

## **2017-8 4NCL Report**

### **Rhyfelwyr Essyllwg**

Rhyfelwyr Essyllwg approached their 9<sup>th</sup> season in the 4NCL with some trepidation. 2016-7 had seen us avoid relegation only in the last game of the 11<sup>th</sup> and final match – incidentally the only match we won all season.

#### **Weekend 1**

The bad luck that had dogged us in the previous season was clearly absent as we got off to a flying start. The highly rated Leeds University Old Boys' team were first on the menu. We lulled them into a false sense of security by donating several better and won positions before Tom Brown, Paul Hatchett and John Trev, the latter in a fiercely complex game (the result of which apparently was 'never in doubt'), all fought back to win to secure the match 4-2. Nigel Ralphs was also under pressure on Board 1 but expertly held his FM opponent to a draw two pawns down in an opposite coloured bishop endgame.

An even game was expected against Hackney the following day. Tom was again under the cosh but defended valiantly to draw. My game was looking decidedly dicey. Not only 2 pawns down but with a computer evaluation of -7 as I couldn't move any of my pieces, it was a surprising turn of events when my opponent resigned 4 moves later. Bill Hewitt diverged from the team's weekend strategy by getting a better position out of the opening and converting efficiently whilst Paul completed our only double win of the weekend to clinch victory 3.5-2.5 and a position at the top of the table.

#### **Weekend 2**

Saturday saw us up against the Division 3 favourites Barnet Knights 1. They were the highest rated team in either Div 3 pool by some margin and ended the season winning nine of their 11 matches, many comprehensively. We pushed them to the limit though and the match came down to one move. Nigel was playing quite possibly the Rhyfelwyr game of the season against CM Thomas Villiers, a dangerous 2200 FIDE player. If this had been a match from Nigel's boxing days, the referee would have stepped in around move 30 so completely was black being outplayed. However, his opponent crawled off the canvas and delivered a sucker punch one move before the bell rang for move 40. An unfortunate defeat 3.5-2.5.

On the Sunday we faced The Full Ponty. Although we started as favourites in the match, we were very lucky to escape with a draw, the decisive factor being a slip by Dave Perrett on the last move before the time control in a drawn pawn ending. A 3-3 result; Welsh bragging rights deferred.

### **Weekend 3**

The prospect of promotion, which burned so brightly after weekend 1, was all but extinguished in our first match of this weekend. We were up against fellow promotion wannabes, the consistently strong Wessex team. In a reversal of fortune from our first match Nigel, Peter Bevan and Trev all built up strong positions but we only managed  $\frac{1}{2}$  a point from these 3 games when their opponents all rather unsportingly decided to play several strong moves in a row.

The following day, we had possibly our worst day of the season with Peter B being the solitary winner in a match against Anglian Avengers 2, a team we comfortably outrated. With half the team taking the 'hangover-draw' route to an easy day, it was left to Nigel to play more moves than the three of us combined in an effort to win the match. Despite being better for most of the game, he was unable to break his opponent down and the match was drawn.

### **Weekend 4**

By drafting in Adam Musson for the pivotal round 7 game, we fielded our strongest team of the season to date. However, our opponents, Cambridge University 2, also had their eyes on making the promotion pool and put out a strong team, after fielding shadow teams for the first 2 weekends. A draw in this match would see us into the promotion pool whilst any defeat and we would need to rely on other results.

After a few early draws and Trev heading for defeat, we needed 1.5 out of 2 from Adam and Tom on the top two boards. Adam produced a masterful example of how to win against an IQP and Tom, with a small combination winning a pawn, was never in any danger. So a drawn match and into the promotion pool.

Round 8 brought home how difficult the promotion pool can be as we were up against a powerful Brown Jack Team whose lowest rated player was higher than our highest – so much for our strongest team of the season. We hung on well in the match but a couple of wins on the lower boards decided the match in the Swindon team's favour.

## **Weekend 5**

We arrived for the final weekend with no chance of promotion unless the rules of mathematics or the competition had changed during our journey. As it was we won two of our matches (against CSC1, the winners of Div 3, pool B and MK Phoenix 1) and narrowly lost one to Oxford 2. The pleasing aspect of the weekend was that all six players scored at least 1.5/3 and it was great to see Alan Young come out of 4NCL semi-retirement. The game of the weekend was on Saturday. Playing black against the ultra-solid FM Ian Thompson, who rarely loses as white, Tom ripped him apart to win in just 16 moves.

Our final position in the Division 3 promotion pool was 6<sup>th</sup> with 5 points. We won 4 matches, drew 3 and lost 4 and scored 33.5/66. A step in the right direction after 2016-7 and it gives us hope for next season. Apart from the captain – see below – a shout out to Bill Hewitt for remaining unbeaten in his seven games and for Trev for winning more games (5) than anyone else.

Many thanks to Tom for organising the team this season and for playing top board most of the time. In fact, Tom only lost one game – from a winning a position – all season, which included games against four titled players.

Pete Heaven