

Small is beautiful

John Hennessy

Northenden Chess Club in south Manchester (originally Sale CC), was given the name around two years ago by the social club that welcomed us with open arms and provided an exceptional venue that is perfect for chess.

We are a small club (around 20 members) and we are very supportive of each other. We all love chess and have a real mix of gradings. Importantly we have successfully attracted a range of positive-minded players.

I would not like the club to be so big that people feel they are anonymous. Grading is not the main criterion for joining Northenden. We want good people who love chess. We organize a Christmas nibbles evening on a club night and a meal at our AGM where decisions go to a vote, members are made to feel equally important.

We established a bright and happy website (northendenchessclub.com) with a blog entry every two months and have regular communication via a WhatsApp group. But despite this, we felt something was missing.

In October, on our way to a charity chess tournament in Leeds, myself and three Northenden members discussed having a go at putting on a tournament. We felt it would be good for us, the social club and provide a boost for local chess. And by the time the train arrived at Leeds, we were ready to start organising.

We had been to excellent local tournaments run by great local clubs like Stockport and Ashton. We decided on five-minute Blitz without increments format to be held on the Saturday before Christmas.

People at the Club rallied round and we drew up plans. I was conscious of the need to separate club members from playing each other. We also agreed on having team and individual prizes.

As this was our first ever tournament, we decided to invite just three other clubs who sent four players each so we had four teams of four, all play all (except players on their own team). The total was 12 matches in the day from 1pm to around 5pm with two breaks of 30 minutes each. And the entry fee was a very reasonable £10 that covered a trophy for the winning team and two cash prizes for best individual performances.

It worked like digital clockwork with the trophy being decided on a tie-break and everyone had a wonderful time, it was brilliant. Certainly the event gave us the green light for future events. The only major change we will make – apart from making it bigger and better – is to have upper and lower grading limits to create more competition and opportunity.

Togetherness is key in a small chess club and we look after each other. We could not have put on the Christmas Blitz if it had not been the help of Jamie Thompson who sorted the advertising leaflet and software, Neil Oddie who ran the results and scores service, Steve Kelly who sourced a projector and Khalid Khokar who was our runner and general trouble-shooter.

Northenden finished third out of four but that is of little importance. We gave people a new tournament and we will repeat it this year and add to it with something different in April or May. Thanks also to Marple, East Cheshire and Stockport CCs along with our own four of Jamie Thompson, Liam Loughheed, Eddie Hunt and Harry Attack whose participation ensured an excellent competition.

So my message to chess lovers is that a small club can be a great club. A big heart, warm welcome and a love of chess is the starting point. Add a venue you treat with respect, a website, WhatsApp group, a democratic, positive ethos, some good food and you are well on your way to success.

If we can do it, so can you.

Happy New Year!

The Northenden Club night is on Mondays from 7pm at Northenden Social Club, 408-412 Palatine Road, Manchester, M22 4JT. Further details from John Hennessy at jghlang@gmail.com