

Portsmouth and District Chess League

This is a discussion paper. Comments are more than welcome. steve.smith@MAYBUSHLTD.CO.UK

Problem Statement

The Portsmouth and District League has been a firm fixture in the area for more than 70 years. Over recent years there has been a decline in the number of teams and players participating. Although this has stabilised somewhat, in recent years there was an occurrence of a complete team default in Division 1 this season. Default, either individually or by complete teams are abhorrent and to be avoided as far as possible.

This paper discusses possible measures that might be taken to avoid default re-occurrence and to update chess playing in the Portsmouth area.

Context

If we accept the general premise that the League exists to promote the playing of chess in and around Portsmouth then we should concentrate on positive aspects of changing the regime. This would not be to stifle discussion around measures, in place already in some other Leagues, such as the fining of Clubs for failing to fulfil their obligations.

Observations

Chess has moved on over the 70 years of the League. There have been rule changes but it seems a sensible time to investigate possible options for further change within the League.

Topics arising

The advent of very powerful software has changed the nature of adjournment analysis. Whilst opinions vary as to the significance of this capability, it is clear that some positions can be decided by such software. I am of the personal perspective that simply relying on such analysis is fraught with risk and have many practical examples over the years. For most adjourned games within PDCL, I observe that typically around 36 moves get played in the first session. With time available ahead of adjournment then, unsurprisingly, players will use it, especially after perhaps a period of limited analysis ahead of the time control.

Time is a critical factor. In weekend tournament then most games are played to a finish on a single session. This seems to be the preference of most players were time available in the evening to replicate this situation. Others dislike adjournments because chess is meant to be played without moving pieces in some retractable way. Playing time could perhaps be increased with a prompt 7:15 start replacing current tardy 7:30 arrangements. Some venues have a hard stop at 10:30 and this needs to be acknowledged, other have move flexibility with the venue being available to 11pm. Transport needs consideration – not everyone drives and is this flexible in this respect. Juniors during term time cannot readily accommodate such late finishes.

Quick play finishes are described variously as a lottery and an abomination. Certainly the chess takes 2nd place to the time. Blitz skills are entirely different to proper, traditional chess - remembering that 50 years ago clocks were rarely used on a routine basis. Games do not get recorded near the end hence claiming repetition or anything else becomes impossible. The Bournemouth & District League and the Dorset League changed from Quick Play Finish rules to increments as discussed below,

because of these shortcomings. They are in the first season of new arrangements and reports are positive.

Modern clocks allow an incremental system. On the positive side this assuages the shortcoming of the quick play finish, at least to some extent, thereby removing sharp practice from such situations. Set against this a game played with increments no longer has an absolutely fixed end time.

Most games finish before 60 moves have been played. I do not have percentages but I estimate this to be around 90%, some say more. Building a set of rules will never be ideal for all games and all players.

On that basis if we might consider the concept of a time budget. An example is discussed below.

The Dorset League and the B&D League play 1 hour plus 30" increments. This means that a 60 move game finishes inside 3 hours maximum. Most venues would accommodate this. The above have found that games generally finish earlier than normal. Acceptance has been good judged on performance to date. Games are fully scored. A 40 move game is played in 80 minutes for each player. This might be unwelcomely rapid for some players. This matter of time limit and speed of play is crucial.

If a start at 7:15 and a dead stop at 10:30 then a minimum of 75 moves gets played in a single session. In this very rare circumstance, Match Captains would agree how to proceed. This circumstance will not always occur even then, as sometimes one player gets ahead on the clock enabling even more move to be played. If playing time is from 7:15 to 11 pm then at least 105 moves would be possible!

Clocks and finance. There are many possible Options. I prefer

- Division 1 only as a Pilot for the 2019 /2020 season

Either

- those Clubs with digital clocks could, as a temporary measure, take them to clubs without – optionally for a fee e.g. £1 per board to cover wear and tear.

OR

- The League could loan the Clubs money to purchase same repayable over say 3 years. So finance is not a problem.

Choice of clock model from DGT 2000, 2010 and 3000 – the 2010 seems to be the de facto preferred standard. The DGT 2010 is available from around £40 depending upon quantity purchased.

In summary, I believe the finances and logistics can be sorted. It is the time limits that are contentious. Constructive suggestions much appreciated.

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