

WELSH CHESS PREMIER LEAGUE 2017/18

Pete Heaven June 2018

This year, as last, there were six entries in the most important team tournament in Wales. Again, as in the previous season, there were five rounds, the first two being played home and away and the last three at a central venue. Or, for Cardigan players, one match at home and four matches away!

One aspect of the Premier League recently is that it is generally very evenly balanced across all teams with no huge favourite. The top two teams from 2014/5 and 2015/6, Abergavenny and Cardigan, finished in the bottom half of the table in 2016/7 whilst Cardiff, with a pretty poor record in the previous two years, swept all before them with a youthful team last season.

This time around, it was again hard to predict a winner. Assessing the teams beforehand, the following table represents the average rating for each team, based on the starting ratings of the strongest team likely to be available (also including a few new players who joined during the season).

Team	Average Rating
Cardigan	2143
White Knights	2130
The Vale	2113
Cardiff	2113
Abergavenny	2103
Nidum	2102

Much would depend on the availability of the top few players in each squad, an aspect which has given Cardigan a clear advantage in recent years, plus the form of the rapidly improving Cardiff team's juniors.

Round 1 – October 2017

Cardiff			The Vale		
2305	Greg Toczek	0.5	0.5	Tim Kett	2269
2148	Alex Bullen	0.5	0.5	Nigel Ralphs	2118
2059	Derek Jones	0.5	0.5	Pete Heaven	2088
1981	Joe Fathallah	0.5	0.5	Lee Davis	2061
1842	Shayanna Sivarajasingam	0	1	Ben Thomas	2030
1740	Venetia Sivarajasingam	0.5	0.5	Robert Taylor	1956
		2.5	3.5		

(All ratings are WCU which takes precedence in WCPL)

So much for form! The unbeaten champions faltered in their first fixture which turned on the board 5 game. Ben Thomas proved that an exchange French need not be sedate as he plunged into a promising-looking knight sacrifice as early as move 9. The ensuing complications were very difficult for black to solve and, with a series of accurate moves, Ben emerged a clear piece up from the opening. The game in which Cardiff had probably their best chances was on board 4. After an excellent, almost winning, opening for Joe, pieces started flying about in all directions as Lee took over, though white had significant compensation, which culminated in a speculative rook sacrifice. When the position settled back into some

sort of normality, the players, presumably exhausted, shook hands. The final game to finish was Tim vs Greg in which Tim had some pressure throughout.

Abergavenny		White Knights			
2230	Sven Zeidler	0.5	0.5	Allan Pleasants	2159
2151	Charles Morris	1	0	Bill Hewitt	2110
2025	Doug Spencer	0	1	Jason Garcia	2078
2088	Frank May	0.5	0.5	Alan Young	2101
1980	Mat Parry	0.5	0.5	Peter Bevan	1965
1980	Richard Miles	0.5	0.5	David Buttell	1913
		3	3		

Both decisive games in this match were initially evenly poised. Charles held a spatial advantage against Bill and, although the position was objectively equal, it was awkward for black to play. Being slightly constricted, Charles provoked a black squared weakness and converted this into a material advantage in short order. Doug, slightly ahead of the recent super-GM trend, played the Petroff against Jason and obtained a very solid position. As pieces were exchanged down to a minor piece endgame, slowly Jason's two bishops came into their own. The White Knights' players had small advantages in most of the drawn games but their opponents refused to yield.

Cardigan		Nidum			
2323	Howard Williams	0.5	0.5	Adam Musson	2121
2241	Iolo Jones	1	0	Rob Sanders	2084
2028	Rudy Van Kemenade	0	1	Craig Evans	2093
1875	Tony Haigh	0.5	0.5	Andrew Gibbons	2010
1752	Julie Van Kemenade	0	1	Ian Jones	2000
1756	Matthew Francis	0	1	Bob Moore	1977
		2	4		

Iolo played a trademark strategic game to provide Cardigan with their only win. With a vanishingly small advantage, he slowly built pressure against seemingly normal moves from Rob. A pawn was won and flawless technique secured the point. Elsewhere Nidum held all the cards. Craig faced Rudy's Petroff and after a false start to his attack (Rh1-h3-h1), lined his rooks up on the g and h files and started hurling his pawns towards the black king. Rudy correctly countered in the centre and, after chances were missed on both sides, a balanced heavy-piece position was reached where it was easy for either side to go catastrophically wrong, which black did, dropping a rook to a mate threat. On the lower boards, Julie tried a very inventive and correct exchange sacrifice which led to equal play until she allowed two pieces to get forked whereas Bob launched a kingside attack which led to the win of several pawns.

Round 2 – November 2017

The Vale		Abergavenny			
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2269	Tim Kett	1	0	Charles Morris	2151
2118	Nigel Ralphs	0	1	John Waterfield	2037
2088	Pete Heaven	0.5	0.5	Lloyd Powell	2104
2061	Lee Davis	0.5	0.5	Mat Parry	1980
2030	Ben Thomas	0.5	0.5	Mark Adams	1980
1956	Robert Taylor	1	0	Richard Miles	1980
		3.5	2.5		

An unchanged home team took on a much changed Abergavenny side shorn of their top board. Nevertheless Abergavenny have great strength in depth and the match was very tight throughout. The top board clash was exciting with Charles's protected passed pawn being decent, long-term compensation against what appeared to be great piece play from Tim against a less than secure king. Tim generally had the initiative although Charles looked to have a fleeting perpetual opportunity. Fleeting it was – Tim crashed through shortly afterwards. Nigel built up what looked like an overwhelming position from the opening. Appearances were a bit deceptive, however. Although white was indeed better, John defended valiantly and Nigel consumed vast amounts of time looking for the elusive breakthrough. At the end, time was the decisive factor, Nigel still having 15 moves to make to the time control when he lost on time, by which time John had equalised. Abergavenny held the upper hand for the most part in the 3 drawn games but the final game to finish ended the match decisively in the Vale's favour. With the expected manoeuvring game looking equalish, Robert spotted 23 Nd5! winning an exchange, the game and the match. Richard battled on for another 40 moves but Robert eventually prevailed.

White Knights		Cardigan			
2159	Allan Pleasants	0	1	Howard Williams	2323
2078	Jason Garcia	0.5	0.5	Iolo Jones	2241
2101	Alan Young	0	1	Gerry Heap	2132
2110	Bill Hewitt	1	0	Rudy Van Kemenade	2028
2036	Adam May	1	0	Tony Haigh	1875
1785	Keith Downey	1	0	Julie Van Kemenade	1752
		3.5	2.5		

Cardigan were strengthened by the return of Gerry Heap to their ranks but White Knights were also fielding close to their strongest team, missing only Carl Strugnell. Their greater strength in depth proved decisive as they won the bottom half of the match 3-0. Faced with Rudy's typical kingside pawn (and piece) storm on the kingside, Bill spotted the nice tactic 15 Bb6! winning a pawn. Rudy retained some compensation but Bill hauled in the point accurately after some fine defence. Board 4 featured an interesting Queen's Gambit, where Tony had good play for his pawn investment. However he chose to restore material equality which looked risky in the face of three black, connected, passed pawns. The position remained unclear but it was always harder for white to find the best moves. On the upper boards, Cardigan were on stronger ground. Allan grabbed a pawn and then another against Howard. However consolidation of the material was hard in the face of white's positional compensation and the generally precarious nature of black's position. An inaccuracy and a blunder on consecutive moves and the game was over in Howard's favour. Gerry played a

fine example of the 4 Knights English where the innocuous positioning of the white pieces hides the fact that black can't afford any imprecisions. One false move by Alan and Gerry's bits sprang into action.

Nidum		Cardiff			
2121	Adam Musson	1	0	Tom Brown	2117
2084	Rob Saunders	0.5	0.5	Paul Hatchett	2065
2010	Andrew Gibbons	0.5	0.5	Joe Fathallah	1981
2006	Matthew Davies	0.5	0.5	Shayanna Sivarajasingam	1842
2000	Ian Jones	1	0	Venetia Sivarajasingam	1740
1882	Chris Sims	0	1	Bill Harle	1721
		3.5	2.5		

Cardiff's determination to favour youth, which worked spectacularly well last season, came agonisingly close for the second match in a row. Of the three draws, Joe managed to get a healthy position but Andrew has a spectacular record with the black pieces in the WCPL and proved a too tough a nut to crack. Chris tried a plausible knight sacrifice against Bill. He eventually gained some serious compensation in the shape of a dodgy black king and better development. With the position in the balance and complex, white played the winning Rxb6, winning, that is, if you don't count the riposte Qxc2 mate. Advantage Cardiff. Of the two remaining games, Adam Musson, facing Tom Brown's retro 1980s Gruenfeld line, escaped from his prison with a pseudo rook sac which led to an advantage he didn't relinquish. Finally Venetia was defending a double rook ending a pawn down which looked harder for black to win than white to draw. However, Ian's exemplary technique sealed the match in Nidum's favour.

After two rounds, both Nidum and the Vale had a 100% record with White Knights close behind and also unbeaten.

Round 3 – January 2018

All six teams assembled at Neath with everything still to play for, given that 5 of the first 6 matches had either been drawn or won by the closest possible margin. Bottom of the table Cardiff played unbeaten White Knights and, in the WCPL, that can only mean one thing:

White Knights		Cardiff			
2166	Allan Pleasants	0	1	Greg Toczek	2298
2075	Alan Young	0.5	0.5	Alex Bullen	2130
2111	Jason Garcia	0	1	Tom Brown	2116
2014	Peter Bevan	0	1	Shayanna Sivarajasingam	1819
2012	Adam May	1	0	Venetia Sivarajasingam	1754
1792	David Buttell	0.5	0.5	Bill Harle	1675
		2	4		

This was a match in which the score reflected the play and could have arguably been a slightly wider margin. Greg and Tom used their white pieces wisely. Greg always looked on top and Tom played a good

knight v bad bishop ending very smoothly. Shayanna was better out of the opening against Peter and swiftly hoovered up a number of pawns. Alex vs Alan was a good fighting encounter, spoilt by one mutual oversight, whereby Alex could have won the rook ending on the spot. David's minority attack was blunted by Bill and, whilst white always had a discernible edge, black held the draw with some accurate play. Finally Adam came through for White Knights with a fine example of why the main 3 Nc3 line against the Caro Kann is so heavily analysed. Just one or two small mistakes by white and black had a comfortable position. Perhaps not better on the computer but easier to play and as solid as a rock. This led white to overpress in a position where the right plan was very difficult to find and Adam struck back through the centre.

The Vale		Nidum			
2304	Tim Kett	1	0	Roy Phillips	2199
2113	Leonidas Liaskos	1	0	Adam Musson	2097
2092	Nigel Ralphs	1	0	Gareth Morris	2127
2111	Pete Heaven	0.5	0.5	Rob Saunders	2078
2042	Lee Davis	1	0	Ian Jones	2018
1986	Ben Choo Yin	0	1	Andrew Gibbons	1997
		4.5	1.5		

This eagerly awaited clash between the two table topping titans – for alliterative purposes only - did not disappoint. The Vale were strengthened by their new international signing, Leo Liaskos, whereas Nidum trumped this by calling up FM Roy Phillips for his first cap. Gareth Morris also provided some muscle in the middle of the order. At half time in this match things were interestingly poised, the short draw on board 4 notwithstanding. Roy had a clearly promising position against Tim, an influential knight on c5 and bad black queenside pawns giving him an edge. Adam was clearly winning against Leo after the latter's Ponziani has gone from interesting to dubious to disastrous in the space of two moves. In one of the WCPL games of the season, Nigel's speculative piece sac led to a probably even more speculative queen sac. With Nigel having one piece for the queen but with some initiative but not really obvious how much, it seemed likely that neither player knew who was winning. Further down, Lee and Ian were contesting a sensible game of chess where the Vale player had a couple of pawns for the exchange which looked roughly equal. On bottom board, Andrew 'give me black' Gibbons had snaffled a pawn and was clearly winning. At this point, any sane adjudicator would have given the match to Nidum by some margin. Then it fell apart. First Leo managed to crawl out of his hole and turn the tables, Nigel won swiftly, having been worse (who knew?) up until the moment he announced mate and Roy dropped a rook in a, by now, slightly worse position. We could all start our journeys home leaving Lee to grind out a win and put some gloss on a very unexpected victory.

Abergavenny		Cardigan			
2232	Sven Zeidler	0	1	Howard Williams	2325
2090	Frank May	0.5	0.5	Brendan-Budok Durand-Le Ludek	2183
2027	John Waterfield	0	1	Iolo Jones	2236
1981	Mark Adams	0.5	0.5	Gerry Heap	2168
1972	Dave Llewellyn	0	1	Rudy Van Kemenade	2015

1965	Richard Miles	1	0	Adam Watkin-Jones	1957
		2	4		

Clearly a busy Christmas in the transfer market, another international signing turned up in the Cardigan team. The Frenchman with five names, as Maxime Vachier Lagrave calls him, added further substance to an already fearsome Cardigan team, the strongest side put out by any club this season. In the heavyweight clash on board one, in their umpteenth Dutch Defence, Howard looked to have a number of trumps with central control and better pieces. However, the (well, Rudy's) computer says it's just equal after 18..Bxe6. After 18...Nxe6, however, black saddled himself with a bad bishop. Howard's kingside attack converted itself into an extra exchange which, despite resourcefulness from Sven, proved to be enough. John got his pieces in a tangle against Iolo and soon had to shed a knight. In Cardigan's clean sweep of their white games, Rudy's pet Moscow variation against the Sicilian, Dave equalised but chose to attempt to address his pawn deficit in the wrong way. Too bad the extra pawn was a passer on d5 soon to be on d6 and deciding the game on its own. These 3 wins, allied to two black draws from Brendon (rarely in trouble) and Gerry (rarely not in trouble) gave Cardigan the spoils.

With two rounds left the table looked like this:

- 1 The Vale 6pts
- 2 Nidum 4pts
- 3 White Knights 3pts
- 4 Cardiff and Cardigan 2pts
- 6 Abergavenny 1pt

Round 4 – April 2018

Cardigan				Cardiff		
2325	Howard Williams	0.5	0.5	Greg Toczek		2298
2183	Brendan-Budok Durand-Le Ludek	1	0	Tom Brown		2116
2236	Iolo Jones	0.5	0.5	Joe Fathallah		2020
2168	Gerry Heap	0.5	0.5	Shayanna Sivarajasingam		1819
2015	Rudy Van Kemenade	0	1	Venetia Sivarajasingam		1754
1957	Adam Watkin-Jones	1	0	Bill Harle		1675
		3.5	2.5			

Although heavily out-rated on most boards, Cardiff were given an early boost as Venetia wrapped up a win almost before some games had even begun – due to traffic delays. Cardigan responded with a fine strategic win from Brendan and Adam confirmed the match win with a sound display as white in a Benoni (via an English). This boosted Cardigan's record with white to 9/12 from the first 4 rounds which in normal circumstances, would be enough to put them in contention for the title. However, without a single game won with the black pieces, they were stuck in mid-table with one round to go.

White Knights				The Vale		
2166	Allan Pleasants	0	1	Tim Kett		2304

2096	Bill Hewitt	0	1	Pete Heaven	2111
2012	Adam May	0	1	Nigel Ralphs	2092
2014	Peter Bevan	0	1	Lee Davis	2042
1792	David Buttell	0	1	Robert Taylor	1972
1837	Keith Downey	0.5	0.5	Sam Jukes	1896
		0.5	5.5		

With both teams above them still to play, White Knights needed to win their last two matches to stay in contention for the league. Unfortunately Alan Young and Jason Garcia were both unavailable as, again, was Carl. Nevertheless the match got off to an even start. Bill was in the process of proving his superior theoretical knowledge and understanding in a very sharp Winawer when a snap queen sacrifice turned the tables completely. Robert finished his game off with a clean rook sac and Tim tiptoed carefully and successfully around the various pitfalls Allan placed in front of him, culminating in a mating attack for the Vale player. Peter provided a ray of sunshine for the West Walians but even his better position disappeared in a two move cheapo of his own making. To compound White Knights' misery and this will be a surprise to most people watching the game, even the final position looks to be drawn. Finally Nigel ground out a rook ending win and Sam survived yet another lost/dodgy Vale position to complete the match.

Abergavenny		Nidum			
2232	Sven Zeidler	0.5	0.5	Roy Phillips	2199
1974	John Thornton	1	0	Craig Evans	2102
1981	Mat Parry	1	0	Adam Musson	2097
1972	Dave Llewellyn	0	1	Matthew Davies	1988
1817	Chris Dixon	0	1	Thomas Van Veelan	1993
1725	Zane Allford	0	1	Ian Jones	2018
		2.5	3.5		

No sooner than Kevin had advised the players to start than John accepted a pawn 'sac' from Craig. There was no way back for the Nidum player, try as he might to generate compensation. Ian took a risky looking pawn but survived the next few moves and suddenly it looked a very wise decision. Thomas, in the third continental European debut of this WCPL season, put in a classy performance to confirm that his strong league results are no fluke. For their third win, which closed out the match after Roy's draw on 1, Matthew Davies outmanoeuvred Dave Llewellyn from an equal ending. Mat Parry's quest to get an opening named after him (1..Nf6; 2...Nc6) gained some momentum with a fine win against Adam Musson but it was too little to save the match.

Round 5 – May 2018

The finale of the season had limited excitement in terms of the destination of the title. Nidum needed to win 6-0 and hope that the unbeaten Vale team could only score 1 point against Cardigan. Their slim prospects of winning was dealt another blow as the hitherto absent Carl Strugnell strolled in to play his first game of the season against them.

Nidum	White Knights
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2199	Roy Phillips	0	1	Carl Strugnell	2321
2127	Gareth Morris	0.5	0.5	Jason Garcia	2111
2097	Adam Musson	1	0	Alan Young	2075
2000	Gareth Yeo	1	0	Peter Bevan	2014
2078	Rob Saunders	0.5	0.5	Adam May	2012
1867	Chris Sims	1	0	David Buttell	1792
		4	2		

Both sides fielded one of their stronger line-ups of the season. Initially things looked rosy for Nidum as Gareth Yeo, replacing fellow correspondence master Craig Evans, blitzed out an efficient win on 4 and all other boards looked either good or at least unclear. However, chances of the title had evaporated with two quick draws in the Vale-Cardigan match and disappeared altogether when Rob and Adam's game ground to a halt. Roy's inventive opening play had given him good chances but, just when things were looking rosy, his queen was trapped mid-board out of the blue. Nidum, however, put this setback aside and won two interesting games. Alan was building up nicely on the kingside against Adam when he tried a pseudo piece sac. This was sound but the follow-up – not to regain the piece - was not quite sufficient and Adam held on with a bunch of accurate moves. On board 6 we had one of the most interesting games of the season. Chris saced a load of material for quite a bagful of compensation in the form of complete, as opposed to none for his opponent, development plus a raft of threats and a bad king for black. Oh and 2 connected passed pawns if he ever needed them. Huge credit then to David for surviving the onslaught and emerging with two rooks for a queen and suddenly active pieces...not to mention a won game. Time proved the crucial factor thereafter as black's prospects receded in line with his remaining seconds until he ran out of the latter. A very entertaining game.

The Vale		Cardigan			
2304	Tim Kett	0.5	0.5	Howard Williams	2325
2113	Leo Liaskos	0	1	Brendan-Budok Durand-Le Ludek	2183
2111	Pete Heaven	0.5	0.5	Iolo Jones	2236
2092	Nigel Ralphs	0	1	Gerry Heap	2168
2042	Lee Davis	0.5	0.5	Rudy Van Kemenade	2015
	Default	0	1	Adam Watkin-Jones	1957
		1.5	4.5		

A nervy finish to the season for the Vale who got off to a bad start when a late illness, together with a clash with the Frome Congress, emphasised how thin their squad was. As with Cardiff last year, The Vale could be thankful that penalties are not applied for defaults. Requiring 1.5 points for the title, a lightning quick draw on board 5 was followed by a more sedate but shorter (in moves) draw on 3. Howard seemed to have a strategic advantage but this proved to be illusory as things soon fizzled out in a hail of exchanges. Just to prove how things could have been had Brendan been available from the start of the season, Cardigan completed the match with their first two black wins of the campaign. Gerry always seemed to have decent compensation for a pawn in a mainline Dragon and Brendan played some pretty (and pretty accurate) moves to win a tough minor piece ending.

Cardiff		Abergavenny			
2298	Greg Toczek	1	0	Frank May	2090
2130	Alex Bullen	0.5	0.5	John Thornton	1974
2071	Paul Hatchett	0.5	0.5	Richard Miles	1965
2020	Joe Fathallah	0	1	Dave Llewellyn	1972
1754	Venetia Sivarajasingam	0.5	0.5	Chris Dixon	1817
1819	Shayanna Sivarajasingam	0	1	Zane Allford	1725
		2,5	3.5		

The champions of the last three seasons, all achieved with 100% records, were consigned to playing a match to determine who would finish last this year. After three short draws, Greg put Cardiff ahead. For a period Frank seemed to have full comp for his pawn sac but Greg found the right time to return the material for a small endgame edge which he converted. That was the high point for Cardiff though as Zane was playing highly enterprising stuff on 6. Having self-trapped his own bishop on a2, he slung a couple of pawns at Shayanna's central and stranded king. The upshot of this was that Zane retained both material equality and also a raging attack. In a position that most people would be expecting to imminently resign, Shayanna fought back, dodging bullets by the move. However, her exposed king eventually led to material loss. In the final game, Dave Llewellyn reprised his minor piece endgame nightmare against Matthew Davies in the previous round, except that this time he was on the winning side, a win sufficient to clinch the tie and consign Cardiff to the basement.

Final Table

Team	P	W	D	L	M	GP
The Vale	5	4	0	1	8	18.5
Nidum	5	4	0	1	8	16.5
Cardigan	5	3	0	2	6	16.5
Abergavenny	5	1	1	3	3	13.5
White Knights	5	1	1	3	3	11
Cardigan	5	1	0	4	2	14

The outstanding performances this year were from:

The Vale: Tim Kett 4/5 (on board 1), Lee Davis 3.5/5 and Robert Taylor 2.5/3.

Nidum: Ian Jones 3/4 and Andrew Gibbons 2/3

Cardigan: Howard Williams and Iolo Jones both 3.5/5, Gerry Heap 3/4 and Brendan-Budok Durand-Le Ludek 2.5/3

Abergavenny: Mat Parry 2/3 and John Thornton 1.5/2

White Knights: Adam May 2.5/4 and Keith Downey 1.5/2

Cardiff: Greg Toczek 3/4

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

Thanks should again be given to Kevin for his organisation throughout the season.