

Appendix: Report by Director of International Chess Malcolm Pein

2021-2022 was a busy year for International Chess because of the timing of two international team events in the same period. In November 2021, with international chess still heavily affected by Covid and many players out of practice, England played in the European Team Championships in Slovenia. Although the Open team's final standing was diminished by a 1.5-2.5 last round defeat by Russia, there were two notable successes. Ravi Haria became our latest GM by inching over 2500 at the event and Gawain Jones had a storming tournament, scoring an unbeaten 5.5/7 for a 2782 performance and securing the silver medal on Board 3.



Lack of player availability left our Women's team depleted and all were completely out of practice - one hadn't played for years! - and it wasn't a complete surprise when they lost the first six matches and only won an individual game in round five.

I want to put on record my gratitude to our Director of Events Shohreh Bayat for agreeing to play after a long break from chess and she scored a creditable 3.5/7, with Zoe Varney also making her debut with 3.5/6. On top board, Katarzyna Toma was out of practice, and this was reflected in her losing her first four games and then winning four in a row. After winning the last three matches, the team ended almost exactly in line with their seeding.

The Chess Olympiad, moved at short notice from Moscow to Chennai, was a logistical nightmare with visas and flights. Huge thanks are due to the Director of Women's Chess Aga Milewska for volunteering to stand for many hours at Indian visa offices.

After weeks of frantic activity, nearly everyone made it to Chennai on time, but we had to do without our board 3 Lan Yao for a couple of rounds due to the delays. Lan made a tremendous debut and I hope our new British Women's Champion is a fixture of the team for many years to come. It was nice to have a Women's team that was very competitive and started with a high seeding, which meant relatively easy early pairings. The team's final result does not reflect the fact that England came quite close to defeating India, and the Armenian captain had some anxious moments too. Despite only being a part time player, Jovanka Houska made a positive score on board one.



I was delighted with the performance of the Open team, who it should be remembered have only two full time players out of five. The standout performance was that of David Howell who scored 7.5/8 and won a gold medal for individual performance on board three. The team also has a relatively high average age, and it was youth that dominated the 11-round event with the Uzbek teenagers and Indian prodigies finishing in gold and bronze medal positions respectively. I must pay tribute to Mickey Adams who went through undefeated on top board and played 10 games.



England started with four straight match wins which included a drubbing of a strong Serbian team 3.5-0.5, and it could easily have been 4-0. In round five we were outplayed by a superb Armenian team who still took silver despite the migration of Levon Aronian to the USA. After some ups and downs, a last round victory over Moldova would have seen us finish fifth ahead of the top seeds USA or a 2-2 draw would have placed us seventh or eighth.

In the end Luke McShane's big advantage disappeared in the time scramble and we lost the match but still finished in line with seeding. Arriving a couple of days early clearly helped

the performance of the team and I'm indebted to the generosity of our performance coach Benjamin Portheault who assisted us gratis and who was able to help many of our players in a variety of ways. Many of the extra costs were covered by individual sponsors, to whom I would like to record my thanks.

Nearer to home it was good to see a revival of closed international tournaments and thanks to the efforts of the 4NCL, Lawrence Cooper, Adam Roof and particularly Tim Wall there more norm opportunities than in previous years. In August Harry Grieve secured a GM norm by winning the British. Earlier in the summer Brandon Clark won an open tournament in Spain having earlier won an all-play-all tournament in Hamburg and I hope that Brandon and Marcus Harvey too can push on and swell the ranks of English GMs.

I managed to run a scaled-down London Chess Classic in December and it was an honour to be able to have Boris Gelfand with us, but it was a shame that the shadow of Covid hung over the event and affected attendance. England's Michael Adams, Luke McShane and Gawain Jones lost narrowly to the Rest of the World team of Gelfand, Nikita Vitiugov and Maxime Lagarde in the main event which unusually was a Scheveningen tournament (we haven't had one of those for some time).

David Howell wasn't at the Classic, but did play at the FIDE Grand Swiss in Riga at the end of the autumn - and how well he did. While Alireza Firouzja and Fabiano Caruana qualified for the Candidates, David was right up there, sharing the lead with those two superstars with two to play. He was defeated by Caruana in round 5, then won four games in a row, a staggering performance in such a strong tournament. Those wins were over Nodirbek Yakubboev, Ruslan Ponomarev, Andrey Esipenko and Anton Korobov. David was then outplayed by Firouzja and held by Vincent Keymer, but his 7/11 and 2764 performance will live long in the memory.



As our enduring weakness has been the lack of talent coming through, I'm delighted to report that at the very end of August, Shreyas Royal got over 2400 for the first time at the age of 14. In addition, as I'm sure my colleague Alex Holowczak has written elsewhere, England now has two world #1 ranked seven-year-olds and two eight-year olds ranked second and 4th respectively. it's essential that these talents and others we have at the

younger age groups are all nurtured and that the money be found to support them and their development. The John Robinson Youth Trust and Chess Trust will be essential in that regard. The taps should be opened wide while we have this almost unprecedented opportunity.

At the other end of the age scale we should celebrate the triple gold success of our Open 50+, Open 65+ and Women's 50+ teams at the World Senior Teams held at Acqui Terme, Italy in July. I was delighted to be able to pop in and watch the very competitive match between England 1 and England 2 when Glenn Flear took Mickey to the brink of defeat. England had by far the biggest delegation and this unprecedented success is due largely to the initiative and huge amount of work – including fund-raising - put in by the acting Manager of Senior Chess IM Nigel Povah, who worked in tandem with Stewart Reuben. We look forward to more success at Dresden in November for the European Championships and indeed there has already been further success with Terry Chapman finishing second in the European Senior 65+ Championship in Lublin, where Tony Stebbings claimed bronze. We have started a roll of honour section on the ECF website, and look forward to more entries in 2022-23.

Malcolm Pein
2 September 2022