

Tim Wall – Director of Home Chess

My background

I am an experienced player, coach, journalist and organiser who has devoted some 15 years of my working life to chess.

My playing experience includes everything from winning the British Under 16 in 1982 to many seasons of club, league and county chess, as well as international events. In my twenties, I taught chess in Newcastle schools and then started a series of international tournaments in my native North East.

In the late 1990s, I worked as Editor of British Chess Magazine, and later I worked as a journalist and editor in Azerbaijan and Moscow, where I immersed myself in the local chess scene.

Since my return to Newcastle in 2016, I have helped my club, Forest Hall, become Northern Counties Club Champions; restarted the Northumbria Masters, providing international opportunities for English juniors; and coached and mentored several leading juniors, including 12-year-old FM Yichen Han.

I have been a regular coach at the ECF Academy and in European and World junior events. Currently, I am England Teams manager in the European Online Youth Championships.

Personally, it has also been a great pleasure to see my children take up the game, with my son, John, playing for the England Under 14 Team in the Glorney Gilbert International.

Current and future challenges

I am keenly aware of the practical difficulties currently faced by many clubs throughout the country.

During lockdown, I have played my part in keeping the local chess community together, holding weekly online club tournaments, Zoom call chats and quiz nights.

This summer, as our club has taken its first tentative steps towards restarting, we were evicted from our premises due to Covid restrictions. With a little effort we managed to find a better venue – also free of charge, but twice the size and able to accommodate all our members while observing social distancing.

The reason I am standing for Director of Home Chess is that I believe strongly that the ECF must do whatever it can to help get chess back on its feet. The chess community faces the most serious challenge it has faced in my lifetime: How to safely keep chess going, both online and over-the-board (OTB) where possible, and to revive the game so that we can grow in the future.

Restarting OTB chess, developing online chess so that it complements our existing clubs and congresses, and trying out new ways of playing – such as ‘hybrid’ chess, where small groups of people play online matches and tournaments in the same venue, under fair play supervision – will all be extremely tough challenges over the months (and possibly years) ahead.

As director, I would devote myself unstintingly to working with Board colleagues, Home Chess officers, arbiters, national and local organisers, and club and congress players to get chess going again. I am confident we can revive the game at all levels.

As an immediate practical measure, I have proposed that the ECF set up a Working Group of organisers and arbiters, plus medical and health & safety professionals, to advise clubs and congresses on ways to get restarted.

It is difficult to predict what format this coming year’s Counties Championships, National Club Championships and British Championships will take, but we should plan as flexibly as possible.

The successful online 4NCL and Counties Championships have shown that there is a keen appetite for online team events, but OTB chess remains the key to the ECF’s membership model and is the glue that holds the chess community together, competitively and socially.

In the past, perhaps there was a feeling that the ECF only needed to concern itself with big events and grading. Now I think there is a growing realisation that we should be involved in all forms of chess, social and competitive, to grow the game.