

2011-12 Report from Lawrence Cooper Director of International Chess

Luke McShane took three notable scalps at the Tal Memorial in June defeating Levon Aronian, Vladimir Kramnik and Alexander Morozevich and finishing with four points against nine of the world's top players rated between 2738 and 2835. Only a last round loss to world number one Magnus Carlsen prevented him from possibly sharing first place. He was seconded by Peter Wells.

Gawain Jones qualified for the 2013 World Cup by virtue of his 2760 performance at the 2012 European Individual in Plovdiv, Bulgaria in March where a 4/4 start and five draws against higher rated and a last round win saw him claim one of the qualifying places.

Nigel Short won the Gibraltar Masters in January with a 2838 performance scoring 8/10 and winning on tiebreak from Hou Yifan. He played nine grandmasters including four over 2700 and finished ahead of fifty-nine other grandmasters. He then won the Thailand Open with 8/9 and a rating performance of 2768.

Gawain Jones and Stephen Gordon became joint English champions finishing on 9/11 at this year's British Championship with Gawain becoming British champion after winning a two game play-off. Jovanka Houska retained her British ladies title whilst one of her students, Radha Jain, made a welcome return to international chess and became British under eighteen girl champion. Marcus Harvey & William Foo shared the under eighteen title and James Adair became under twenty one champion. I would also like to personally thank Lara Barnes for performing such an excellent job as tournament organiser and hope she remains involved with the tournament for many years.

David Howell won the Leiden Chess Tournament Open in the Netherlands in July with a rating performance of 2750 and the 6th Wunsiedel Open in Germany in May with a 2702 performance.

Colin Crouch & Chris Ross won silver medals on boards one and two for the United Kingdom team at the International Braille Chess Olympiad in India in August and Chris was then part of the International Braille Chess Association team at the Olympiad scoring 5.5/8 as his team won the bronze medal in their rating band.

As mandated by ECF Council, I ensured that England fielded their strongest available teams in the European Team Championship in Greece from 3-11 November 2011 having secured £10,500 of outside funding to add to the budget provided by the ECF. Although the team of Michael Adams, Nigel Short, David Howell, Gawain Jones and Nick Pert finished below their seeding, Michael won gold medal on top board finishing off with a win against Vassily Ivanchuk whilst Gawain had a 2700+ performance. The women's team consisted of Jovanka Houska, Dagne Ciuksyte, Maria Yurenok (making her England debut), Kanwal Bhatia and Sarah Hegarty. Dagne top scored with 6/8. Glenn Flear returned as captain of the women's team for the first time since 2008.

Thanks to Ian Reynolds and eight other anonymous donors I was also able to field our strongest available open team at the 2012 Olympiad. With Luke McShane sadly unavailable the team was unchanged from 2011 although Gawain moved to board two with Nigel and David each dropping a board. Captained by Peter Wells for the first time since 2008 the team finished in equal ninth place out of one hundred and fifty-seven teams albeit they were placed seventeenth on tie-break. Nigel was top scorer with 7.5/10 and the team was in contention for medals after winning their first three matches and then being on eleven points out of fourteen. Sadly defeats in rounds eight and nine ended their medal hopes but two victories at the end meant they had achieved their best performance since 2008, when coincidentally, Peter was also captain.

Whilst the women's team didn't have any of their IMs playing this year, (Jovanka was taking a well earned rest after (I believe) thirteen successive appearances and Dagne had recently given birth), we were able to field one of our youngest teams for a long time with three players making their debuts. Anya Corke (born in 1990) scored fifty per cent on top board, Maria Yurenok followed up her England debut in 2011 by making her Olympiad debut and Sabrina Chevannes (born in 1986) made a long overdue return to the England team after an absence of five years and was actually England's leading percentage scorer in both teams after eight rounds before finishing with a very respectable 4.5/7. Sarah Hegarty (born in 1988) followed up her outstanding 2010 Olympiad debut by scoring 6.5/9 on board three whilst Kanwal Bhatia playing in her third consecutive Olympiad achieved a plus score. Stephen Gordon was captain and the team finished a very respectable 40th = (46th on tie-break) out of one hundred and twenty-seven teams.

The English event of 2011 was again The London Chess Classic organised by Malcolm Pein. Held at the fantastic London Olympia venue the top event pitted England's top four players against five of the world's best: Vishy Anand, Magnus Carlsen, Levon Aronian, Vladimir Kramnik and Hikaru Nakamura. Whilst Vladimir Kramnik won the event Luke McShane had a 2853 performance that was even more remarkable given he had returned to full time employment earlier in the year and hadn't played a tournament for nine months! Notable English performances in the open came from Lorin D'Costa who had a 2601 performance but sadly only played eight games so did not get a GM norm whilst Jovanka Houska had a 2573 performance but a last round loss meant she missed out on a GM norm. Dagne Ciuksyte was joint winner of the women's event with 7.5/9.

England was well represented at the 2012 World Junior with Yang-Fan Zhou, Callum Kilpatrick, William Jones, Henrik Stepanyan and Ravi Haria all competing in the boys/open event and Lateefah Messam-Sparks and Anna York-Andersen competing in the girls event. Mark Hebden and myself were coaches for the English contingent.

England achieved two junior medals, coincidentally both bronze medals in August in the under eight age group. First Ieysaa Bin-Suhayl in the EU Youth in Mureck, Austria and then Joshua Altman a couple of weeks later in the European Youth in Prague. Ravi Haria was in contention for a medal going into the last round of the 2011 World Youth but a last round draw with the player who subsequently took the gold medal meant he finished third equal but sixth on tie-break half a point behind the two joint winners. Yang-Fan Zhou also had a good performance, a round 8 loss put him out of medal contention but a last round win meant he finished in equal fifth place (sixth on tie-break).

Sabrina Chevannes was instrumental in organising junior matches between Norway and India at the London Chess Classic. The higher profile match, against India, resulted in a 11.5-6.5 victory to England with William Foo and Conor Murphy scoring 2/2, Peter Batchelor scored 1.5 and Yang-Fan Zhou, Sam Franklin, Isaac Sanders, Ravi Haria, Amy Hoare and Rohan Shiatis all scoring 1. The result was a big boost for English junior chess and those who played can be very proud of their performance.

Ameet Ghasi completed his third and final IM norm at the August e2e4 Gatwick International whilst Alex Holowczak qualified for first his FIDE Arbiter title and then his International Arbiter title in the same year! Jack Rudd also became a FIDE Arbiter. I had also forgotten until I checked the FIDE site that I had been awarded the title of International Organiser as recently as October 2011!

Sean Hewitt's e2-e4 FIDE rated events continue to grow from strength to strength providing many players and arbiters with rating and norm opportunities. It is hard to believe they have only been in existence for five years and it would be unthinkable should they disappear from our calendar. He found time to organise events in Amersham, Brighton, Buxton, Dublin, Gatwick, High Wycombe and Hinckley. He was even kind enough to allow me to host an England Wales women's match alongside Amersham that was very useful preparation for both countries in the build up to the Olympiad.

In closing, I would like to thank the following people for their help: Sabrina Chevannes, Sean Hewitt, Malcolm Pein (who assisted in arranging anonymous funding for the England team in 2011) and Ian Reynolds who helped find funding the England open team in 2012. I would also like to thank The John Robinson Trust for their support for this year's World Junior and Friends of Chess for their continued support of our amateur and female players. I wish my successor well for the future.