



## Divisions 1 and 2, Weekend 5 (May 2018) *by Rhys Cumming*

### Division 1C

Guildford 1 wrapped up the title with a round to spare and finished with their expected 11 wins from 11. After beating Barbican 1 and Wood Green HK  $6\frac{1}{2}-1\frac{1}{2}$ , the title was all but sealed for Guildford over 8 hours into the Sunday match when Cheddleton, who would play Guildford in the final round, were held to a 4-4 draw by White Rose 1. Cheddleton and White Rose were level at  $3\frac{1}{2}-3\frac{1}{2}$  with only the top board remaining, in which David Howell was trying to grind down the Spanish GM Daniel Alsina Leal. Howell missed his chances in the endgame and was only able to get into a rook and king vs knight and king ending which he was unsurprisingly unable to win. That drawn match, their second of the season, meant they would have to beat Guildford 1  $7\frac{1}{2}-\frac{1}{2}$  in the last round to claim the title, which given they were the underdogs for anyway meant the title was already decided. Guildford 1 won that final round match comfortably  $5\frac{1}{2}-2\frac{1}{2}$  anyway thanks to 3 wins with the white pieces and 5 draws. That wrapped up one of Guildford's most dominant seasons in recent years, but perhaps next year will be more of a challenge with a new challenger in Manx Liberty joining the division.

Cheddleton did manage to get 2<sup>nd</sup> place for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row however, narrowly finishing ahead of White Rose, who they pushed out into 3<sup>rd</sup> place on points difference. 3<sup>rd</sup> place matched White Rose's highest finish thanks to beating their biggest challengers for a top 3 spot, Guildford 2, on the Saturday. There may be a touch of disappointment for White Rose however as if they had beaten Wood Green HK in the final round they would have overtaken Cheddleton into 2<sup>nd</sup> place. The two teams were evenly managed, so the drawn match shouldn't be too surprising, but it may have been a lost opportunity for White Rose, especially since there was a major turnaround on board 2 where James Adair had a dominant position with white against Neil McDonald but seemed to miss a tactical shot and was immediately lost. Wood Green HK ended up finishing 5<sup>th</sup> despite finishing on 8 points, but they did have the bonus of 2 of their players achieving norms: both David Fitzsimons and Adam C Taylor completed IM norms.

At the bottom end of the pool there weren't too many shocks. Barbican 1 beat both Grantham Sharks 1 and Oxford to secure 6<sup>th</sup> place, while both Grantham and Oxford lost all 3 matches over the weekend against sides that out-rated them.

### Division 1D

With only Cambridge University set to go down before the weekend started, there was a lot to play for in the Demotion Pool. Both 3Cs and Blackthorne Russia were close to securing their survival and were safe by Saturday evening with wins over Alba and Barbican 2 respectively. The ADs had only 2 points going into the weekend and so would probably need 5 points to stay up and never really got close. They lost to West is Best 1 on the Saturday which mean they were almost certainly relegated and confirmed that with a loss to Alba on the Sunday. They did achieve a consolation victory on the Monday however against Cambridge University 1 who became the first team in 4 years to go the whole season without getting a point. West is Best 1 went into the weekend on 4 points so needed to win 2 out of their 3 matches to be safe. Their win against The ADs put them in touching distance, but they had their biggest result of the season in beating 3Cs in Round 10 to ensure survival. They made it 3/3 by beating Spirit of Atticus in the final round to finish in a comfortable 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the pool. Spirit of Atticus started the weekend off well by beating Cambridge University but came up against Blackthorne Russia on the Sunday which saw off their chances of staying up. They were heavily out-rated across their team and it showed in the match as they lost  $5\frac{1}{2}-2\frac{1}{2}$ . That result meant that even though they were not mathematically down, they would need to beat West is Best 1  $6\frac{1}{2}-1\frac{1}{2}$  and have other results go their way. None of that was close to realising itself as they went down  $4\frac{1}{2}-3\frac{1}{2}$ .



This all left just 1 remaining spot up for grabs going into the final round and it came down to just one of Alba and Barbican 2 who played each other in the final round. Both teams had won 1 and lost 1 over the previous 2 days and sat on 6 points heading into their match-up. Alba had the better points difference and would therefore go through if the match was drawn. It was a well toughly fought match with almost all the matches reaching the time control, but Alba always seemed in the better position thanks to better positions on the higher boards and Alba eventually won  $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$  to narrowly keep themselves up, the only newly promoted side to do so. That mean that Barbican 2, Spirit of Atticus, The ADs and Cambridge University were relegated. Barbican 2 have been a fixture in Division 1 for many years now despite occasionally flirting with relegation, but they will presumably be one of the favourites to return to the top division next year.

### **Division 2C**

The four promotion spots in the Promotion Pool were all wrapped up barring miraculous comebacks before the weekend had even started and so it proved with Manx Liberty, Celtic Tigers, Wood Green Monarchs and North East England all to be plying their trade in Division 1 next year. Manx Liberty had already guaranteed their place but went all out for the title, producing their strongest team of the season for the final weekend. That team which featured only 1 player below 2450, ensured Manx a clean sweep of the division at their first attempt. Each of their matches in the final weekend were comfortable victories with their  $6\frac{1}{2}$ - $1\frac{1}{2}$  victory over North East England their closest match of the weekend. This is presumably the last Division 2 will see of Manx Liberty in the years to come and they will likely enter Division 1 next year as Guildford 1s biggest title contenders.

North East England went into the weekend on the same points as Manx Liberty with 8 wins out of 8 and promotion already confirmed but had a very different weekend from the Manx team. It should be said that their weekend featured 3 matches against the best 3 teams in the division, but their 3 losses will still have been somewhat disappointing. Nonetheless, they will be in Division 1 next year and have a chance to get revenge on all those teams next year. Celtic Tigers and Wood Green Monarchs had not completely secured their place but were well clear with an easier set of fixtures in the way. Their closest challengers going into the weekend were Manchester Manticores, who were 3 points behind but still had to play Manx Liberty. In the end the Manchester Manticores lost every match they played this weekend so didn't mount much of a challenge to the promotion places. In fact, both the Celtic Tigers and Wood Green Monarchs ensured their promotion by beating North East England: Celtic Tigers on the Saturday and Wood Green on the Sunday. The team of the weekend however were a team who didn't have a single point after 4 games played in the Promotion Pool: Anglian Avengers. They won all their matches over the weekend including against two of the sides that went on to earn promotion: Celtic Tigers and Wood Green Monarchs. Despite their wins, they were never in a position to get promoted but did end up finishing in a very creditable 5<sup>th</sup> place.

Guildford 3 had a tough weekend losing to both Celtic Tigers and Manx Liberty and drawing with Grantham Sharks 2. Due to there being 2 Guildford sides in the first division, Guildford 3 are ineligible for promotion and so never really had anything on the line in the final weekend. Grantham Sharks also were never in the running for a promotion spot although in their case that was due to being on 0 points entering the weekend. The finished with a win, a draw and a loss but they had already achieved their primary goal of making it into the Promotion Pool.

### **Division 2D**

Of all the pools in the top 2 divisions this certainly involved the most drama. Barbican Youth had given themselves hope in the 4<sup>th</sup> weekend by beating KJCA Kings, but needed a big showing in the final weekend to stay up and when they arrived with a very weakened side, it became clear fairly quickly that this would be their last year in Division 2. They went on to lose all 3 games and finished bottom on 3 points. Despite



having the strongest teams in the Division, Pool A also ended up producing the weakest. White Rose 2 had only 3 points going into the weekend and needed at least 2 wins. They drew a tight match with West is Best 2 on the Saturday but they lost badly to Warwickshire Select 1 which gave them no chance of staying up going into the last round. The Sussex Martlets didn't need much to be safe but won every match  $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$  to finish top of the demotion pool, while Warwickshire Select 1 also ensured their safety with ease. Poisoned Pawns 1 struggled early in the season but had made somewhat of a comeback. They drew with King's Head but were essentially relegated after a  $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$  loss in round 10 to the Sussex Martlets which featured 7 draws and the solitary loss. This left 3 teams fighting for 2 spots heading into the final day. West is Best 2 were in pole position on 7 points but probably had the hardest match, against the Sussex Martlets with KJCA Kings and King's Head narrowly behind on 6 points facing White Rose 2 and Warwickshire Select 1 respectively. KJCA Kings had strengthened significantly and brought in John Emms and Chris Ward to steer them over the line. In the final round they narrowly beat White Rose 2  $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$ , but as it turned out a draw would have been enough to see them through anyway. This left West is Best 2 and King's Head battling it out. West is Best's match against the Sussex Martlets was always close, but West is Best never looked like they would have quite enough to scrape a match point and so it turned out going down  $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$ . This left West is Best's fate in the hands of Warwickshire Select. King's Head needed a 4-4 draw to survive after a roller coaster season. King's Head had racked up 5 points after 2 weekends in Pool A and looked to be shoe-ins to make the Promotion Pool, but then they fell away completely and in rounds 5-10 only picked up one more draw. With just 2 games left in the match, King's Head took a  $3\frac{1}{2}$ - $2\frac{1}{2}$  lead and needed just another draw in order to survive. It all came down to board 1 where Evgeny Tukpetov was trying to hold an ending a piece for 2 pawns down against Warwickshire's John Pitcher, but ultimately went down to see West is Best 2 survive at the expense of King's Head.

There is little doubt that this has been the strongest Division 2 has been since the change of format 10 years ago, evidence of which can be seen in looking at the relegated teams. 3 of the 4 teams to go down in particular: King's Head, White Rose 2 and Barbican Youth have been in the top 2 divisions for many years, but with newer teams coming up from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions, some of the more established teams have been pushed to the bottom of the pile.

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