

Chair's Report

The 2019-2020 season got underway on time thanks to Chris Davison who took on the post of Match Secretary at the AGM when we found ourselves without one. The season then continued normally until March when the covid-19 crisis became serious in the UK. The committee found the situation challenging not least because of the under-representation of clubs on the Core Executive (only Cambridge and Linton were represented). We decided to suspend the league on March 13th which was slightly in advance of the UK lockdown which came on the 23rd March. Deciding how and when to restart is a difficult issue and it would be helpful to get more input from the clubs – it is your league.

The three core issues for BACL are:

1. How to resolve the 2019/20 season?
2. What should be 2020/21 competitions and when can they start?
3. Because of the pandemic raises challenges relating to the venues that clubs play in and the vulnerabilities of players, it is essential that the decisions relating to the future have full input from the clubs

The ECF has recently published guidelines and a template risk assessment for restarting OTB chess. The application of these guidelines is complex because we have plenty of vulnerable players, 70-80% of cases are estimated to be asymptomatic. A currently compliant solution would have to incorporate adequate distancing (either 2m or at least 1m with masks or shields and probably the use of 2 boards) and there would also have to a cleaning regime for venues. Such rules would significantly affect the capacity of all venues and reduce enjoyment for many players probably to a level where many would choose not to play. I cannot see over the board amateur chess starting before January 2021 and how soon it could begin may well depend on the success of vaccines and their availability for mass vaccination programmes.

I hope we can determine how to complete the 2019/20 season at this meeting – the main options are cancellation or completion based largely on current positions. There is also at least a theoretical option to complete the league when OTB chess can be resumed though this will be some time in the future and probably with significantly fewer players than now. Some clubs may struggle to raise teams in all the competitions they originally entered and the teams that are able to resume may be significantly different from those who were playing at lockdown.

The best case for the 2020-21 season is being able to start early in 2021 and maybe have a competition where clubs play each other once rather than the normal twice and probably with a reduced number of teams because some players will not want to play under the conditions that are required. The worst case is that play does not become possible before the end of the season. I want the AGM to consider whether it wants BACL to organise any online events – some examples are given in the attached paper.

The lockdown has been difficult for the Executive to manage because certainly the core Executive has been too narrow and convening ad-hoc groups has generally led to narrow participation. I propose we dismantle the two-tier Executive and involve all officers in discussions and decision-making between AGMs, and there is a proposed rule change on the agenda to give effect to this. In addition, I propose forming a Committee with representation from all the clubs to consider the resumption of play periodically as the pandemic situation develops.

At the moment, the Executive is without an Administrative Secretary and a Vice Chairman. This is a serious problem; the posts are not onerous in terms of time commitment but the Executive will find it difficult to function if the clubs are not well represented and these posts are not filled.