



4NCL Weekend 2 14th-15th January, Press Report by Rhys Cumming

Division 1a

All of Pool A's matches in Rounds 3 and 4 went to the rating favourites and almost all of them were by fairly comfortable margins. Cheddleton continued their 100% start to the season with wins over Guildford 2 and 3Cs who look to possibly be their closest challengers in the pool. While 3Cs were able to match Cheddleton on the top boards, where they once again had the services of 2600 Christian Bauer, Cheddleton's strength in depth earned them a comfortable 5½-2½ victory. 3Cs did win their Sunday match to put them on 6 match points out of a possible 8, and although they still have a couple of tricky fixtures left, one would expect 3Cs to qualify for the promotion pool after the strong start they've made. The other two places in the promotion pool will likely come from Guildford 2, Barbican 1 and Blackthorne Russia. In what may well prove a crucial match for deciding the fates of these two teams, Barbican 1 beat Blackthorne Russia in the pool's closest match of the weekend. They ran out 5-3 winners thanks to wins from Barbican's young guns: Alan Merry and Brian Tarhon. That win, along with a Saturday win against South Wales Dragons leaves Barbican's fate well within their own hands as they sit ahead of the other two teams on 6 match points, although they are yet to play Cheddleton. Guildford 2 and Blackthorne Russia both scored one win and one loss to leave themselves on 50%. At the bottom of the table, King's Head continued their winless start to the season with two losses, including against fellow relegation candidates South Wales Dragons. Celtic Tigers also added two losses to their name, but with a match against King's Head next week they will have a chance of entering the demotion pool with a very respectable 4 points.

Division 1b

Guildford 1 continued their winning ways, beating one of their biggest challengers White Rose and then thrashing Oxford 7-1 on the Sunday. White Rose did in fact win on the bottom two boards including a win for Paul Townsend over Mark Hebden, but Guildford won the top 6 boards 5-1, meaning that the match was actually quite comfortable. Behind Guildford there are several teams all with a chance of claiming the title of "best of the rest". In pole position so far is White Rose whose loss to Guildford is there only one so far. They are joined on 6 points by Wood Green HK and Grantham Sharks, who faced each other in round 4, where Wood Green came out on top 5-3. The only team that might challenge White Rose, Wood Green and Grantham for a place in the Championship Pool is Oxford 1, who lie just 2 points behind and have already played what are probably the two best teams in Guildford and White Rose. At the other end of the table, North East England and Anglian Avengers both remain without a point and their survival hopes probably rely on being able to salvage a result against the other when they meet next weekend. Barbican 2 meanwhile look set for 6th place. While they look comfortably better than the bottom two sides as shown in their 6-2 win against North East England, they haven't been able to pose problems to the sides above them as they have done in previous seasons as they lost comfortably to Wood Green 6-2.

Division 2a

The story of the weekend in pool 2a was close games. Of the 8 matches played over the weekend, there was one 4-4 draw, five 4½-3½ wins, one 5-3 win and one 5½-2½ win. It is clear then that the

margins between victory and defeat are narrow and Pool A is by far and away the tightest of all the pools in the top 2 divisions. The somewhat surprising leaders after 4 rounds in Pool A are the Sussex Martlets who have won all their matches to date. Their two wins this weekend both came in the 4½-3½ variety, but they have nonetheless amassed a commanding 3 point lead at the top of the table. West is Best, who sat alongside Sussex with 2 wins from 2 going into the weekend, remain in 2nd position despite being only able to muster 1 point after they drew with Grantham Sharks 2 and then lost to the ADs. The ADs have joined West is Best on 5 points thanks to two 4½-3½ wins of their own against Barbican Youth and West is Best. Just one point further back there are then 3 teams on 50%, all with a chance of making the promotion pool: Grantham Sharks 2, Warwickshire Select 2 and Downend & Fishponds. Warwickshire Select 2 continued their strong start to the season with another win at the expense of CSC Dragons who now sit bottom of the table after another winless weekend. The other team that will find a place in the promotion pool hard to come by is Barbican Youth, who had a winless weekend of their own and currently sit on 2 points.

Division 2b

Alba backed up their claim, or more accurately the claim of everyone else, that they are the strongest side in the division, as they remain on full points thanks to two comfortable 5½-2½ wins over Guildford 3 and White Rose 2. Cambridge University 1 also looked very strong in the first weekend and they proceeded to beat KJCA Kings in round 3, however in round 4 they met the stern test of Warwickshire Select 1 who held them to a 4-4 draw. Warwickshire Select 1 failed to gain promotion last year after several years of yo-yoing between the top two divisions however they look to be in a good state to return to the top division after beating Bradford DCA Knights and then drawing with Cambridge. Spirit of Atticus are the other team in a prime position to make it into the Promotion Pool after two wins this weekend. They beat White Rose 2 and then in a match which could be crucial in stamping their place in the top 4, they comprehensively beat Guildford 3 6-2. Guildford sit in 5th place, after a tough weekend where they lost to two very strong teams, but their hopes of a place in the top 4 are not over and probably rely on beating Warwickshire Select next weekend. At the other end of the table, Bradford DCA Knights continue to struggle and have clearly not been helped by the fact that they have not managed to field 8 players yet this season. White Rose 2 have had a tough set of fixtures so far this season and despite coming down from Division 1 last year, they are yet to record a win this season. They do have important matches against Bradford and KJCA Kings to come however so there is still much to play for. KJCA Kings brought in Chris Ward for the weekend and managed to get off the mark in round 4 against Bradford. It looks like their match next week against White Rose 2 may prove crucial in their battle for survival this season.

The pgn for all games played at the weekend can be found here:

<http://www.4ncl.co.uk/downloads.htm>