

## WELSH CHESS PREMIER LEAGUE 2016/17

Paul Hatchett May 2017

This year there were six entries in the most important team tournament in Wales, a reduction of one from the previous year. This was due to the apparent move of players from the defunct East Glamorgan Nomads to The Vale. The competition had been won for the last two seasons by Abergavenny with Cardigan in second position. Those two teams were likely to be favourites again although White Knights are always strong. The new strengthened Vale team looked impressive on paper. This left Nidum and Cardiff, the latter deciding to play juniors on the bottom boards.

With only five rounds of matches, it was decided that the first two would be on a home and away basis with the last three at a central venue. This seemed to work well with only one default game. The central venue allows the best players in the country to meet, chat and look at each other's games. It does mean a lot of travel for a team like Cardigan though.

### *Round 1 – October 2016*

So much for predictions! The top teams for the last two years both go down with the biggest surprise perhaps the demise of Abergavenny to The Vale despite the latter missing their top player, Tim Kett. In fact, it is fair to say that all the teams were missing some players when you looked at the people registered.

The Vale			Abergavenny		
2085	Nigel Ralphs	0	1	Charles Morris	2194
2069	Lee Davis	1	0	Lloyd Powell	2108
2065	Pete Heaven	0.5	0.5	Frank May	2094
2064	Ben Thomas	1	0	Douglas Spencer	2011
1992	Robert Taylor	0.5	0.5	Mark Adams	1965
2001	James Thomas	1	0	David Llewellyn	1942
		4	2		

(All grades are WCU which takes precedence in WCPL)

Abergavenny were without Sven Zeidler but still looked strong on grades. Charles won a pawn coming out of the opening and another going into the ending. Board 2 was decided by a blunder when the Abergavenny player appeared to be winning comfortably. This was probably the important moment as both the Thomas boys had good wins to put The Vale in a strong position.

Nidum			Cardigan		
2068	Robert Saunders	0.5	0.5	Howard Williams	2364
2071	Craig Evans	1	0	Iolo Jones	2226
2033	Andrew Gibbons	1	0	Rudy van Kemenade	2051
1961	Robert Moore	1	0	Tony Haigh	1913
1902	Chris Sims	0.5	0.5	Adam Watkin-Jones	1987
1888	Hywel Griffiths	0	1	Matthew Francis	1690
		4	2		

Board 1 was a complex but short draw. Rudy played too loosely and even giving up his queen failed to stop checkmate. Moore v Haigh was messy with the Swansea player coming through in the end. However, game of the whole round was probably the effort by Craig Evans against one of the hardest players in Wales to beat. Iolo is an excellent ending player so it is always a good idea to stop him getting there in the first place!

White Knights			Cardiff		
2099	Jason Garcia	0	1	Tom Brown	2161
2020	Peter Bevan	0	1	Paul Hatchett	2109
1996	Nicholas Evans	0.5	0.5	Derek Jones	2026
1952	Adam May	0.5	0.5	Shayanna Sivarajasingam	1824
1824	David Buttell	0.5	0.5	Venetia Sivarajasingam	1842
1807	Keith Downey	1	0	Default	
		2.5	4.5		

It is fair to say that Cardiff travelled with little hope to Llanelli as, unfortunately, a last minute circumstance meant that it was not possible to get a full team. Walter Braun had left for England and the next top two highest graded players were not available. However, the mood lifted a little when the team from White Knights showed up at the Conservative Club with no Strugnell, Hewitt or Young. The quickly improving Sivarajasingam sisters would be included in all matches, when available. This provided valuable experience of playing in the top league in Wales. However, it was unknown how they would cope despite their obvious talent and tenacity.

Wins on the top boards may appear decisive but it was Shayanna's amazing rescue of a terrible position which swung the day to the East Walians. It was clear already that the juniors were an asset, not a liability.

*Round 2 – January 2017*

<b>Cardiff</b>			<b>The Vale</b>		
2140	Alex Bullen	1	0	Tim Kett	2239
2137	Tom Brown	1	0	Nigel Ralphs	2130
2083	Joe Fathallah	0.5	0.5	Lee Davis	2074
2032	Derek Jones	1	0	Pete Heaven	2097
1744	Venetia Sivarajasingam	0	1	Ben Thomas	2027
1841	Shayanna Sivarajasingam	1	0	Robert Taylor	1944
		4.5	1.5		

Both teams were stronger for the second round after winning their first matches. Cardiff won convincingly on four of the boards with only Ben Thomas obtaining his second win as compensation. Alex Bullen's played particularly well again using the Caro Kann very effectively.

It is worth noting perhaps that this Cardiff team was far younger on average compared with the usual WCPL fare. Perhaps, youth is the best policy.

<b>Abergavenny</b>			<b>Nidum</b>		
2246	Sven Zeidler	0.5	0.5	Robert Saunders	2076
2087	Frank May	0.5	0.5	Andrew Gibbons	2026
2000	Douglas Spencer	0.5	0.5	Craig Evans	2086
1974	Matthew Parry	0.5	0.5	Matthew Davies	2026
2003	John Waterfield	0.5	0.5	Gareth Yeo	1997
1959	Mark Adams	1	0	Chris Sims	1883
		3.5	2.5		

The other winning team from the first round came up against Abergavenny. Most of the games were very even although it is perhaps unusual for the wild Blackmar-Diemer to be drawn after 13 moves (Evans v Spencer). The other games showed more fight, especially on the top boards. The decisive game showed Chris Sims using a familiar bishop sacrifice on h3 in the Scandanavian. When things did not go as planned, he threw more wood on the fire. Sadly, this did not work and Abergavenny ran out narrow winners in the match as a result.

Cardigan			White Knights		
2342	Howard Williams	0	1	Carl Strugnell	2242
2219	Iolo Jones	1	0	Bill Hewitt	2145
2168	Gerry Heap	0	1	Alan Young	2105
2009	Rudy van Kemenade	0	1	Jason Garcia	2100
1960	Adam Watkin-Jones	0	1	Adam May	2006
1903	Tony Haigh	0.5	0.5	Peter Bevan	1986
		1.5	4.5		

Both Cardigan and White Knights came out with virtually their strongest possible teams and a close battle was expected. What happened was a very one sided encounter with only Iolo Jones and Tony Haigh scoring for Cardigan. On a personal level, I was sad to see an Alekhine Defence getting squashed on board 1. Board 3 ably demonstrated the power of the two bishops in a Scheveningen.

So, after two rounds only Cardiff had a 100% record with Cardigan yet to score. The other teams had one win each.

### *Round 3 – March 2017*

All the teams got together in Pencoed with everything still to play for. Cardiff played bottom side Cardigan and were finally able to bring out the four top boards available with the two pre-selected juniors. The match was very close indeed:

Cardigan			Cardiff		
2342	Howard Williams	0.5	0.5	Grzegorz Toczek	2265
2219	Iolo Jones	0.5	0.5	Alex Bullen	2140
2168	Gerry Heap	0.5	0.5	Tom Brown	2137
2009	Rudy van Kemenade	0	1	Paul Hatchett	2110
1903	Tony Haigh	1	0	Venetia Sivarajasingam	1744
1768	Adam Robinson	0	1	Shayanna Sivarajasingam	1841
		2.5	3.5		

Howard came under tremendous pressure in an ending and was perhaps fortunate to draw. Rudy lost control of the one open file and that ultimately cost a pawn and the game. Shayanna won a piece very quickly and the game did not last long. As the rest of the Cardiff loyalty ran for home, it was left to Alex Bullen to defend an ending a pawn down against the remorseless Iolo Jones. A draw was required to achieve the win. This was finally achieved when the difficult theoretical ending, King versus King was reached after 80 moves.

<b>Nidum</b>			<b>The Vale</b>		
2074	Adam Musson	1	0	Nigel Ralphs	2130
2076	Robert Saunders	0.5	0.5	Lee Davis	2074
2026	Andrew Gibbons	0.5	0.5	Pete Heaven	2097
1997	Gareth Yeo	0	1	Sam Jukes	18202
2026	Matthew Davies	1	0	Neil Stuart	1718
1923	Mark Evans	1	0	Stephen Bonutto	1636
		4	2		

A weakened Vale side were not strong enough for a consistent Nidum team, especially on the bottom two boards. Sam Jukes effort against a higher rated player underlined how much improvement he has made recently

<b>White Knights</b>			<b>Abergavenny</b>		
2242	Carl Strugnell	0	1	Charles Morris	2153
2145	Bill Hewitt	0.5	0.5	Frank May	2087
2105	Alan Young	1	0	Douglas Spencer	2000
2006	Adam May	0.5	0.5	Mark Adams	1959
2058	Nicholas Evans	0.5	0.5	John Waterfield	2003
1986	Peter Bevan	1	0	David Llewellyn	1923
		3.5	2.5		

A close heavyweight encounter gave victory to White Knights. They must have rued fielding a weakened team in round 1 where a win against Cardiff would have now given them a 100% record. As it is, Alan Young produced his second win in a row, again showing the power of a bishop in an ending. Peter Bevan won an exciting and complex game with his king running to the fifth rank chased by black's queen and rook.

With two rounds left the table looked like this:

1 Cardiff 6pts

2 = Nidum and White Knights 4pts

4= Vale and Abergavenny 2pts

6 Cardigan 0 pts

With Cardiff due to play Abergavenny and Nidum whilst Nidum having to meet White Knights in Round 5, it was still an open race but it was almost certain that the title was in the hands of the top 3. The demise of Cardigan was difficult to explain.

#### *Round 4 – April 2017*

The day after April Fool's day found the players meeting in Merthyr. Would Cardiff be able to continue the 100% record?

<b>Cardiff</b>			<b>Abergavenny</b>		
2140	Alex Bullen	1	0	Frank May	2087
2137	Tom Brown	1	0	Matthew Parry	1974
2110	Paul Hatchett	0.5	0.5	John Waterfield	2003
2083	Joe Fathallah	0.5	0.5	Richard Miles	1995
2081	David Roberts	0.5	0.5	David Llewellyn	1923
2032	Derek Jones	0.5	0.5	Chris Dixon	1810
		4	2		

No Charles Morris, Lloyd Powell or Sven Zeidler for the reigning champions probably was critical as the top two boards for Cardiff continued their excellent form. The juniors were not available and the substitutes were suitably solid in what turned out to be a comfortable victory.

<b>White Knights</b>			<b>Nidum</b>		
2145	Bill Hewitt	0.5	0.5	Adam Musson	2074
2105	Alan Young	0	1	Robert Saunders	2076
2100	Jason Garcia	0	1	Craig Evans	2086
2006	Adam May	0.5	0.5	Matthew Davies	2026
1986	Peter Bevan	0.5	0.5	Chris Sims	1883
1811	David Buttell	1	0	Hywel Griffiths	1874
		2.5	3.5		

This result left open a potentially exciting finale between Cardiff and Nidum. However, the match should really have gone the other way as Alan Young bravely sacrificed against Robert Saunders but, unfortunately, missed a mate in two.

Cardigan			The Vale		
2342	Howard Williams	0	1	Tim Kett	2239
2219	Iolo Jones	0.5	0.5	Nigel Ralphs	2130
2168	Gerry Heap	0.5	0.5	Lee Davis	2074
2009	Rudy van Kemenade	1	0	Pete Heaven	2097
1903	Tony Haigh	0	1	Sam Jukes	1802
1758	Martin Jones	1	0	Stephen Benutto	1636
		3	3		

It was honours even for two teams towards the bottom of the table. Howard tried the Berlin Defence against Tim but the latter kept it tight. A sort of Steinitz arose and when the many times Welsh Champion tried to break open the position, Tim took advantage and obtained a winning ending which he duly converted. Rudy took advantage of the white pieces, which he had in all five matches, to open his account. Under significant pressure, Pete Heaven could not stop his kingside attack.

Another advantage of playing all the matches together was shown when I had chance to reminisce about getting drunk with Cardigan's board 6, and two others, some thirty years previously. The reason for the inebriation was Haverfordwest's victory over Cardigan in the Mid Wales League!

### *Round 5 – May 2017*

The finale of the season had some in-built potential excitement. If Nidum could beat Cardiff by at least 4 points to 2 then the title would go west. Anything less than this and Cardiff would win.

Nidum			Cardiff		
2074	Adam Musson	0	1	Grzegorz Toczek	2265
2076	Robert Saunders	0	1	Alex Bullen	2140
2026	Matthew Davies	0	1	Tom Brown	2137
1997	Craig Evans	0.5	0.5	Paul Hatchett	2110
2026	Alan Bennett	1	0	Derek Jones	2032
1923	Glyn Sinnett	0.5	0.5	Venetia Sivarajasingam	1744
		2	4		

It was probably crucial that Cardiff could put out the top four boards used in the season on the final day. A 3-0 result on the top half comfortably confirmed a clean sweep for the capital. Adam dropped a piece to a simple tactic early on board 1. Alex ground out a good technical win on the queenside

whilst controlling Robert's activity on the other wing. I won a pawn but after some poor form in the Welsh Championship and 4NCL, I quickly offered a draw with one eye on the match score. Craig waited until Glyn took a draw a pawn up against Venetia before accepting that the title was out of reach.

This left the captain to show his attacking skills smashing through on the kingside after sacrificing more than one pawn.

The Vale			White Knights		
2239	Tim Kett	0	1	Carl Strugnell	2242
2130	Nigel Ralphs	1	0	Alan Young	2105
2074	Lee Davis	0.5	0.5	Jason Garcia	2100
2097	Pete Heaven	0.5	0.5	Adam May	2006
1802	Sam Jukes	0	1	Peter Bevan	1986
1636	Stephen Bonutto	0	1	David Buttell	1811
		2	4		

White Knights leapfrogged Nidum on game points after a good win against The Vale. Carl won an exciting game against Tim to follow on from his IM norm in Ireland. The match result should probably been more one-sided but the board two result swung around completely due to time trouble.

Abergavenny			Cardigan		
2087	Frank May	0.5	0.5	Howard Williams	2342
2153	Charles Morris	0.5	0.5	Iolo Jones	2219
2003	John Waterfield	0.5	0.5	Rudy van Kemenade	2009
1923	David Llewellyn	0.5	0.5	Adam Watkin-Jones	1960
1959	Mark Adams	0.5	0.5	Tony Haigh	1903
1810	Chris Dixon	0.5	0.5	Julie van Kemenade	1743
		3	3		

All I shall say is that games were, in some cases, more exciting than the bare match score shows!



### *Final Table*

<b>Team</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>GP</b>
<b>Cardiff</b>	5	5	0	0	10	19.5
White Knights	5	3	0	2	6	17
Nidum	5	3	0	2	6	16
Abergavenny	5	1	1	3	3	13
The Vale	5	1	1	3	3	12.5
Cardigan	5	0	2	3	2	12

The final table seems to show that Cardiff dominated the season and were not really in trouble after perhaps getting away with defaulting against White Knights on the first day. The Sivarajasingam sisters performed well and the top four boards did not lose a game. Alex Bullen (3.5/4) and Tom Brown (4.5/5) were outstanding.

All the games are available to download on the WCU website in the games section.

Thanks should be given to Kevin for his organisation and all that helped set up and act as arbiters in the league this year.