2026 Hampshire Rapid and Blitz Championships Tournament Report:

The 2026 Hampshire Rapid and Blitz Championships were held at Barton Peveril 6th Form College on the 18th and 19th April. The format of the Rapid tournament remained unchanged from the 2025 edition; however, due to low turnout last year, the Blitz sections were merged into one tournament. This proved successful with a significantly higher number of entrants than last year.

In the Open section, with Roland Bezuidenhout not returning to defend his title, Steven Jones was the clear rating favourite. In Round 3, after no clear upsets in the first two rounds, the tournament was thrown wide open with John Weatherlake beating Steven, leaving him a point adrift. Yiyi Liu seized his opportunity, and after a stunning 5/5 in the first 5 rounds, including sharp tactical wins and strong positional performances, he was a full point ahead of second place. After a comfortable draw in the final round, Yiyi Liu deservedly claimed the title of Hampshire Rapid Champion.

In comparison, despite the return of 2025's U1650 Rapid Champion Liam Devlin, there was no clear favourite in the U1650 section. After dominant performances in the first 4 rounds, only Dave Williams and Peter Eales hadn't dropped points, making their round 5 encounter crucial. After an interesting game where both players could have won, Peter came out on top, leaving him a full point ahead with only one round to go. Despite only needing a draw, Peter continued his winning run, outplaying David Agostinelli on the White side of a Jobava London in the final round, on his way to a very impressive 6/6 and the title of U1650 Hampshire Rapid Champion. What made Peter's victory all the more impressive was that he played the players finishing 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 10th and 11th!

With the Blitz sections combined in the 2026 edition, it was unsurprising that there were no major upsets in the first 3 rounds. However, in Round 4, after Steven Jones miscalculated a tactical sequence, leaving him a piece down, Finn Schell comfortably converted and took the sole lead as Saahil Bansal and Oliver Coddington, the only other players on 3/3, drew.

Over the next couple of rounds, Finn continued to build his lead, finding himself 2 points ahead after 8 rounds on 8/8. In Round 9, he faced the newly crowned Hampshire Rapid Champion, Yiyi Liu, who wasn't going to go down without a fight.

After reaching an equal endgame, Yiyi showed a strong desire to win, eventually outplaying Finn and winning. Now having to defend only a 1-point lead, there was significantly more pressure on the final 3 rounds. After winning the next two rounds, Finn took a quick draw in the final round to finish on 10.5/11 and secure first place. As a player from Dorset, Finn was ineligible to be crowned Hampshire Blitz Champion, making Steven Jones' 6/6 in the final 6 rounds all the more important on his way to the title.

Over the weekend, the titles of Hampshire Quickplay Champion and Hampshire U1650 Quickplay Champion were also up for grabs. The winners were the players with the highest combined score across both tournaments, where their score in the Rapid counted double. After strong performances in both the Rapid and Blitz, with each winning one title, it seemed appropriate that Steven Jones and Yiyi Liu shared the title of Hampshire Quickplay Champion. Meanwhile, with the absence of Peter Eales in the Blitz tournament, Philip Tarrent-Edwards took his opportunity to claim the U1650

Hampshire Quickplay title, despite taking the more challenging route by playing in the Open section of the Rapid Championships.

Results:

Open Rapid:
1st – Yiyi Liu (Portsmouth), 5.5/6
2nd = – Martin Buckmaster (Southampton), Finn Schell (Southbourne), Steven Jones (Basingstoke), Oliver Coddington (Southbank), 4.5/6
U1800 – Finn Schell (Southbourne), 4.5/6

U1650 Rapid:
1st – Peter Eales (Chandlers Ford), 6/6
2nd – Iulia Poama-Covaci (Emsworth), 5/6
3rd = – Sholpan Namazbayeva (Coulsdon), Alexander Short (Isle of Wight), 4.5/6
U1500 – Dave Williams (Isle of Wight), 4/6
U1300 – Dias Nurzhanov, (Desert Penguins), 4/6
Junior – Dias Nurzhanov, (Desert Penguins), 4/6

Blitz:
1st – Finn Schell (Southbourne), 10.5/12
2nd – Steven Jones (Basingstoke) 10/12
3rd – Oliver Coddington (Southbank), 9.5/12
U1700 – Lucas Kwok (Kent) 7.5/12
U1500 – Philip Tarrant-Edwards (Chandlers Ford), Aarav Swansh Mehta (Southbourne), 6.5/12

Hampshire Champions:
Rapid – Yiyi Liu (Portsmouth), 5.5/6
Blitz – Steven Jones (Basingstoke), 10/12
Quickplay – Yiyi Liu (Portsmouth), Steven Jones (Basingstoke), 19/24
U1650 Rapid – Peter Eales (Chandlers Ford), 6/6
U1650 Blitz – Philip Tarrant-Edwards (Chandlers Ford), 6.5/12
U1650 Quickplay – Philip Tarrant-Edwards (Chandlers Ford), 13.5/24

A full list of tournament entrants and results can be found at: https://s1.chess-results.com/tnr1347590.aspx?lan=1&art=0&fed=ENG&SNode=S0.

Iwan Cave
Quickplay Officer – Hampshire Chess Association