

## NATIONAL CLUB REPORT

As I am standing down as National Club competition captain after 12 years in the role, I thought it may be acceptable to indulge myself with a few recollections of a job that I have enjoyed very much over the years, despite a few anxious moments along the way.

I took over as captain in 2003/04 and after a couple of years where the team excelled yet lost matches on board count, Bedford embarked in 2005/06 on their best ever season in the competition. In the U-160 section I was able to field a very reliable top two, playing two out of Peter Constantinou, Steve Ledger and Paul Habershon, and unleash on the opposition the exceptional tactical ability of Olu Olulode and Patrick Goldsworthy, both under-graded that year, on boards 3 and 4. Our finest hour came away at Wood Green when a team of Constantinou, Habershon, Olulode, Goldsworthy and Neil Hickman beat strong opposition whose captain was indulging in some grading subterfuge. The final was a doddle by comparison, with Bourne End defeated 3.5-1.5 on the day that Italy won the World Cup (just in case Joe is reading this!).

The following year a team much weakened by the absence of players on holiday made the long journey to Gloucester in the semi-final and lost heavily.

With the departure of Patrick and Olu to pastures new, I turned to the U-140 competition, which we first entered in 2008/09. After an early loss to Wanstead (never a happy hunting ground), we went all the way to the plate final at Syston, near Leicester, and Joe, on a high due to the presence of his latest girlfriend, played brilliantly and won us a narrow victory (the team was Valerio, Hill, John Harbour, Nigel Walker if memory serves me correctly). The following year we went all the way in the U-140 competition proper and a team of Mike Botteley, Joe, John and Nigel Staddon thrashed Snodland at Golden Lane, again on World Cup final day! I believe this was the day when John was able to leave the board, consume a large quantity of fish and chips and return to finish off his opponent!

By 2011/12 it was time to revive the U-175 team and after an unfortunate defeat to St Albans at St Mark's we went all the way to the Plate final (yes, you've guessed it – World Cup final day!). Messrs Ledger, Habershon, Arulnandhy, Taylor and Valerio massively out-graded their Maidstone opponents who were also committed to playing in two other sections on that day and won 5-0. The following year the team went one better and won the U-175 competition proper, with Paul Habershon the star against Metropolitan, winning brilliantly against a 188 and everyone (Ledger, Habershon, Arulnandhy, Taylor and Collacott) performing well in a tricky fixture away at Bushbury in the Midlands. The final was relatively straightforward for the same team against Farnham, a 4-1 win.

The ECF, probably bored by all these Bedford victories, hit back by changing the format drastically. The competition became a week-end tournament in 2013/14 but Bedford, not to be out-done, entered a 4-man team of Paul Habershon, Steve Pike, Chris Hill and Ben Pike in the U-150 section and won comfortably. Sadly, only three players were available to attend the week-end in 2014/15 and I had to accept that Bedford would not be represented in the National Club for the first time since I took over (and probably for many years prior to that).

So most of my memories have been good ones and most of the bad ones involve losses on board-count! Other than that, bad times include: waiting outside St Mark's desperately hoping that Olu would arrive before the default time (he always did!), the incident of Mike's phone going off shortly after the start of our match at Newark in Nottinghamshire, the horror of Patrick Goldsworthy, needing only a draw to win

us the match, playing on for an unlikely win with opposite coloured bishops when in desperate time trouble at St Mark's, causing me to admit that the job was bad for my health!

But the team achieved all the victories detailed above and almost every player took part ( except I never succeeded in getting Peter Gill to play a match over those 12 years!) and some brilliant and, perhaps more importantly, some very determined chess was played by all.

I hope that someone will come forward to organise a team (or even better, two teams) in the annual National Club week-end tournament in the future.

My thanks for all your support over the years.

Chris