. Each team shall nominate a day of the week and playing venue for its home matches. The Fixtures Secretary shall provide a list specifying the dates on which matches shall be played unless the team captains agree to rearrange. The Fixtures Secretary should be informed of all rearranged dates.

b. **Postponements** – A team captain seeking a postponement should make direct contact with the opponents' team captain at the earliest possible opportunity to propose alternative dates. If a postponement is requested at short notice (less than a week) it may be turned down unless there are exceptional circumstances for the request (e.g. hazardous travelling conditions); otherwise the opposing team is normally expected to accept the request. In case of any dispute, the League Secretary should be contacted, in writing, as soon as possible. [Note: Players becoming unavailable at short notice (e.g. falling ill) will not be regarded as exceptional circumstances.]

c. **Venue changes** – any alternative playing venue may be used as long as both captains agree, and agreement is made at least one week in advance of the match. Otherwise, the club's normal home venue should be used.

d. All league matches must be played separately.

e. All league fixtures should be played by the 16th May. If teams wish to play a fixture after this date, they should contact the Fixtures Secretary to agree this. The League Committee reserves the right to void any matches not played by the 16th May.

7. TIME OF MATCH

a. Matches will normally start at 7.30pm but a team may require a start time of 7.15pm for all its home matches. Any team wishing to invoke this option should contact the Fixtures Secretary in advance so that all visiting clubs can be informed.

b. Should any player be absent for more than 30 minutes from the start of play, the opponent shall be entitled to score the game as won by default. The side whose player is absent shall have the right of putting in an eligible player as substitute at the vacant board, provided that it is done before the expiration of the half hour. The substitute player may not have a rating higher by more than 100 points than the player on the next board up; however his/her rating may be more than 100 points lower than the player on the next board down.

c. Clubs are entitled to start the clocks at the agreed start time. A clock should only be started late, as a courtesy to a late-arriving player, if this does not create a problem associated with the amount of time available and the time control to be played.

8. RULES OF PLAY

Unless otherwise stated, the FIDE laws of chess shall apply and the League Code of Conduct shall act as a guideline as to what is expected from clubs and players.

9. ELECTRONIC DEVICES

a. All mobile phones and non-medical electronic devices must be switched off for the entire duration of the game, except in the case of a player with a special need, as authorised by team captains before the match. [Note: a special need includes the case of a team captain keeping their phone on to communicate with a player who has not yet arrived at the venue.]

b. If a player's device makes a sound during the game, the player shall receive a warning the first time it happens and will default the game the second time it happens.

c. If a player leaves the playing area during a game and is found to be in possession of an electronic device that is not exclusively medical in nature, the player shall forfeit the game.

Note: it is recommended that

- any phones or electronic devices (e.g., watches) should be placed on the table or in a coat pocket to avoid accidentally taking it out of the playing area
- club secretaries advise members that there should be no analysis or discussion of active games, and analysis of completed games should be done away from the playing area

10. RATE OF PLAY

a. Clocks shall be used in divisions 1,2,3 and, if available, in lower divisions. Failure to arrange for the provision of a clock in divisions 1, 2 or 3 shall result in the loss of the game(s) by the home team. [Note: games played without using a clock are not eligible for ECF rating.]

b. If clocks are used, a score of the game shall be taken by both players.

c. All games are to finish on the night with either the use of time increments (the default option, where digital clocks are available) or a quickplay finish, with the same time controls being used on all boards (except where Rule 10f applies). An away team may, at their discretion, bring digital clocks, if not available at the home venue, to enable the use of time increments. [Note: time increments are encouraged by FIDE/ECF/SCL to avoid difficulties in arbiting quickplay finishes.]

d. Where time increments are used, the increment will be 10 seconds, commencing from the start of the game. Clocks should be set initially to 80 minutes, for a 3-hour playing session, or 65 minutes for a 2½-hour playing session. [Note: Players are no longer required to keep a score of the game as soon as they have less than 5 minutes on their clock, even if their time subsequently goes above 5 minutes due to increments.]

e. For quickplay finishes, the default time control is all moves in 90 minutes each. An alternative time control may be agreed between captains as long as the game finishes on the night and a minimum 2½ hour session is played. (See Appendix for quickplay finish rules)

f. For any game involving a junior player (under 18), the junior player or their captain, can require a time control of 60 minutes per player for all moves.

11. DEFAULTING ON ONE OR MORE BOARDS

a. Where defaults are known before the match starts, the bottom board(s) must be defaulted.

b. Captains are not required to write any player's name on the match card on defaulted boards and if a name is given, it will be ignored (for example, there would be no penalty applied if the name provided was not eligible to play for the team).

c. Similar considerations apply where a board is defaulted 'on the night' as a result of a player not turning up for a match. That is to say, the opponent who was 'stood up' is treated as not having been in the team and so cannot be subject to any penalties due to being ineligible or playing out of board order.

12. PERMITTED ROLE OF TEAM CAPTAINS AS ARBITERS

a. Team captains are permitted to act as joint arbiters in the case of any disputes or other issues arising during a match. Ideally, they should consult or be conversant with the FIDE Rules of Chess (https://handbook.fide.com/chapter/E012023), including Article 12 (The Role of the Arbiter). It should be noted that an arbiter is only permitted to intervene in a game in the following circumstances:
   - if requested by one of the players (e.g. in claiming a draw)
   - they observe an irregularity (e.g. illegal move, player not recording moves when required to do so, some form of disturbance etc.)
   - to point out a flag fall.

   They are NOT permitted to intervene to claim a draw on behalf of a player.

b. Any decisions materially affecting the outcome of a game should be made with the agreement of both team captains, if possible. In case of any disputes see Rule 17.

13. LEAGUE TROPHIES

The League Trophies shall be the property of the League and shall be competed for annually. The Secretary of each winning club shall be held responsible for the trophy during such time as it is in their club's keeping and shall deliver it to the League Committee when requested.

14. LEAGUE COMMITTEE and COMPETITION ORGANISERS

The League Officers form the League Committee and shall be elected at the AGM. The current officers are:
League Secretary: Fraser McLeod (Southampton)
Fixtures and Results Secretary: Malcolm Clarke (Chandlers Ford)
Treasurer: Michael Pope (Salisbury)
Chair: Matthew Coldwell (Salisbury)
Vice-Chair: Michael Pope (Salisbury)
Webmaster: Graham Stuart (Chandlers Ford)

15. NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

a. At least 14 days' notice shall be given of the Annual General Meeting. Any suggested alteration or amendment to these rules shall be notified to the League Secretary before 16th April (this date may be extended at the discretion of the League Secretary) prior to the meeting; such suggested alterations will be sent to club secretaries with the notice of the meeting.

b. A quorum of at least 50% of the clubs playing in the league must be in attendance to allow any changes to the league rules. During any other business of the A.G.M. interim amendments to

the rules may be proposed and voted upon. An interim amendment shall require a two-thirds majority and shall be enforced for that season only. At the next A.G.M. it shall be automatically entered on the agenda and shall require a simple majority to become a permanent rule.

c. An Extraordinary General Meeting may be called by the Committee or at the request of two clubs provided that 7 days' notice is given to all club secretaries. At General Meetings each club shall have one vote. No proxy voting or voting in advance without attending are permitted.

16. PENALTIES

a. Where a team plays out of board order (rule 4a) any player playing "too low" (that is, below somebody whose rating is more than 100 points less than theirs) will be deemed to have lost their game for match scoring purposes.

Example:

Board	Rating	Original result	Corrected result
1	1600	1	1
2	1800	1	0
3	1750	1	0
4	1650	1	1

b. Where a team plays an ineligible player (rule 5) one point will transfer from the offending team to the non-offending team for each ineligible player played up to a maximum of the number of points scored by the offending team and the team will lose the match, even if their aggregate score in the match remains the higher. So, for example, a 5-0 win with an ineligible player would become 4-1 but the two match points would be awarded to the 'losing' team.

c. If both teams field an ineligible player (rule 5) then the match will be voided and no match points will be gained by either side.

d. All game results stand, as played, for rating purposes irrespective of whether a player was ineligible or played out of order.

e. Where the League Committee decides to void an individual game in circumstances where both sides were considered to be at fault, the game is scored as 0-0 and a team is only awarded:
   - a draw if it has scored 2.5 points, for a 5-board match, or 2 points for a 4-board match
   - a win if it has scored 3 or more points, for a 5-board match, or 2.5 or more points for a 4-board match

   Example: If a 5-board match stands at 2-2 and the remaining game is voided with both sides at fault then no match points are awarded to either side.

f. Where a team defaults, its opponents shall score two match points and the maximum number of game points (e.g., 5-0 or 4-0, depending on number of boards).

17. DISPUTES

a. Any dispute that may arise which cannot be resolved by those involved should be conveyed to the League Secretary, in writing, giving full details. Where this relates to a match, the issue should be reported within two weeks, with full written information, endorsed by a club official, provided within four weeks.

b. Any irregularities in Cup/Plate matches need to be reported within four weeks or before the next round of the competition is completed, whichever comes later. [Note: the intention of this is to allow any penalties to be applied in good time, before the competition has progressed too

far. The committee reserves the right not to enforce any penalties if it considers it too late to do so, in the interests of the competition.]

c. Straightforward matters already clearly covered by the rules will be dealt with by the League Secretary. More contentious matters or those requiring interpretation of the rules will be discussed by the League Committee, who may consult with club officers (secretaries and/or team captains) or ECF arbiters to hear their views. The League Committee's decision will usually be final, without appeal, unless new evidence is submitted. If a club or individual continues to complain but raises no significant new matters and presents no new information, they will be referred to the original decision and informed that the League will not enter into any further correspondence about the matter. Any further correspondence may be considered as harassment and the SCL committee may ultimately decide to suspend or bar a club or individual where this continues.

18. RATING

All games played in the Southampton League will be submitted to the ECF for rating. Clubs will be required to reimburse the League the full cost of any charges made by the ECF for rating games of players who are not individual members of the ECF (at 'bronze level' or above). To avoid such charges, the League advises all clubs to strongly encourage all its members who play in the League to join the ECF.

19. REPORTING of INFORMATION on WEBSITES

A condition of playing in the League is that player names, ratings and game results will be published on the SCL website or other websites (e.g. those of HCA or ECF).

20. ROBERTSON CUP and PLATE

a. All SCL rules (including time controls) apply unless stated otherwise here.
b. Cup and League matches are not to be played simultaneously unless agreement has been sought and granted from the SCL League Secretary.
c. All matches are played on a knockout basis.
d. The Cup is open to all teams.
e. Clubs in division 1 will not be required to play in any preliminary round of the Robertson Cup (normally used to reduce the number of teams involved to 16) and will be seeded so as to not play each other in the first round.
f. First round losers in the Cup are entered into the Plate. (Note: losers in any preliminary round do not qualify for the Plate.)
g. All matches are played over 5 boards, with the away team having white on boards 1,3,5 and black on boards 2 and 4.
h. Time control rules are the same as in the league.
i. A player may only play for one team in the Robertson Cup/Plate (considered to be a single competition for the purposes of this rule). If a team plays someone who has already played for another team, they lose the match. [Note: that player remains eligible for their original team].
j. Tied matches are resolved, in order of priority, by:
    1. **Board count.** Add the winning board numbers together - the smaller board count wins. For example, a team winning on boards 1 and 4 (board count = 5), defeats a team winning on boards 2 and 5 (board count = 7).
    2. **Bottom board elimination.** If board counts are equal, the results from the bottom board(s) must be successively eliminated until a definite result is obtained. For example, a team winning on boards 1 and 5, would lose to a team winning on boards 2 and 4, as both have a board count of 6 but the win on board 5 is eliminated.

3. **Replay or coin toss.** In the event of a draw on all boards, the match shall be replayed, if time permits, with venue and colours to be reversed. If the match cannot be replayed before the stated deadline for the round, the result will be decided by a toss of a coin (either done on the night of the match by the teams involved or by the Results Secretary at a later date).

21. CLARKE CUP (Div 4/5 Cup)

a. All SCL rules (including time controls) apply unless stated otherwise here.

b. Cup and League matches are not to be played simultaneously unless agreement has been sought and granted from the SCL League Secretary.

c. It is open to the lower league teams (currently divisions 4 and 5). The teams eligible to enter the competition are determined when the constitution of the league has been finalised.

d. Matches are played on a knockout basis, with winners progressing to the next round.

e. Tied matches are resolved as for the Robertson Cup (see Rule 20h).

f. The draw determines who plays who in subsequent rounds and which team plays at home.

g. Eligibility to play in the competition is not affected by participation in the Robertson Cup or Plate.

h. A player may only play for one team in the Clarke Cup.

i. A player must be eligible to play in division 4 or division 5 league games for that team (see Rule 5e).

j. Matches are played over 4 boards, with the away team having white pieces on boards 1 and 3 and black pieces on boards 2 and 4.

k. The penalty for playing an ineligible player is loss of match.

22. Southampton Individual

a. Individual players are invited to contact the League Secretary **by 31st October** to enter this competition.
b. The winner (or joint winners) holds the Southampton Individual trophy for the year.
c. The format depends on the number of entrants, with the aim of providing between four and nine games for each player. It will be run as an all-play-all event (for up to 10 players) or as a Swiss event with at least six rounds (for more than 10 players).
d. All games are to be played following league rules, including the use of a clock, scoresheet, and a standard play time control (see Rule 10).
e. All games will be ECF rated.
f. Games are played throughout the season at players' clubs or homes.
g. The organiser will provide a playing schedule, but players should agree dates between themselves.
h. All games should be played by the 16th May. The League Committee reserves the right to void any games not played by this date.
i. The League Secretary should be contacted as soon as possible if there are any problems in arranging games.

Appendix (Quickplay finish rules)

Based on: http://www.chessarbitersassociation.co.uk/Laws2018.pdf

Q1 If both flags have fallen and it is impossible to establish which flag fell first then the game is drawn

Q2.1 If the player to move has less than two minutes left, they may pause the clock and claim a draw before their flag falls on the basis that the opponent cannot win by normal means, and/or that the opponent has been making no effort to win by normal means. If the opponent disputes the claim, both team captains acting as joint arbiters (as permitted in League Rule 11) should be summoned, if available. If a team captain is unavailable (e.g. due to playing their own game) the players should wait for both to become available.

Q2.2 If the arbiters agree with the claim, the game is drawn. Otherwise, they may postpone the decision or reject the claim.

Q2.3 If the arbiters postpone a decision the game shall continue, if possible, in the presence of both arbiters. The arbiters shall declare the final result later in the game or as soon as possible after the flag of either player has fallen. They shall declare the game drawn if they agree that the opponent of the player whose flag has fallen cannot win by normal means, or that they did not make sufficient attempts to win by normal means.

Q2.4 If the arbiters reject the claim, the opponent is entitled to two extra minutes on their clock and the game shall continue. If the arbiters judge that that the claim was made only to gain extra thinking time then they may award the game to the opponent.

[Definition of ‘win by normal means’ - Playing in a positive manner to try to win; or, having a position such that there is a realistic chance of winning the game other than just flag-fall. It should be noted that the arbiter's decision is NOT an adjudication about ‘who is winning’. For example, the arbiters may postpone a decision or reject the claim where the opponent is still trying to win from an objectively worse position.]

[Arbiter guidance: Arbiters should ask the basis on which the draw claim is being made and whether the opponent accepts or not. It is common for arbiters to require play to continue to see more moves played. In this case arbiters may award a draw after a flag fall but only if it is the person who made the claim whose flag has fallen. Where play continues, the opponent who rejected the draw risks losing the game (e.g. by checkmate or flag-fall). Where the arbiters reject the draw claim they should ask whether the opponent wants two minutes added to their clock (a player may choose to decline this, e.g. on basis that resetting clocks would give opponent more time to think)].

[Player guidance: If you continue to play for a win when short of time you risk losing unless your opponent does not have checkmating material. If you have a position where you think your opponent cannot win by normal means, you can make a move and offer a draw and, if rejected by your opponent, you can then stop the clocks and claim a draw under Q2.1. Unless the position is clear-cut, it's wise to leave yourself some time to make more moves, as might be required if the arbiters postpone their decision under Q2.2.]

Q2.5 If the joint arbiters are unable to agree a decision or if they are unavailable throughout the playing session, the game ends and the claim should be referred to the League Secretary. In this case, the player making the claim must write down the final position and submit an up-to-date scoresheet, borrowing the opponent’s scoresheet if necessary to record moves. If neither opponent has kept an up-to-date scoresheet they should attempt to do so. The opponent shall verify both the scoresheet and the final position, and both players should sign it. This, or a copy thereof, should be sent to the League Secretary who will then consult with the Committee and/or with an ECF arbiter to decide on the result.

[Note: Due to the difficulty of applying these rules, FIDE/ECF/SCL encourage the use of time increments where possible. An arbiter or spectator may assist with recording of moves.]