

A Discussion of the Counties Championship Rule Change Proposals

The NCCU has proposed two changes to the Counties Championship rules:

- (a) To provide an option for Counties to field a 12-player rather than a 16-player team in all sections of the National Stages.
- (b) To reduce the number of sections in the Championships from seven to six, with a grading difference of 25 points between each of the grading limited sections.

This paper seeks to discuss these proposals, and offer counter-proposals where appropriate.

The proposals as written

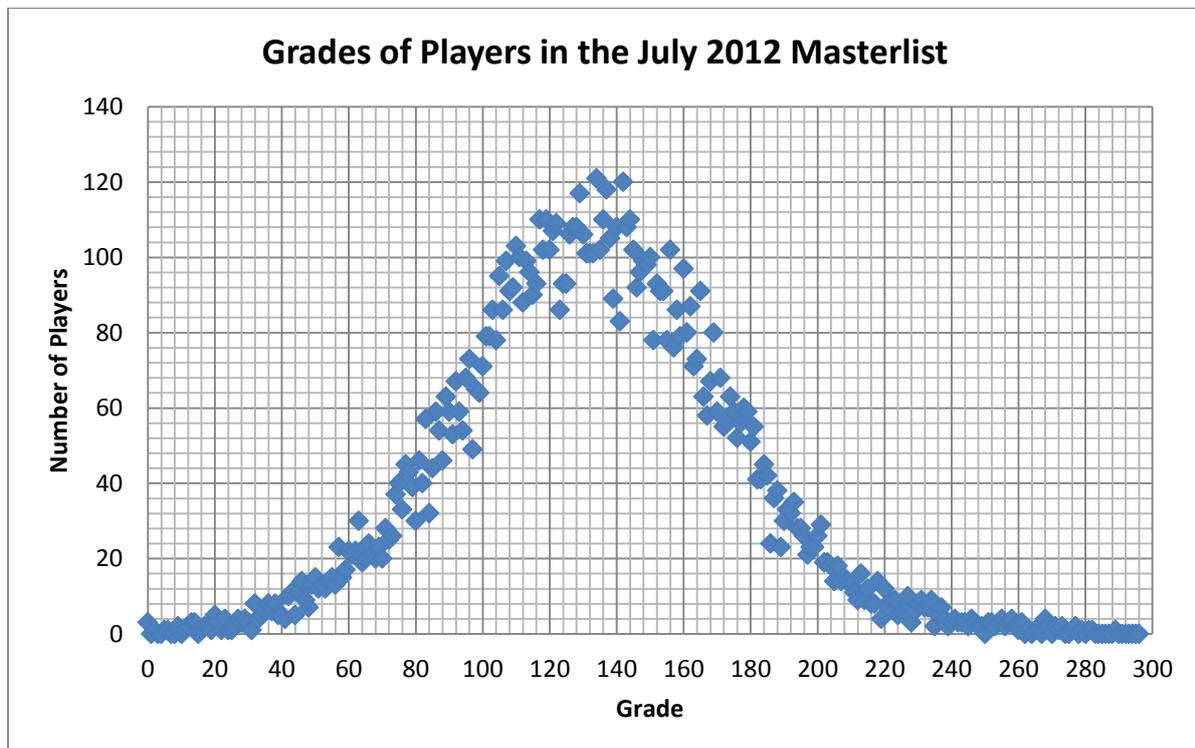
- (a) There is no way to provide an “option” for Counties to field a 12-player team. The rule would have to be written so that the team size for everybody was 12 boards, with the right for captains to agree to play over more boards if both captains agreed. At the moment, the rules specify 16 players for the top five sections.
- (b) This is very vague. We could do away with the Minor and keep five grade-restricted sections. I’m not entirely sure what the proposal is proposing, but its vagueness is probably reasonable to ensure the maximum likelihood of its success.

Statistics

I have done some statistics based on the January grading list, in a bid to determine whether the sections are fair.

Mean grade: 133

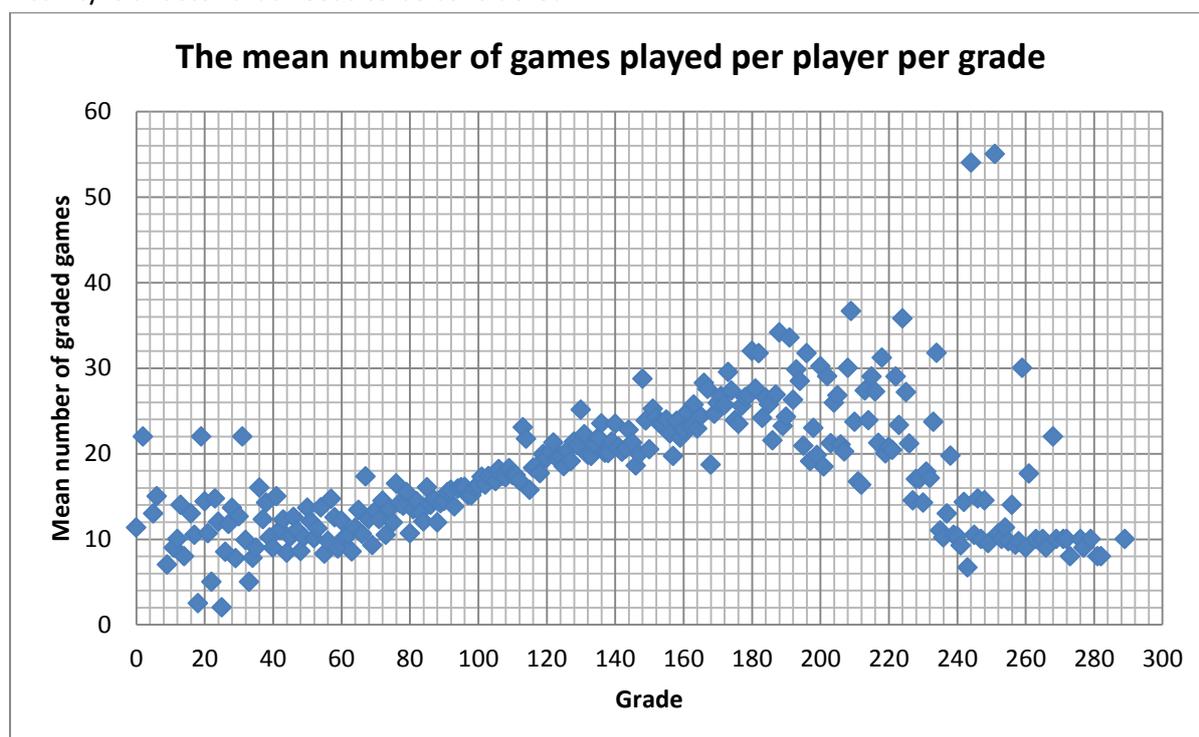
Median grade: 132



Note: I realise that this is discrete data, and that I should be using bar graphs. However, Microsoft Excel only allows bar graphs with fewer than 256 bars, so the only alternative was a scatter graph...

The graph is, roughly, normally distributed. This is what we'd expect to see. It shows that the highest number of potential players to pick from is in the 20-point band between 120-139, and it becomes more difficult in the 20-point boundaries deviating away from that. This is reflected in the MCCU, where most counties have an Open team, and thereafter, most teams are in the 120-139 section, and the number of teams decreases the further you are away from that.

Activity is a factor that needs to be considered.



This graph shows the mean number of games played per grade. So if there were 7 people with a grade of 100, and they played 70 games between them, then the point $(100, [70/7])$ was plotted. The peak of the curve here is much higher: It's at about a grade of 180, but it shows that apart from the 240+ bracket, activity tends to increase the higher the grade. In fact, the variance of activity increases substantially above 180. The 240+ bracket are mostly foreign GMs playing in English events: E.g. Hastings, Gibraltar, London Classic.

These graphs explain phenomena we see in the Championship:

- (1) The Under 100 section has lots of eligible players, but they are relatively inactive.
- (2) There are relatively few players over approximately 180, at which point activity in ECF-graded chess tails off. This perhaps explains why some county players prefer other events to the County Championship.

Counter-proposals for this meeting

Taking into account the two graphs above, I have come up with two counter-proposals. It's quite radical, but the above data doesn't suggest that the sections should be linearly separated.

The proposal:

For 2013/14, the following sections, with the following team sizes, should be used:

- (1) Open, 20 players
- (2) Minor, 16 players [the average grade of 180 is to be retained]
- (3) Under 170, 16 players
- (4) Under 140, 16 players
- (5) Under 120, 16 players

Each of the following paragraphs forms parts of the proposal, and their rationale:

(1) The Under 100 section is traditionally the section with the weakest support in terms of teams entering the Final Stage, and at Union level. I therefore propose that this section is removed, but to compensate for this, the number of boards for the Under 120 team is increased to 16.

(2) The Under 180 section struggles to gain the necessary level of support. Outside of the SCCU, it is very under-supported. WECU treat the Under 180 section as the division of choice for the weakest of their 1st teams. The MCCU – one of the bigger Unions – traditionally enters two teams to the section, both of which qualify for the Final Stage. I don't think it is a sound principle for teams to automatically qualify for the Final Stage before entering the Union stage. To compensate for the shift downwards in the grade boundary, I propose to increase the number of players in the Open to 20, while keeping the Minor at 16.

(2b) If it is decided that the Minor should be increased to 20 boards to tie in with the Open, then that's fine, but I would recommend lowering the mean grade for the team to 175.

In my opinion, it is easier to field larger teams and fewer of them, than smaller teams and more of them. With the former, each captain's contact base becomes larger, and so the job becomes a bit easier. Volunteers are increasingly sparse, and so requiring fewer of them would be a welcome development from that aspect.

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