

The President of the English Chess Federation should not only be a figurehead. He should have high level contacts both in business and politics, and use those to further the interests of all chessplayers, from club to national level.

I have those contacts and have used them to great effect in the past.

In 1983, after the FIDE Candidate semi-finals matches (Korchnoi-Kasparov and Smyslov-Ribli) were thrown into confusion by the refusal of the Soviets to let Kasparov play in the designated venue of Pasadena, I contacted Acorn Computers and persuaded them at very short notice to put up the necessary prize fund of 200,000 Sw Fr to hold the match in London. This was (at that time) the most important FIDE event ever to be held in the UK.

A few years later, I used my contacts to persuade the insurance company Eagle Star to pay a substantial annual stipend to finance Nigel Short's training and chess development. This, in a sense, was the model for the later highly successful funding of British Olympic athletes, though that used Lottery funds.

At the political level I have also been successful in utilizing top-level contacts. I persuaded George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to make the state rooms of 11 Downing Street available for the closing ceremony of the 2013 London Candidates Tournament. This accolade was highly appreciated not just by the FIDE officials, but also by the players themselves.

My political contacts are on both sides: Rachel Reeves, the Labour shadow secretary of state for work and pensions, joined me as opponent/interviewee in my radio series Across the Board. The BBC approached me in the first place to devise this series, the first broadcast chess programmes since the sad demise of The Mastergame and the first chess series on radio for over half a century. It was highly successful and the BBC have invited me to record a second series--which will be broadcast next month.

These radio programmes are part of my long-held aspiration to bring chess to a mass audience: it is an essential requirement for any President of the ECF to be able to increase public interest in chess. It is for the same reason that once a month that for the past six years I have contributed a full page about chess for the political and cultural magazine Standpoint.

Of course this wider public engagement with chess should start at grass roots and junior level. Hence I am part of the Chess in Schools and Communities programme, as one of a number of players from Pimlico chess club who have signed up to teach the game at a local school. ECF members will be reassured to learn that I received a clean DBS check! I also introduced to Chess in Schools and Communities an American financier friend resident in the UK; as a result he has now agreed to fund this in schools in Hastings--which has been so associated with chess historically, and which cries out for revival.

Finally, as you all are, I am active at club level--representing Lewes in the Mid-Sussex League and Pimlico in the Central London League. Over the past two years I have also travelled abroad to take part in the Gibraltar Open and the Thai Open, demonstrating my continued deep passion for the game we all love.