

As someone who has devoted much of his life to chess, it is difficult to think of a greater honour than to become the President of the English Chess Federation and I would respectfully call upon your support to help me in that endeavour. Until now, I have done what I could to further the cause of chess without stepping into the foreground. Now, I feel that I can do even more by moving out of the shadows and leading from the front.

I first saw the light of day many years ago at Looe in Cornwall – a fact that accounts for my lifelong, illogical loyalty to Plymouth Argyle! I was then taken on a world tour which lasted many years and has served to equip me with a cosmopolitan outlook on life which uniquely prepared me for a role such as this – although that was not the intention!

This meant that I was educated in Heliopolis, Plymouth, Aden, Ivybridge, Changi, London and Harrogate amongst other places. The two at which I dallied longest were Harrogate Grammar School and Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham Boys' School as it was then called and I am proud to note that I am included in the list of alumni on each of these schools' Wikipedia sites.

On leaving school I joined ICT – then a comparatively new Company - as a programmer and spent forty years in the computer industry before becoming a full time Stamp Dealer.

I started playing chess at Harrogate as did my namesake Raymond Edwards, who was always a better player than me, and followed this up with further wandering around the country, playing in all corners and many areas. My first competitive games were in Stockport and I played quite a lot of games for the North Thames Gas Board and Acton. I arrived in Staffordshire in 1968. To pursue my burgeoning interest in chess I joined the Victory Chess Club which was the largest in the area and somewhat apprehensively turned up at St. Matthew's Church Hall, Hartshill, for the first time on 10th May, having no thought at the time of eventually aspiring to the most prestigious position in chess in the country. I was made very welcome and soon settled down there. I vividly remember playing my first match in the Stoke League on 18th October when I took the black pieces against one of the Victory Club's stalwarts, schoolteacher Don Crawley, in an internal match playing for Victory A against Victory B. I remember that I narrowly lost and the reason given by the eagle-eyed club secretary, Laurie Landon, was over-cautious play.

From this somewhat inauspicious start, I set about getting involved in organisational matters and was soon controlling events (and playing and doing the refreshments at the same time). I also had an interest in grading and took opportunities when they arose to become a local grader and later the union grader for the MCCU through my computer expertise. At length, I was persuaded to take the arbiters' exam in the mid-1980s which I managed to pass without having to bribe the examiner. In 1988, I was appointed as Director of National grading for the BCF and in 1989 I started to act as an arbiter at the British Championship for the first time at Plymouth and have served in the same capacity on twenty subsequent occasions. I have been made an Honorary Life Vice President of the ECF and am a Vice President of the MCCU and of Staffordshire and I am President of the North Staffs League and also of the Cheddleton & Leek Chess Club. Now, with the next two generations of my family appearing on the Grading List, I could feel it was time to rest on my laurels – but, I have the urge to do more.

If I am fortunate enough to gain your approval and support, my aims would be few but significant and compelling.

First and foremost, I believe that the interests of the grassroots chess players should be paramount. To concentrate on the interests of the elite player at the expense of those of the grassroots player will eventually lead the Federation to disaster. That is not to say that the interests of the elite should be ignored – far from it – but the grassroots have been neglected for too long and that is the road to perdition.

Secondly, I want to re-examine the membership scheme. There is much that I like about this scheme but, to many players it may seem over-complicated and not sufficiently mindful of their needs. More effort must yet be made to discover and take notice of the opinions of the ordinary player as well as to have a system which is easier to administer by Congress and League organisers – especially those of the British Championship.

Thirdly, I want more autonomy for the various constituents of the ECF with less transferring of funds from one part to another. I feel that each part of the Federation be it the British Championships or Junior chess or any other should be self-financing and I would work towards making it so in cooperation with the Finance Director and Committee.

Finally, I have always understood that grades are meant to indicate a player's strength, not to show that he or she has been well behaved and played in the right events. Grading should not be used as a political tool and I also believe that there should be more cooperation between the ECF grader and the Scottish and Welsh graders to make sure that all a player's games are included in order that the grade is as accurate as possible.

I will always be a "hands-on" President and together I hope we can work to make the Federation into something even better than it is now.