

COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIPS

PROPOSAL BY THE SOUTHERN COUNTIES CHESS UNION

That E2.3 of the County Championship rules be deleted, and E4.1 be amended to read:

“Before the time fixed for the start of play the captains shall exchange team lists, with players arranged in **descending order of known current playing strength. ECF grades shall not be taken as indicating the order of current playing strength.** Any known defaults shall be placed on the lowest boards. The names of the players, their ECF membership numbers, their ECF grading reference numbers and their grades must be included on the Result Sheet.”

This reverses the change made for 2012-13 and reverts to the previously existing order-of-strength rule.¹

It needs to be said that last year’s change was not made by Council. It was made by the Board, or perhaps the Home Director, after a rushed consultation and a very close straw poll at the end of the April 2012 Council meeting. We opposed the change then because we thought it rigid and mechanical and a needless constraint on match captains’ freedom of judgment. We still think this, but it is not quite the reason for our proposal.

The old order-of-strength rule did not specify penalties for breach. That is the price you pay for a flexible rule. A mechanistic rule goes hand in hand with penalties, and last year’s change supplied some. Unfortunately they are flawed. Consider an imaginary case. A high-graded player plays below three others whom he outgrades by more than 10 points. Who is ineligible? The high-graded player, and he will be penalised. Now reverse the case. A low-graded player plays above three others who outgrade him by more than 10 points. Who is ineligible? The three players he leap-frogged, and the penalty is three times as great.

It cannot be right that symmetrical offences attract different penalties. So fix the penalties? This is not easy; at least we have found no satisfactory way. The 4NCL, whose 80-point rule is analogous to the ECF’s 10-point one, makes no attempt to specify penalties. It works because the 4NCL is in a position to forestall offences; but the County Championship Controller is not.

We are asking Council to make the choice that was made for it last year. We know opinion is divided. For ourselves, we prefer a flexible system to a mechanistic one whose rules do not work.

¹ As this rule only relates to the National stage, there is no reason why a change could not come into force for 2013/14.