

Division 1A

Guildford 1 extended their run of wins to 46 in a row with 2 comprehensive victories in the first weekend. They have not lost a match since 2012 and beat their opponents in the first weekend by a combined score of 15½-½ against The ADs and Grantham Sharks 1. The only game that Guildford failed to win came on top board, where Peter Roberson held Matthew Sadler to a draw in order to avoid the 8-0 score-line that Guildford surprisingly managed only once last season. White Rose 1 also scored 2 wins out of 2 with wins over 3Cs 1 and Barbican 2.

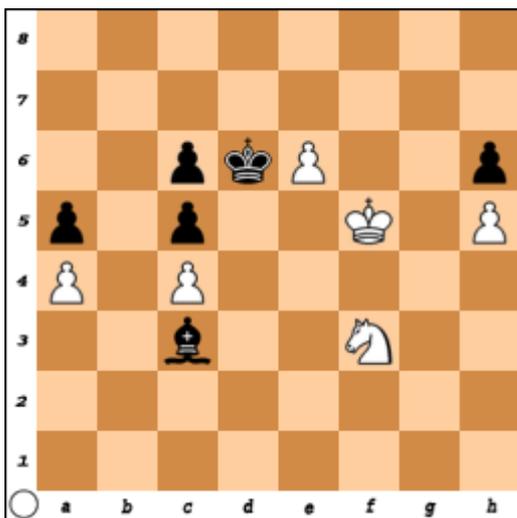
While competing with Guildford is probably a tall order, they are firmly in the running for 2nd spot. Spirit of Atticus have not stayed in the same league for the past 5 years, but they had a promising first weekend on their second attempt at the top flight after narrowly missing out on survival two years ago. They were beaten on the Saturday by 3Cs, who have successfully established themselves as a midtable team after being promoted a couple of years ago along with Spirit, but they came back to beat Barbican 2 on the Sunday.

Barbican 2 typically find themselves safe by the final weekend, but after an opening weekend with two losses, maybe things will be a bit more nervous this year. The match from the first weekend that seemed to have the most bearing on who makes it into the Championship Pool was Oxford 1 vs Grantham Sharks 1. Both teams often find themselves just on one side or the other of the cut-off when the initial pool stages finish, so the narrow win for Grantham in round 1 may prove pivotal. That match turned near the end on board 3 when American FM Christopher Wu miscalculated the resulting king and pawn endgame to draw what should have been a comfortably winning endgame (see the featured game below).

White: Christopher Wu (Oxford 1) 2336

Black: Dimitar Daskalov (Grantham Sharks 1) 2310

1. e4 e5 2. Nf3 d6 3. d4 exd4 4. Nxd4 Nf6 5. Nc3 Be7 6. g3 O-O 7. Bg2 Re8 8. O-O Bf8 9. Bf4 c6 10. Qd2 Nbd7 11. Rad1 Ne5 12. h3 Nh5 13. Bg5 f6 14. Be3 Nc4 15. Qe2 Nxe3 16. Qxe3 g6 17. Qd3 Ng7 18. Kh2 Ne6 19. Nb3 a5 20. a4 b6 21. Qd2 Ba6 22. Rfe1 Qc7 23. f4 Rad8 24. Qf2 Kg7 25. h4 Bc8 26. Qf3 Qf7 27. Ne2 Nc5 28. Nxc5 dxc5 29. Qf2 Bg4 30. Bf3 Bxf3 31. Qxf3 Qe6 32. Nc3 Rd4 33. e5 f5 34. Rd3 Red8 35. Red1 Be7 36. Ne2 R4d5 37. Nc3 Rd4 38. Ne2 Rxd3 39. Rxd3 Qc4 40. Rxd8 Bxd8 41. Nc3 Qe6 42. Qd3 Be7 43. b3 Kf7 44. Kg2 h6 45. Kf1 c4 46. bxc4 Bc5 47. Ne2 g5 48. c3 gxh4 49. gxh4 Qg6 50. Ng3 Ke6 51. Qf3 Kd7 52. h5 Qg8 53. Qd3 Kc7 54. Kg2 Qg4 55. e6 Bd6 56. Qxf5 Qxf4 57. Qxf4 Bxf4 58. Ne4 Be5 59. Kf3 Kd8 60. Kg4 Ke7 61. Kf5 Bh8 62. c5 bxc5 63. c4 Bd4 64. Nd2 Bc3 65. Nf3 Kd6 (diagram)



Position after black's 65th move.

66. Ne5?? (there are several winning options here, the simplest probably being to reroute the knight with Nh2-g4. White will then sacrifice the e6 pawn at the appropriate moment to win the h6 pawn and black will not be able to defend against both white shepherding the h-pawn while also defending his queenside pawns)

66...Bxe5 67. e7 Kd7! (67... Kxe7? 68. Kxe5+- is clearly what white had analysed, where white wins as he takes the opposition)

½-½ Draw agreed since black takes the opposition after both 68. e8=Q Kxe8 69. Kxe5 Ke7 and the immediate 68. Kxe5 Kxe7.

Division 1B

There was a mild shock in the first round of pool B as Cheddleton, who have finished as runners up for the past two years, were held to a draw by Wood Green HK. Although Cheddleton's fire power at the top was enough to muster wins for Hawkins, Fodor and Arkell on boards 2,3 and 4; Wood Green swept boards 5-7 to hold the match.

Cheddleton followed up their draw by beating the newly promoted Alba and will still remain favourites to top the pool, although we may be in for a tighter affair than in previous seasons. Alba are now in just their 3rd season since forming to unite the many Scottish players who were up to that point dispersed among a variety of teams. After winning the titles in both Division 3N and Division 2 on their first attempt, they are presumably the most likely of the promoted to teams to stay up, but their task will not have been helped by their first weekend in the division. They lost both of their matches: to Cheddleton and more surprisingly to West is Best 1.

West is Best merged with South Wales Dragons in the offseason and West is Best 1 retain a South Wales Dragons feel, as 6 of their 8 players in the first weekend played for South Wales Dragons last season. Nonetheless, given that South Wales Dragons have consistently found themselves in relegation battles and Alba out-rated West is Best 1 by 50 points a board, Alba would have presumably considered this an important match to win. The foundation for West is Best's victory was on the top 2 boards where Jack Rudd and John Cooper, while both IMs, were out-rated by an average of 150 points against Andrew Greet and Clement Sreeves, but won on both boards.

They continued their impressive showing on the Sunday as they pushed Wood Green HK right to the wire, with Wood Green only running out 4½-3½ winners despite being heavy rating favourites. The only team in Division 1b to win both of their games was Guildford 2, who beat Barbican 1 for the second straight year despite being rating underdogs. Their narrowest win however was actually in round 2 against Cambridge University 1 who are back in the division after a sabbatical year in Division 2. Guildford 2 finished the match as 4½-3½ winners despite impressive wins from Patryk Stanisz, Chris Beckett and Stuart Robertson for Cambridge. Barbican meanwhile got back to winning ways on the Sunday against Blackthorne Russia, narrowly winning 4½-3½ to keep them on track for the Championship Pool.

Division 2A

Of all the teams in Division 2 this season, it's fair to say that one stands out amongst the crowd. Manx Liberty finished 2nd in Division 3N last year using a squad mixed with local Isle of Man players and the remains of SG Trier, a team that until last year played in the top flight of the German 'Schachbundesliga'.

The folding of SG Trier and an expanded Manx squad featuring many of the GMs and IMs who played for SG Trier last year, meant that there was certainly interest as to how strong a side Manx Liberty would put out. The team that did turn up for Manx Liberty managed two wins, both by a score of 5½-2½ over Wood Green Monarchs and the Sussex Martlets. Their strength was unsurprisingly at the top of the order where the top 5 boards scored 9/10 over the two days. The two draws denting that tally came from Adam Taylor for Wood Green as black against Polish grandmaster Lukasz Cyborowski and David Graham for Sussex against Miklos Galyas. Both matches were competitive however so although the Isle of Man outfit must surely be favourites to go up, there will be chances for their opponents throughout the season.

Both Wood Green and Sussex also matched each other on their other result of the weekend, with both sneaking past White Rose 2 in 4½-3½ victories. White Rose had the second highest average rating in the pool this weekend, but ended up with 2 losses showing yet again how unpredictable Division 2 is and their route to the promotion pool will now be that much tougher. Celtic Tigers won both of their matches to join Manx Liberty at the top of the table. They overcame Grantham Sharks 2 and King's Head with WGM Klaudia Kulon's 2/2 on top board being crucial. King's Head could only get a return of 1 match point on their return to the division after relegation from Division 1 last year as they were held to a 4-4 draw by Barbican Youth on the Saturday in their other game of the weekend. Barbican Youth are also waiting for their first win, as their Sunday match was a narrow loss to Grantham Sharks 2.

After being reprieved from relegation this year due to the withdrawal of Downend & Fishponds, Barbican Youth will presumably find themselves in another relegation battle this season as this year the division seems to be the toughest in recent memory.

Division 2b

As ever in Division 2, working out who the best teams are before the action kicks off is a nigh on impossible task. In fact, the close nature of this pool in particular could be seen on the Sunday, where every team managed at least $3\frac{1}{2}$ points. North East England had only a brief stay in Division 1, but they have a good chance of getting back there just as quickly as they left it.

They won both of their opening matches $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$; against West is Best 2 and Manchester Manticores. Anglian Avengers also look to be one of the strongest sides in the pool, as shown by their victory over Warwickshire Select 1 $6\frac{1}{2}$ - $1\frac{1}{2}$ despite the two teams having almost identical average ratings. Anglian Avengers were unable to beat Poisoned Pawns 1 on the Sunday however, drawing the match 4-4. Warwickshire Select 1 only just missed out on promotion last year, so they will have been disappointed with their first round loss to Anglian Avengers, but they did get off the mark by beating KJCA Kings in Round 2 due to their strength on the middle boards.

They still have one of the better squads in the division, so should be very much in the running for promotion again this year. KJCA Kings meanwhile managed to beat Poisoned Pawns on the Saturday and with a squad of talented juniors, they will not be an easy side for any team. The only side to remain pointless after the first weekend were Manchester Manticores who won every match last year in Division 3N. They did only lose both matches narrowly and did have one of the divisions better rating averages at the first weekend, but they will have to adapt to Division 2 life quickly next weekend.

Links

Results: Division 1a [Round 1](#) | [Round 2](#)

Results: Division 1b [Round 1](#) | [Round 2](#)

Results: Division 2a [Round 1](#) | [Round 2](#)

Results: Division 2b [Round 1](#) | [Round 2](#)

[Division 1 & 2 Tables from Weekend 1](#)