

TEAM CHESS CHALLENGE 2015

Finals: Imperial College, London Wednesday 22nd April

(Report by Trefor Thynne, Team Manager, Torquay Boys' GS)

After a successful inaugural year in 2014, England's newest team tournament for secondary schools held a second very enjoyable finals day at Imperial College, London. This time thirteen schools had qualified via regional heats and, together with a fourteenth team made up of reserves attending the event, played five rounds of rapidplay chess at a rate of 10 minutes per player plus a two second increment per move.

Many of England's top junior players represented their schools and the strength of the teams can be seen by the total team grades; these ranged from 790 for last year's winners, Manchester Grammar School (i.e an average grade of 197!) down to 450 for the KE Camp Hill team. Six teams had an average grade above 160.

It quickly became clear that nothing was going to stop Manchester G.S. from repeating last year's triumph. In fact they only dropped 2 game points out of 20 to finish 6 points clear and won all five of their matches. Interest centred therefore on second and third places: these were hotly contested by six teams separated at the end by a single game point with Royal Grammar School, Newcastle being runners-up, half a point ahead of Wilson's School, Wallington and Hampton School. The former took third place on the strength of having beat Hampton in their individual encounter.

The Swiss system allowed all the teams to have their moments and the day was greatly enjoyed by all the participants. In the morning, before the start of the main event, the teams had taken on Grandmaster Jonathan Mestel in a clock simultaneous, Mestel (the Director of undergraduate Studies at Imperial College) having 40 minutes and the teams (who were allowed to consult) 20 minutes on the clock. This proved a tough call for the grandmaster who had to concede defeat to the teams from Manchester Grammar School, Hampton School, Mill Hill School, Nottingham High School and Torquay Boys' Grammar School. The teams from Millfield School, Eltham College and King Edward VI (Camp Hill) Grammar School, Birmingham managed to draw their games. Jonathan Mestel also presented the prizes to the winners of the team tournament at the end of the day.

Thanks are due to Imperial College for hosting the event and laying on an excellent buffet lunch, to the equipment providers Castle Chess, the first-class controller Chris Howell and, of course, to the chief organiser and instigator of this valuable addition to the chess calendar, Neill Cooper who is making a big impact in his role as Secondary Schools' Chess Manager for the ECF. The prizegiving was graced by the presence of the ECF Chief Executive, Phil Ehr who spoke briefly to add his thanks to the organisers.

Gratitude is also due to the many organisers and hosts of the regional heat tournaments which took place between October and February and, finally, to the participants themselves for their sporting attitude and for travelling, in many cases, long distances to attend this most worthwhile new tournament.

Further information about the Team Challenge can be found on its website at www.TeamChessChallenge.org.uk

Results: (team total grades in brackets)

1st Manchester Grammar School	18 points	(790)
2nd Royal Grammar School, Newcastle	12	(667)
3rd Wilson's School, Surrey	11½	(669)
4th Hampton School	11½	(695)
5th Millfield School	11	(693)
6th Eltham College	11	(689)
7th Mill Hill School	10½	(562)
8th Nottingham High School	10½	(584)
9th Magdalen College School, Oxford	9½	(549)
10th Reserves team	9½	(494)
11th Torquay Boys' Grammar School	9	(513)
12th Westminster Under School	8	(576)
13th King Edward VI (Camp Hill) Grammar School, B'ham	5	(452)
14th Bangor Grammar School	3	