



4NCL Weekend 3, 11th-12th February, Press Report by Rhys Cumming

Division 1a

Cheddleton continued their unbeaten start to the season with two more wins, although they found themselves in their tightest match of the season so far against Barbican 1. Barbican were helped by a win with black for Alan Merry over Tomas Fodor, but with wins for Hamitevici, Ezra Kirk and a typically sacrificial win for Simon Williams over Peter Sowray (featured at the bottom of this report), Cheddleton's record was never really in doubt.

Barbican 1 would have expected to lose to Cheddleton, however they also lost to 3C's in what was on paper a very evenly matched contest. In part this could be seen in the results; as the match featured 7 draws. 3C's quality at the top showed through however as Stephen Gordon got the sole decisive result to give 3C's an important $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$ win. 3C's have now won all of their matches so far this season against teams not called Cheddleton and will have a very good shot at ensuring a top 4 finish. Despite their two losses, Barbican 1 look very likely to make it into the Championship Pool. In the final round they need to match the result of Blackthorne Russia, however given that Blackthorne Russia are playing 3C's, and Barbican are playing Celtic Tigers, one would expect Barbican to make it through without much trouble.

Guildford 2 meanwhile sealed their place in the promotion pool with 2 wins. They demolished King's Head before winning their crucial match against Blackthorne Russia. This pool seems to have a clear split between the 5 strongest teams and the 3 weakest teams. As mentioned, it looks as though Blackthorne Russia will be the odd ones out again, although their chances of being relegated are presumably very slim.

There was a shock amongst the teams battling it out for the bottom places. King's Head had looked to be the weakest of all the newly promoted teams so far this season, however they brought out a strengthened line-up for their all-important clash with Celtic Tigers and managed to run out $5\frac{1}{2}$ - $2\frac{1}{2}$ victors. This leaves all of Celtic Tigers, King's Head and South Wales Dragons on 2 match points, with 1 win and 1 loss each amongst their internal games and losses to all other teams. While none of them are doomed, they will all need a strong end of the season to still be in the top flight next year.

Division 1b

The 4 sides making their way through in Pool B are already decided: Guildford 1, White Rose, Wood Green HK and Grantham Sharks. Guildford 1 continued to rack up high game points despite playing two strong sides this weekend. They beat Wood Green 7-1 and Grantham Sharks $7\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ and have lost just 2 games all season. Their high game point difference will likely give them the tiebreaker in case of a draw in the inevitable final round

match against Cheddleton. White Rose also had two very big winning margins, although against somewhat weaker opposition than Guildford. They beat Barbican 2 by a score of $7\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$, and North East England 7-1.

The only team outside of the top 4 with a realistic chance of making the Championship Pool were last year's surprise outfit Oxford 1. In rounds 5 and 6 they had two crucial matches but lost them both; to Grantham Sharks and Wood Green. Their loss to Grantham was by just $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $3\frac{1}{2}$ and their efforts presumably weren't helped by an ill-timed phone default on board 6. Those wins by Wood Green and Grantham certified their place in the Championship Pool.



At the other end of the table, North East England won the crucial match between the two newly promoted sides in the pool, against Anglian Avengers by a relatively comfortable score-line of 5½-2½. Anglian Avengers also lost their other important game of the weekend to fellow strugglers Barbican 2. The result leaves Barbican

2 on 4 points where they sit along with Oxford 1. Those two sides play each other in Round 7, with the result being taken through to the Demotion Pool. While it is likely that both sides will remain in the division, the winner of the match will presumably be safe and the loser dragged into the relegation battle below.

Division 2a

Going into the weekend this was by far the tightest of the pools across the top two divisions, but in rounds 5 and 6 there was a degree of clarification. Sussex Martlets 1 were clear ahead of the pack going into the weekend. While they did guarantee their place in the promotion pool, it was more of a stumble across the finish than a glide. They lost their Saturday match 4½-3½ to The ADs, but got over the line thanks to a drawn match against Barbican Youth. West is Best 1 had a much more successful weekend as they won both of their matches by the narrowest of margins to join Sussex on 9 match points. That included a win in the South West derby against Downend & Fishponds. Grantham Sharks 2 also won both of their games to join Sussex and West is Best in the Promotion Pool.

The final place is still up for grabs however and could go to either The ADs or Barbican Youth. The AD's managed to beat leaders Sussex on the Saturday, but then surprisingly fell to bottom of the table CSC. It has been an odd season for The ADs having lost to the teams lying in 7th and 8th, while scoring 7 match points out of a possible 8 against all other sides. Due to the league structure, this makes their 7th round match against Downend & Fishponds vital. Should they win, they would take 5/6 match points through to the Promotion Pool. Should they lose however, and Barbican Youth win against Warwickshire Select 2, then they would take 0 points through to the Demotion Pool. Round 7 then will decide whether they are strong favourites for Promotion or in desperate danger of relegation. Their challengers for the Promotion Pool as mentioned are Barbican Youth, who rode their fair share of luck over the course of the weekend. Their top 4 hopes looked to be in ruin before a miraculous save on board 8 in a completely lost rook ending ensured a 4½-3½ win over Warwickshire Select 2. On the Sunday they salvaged a draw against the Sussex Martlets in a match that Sussex looked to be cruising.

Both Downend & Fishponds and Warwickshire Select 2 went into the weekend with serious chances of making the top 4, but both faded with two losses. CSC Dragons meanwhile did get off the mark against The ADs, but will need a sharp turnaround in form to survive the season.

Division 2b

With 1 match to go, the top 4 from Pool B are already set as there were no real surprises in rounds 5 and 6. The key match for determining the Pools was between Warwickshire Select 1 and Guildford 3. In the end Warwickshire ran out 5-3 winners despite being the rating underdogs. This confirmed that they would join Alba, Cambridge University and Spirit of Atticus going through to Pool C. Alba are now the only team in the 2nd division who have won all of their matches. Despite a slightly weakened line-up, they easily beat the two bottom sides in the pool: Bradford DCA Knights and KJCA Kings. Spirit of Atticus meanwhile had two much tougher tests. On the Saturday they faced Cambridge University, in a match with important promotion



implications, and it ultimately ended in a 4-4 draw. Their Sunday match was not much easier as they had to face Warwickshire Select 1. They won this match ensuring they will take 3/6 points through to the Promotion Pool. Since it looks as though Pool B is the tougher pool, Spirit of Atticus look to be in prime position to return to the top flight after their brief visit last year. Cambridge University meanwhile also beat Guildford 3 and will now get to face off with Alba in the last round of the pool.

At the other end of the table, White Rose 2 finally got after the mark having struggled since returning to the division after coming down from the top flight. They beat KJCA Kings on the Saturday, but couldn't get more than a draw against Bradford DCA Knights who themselves have been struggling to cope with the division, having come up from Division 3 North. Guildford 3 will presumably be fairly comfortable, but all of the other 3 teams will need good results when the pools merge in order to stay in the division.

White: Simon Williams (2448) (Cheddleton 1)

Black: Peter Sowray (2312) (Barbican 4NCL 1)

1. d4 g6 2. e4 d6 3. Nc3 Bg7 4. f4 a6 5. Nf3 b5 6. Bd3 Nd7 7. a4 b4 8. Ne2a5
9. O-O Ngf6 10. e5 Nd5 11. Ng5 h6 [Diagram]



12. Ne6 fxe6 13. Bxg6 Kf8 14. Ng3Kg8 15. Qh5 Rh7 16. Bxh7 Kxh7 17. f5 Nf8 18. Qf7 Nd7 19. Bxh6 Qg8
20. Qg6 Kh8 21. fxe6 Nf8 22. Bxg7 Qxg7 23. Rxf8 Qxf8 24. Rf1

The pgns for all games can be found here: www.4ncl.co.uk/downloads.htm